Indiscrete Media:

Television/Digital Convergence and

Economies of Online Lesbian Fan Communities

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I / INDISCREET MEDIA

In 1997, a member of the newsgroup alt.tv.xena compiled answers to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) about "subtext" on the TV series *Xena: Warrior Princess* (syndicated, 1995-2001), defining this term as "a subtle, underlying theme... [of] romantic innuendo between [lead characters] Xena and Gabrielle" {http://xenite.org/faqs/subtext.html}. In response to frequent harassment by homophobic skeptics (e.g. "'All this subtext crap is pure bull. Xena's no lesbian.'"), fans of the couple offered "proof" in the form of "interviews with the cast and crew" of the program wherein they "flatly stated... that they put subtextual scenes and dialogue in the shows intentionally." In the words of one radio host, "the producers... seem[ed] to be consciously using the pair to cultivate a bit of a lesbian following." Given the candid dialogue between *Xena*'s creators and viewers, the former were no doubt aware of the outpouring of online fan fiction about Xena and Gabrielle -- these stories rendered subtext as maintext, filling in the discreet gaps in the onscreen narrative (often with sexually explicit scenes) or transposing the characters into entirely new settings in "uber" fic (see, for example, {http://xenafanfiction.info}). This exchange around *Xena* in the late 1990s was a harbinger of widespread transformations in the relationship between professional and fan producers catalyzed when media fandom relocated to internet platforms. It is also an origin story for this dissertation, which analyzes these transformations via the coordinates of queer female fan formations. In the following

project, I will theorize media convergence by exploring fan creativity, and explain why the legacy of *Xena* is crucial to an understanding of today's media economies.

Fan fiction is not a new phenomenon: since at least the 1970s, when the practice coalesced around *Star Trek* and several other cult programs, enthusiasts have produced amateur artwork by borrowing from mass media source texts. Before the popularization of the internet, these fanworks were primarily printed in handmade 'zines and distributed at fan conventions or through the mail. These early creative subcultures within media fandom were populated predominantly by straight women, but depictions of a romantic and/or sexual relationship between two male characters quickly became a substantial genre. This tradition is known as "slash," since couples like the paradigmatic Kirk and Spock of *Star Trek* were abbreviated as K/S. While stories pairing two female characters have existed throughout this history, *Xena* was the first large fandom to emerge with a lesbian relationship as its principal focus, and this happened in the 1990s -- after the advent of the web. The rise of female slash -- termed femslash, femmeslash or girlslash according to the established convention but also called subtext fic, altfic (from "alternative"), or saffic (a pun on Sapphic) in its relatively autonomous communities -- is thus intertwined with transitions in both "old" and "new" media. One possible explanation for the late arrival of this formation is that few earlier television programs included two or more strong and complex central female characters, a norm that has gradually shifted in the 90s and 00s. But the internet's role in expanding the accessibility and diversity of fan fiction no doubt also contributed to femslash's critical mass. Media fans tend to be early adopters, and fan subcultures have evolved along with the technology from Usenet newsgroups (such as alt.tv.xena), to email lists, to homemade

sites, to threaded forums, to blogging services, to social networks. The web changed the tenor of fandom, increasing the magnitude of fan production and its recognition by mainstream culture, generating new tensions between fans and the entertainment industry, and demanding new approaches to fandom from academics.

Most early analyses of fan fiction were loosely affiliated with the ethnographic approach to audience studies that grew out of the UK's Birmingham Center for Cultural Studies, and tended to argue that this creative practice embodies an active mode of reception that challenges the mass media's domination of popular meanings and mythologies. As a precursor, feminist sci-fi author Joanna Russ published an essay about K/S slash, "Pornography by Women, for Women, with Love," in a 1985 collection (Russ). Animated by the titillating question of why middle-aged housewives were writing gay male erotica, Russ asserts that women use K/S to imagine a utopian alternative to their unsatisfying lives. They envision an intimate partnership of equals, but because it is impossible in our culture to conceive of a heterosexual couple in this way, they appropriate two male characters (Kirk and Spock) who can integrate both masculine and feminine characteristics. Subsequent work extended this preoccupation with slash's unconventional demographics, and Camille Bacon-Smith's 1991 ethnographic study *Enterprising Women* essentially supports Russ's conclusion by chronicling slash fandom as an empowering and supportive community of women (Bacon-Smith). Constance Penley also wrote about fan fiction in the 1990s from a feminist perspective, incorporating an emphasis on technology drawn from media studies. In "Brownian Motion," she makes the case that both the content and the context of slash are a site for "debate [about] the issues of women's relation to the technologies of science,

the mind, and the body" (158-9). These approaches describe the formulation of a coded expression of resistance, but largely stop short of asking how fan production succeeds or fails at intervening in the oppressive material and ideological conditions to which it responds.

Henry Jenkins's book *Textual Poachers* is widely cited as the first authoritative theoretical engagement with creative fandom in the tradition of cultural studies. Countering popular and academic "stereotypes of fans as cultural dupes, social misfits, and mindless consumers," he proposes that "fans actively assert their mastery over the mass-produced texts which provide the raw materials for their own cultural productions and the basis for their social interactions. In the process... they become active participants in the construction and circulation of textual meanings" (23-24). In this conception, Jenkins allows that creative fans go beyond a sort of resistant "reading" to contribute to "writing" popular entertainment. However, he nonetheless positions derivative works as subordinate to their commercial source, writing that "because the texts continue to fascinate, fans cannot dismiss them from their attention but rather must try to find ways to salvage them for their interests" (24). He goes on to concede that "fans operate from a position of cultural marginality and social weakness... lack direct access to the means of commercial cultural production and have only the most limited resources with which to influence the entertainment industry's decisions" (26). Jenkins thus advances the rather contradictory view that fans are important cultural producers who are nonetheless disempowered vis à vis the culture industry; it is not clear whether he ultimately adheres to capitalist definitions of production that privilege the commercial, or whether he implies that fandom could radically redefine these terms. In *Textual*

Poachers, fanworks are represented as an intervention at the site of reception, which is unproblematically distinct from mass media commodities, and therefore the effects of this process are essentially contained within fan communities.

This relatively bounded and static economy of cultural, textual, and technological relationships between fan and corporate production was already obsolescing. By the mid-1990s, the web was transforming fandom and indeed the larger media ecology, but there was little academic research to turn to beyond the aforementioned authors and a contiguous anthology, *The Adoring Audience* (Lewis). In a 2009 overview of "Fan Studies 101," Karen Hellekson observes that fan "[s]cholarship was slow to follow along as fans took to the Internet" (6), and as published work did begin to catch up to the efflorescence of online fandom, its development was not organized or cohesive. Adding to this haphazard quality is the fact that, increasingly, "fan studies is a truly interdisciplinary field" incorporating approaches from "English and communication... ethnography... media, film, and television studies... psychology... law" (5) and more, generating a wealth of analysis but making it difficult for any one researcher to take the measure of the subject. Hellekson warns that this dispersion engenders an intellectual amnesia, wherein "Fan studies... is being ignored by current scholars, and those in other fields who tangentially run across fans seem unaware that an entire body of scholarship already exists to study fans and fan artifacts... [while in] a parallel activity, women-dominated, old-style active fans and their contributions are now in the process of being erased by studies of (male) online fandom, although recuperative work is underway" (5). Despite this trend, the late 1990s and early 2000s were a dynamic period in the evolution of both media fandom and its academic study, with many scholars contributing to a

growing body of work that often extended the focus on slash fiction as a privileged artifact.

Today, at the close of the decade, fan studies is finally consolidating as a discipline in response to another groundbreaking transition in popular media: the convergence of television itself with the web's decentralized networks of distribution, community, and creativity. This metamorphosis has once again prompted a rapid expansion of fan subcultures and of attention to them, as the entertainment industry increasingly absorbs fandom's schema for an engaged and productive audience as a dominant structuring principle. Despite the heterogeneity of the various patterns that constitute fandom, I would argue that queer fan activities like slash have remained a key dimension of both media transformations and continuing academic research about them. Informed by the disparate work in fan studies, this dissertation surveys the emerging landscape from a media studies perspective, asking what recent femslash formations can tell us about today's shifting alliances and antagonisms between media producers and consumers. I explore how corporate efforts to monetize and mainstream fandom may affect queer female communities of practice, but also how these modalities reverberate outward, inciting us to take account of the queerness of convergence at large.

A / FEMSLASH FANDOM

Even after the explosion of online fan production and associated scholarship, femslash communities remain small in comparison to their male slash and heterosexual ("het") counterparts, and have garnered very little dedicated study. In the absence of sustained analysis, it's difficult to establish the degree to which arguments about slash

and related fan practices apply to femslash configurations and the degree to which the latter are historically, subculturally, and erotically distinct. Certainly there are significant differences between the articulation of women's relationship with male characters and women's relationship with female characters, and although the minority participation of straight men and straight women in femslash fandom is often discussed, the assumption is that queer women are its primary demographic. This presumed correspondence between the sexualities that fan fiction portrays and the sexualities of its readers and writers is a marked departure from the fascination with straight women writing gay male porn that characterizes much of the work on slash. Moreover, male slash implies a particular mode of reading that interfaces with the mass media's codes for representing masculinity: because affectionate gestures between men are taboo, onscreen instances of intimate male-male relationships appear charged with romance and eroticism. In the rarer cases where two female characters have a meaningful relationship, their attachment may be expressed more freely but thus read less clearly as homoerotic. Due, therefore, to the contrasting inflection of women's engagement with televised women, to the under-representation of female characters in the mass media, and to the divergent interpretive strategies involved in cathecting femslash pairings, queer female fan production warrants dedicated examination.

In order to offer some sense of the extant approaches to queer female fan communities, I will now review several articles on *Xena: Warrior Princess* (XWP) fans, a selection that I advance as a small sample of the proliferation of research on fan production over the past dozen years. Sara Gwenllian Jones has done some of the most prominent work on *Xena* from a television studies perspective, and in "Histories,

Fictions, and *Xena: Warrior Princess*" she explores how "XWP's ironic reworkings of history and mythology, together with its connotative, 'subtextual' queer construction of the central Xena-Gabrielle relationship, invite, even require, active interpretative practices from the series' audience" (407). She observes that these practices "are broadly the same as those of the fan cultures described by Jenkins in *Textual Poachers* (1992)[:] XWP fans write and read fan fiction and cultural criticism essays; they produce fan art, music, and videos; they circulate series-related information and gossip; and they interpret episodes, characters, events, and relationships according to their own experiences, perspectives, interests, and needs" (406). Notably, though, "XWP debuted in 1995, arriving on television screens across America during roughly the same period... [as] the development of the World Wide Web... [and] from the outset, XWP fan culture has been predominantly Net-based. Online XWP fandom constitutes a vast conceptual territory that fans refer to as 'the Xenaverse'... [and here] fans have almost instant access to fan [artifacts]... and [to] each other" (407). Jones argues that "XWP fans (most of whom are women, many lesbian or bisexual) can and do identify themselves among history's lost tribes -- the colonized, the terrorized, the outcast, the dispossessed" (405), and they "seize on the series' proffered ways of being female and lesbian in a mythological past so that they can formulate and explore their own modes of being in the present and the future" (407). In addition to metaphorically recognizing their own struggles in *Xena*'s postmodern historical pastiche, "[XWP fans] recruit the text to... rethink history itself and, in particular, its inscriptions of marginalized identities" (406). Thus "the online Xenaverse... demonstrates that the interpretative practices of fans are not focused only on the world of the television text but also on the 'text of the world'... [and] it may be that

our existing concept of a 'television fan culture' is inadequate to the task of addressing some of the more ambitious and urgently political projects in which fans are engaged" (416). In particular, Jones proposes that "the television text is not so much a source as an intertextual nexus" (409), and that this intertextuality is both "XWP's primary textual strategy" (408) and "in its hypertextual expression... the fabric of the Xenaverse, as it is of all online cultures" (409). Thus online *Xena* fandom as an object has broad ramifications for our understanding not only of fan practices but of television itself in the internet age, and it indicates that fan production incorporates multiple layers of meaning to generate larger political interventions. My methodology in this dissertation is similar to Jones's in its attention to the interfaces between diegetic narratives and fans' work on the "text of the world," which suggest wide-ranging implications for our scholarly conceptions of changing media worlds.

An article by Rosalind Hanmer, "Lesbian Subtext Talk: Experiences of the Internet Chat," presents a more traditional ethnographic account of a clearly defined subcommunity within the Xenaverse, a fan website called Xenasubtexttalk. Hanmer deals expressly with a population of "women fans who identify themselves as lesbians" (80), establishing "a triangulation between the television programme, the Internet and the fans" (91). She critiques an existing lacuna in fan studies when she observes that "there is a general lack of interest generated in texts that offer a subtext as a mode of resistance for the lesbian fan... [and] research has approached fandom with an assumed prior notion of a heterosexual audience... a discourse that excludes and marginalizes the lesbian fan" (82). As a corrective, her research examines how lesbian-identified *Xena* fans "become involved in taking action and deploying agency... [through] the appropriation of the

television series, to discuss their life histories and experiences and to make empowering changes... declared through their expression of 'desire'" (100). This sexual community germinated as "the commodities of television and the Internet [were] utilised by lesbian fans to produce a different kind of lesbian 'performance'" (83), one that consisted of both informal discussion on Xenasubtexttalk and more concerted expressions of this orientation, including the online journal *Whoosh!* {http://whoosh.org}. This site is "part of IAXS (International Association of Xena Studies), which... is 'a quasi-literate, quasi-academic, quasi-fandom, entirely FUN excuse to write about and share with others your unique obsession with all aspects of [XWP]'" (84), and as such represents fandom's habitual production of vernacular theory. From 1996-2006, *Whoosh!* published *Xena* essays, episode guides, news, and interviews with prominent fan and professional creators, thus serving as a nexus for the fandom's various intersecting dimensions. Hanmer highlights an interview with XWP executive producer Robert Tapert that illustrates the openness of "the programme makers... [to] the Internet audience's response... [which, Tapert confirmed,] encouraged a dramatic shift in the narrative of the show, leaning more towards Xena and Gabrielle's romantic relationship" (84-85). This "acknowledgement of a 'space' in the text" contributes to the "ambivalence... [of] sexuality as an unstable and arbitrary signifier, thus producing 'talk' as a material aspect of the text... 'talk' is then reproduced as part of the participant's own coming out narratives... [leading to] the growth of communication and collaboration between lesbian fans on the Internet" (99). Like Jones, therefore, Hanmer contends that fans recognize aspects of their own identities in *Xena: Warrior Princess* and mobilize the intertextual openness of both television and the internet to collectively work through the cultural

coordinates of sexuality. While not an ethnography, the following chapter of this dissertation treats concerns comparable to Hanmer's in the case of *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* fandom, exploring how fans' reactions to onscreen subtext and to the coyness of the program's producers generate a vibrant network of queer female textualities and knowledges.

If both Jones and Hanmer's assessments of *Xena* fan production consider its implications to be largely positive, Jeanne E. Hamming's Deleuzian analysis is less optimistic. In "Whatever Turns You On: Becoming-Lesbian and the Production of Desire in the Xenaverse," she maintains that the fandom constitutes the

> perpetuation of a model of desire predicated on an "open secret"... [and] this so-called "liberation" masks the policing of the very lesbianism the show seemingly brings to the surface.... Furthermore, the cache of Xena/Gabrielle slash fiction which has grown out of the show's reliance on open secrecy... [is] produced and re-produced through the circuit formed between the show and its online fans... foreground[ing] the mechanisms of repression and commodification of lesbian sexualities (¶1)

In other words, subtext instigates a profitable oscillation of desire and denial, inducing "a feedback loop as both producers and consumers of *Xena* market the very unmentionability of lesbian sexuality" (¶14). For Hamming, "Jenkins' conception of textual poaching... offers an unsatisfactory explanation of the circuit formed between the fan consumer and the television producer... it is not true that this movement is unidirectional, from the producers of the show to the 'poaching' consumers" (¶6), especially given that "the internet... has brought fan fiction to the immediate attention of television producers who have responded by incorporating fan material into production" (¶7). Her principal qualm about this development is that "the circuit created between

Xena: Warrior Princess and *Xena* slash fiction, between the production of the series (as commodity) and the production of slash confession (also as commodity), is, in short, a capitalist relation; 'sex(uality) sells!'" (¶18). This entanglement with market logics casts "the production of new texts, and hence new augmented 'realities,' from the "raw material' of the show" by "*Xena* fanwriters operat[ing] as desiring-machines" (¶5) in a less favorable light, since all this free-flowing desire is ultimately structured by "positing [lesbian sexuality] as dangerous and subversive" (¶12) and "leads to a multiplication of capital gain for the series' producers" (¶21). Nonetheless, Hamming allows that, since "the capitalization of lesbian desire exposes sexuality as a construction" (¶24), "lesbians can at least retain the possibility of inhabiting contested and mobile zones of sexuality which resist the overcodings of social repression" (¶26). In the case of *Xena* fandom as "an ongoing construction of desire, there is no rational basis for drawing a distinction between the production of *Xena* on television and the production of *Xena* on the web... [and] Xena slash operates as a kind of unnatural participation" (¶27) wherein "these writers have demonstrated the possibility of producing an ars erotica that has its own intrinsic pleasures and generates its own rules as to what is and isn't acceptable to produce, market, and consume" (¶28). While an approach via critical theory conducts Hamming toward a pessimistic outlook, then, in the end she identifies certain hopeful facets within the matrix of *Xena* fandom. Like Hamming, my primary methodology is theoretical, and in Chapter IV I delve into the issue of fans' implication in capitalism through a study of labor relations in and around *The L Word*, finding a similar balance of commodification and resistance.

Finally, in "'Guys who've never slept with a woman and women who have': *Xena: Warrior Princess* Fans and Cultural Anxieties of Sexuality," Mel Stanfill examines journalistic accounts of *Xena* fandom and what their hyperbolic judgments reveal about the non-normative dimensions of fan practices. Returning to the discipline's formative efforts, she observes that "fan studies was inaugurated as a field by academics who sought to defend fans against... mockeries by arguing that they did not represent fans as they really were" (2). Given the dominant culture's "tendency toward classifying what is 'wrong' with fans as sexual deviance" (2), most academic analyses have elided fans' sexuality in the service of refuting these stereotypes -- for instance, by claiming that slash is "subversive or transgressive" (3), a "resource for developing identity for... [marginalized] communities" (4), or "a space in which one can work out one's sexuality through discussions with other fans" (5), rather than that slash is erotic per se. "More recently," according to Stanfill, scholars have turned away from this focus on recuperating fandom from popular censure and "the tendency has been to declare these visions antiquated and proclaim that fandom has broken into the mainstream" (6). She asserts that it is problematic that "little attention is paid in fan studies to the fact that fans *are* actually nonnormative, and fandom *is* a sexual practice" (6) and, while we obviously shouldn't accept the clichés of fans' degeneracy at face value, researchers need to "take seriously the implications of the fact that fans get sexual pleasure from their fan activities" (6). Through discourse analysis (9), Stanfill explores anxieties about the perverse genders and sexualities of *Xena* fans that appear consistently in over 700 press reports on the phenomenon, recognizing that they may echo non-normative possibilities that are actually in play. Despite their emphasis on derision and titillation, journalists'

descriptions contributed to "a feedback loop: fans felt like they weren't the only ones to see subtext, or saw it for the first time, or people began watching the show looking for it; makers got a sense that this was a widespread view; and the show's lesbian subtext became an issue to be addressed in subsequent media discussions of the show, which began the cycle again" (21). Stanfill concludes that fans (at their best) are still scandalous and thus productive of such cycles because they "transgress our culturally-established boundary with media -- they get too close, take it too seriously, feel too much and the wrong things" (22). In short, since "fundamentally, all fans are considered to transgress sexual norms... 'fan' might be usefully considered as 'queer'... in that it violates norms and blurs categories" (22). This affiliation implies different values and methodologies than are typical in fan studies, and I share Stanfill's commitment to elaborating a queer approach to fan production that takes desire and sexuality as pivotal elements. In Chapter III, I investigate how theories of hybrid technologies and identities elucidate the formation of queer female "families" in *Battlestar Galactica* and its fandom, suggesting that the erotics of fan communities are not so easily normalized by an authorized commercial lineage.

In this dissertation, I take femslash fandom as it developed after *Xena: Warrior Princess* as my paradigmatic object -- a willfully perverse choice given the under-representation of femslash in both fandom as a whole and in its academic analysis. This is not, however, a dissertation *about* femslash fandom, and beyond my three case studies I make no claim to a comprehensive survey or overarching argument about the characteristics, organization, or practices of femslash in and of itself. While this would be a worthy project for other scholars, for my own purposes I overturn the typical

privileging of male slash and simply render femslash as the unmarked term. Rather than scrutinizing the particularities of queer female fan communities, I ask what they prototypically reveal about larger transformations in media production and consumption today. As I have explained, the cultural and industrial ramifications of TV-internet convergence reposition fandom as the mass media's aspirational model of audience engagement. Therefore, it is an opportune moment to explore the effects of this so-called mainstreaming on the established queer economies of fandom, and vice versa. Revisiting the present-day conjuncture of fan studies will further contextualize my mobilization of femslash formations in the service of an expansive outlook.

1 / Fan Studies Meets Convergence

The articles on *Xena* fans that I glossed above exemplify both some of the broad approaches to fan studies and some of the specificities of studying femslash fandom. After a decade of proliferation and diversification, the field is now in a position to cohere as a network of scholars and concerns and, as interest in fan phenomena becomes more widespread, to cross-pollinate with related research in various disciplines. As a reference point for the state of fan studies today, I would like to juxtapose the introductions to two landmark anthologies that sought to delineate a sustained contribution to media and cultural studies at large. Hellekson has observed that "fan studies can be usefully divided into two major approaches: study of fans themselves and fan culture, and study of the artifacts fans create" (5), and this rough bifurcation holds for the differing orientations of *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, edited by Jonathan Gray,

Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington (2007), and *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, edited by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse (2006).

In "Introduction: Why Study Fans?" Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington identify three "waves" of fan studies, beginning with the early work that I discussed previously. Since the typical modality of this generation "did not so much deconstruct the binary structure in which the fan had been placed as... differently value the fan's place in said binary" (3), it risked "Othering" fandom and ignoring its less intensive forms (4). These "conceptual" problems of the recuperative phase, along with the "historical" trend toward "mainstreamed appreciation of being a fan" stimulated by the shift from "an era of broadcasting to one of narrowcasting... deregulation... [and] new media technologies" (4), pushed academic inquiry to evolve. From the mid-1990s, according to the authors, scholars turned to Bourdieu's "sociology of consumption" to "unmask the false notion of popular culture as a realm of emancipation" and demonstrate that "practices of fan consumption are structured through our habitus as a reflection and further manifestation of our social, cultural, and economic capital" (6). Here the *Fandom* editors clearly confine themselves to a particular segment of the field, that centered on a cultural studies approach to the praxis and politics of interpretive communities, skirting the work on fandom as textual production. When we come to the third wave, which no doubt overlaps with the second but surfaces around 1998, Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington claim that fan studies has expanded to take account of the "empirical" end of fandoms as "subcultures" due to the "changing communication technologies and media texts [that] contribute to and reflect the increasing entrenchment of fan consumption in the structure of our everyday life" (8). At this juncture, where the articles comprising the volume are

situated, "fandom is no longer only an object of study in and of itself," and instead "aims to capture fundamental insights into modern life" as "audience research has revealed the deep-seated symbiosis between the cultural practice and perspective of being a fan and industrial modernity at large" (9). The anthology puts forward six "directions" for the field that correspond to broader themes in the study of postmodernity (11), and as such answers the question that frames the introduction: "What contribution can the study of fans make to a world faced with war... among other disasters?" (1). This opening effort to justify the project of fan studies seems rather retrograde, evoking the "first wave" concern with countering negative views of fandom as well as innumerable dismissals of the academic study of popular culture. Nonetheless, Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington's definition of the "third wave" faithfully captures my own alignment in this dissertation, which leverages fan phenomena as artifacts to illustrate more ambitious arguments about media futures.

In contrast to the lofty tone of the *Fandom* introduction, Hellekson and Busse commence their introduction to *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, titled "Work in Progress," with two conversational anecdotes that highlight how the process of compiling the volume both parallels and intersects the process of fan production. Rather than looking outward toward the expansion of fan studies into far flung domains of postmodernity, *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities* turns inward to invest in the core of the field, explicitly nurturing scholarship that is rooted in participation and concertedly updating its traditions for the internet era. They also offer a summary of past research, but their emphasis is on the multiplicity and fluidity of fan studies and its objects, underscoring "the dense intertextuality found in the creation of fan

works of art and in fan academic discourse" (5-6) that reminds us that "like the fantext, with its complementary and contradictory readings of the source text, the academic text seeking to describe and understand fandom also creates a work in progress" (7). Moreover, Hellekson and Busse's path through the literature is less schematic than Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington's; they acknowledge more diverse precursors and specifically more of the foregoing work on slash and other forms of fan creativity, and their genealogy includes the vernacular theory produced by fans themselves (23-24). The anthology's concentrated focus on fan fiction places it in the opposite methodological camp from *Fandom*, but although it takes fan texts rather than fan subcultures as its primary target, its aim is to contribute to community building in addition to scholarly debates. The editors "hope to shift the concerns [of fan studies] from a dichotomy of academic and fannish identity to subject positions that are multiple and permit us to treat the academic and fannish parts as equally important" (24), and in so doing "to acknowledge our depth [sic] to the community at the same time that we present, if only metonymically, the complexity of thoughts that fandom itself generates" (25). While my analysis strives for the scope and impact described by Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington's "third wave" orientation, its topics and approaches are closer to those of *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities*: my interest is in the intersecting textualities of television programs, their authorized cross-media extensions, and their appropriations in queer female fan production, rather than in studying subcultural formations from a sociological perspective. Furthermore, my work is likewise intertwined with my participation in creative media fandom and its scholarly networks, and although this project is cast in

formal academic terms I do not profess distance or objectivity in relation to the three fandoms I discuss.

The final landmark that delineates the context of my work is Henry Jenkins's adroit and accessible monograph *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006). Jenkins is masterful at diagnosing and synthesizing developments in popular culture, and this book was instantly the definitive reference for any engagement with its eponymous phenomenon, "convergence" -- a buzzword for the sweeping changes wrought by "new" media on the technical, industrial, and cultural organization of "old" media. This label takes on varying meanings in the milieus of policy, journalism, or technology, but for Jenkins,

> Convergence does not depend on any specific delivery mechanism. Rather, convergence represents a paradigm shift -- a move from medium-specific content toward content that flows across multiple media channels, toward the increased interdependence of communications systems, toward multiple ways of accessing media content, and toward ever more complex relations between top-down corporate media and bottom-up participatory culture.... We are in a critical moment of transition during which the old rules are open to change and companies may be forced to renegotiate their relationship to consumers. (243)

Fandom remains at the heart of Jenkins's concerns, and as such he explicates convergence largely in terms of fan practices, cementing the centrality of fan production to broader discourses about media in transition. As his definition suggests, his research is particularly occupied with the corporate dimensions of this transformation, and he sees no contradiction between "tactical collaboration" (250) with the media industry, which allows him "adventures into spaces where few humanists have gone before" (13) as "an active participant in discussions among industry insiders and policymakers" (12), and his "critical utopian" (247) idea that "the emergence of new media technologies supports a

democratic urge to allow more people to create and circulate media" (258). This collision of new market imperatives and new participatory potentials is the site of mounting tensions and synergies between fans and commercial entertainment today, and Jenkins sums up the corporations' quandary: "the media industry is increasingly dependent on active and committed consumers... and in some cases they are seeking ways to channel the creative output of media fans... at the same time, they are terrified of what happens if this consumer power gets out of control... it can not be fully contained or channeled by them" (134). Jenkins's assessment of present-day metamorphoses in the cultural status and function of fandom has been widely influential, not least as a catalyst for fan studies itself. His survey of convergence culture has spurred the field toward greater cohesion as its various factions pursue their interventions in this discourse, thus becoming more visible to outsiders and to each other.

I take much of Jenkins's appraisal as axiomatic for my own research, in particular his formulation of convergence as a heterogeneous cultural process with intertwined technological, industrial, aesthetic, and social components (3), a view that counters the "Black Box Fallacy" (14) which assumes that all media will merge seamlessly into a single device. Jenkins is careful to distinguish the technological layer from the participatory activities with which he is concerned, writing that "Interactivity refers to the ways that new technologies have been designed to be more responsive to consumer feedback.... Participation, on the other hand, is shaped by the cultural and social protocols... the Web has pushed that hidden layer of cultural activity into the foreground, forcing the media industry to confront its implications" (133). I would argue, however, that Jenkins too readily dismisses the impact of developments in technology (the web, for

one), and that the insights of media theory would enrich his account. Media studies is not synonymous with technological determinism -- in my analysis I take technical capacities, including interactivity, as the foundation for understanding the emergent practices of viewers and users, including participation. Moreover, although Jenkins's sustained attention to fandom is valuable, his framing of the phenomenon seems to have changed little since *Textual Poachers*: it stands as the paradigmatic site of grassroots resistance, so that when "mass media has tended to use its tight control over intellectual property to reign in competing interpretations... fans reject the idea of a definitive version produced, authorized, and regulated by some media conglomerate. Instead, fans envision a world where all of us can participate in the creation and circulation of central cultural myths" (256). The architecture and status of fan communities looks very different today than it did in 1992, when Jenkins first appraised fanworks as popular mythologies akin to folk traditions, and it is time to update our understanding of fandom's power relations for present-day conditions.

My project aims to reconceptualize fan production, in particular the antagonism between fans and the entertainment industry, for the era of convergence. I believe that this endeavor requires a critique of capitalism, an element that is markedly absent from Jenkins's scholarly praxis. As Anne Kustritz puts it in her review of *Convergence Culture*, he "clearly states that media corporations will allow shifts toward more democratic interactions with consumers and more diverse media because such decisions ultimately reinforce their own economic interests... such strategies also maintain or even expand the basic structures of capital and the profit motive by spreading commodification and corporate control" (Kustritz). From my standpoint, fans are not subversive by

definition, but nor are the interests of fans and corporations commensurate. Conditions of increasing commodification and control raise the stakes of their negotiations, and to intervene we need theoretically elaborated criticism of the implications of convergence for the technological, textual, ideological, and sexual economies of fan production.

2 / Television Meets the Internet

Growing interest in convergence has intersected with a range of academic discourses and contributed to the widening orbit of fan studies. In television studies, both new and established scholars have wrestled with the intermediation of TV and video content and its ramifications for the field's concepts and methodologies. Amanda Lotz's book *The Television Will Be Revolutionized* historicizes this "ambiguity about the boundaries of the medium," pointing out that "although the term 'television' has been broadly used to refer to a singular technology -- a box with a screen -- the range of experiences has long made the object of study quite uncertain" (29). As her title implies, today's changes are indeed transformative, but television remains relevant as a formation because "our cultural understanding of this medium does conceive of it as more than a monitor, piece of hardware, or gateway to programming... [it is] less defined by how the content gets to us and what we view it on than by the set of experiences and practices we've long associated with the activity of viewing" (29-30). Lotz observes that "the lack of interactivity inherent in the one-way transmission of television made it difficult for viewers to recreate viewing communities during much of the multi-channel transition, [but] the web has since created locations for the development of rich fan cultures and communities. As the 'viewing' of television and the internet continue to converge,

audience members will be better able to participate in communities of fanship" (255). Thus online fandom emerges as an increasingly general experience of the collective audience.

Writing in the anthology *Television After TV*, William Uricchio examines how one of the seminal ideas of television studies, Raymond William's description of the property "flow," has evolved along with the medium. Although again, "television has [always] been a transient and unstable medium... the present day's convergent technologies, economies, and textual networks have not only subverted many of the assumptions which have until now driven the logics of television, but they have also transformed the medium's context and cultural place" (165). Uricchio notes that because of "intensified convergence and the television medium's own shift from broadcasting to a variety of alternate carriers (cable, satellite, and video-on-demand systems), content has been loosened from any particular distribution form, giving the Internet access to once exclusive televisual domains... [while digital] technologies have also encouraged television providers to offer services that look very much like those associated with the Internet" (175). This entails "a concept of flow that is fundamentally different... [in its] radical displacement of control" (175) toward computer algorithms that aim to automate our viewing decisions. Will Brooker has likewise claimed that in "a situation where the text of the TV show is no longer limited to the television medium... [we are] witness to more than just the sometimes bizarre melange of television flow which dazed Raymond Williams in the 1970s" (457), but he emphasizes participation over mechanization in evaluating this transition. "We need a new word for the process... [of] becoming part of the broader text" (457), he argues, proposing "'overflow' [which] can be linked to the

notion of 'convergence'" (458). Taking the online promotions for the teen soap *Dawson's Creek* as his example, he points out that "the official *Dawson's Creek* network... problematizes Jenkins' strict division between owner-produced and fan-produced convergence.... On the other hand, perhaps these interactive forums and the generous links to fan pages merely suggest a sophisticated process of incorporation on the part of the producers" (459). While Brooker's conclusions based on a survey of US and UK teens are provisional, he thus broaches fruitful questions for an era that "enable[s] an immersive, participatory engagement with the programme that crosses multiple media platforms and invites active contribution; not only from fans, who after all have been engaged in participatory culture around their favored texts for decades, but also as part of the regular, 'mainstream' viewing experience" (470). Overflow is one framework that researchers have adopted to analyze this transformation in the constitution of mass media production and consumption.

Sharon Marie Ross has conducted a book-length study of how online fandom is changing the relationships between texts, viewers, and producers. In *Beyond the Box*, she explores the "range of experiences in tele-participation that can occur when TV and the Internet meet" (3), focusing specifically on new "reciprocal dynamics" (4) between media makers and consumers. Arguing that "the Internet's placement 'between' sites of production and sites of reception... encourages a sense of reciprocity and closeness between industry professionals and viewers" (10), Ross formulates a taxonomy of industrial "invitations to interact with TV shows beyond the moment of viewing and 'outside' of the TV show itself" (4). Much of her assessment deals once again with the mainstreaming of subcultural fan practices, and her case studies follow the ways that

"recent TV shows [have] perhaps borrowed from the strategies of cult television and its fandom to create more mainstream programming that... [might] be reconfiguring the very idea of the 'regular viewer' to more closely approximate 'the (cult) fan'" (13). *Lost* (ABC, 2004-present) in particular serves as an example of a network hit that "has much in common narratively with cult fan shows of the past... [and that] has inspired a rapidly developing and complex Internet presence... the TV industry has been watching this series and its successful invitations as a potential model for future developments of tele-participation" (28). Building on Brooker's findings, Ross acknowledges that "'cult-like' strategies are no guarantee of cult-like consumer behavior... [but] the tele-participating viewer is becoming a prototype -- and real or imagined, the *perception* of the social audience is often as important as the *actuality* of the social audience" (15). This "constantly shifting... web of relationships" (22) between the emerging conception of participatory engagement and the heterogeneous realities of television consumption, and between the intertwined layers of textuality and creativity across TV and the internet, entails "a fine balancing act between the power of the industry on the one hand and the power of viewers on the other" (20), and "if what is ultimately most useful to the social audience is in tension with what is most useful to the industry, the relationships in this aesthetics of multiplicity will become strained" (26). Ross's account therefore identifies a similar problematic to Jenkins's in *Convergence Culture* -- the evolving negotiations between corporations and fans in the context of media convergence -- but she concentrates in detail on television's industrial landscape (5-6).

Derek Kompare has also complicated the relationships of television production, countering academic research that too often "lacks an analysis of the complex workings

of the television industry, its components, and its people" (¶2). He observes that "many television creators today (writers in particular) consider themselves fans, and actively foster relationships with fans... [and] present significant opportunities for connecting the dots between producers, texts, and viewers" (¶2). Like Ross, Kompare claims that "the internet has greatly expanded the range and volume of these creator-fan encounters... [and] creators have taken an even more active role in this relationship, offering up extensive online commentary and discussion about their work" (¶3). *Lost* is again a paradigmatic example of such connections, and "like their fan-produced counterparts (which number in the dozens), [its] official blogs and podcasts offer new spaces for analysis, interpretation, and creator-fan interaction" (¶5). Turning to fandom's side of this equation, Jason Mittell scrutinizes Lostpedia, a collectively generated wiki that contains the authoritative compendium of *Lost* trivia. Because *Lost*'s fan appeal is based in a web of ongoing mysteries, Lostpedia diverges from Wikipedia's restriction to facts -- it "has served as a site for mulling possible explanations for the island's enigmas... [and] has always allowed for original research and analysis, incorporating fan-created knowledge alongside the more encyclopedic acts of collecting, organizing, and distilling canonical information" (¶2.13). The power dynamics between professional and fan producers play out here as well, though, since Lostpedia's "architecture is designed to allow spaces for noncanonical fan production as a means of prioritizing canonical authorized content... [marking out a] separate sphere of unofficial knowledge that helps make canon seem more official by comparison" (¶2.16). This enforced hierarchy is to some degree a departure from creative fandom's embrace of multiple interpretations, implying "gendered differences" (¶2.33) between investigative communities such as

Lostpedia and the predominantly female communities producing fan fiction and artworks, but Mittell challenges us to recognize the creativity (and the women) involved in constructing fannish knowledge and speculation. The array of television scholarship that I have glossed here, then, is exemplary of research that is pushing the field to incorporate the developments of convergence, foregrounding fandom as a pivotal nexus for working through the shifting alliances and intertexts at the meeting of TV and the internet.

My project is grounded in this growing body of work on convergence that explicates the significance of fan production to present-day transformations in popular media economies. I bring together two modalities of fan studies: roots in the subcultural networks of queer female creative fandom and attention to the tendency toward mainstreaming evidenced in popular and visible fan communities like *Lost*'s. Building on my own and others' analyses of fan phenomena, I investigate how convergence shapes femslash formations. More importantly, however, I investigate how the queer dimensions of creative fandom, exemplified by femslash formations, shape convergence. My overarching aim is to construct a theoretical framework for understanding the stakes of the larger transition within which these connections are embedded. Drawing on the infrastructures of media theory, queer theory, Marxist theory, and other critical traditions, my three case studies extrapolate from particular objects broader claims about the emerging power relations of today's media ecology. I hope to elucidate the tensions not only between fans and the industry but between consumption and capitalism that delimit possibilities of containment and resistance within our technocultural milieu.

B / QUEER METHODOLOGIES

This dissertation proposes that the logic of convergence is a queer logic, an assertion that is based in the queer traditions of fan production (that is, creating interpretations and artworks that mine mass media for same-sex romances and erotics) which are now colliding with dominant industrial forms. It is also based in the more abstract contention that desire is a vital axis of the architectures that span fandom and capitalism. For one example of the difficulties that desire poses for capitalist control, I turn to legal scholar Rebecca Tushnet's essay on its incompatibility with intellectual property. In "Economies of Desire: Fair Use and Marketplace Assumptions," she argues that "a copyright law that treats creativity as a product of economic incentives" fails to account for the fact that "the desire to create can be excessive, beyond rationality, and free from the need for economic incentive" (515). According to Tushnet, fan fiction is a common reference in debates about fair use (528), and "slash works as a metonym for transformative fair use because it is about nonrivalrous pleasures.... Fan creators, realizing this, reject the economy of scarcity and excludability that animates mainstream copyright discourse" (529). She conceives desire in terms of a "plenitude" (543) that places fan production in opposition to systems of ownership. "Not unrelatedly," she writes, "fanworks regularly engage with sexuality of all kinds. A group of mostly-female creators writes, draws, and makes video for an audience that is also mostly female, and they are often turning each other on" (541). Tushnet thus parallels the queer orientation of slash fandom with more general creative desires, and maintains that this "excessive" productivity challenges the coherence of copyright law's economic schema.

Without descending too far into schizoanalysis, let me suggest that Deleuze and Guattari's articulation of desire in *Anti-Oedipus* might furnish a theoretical scaffold for Tushnet's findings: "Capitalism therefore liberates the flows of desire, but under the social conditions that define its limit and the possibility of its own dissolution, so that it is constantly opposing with all its exasperated strength the movement that drives it toward this limit. At capitalism's limit... the decoded flows throw themselves into desiring-production" (139-40). Capitalism, in other words, is constituted by a constant antagonism, as the very productivity that renders it so dynamic as an economic system is always troping toward the limit of its capacity for containment. I recognize in fans' desiring-production a gesture in the direction of this limit, and hence I wouldn't claim that fandom runs counter to capitalism (as many thinkers, including Tushnet, tend to). I do believe, however, that we can witness here a manifestation of capitalism's structural opposition to itself, as it simultaneously "liberates the flows of desire" and tries to arrest their movement (with tactics that include intellectual property law).

Therefore the work that *queer* does in my project is to mark the centrality of desire to the operations of creative fandom in its imbrication with capitalism. This is queer as a shorthand not only for same-sex desire but for any non-normative elements at play in our desire for entertainment commodities. Nonetheless, the fan formations I discuss are occupied with a specifically lesbian desire for television and with producing lesbian desire around television. As a term, queer functions at both these levels, orbiting the particularity of lesbianism, or, sex between women, while evoking the more expansive flows of desire that propel this economy. The problem of abstracting "queer" too far from sex itself is documented in queer theory, and I intend this parallel between

queer as a property and lesbian as a practice to anchor the concept in something concrete: the narratives of same-sex desire created by femslashers, which mirror the queer implications of fan production within convergence. Thus if "queer" embodies, in the words of Lee Edelman, the refusal of "some easily predictable generation of 'proper' unity, coherence, and affection" (344) and "a force of derealization, of dissolution into the fluxions of a subjectless desire" (348), "lesbian" is a facet of this instability that we can provisionally fix as a reference to sexual desire between women. It is an identity that may, but does not necessarily, mobilize an identity politics that works against queer affinity politics. As Judith Butler puts it in *Bodies That Matter*, it is precisely because "the subject as a self-identical entity is no more... [that] the temporary totalization performed by identity categories is a necessary error. And if identity is a necessary error, then the assertion of 'queer' will be necessary as a term of affiliation, but... it will be necessary to affirm the contingency of the term" (230). I like to think, and I believe queer theory as a whole would like to think, that this contingency can be fruitful rather than obfuscating.

To be fair, this rather messy terminology transposes to some degree an ambiguity around queer and lesbian orientations that exists in femslash fandom itself, since, as I will explore, these communities seem to oscillate between reveling in the nonrivalrous plenitude of desire described by Tushnet and yearning for a stable and unequivocal manifestation of lesbian sexuality. Ien Ang has argued that this tendency for identities to disintegrate as quickly as they can coalesce is an effect of capitalism:

> It is in the very nature of capitalism, particularly consumption capitalism, to inscribe excess in its very mode of (re)production.... That is to say, the culture of consumerism is founded on the idea that constant transformation of identities (through consumption) is

> pleasurable and meaningful.... The historical institutionalization of excess of desire in the culture of capitalist postmodernity (most directly for example through the discourses of advertising and marketing)... opens up the cultural space for the formulation and proliferation of unpredictable needs and wants -- i.e. meanings and identities -- not all of which can be absorbed and incorporated in the postmodern order of the capitalist world-system. (176-77)

Her characterization of consumerism as an overabundance of desire, driving a "proliferation of difference and identity, of identities-in-difference" (177) that we might call queer, captures a predicament similar to that expressed by Deleuze and Guattari: capitalism unleashes an excessive productivity that it must then struggle to contain. I contend that, to understand the present-day conjuncture of fandom, we must engage with this predicament, and *queer* marks the axis of this contestation of desire in my account.

Interestingly, both Ang and Edelman aspire to a certain reflexivity in their intellectual projects. Ang asserts that the study of television reception should "document how the bottom-top, micro-powers of audience activity are both complicit with and resistive to the dominant, macro-forces within capitalist postmodernity... [and] embrace fully the primacy of indeterminacy of meaning which, I would argue, is essential for understanding how and why capitalist postmodernity is a 'true realm of uncertainty'" (171). In other words, to encapsulate the unpredictability of media consumption today, scholarship must accommodate this unpredictability in its form. Edelman, in parallel, proposes that, "as a locus of political and intellectual activity committed to interrogating the culturally determined -- and culturally determining -- shapes in which 'desire' can appear, queer theory can only become itself through the gesture whereby it refuses itself, resists itself, perceives that it is always somewhere else, operating as a force of displacement, of disappropriation: operating, in short, as a vector of desire" (345). This

dissertation is a vector of desire for queer media futures that remain open to our simultaneous complicity with and resistance to capitalism and sustain the proliferation of surplus productivity within consumption. It is likewise structured in reflexive strata, with the assumption that the layers of the phenomena under discussion can and do echo each other. Each of the following three chapters counterpoises three intertwined dimensions of one television program and its femslash fandom: screen text, online promotion, and fan production. Each also frames this matrix with a theoretical interpretation of a major aspect of convergence that reflects the logic of its object. My work thus attempts to mitigate a methodological difficulty of fan studies, the Balkanization of disparate sites of analysis, by reading television's representations, production, and reception in imbrication with each other.

In Chapter II, "Private Eyes," I follow three analogous detectives as they investigate sexuality: the scholar, the fan, and the *Law & Order: SVU* (NBC, 1999-present) character Olivia Benson. Beginning from slash's primordial question -- what constitutes subtext? -- I examine the epistemological procedures that structure their inquests into lesbian desire. In both television studies' debates about the coordinates of queer representation and *SVU* fandom's debates about whether Olivia "is" a lesbian, knowledge of sexuality is thwarted by an endless oscillation of contradictory evidence drawn from onscreen portrayals, viewer interpretations, and cultural conditions. This is a textual economy, and I theorize it as a closet formation (Sedgwick) that continually produces fascination and frustration with categorical instability across our society's array of linked binaries. Among them is the binary of television and the internet, and while there are no official online tie-ins here, fans have deciphered behind-the-scenes

interviews with executives and actors, readily available on the web, for corroboration of their hunches. This detective work mirrors the gendered genre of the procedural with its impetus toward certainty and closure, and slash fan fiction stories about Olivia render this incitement as erotic in a mutually constitutive circuit. The closet is thus a figure for convergence, as the industry deploys a certain coyness in its attempts to manage the interdependence of television and the internet, production and consumption, or desire and deviance.

Chapter III, "The Shape of Things to Come," proposes the conflict between humans and Cylons (robot adversaries who can perfectly mimic humans) in *Battlestar Galactica* (SyFy, 2003-2009) as an allegory for the conflict between the television industry and online fandom. Moving from binary oppositions to their hybrid progeny, I focus on the character Hera, the first child of mixed human and Cylon parentage, and her queer family of adoptive mothers. This intimate female collective resembles the community of fan vidders, who appropriate television's raw materials to create online music videos that represent an alternative future. To understand how reproduction operates at these real and fictional valences, I look to theories of media hybridity from Marshall McLuhan to N. Katherine Hayles. This technological economy, populated by onscreen cyborgs and prosthetics like fans' Girlslash Goggles, also concerns the intertwined configurations of race, sexuality, and technicity (technologically derived ethnicity). Contrasting fan vids with *Battlestar Galactica*'s online promotion Video Maker, which invited derivative videos provided that they conform to certain restrictions, I explore the limits and risks of such efforts to harness fan production for explicitly

corporate ends. Convergence is here figured by the hybrid because, as a provisional, impure, and often queer synthesis, its legacy remains in dispute.

With Chapter IV, "Labor of Love," I finally arrive at the capitalist economy itself in my evaluation of fandom's labor relations, as exemplified by *The L Word* (Showtime, 2004-2009) and its fan-driven marketing schemes. Theorizing late capitalism according to Autonomist Marxist conceptions of immaterial labor, I read *The L Word* as a didactic illustration of how to render lesbian identification as profitable work. In particular, the character Alice's chart of a network of lesbian liaisons becomes her job, and it became the job of *The L Word*'s fans as well when Showtime launched OurChart.com, a promotional social network that materialized this diegetic trope. Fan-written script contests also mobilized free labor to advertise the program, extending *The L Word*'s signature claims to authenticity. However, the company that designed the contests elsewhere catalyzed a revolt within creative fandom that led to the launch of a non-profit advocacy organization, underscoring the boundaries of fans' tolerance for expropriation. Autonomism maintains that subjectivity is now directly productive for the value of immaterial commodities, and that workers in self-organizing communicative networks have an autonomy that supports their antagonistic relationship to capital. In this framework, convergence is figured by the worker as a negotiation between corporations and consumers over the labor conditions of desire.

My conclusion, "Television as New Media," returns to some of the topics of this introduction -- including queer flows and TV flow -- to situate my project within digital media studies. As a corrective to this field's intermittent resistance to engaging with TV and popular culture, I outline a media archaeological approach to convergence and

suggest some alliances with existing work on television. My organizing theme is the parallel efforts in poststructuralist theory, media theory, and queer theory to untangle the relation between the material and the discursive, and I argue that subjectivity consistently reemerges as their fulcrum. Once again, then, I call for analyses of present-day media transformations to consider sexuality, because technoculture is constituted in the articulation of bodies with information, subjects with capitalism, and desire with production. Overall, through mapping the interventions generated by queer female fan communities, this dissertation argues that the technologies, discourses, and subjectivities of convergence pose structural challenges to economies of reproduction, circulation, and value that define the antagonisms shaping media evolution today.

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II / PRIVATE EYES

Let me introduce you to Olivia Benson: a dedicated yet personally tormented detective who investigates sex crimes in New York City, sporting a deadly weapon, a leather jacket, and a short haircut. She's hopelessly in love with assistant district attorney Alexandra Cabot, who prosecutes her cases -- they're each other's domestic partners, occasional lovers, or secret crushes, depending on who is telling the story. That is, these individuals are fictional characters on *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* (*SVU*; NBC, 1999-present), and the question of whether Olivia could be Alex's (or anyone's) girlfriend is a particularly contested one across online *SVU* fandom: some fans are determined to claim her as gay, while others insist that she's straight. Although there is clearly intense investment on both sides in definitively verifying the answer, there is at the same time significant confusion about the proper source of the necessary evidence: text, subtext, or metatext. In this chapter, I chronicle the inquests of three detectives with parallel mandates to uncover the truths of desire: the TV character, who is hot on the trail of New York City's sex offenders; *SVU* fans, who watch the show vigilantly for clues to who is in Olivia's heart and in her bed; and television scholars, who are fascinated by these epistemological conundrums, driven to investigate how we might know things about television, about audiences, and about sexuality. I maintain that the projects of these three detectives are intertwined in multivalent networks that link knowledge, desire, and spectatorship across diverse registers. Within this intertextual architecture, the question of whether Olivia is "really" a lesbian is inextricable from broader ambiguities that infuse

the conflicted relations between texts and audiences, academics and fans, gender and consumption, hermeneutics and erotics.

My own romance with Olivia Benson [Figure 1] began with a chance conversation at my local coffee shop that catalyzed an addiction to USA's nightly *SVU* reruns. Because of my preexisting fluency in subtextual viewing protocols, the availability of the Olivia/Alex dyad transformed *SVU*, for me, into a compelling nexus of speculation, imagination, and desire. Olivia and Alex are indeed a power couple of female slash fandom, one among a scattered pantheon of classic "one true pairings" -- OTPs that certain media seem to invite us to recognize by portraying a profound (if not explicitly romantic) relationship between two characters (an archetype that, in the world of femslash, does not much predate *Xena: Warrior Princess* [1995-2001]). My personal engagement with their saga depends on the contingencies that shape television viewership -- daily routines, a fortuitous meeting, and the topographies of social networks and lesbian subcultures (both online and off) -- demonstrating how interpretations of, and libidinal encounters with, *SVU* the program are entangled with internet fandom and with everyday life. Television criticism often leans toward one or the other side of the border separating diegetic content from audience reception, examining one territory in relative isolation. Here, I attempt to plot the intersections between screen texts and fan texts, taking them as mutually constitutive. This process incorporates the disintegration of a number of linked binaries, because the indeterminacy of inside/outside or gay/straight impinges on the stability of private/public, fiction/reality, fan/critic, leisure/work, and other oppositions.

Crucial among them is the rapidly dissolving frontier between television and the internet, which brings the interdependence of TV producers and consumers ever more out into the open. The subtext of my argument is the notion that television is itself in the closet about its digital tendencies, largely as a defense mechanism for preserving broadcast's profit models and margins. Like the question so often posed about Olivia -- "is she or isn't she?" -- the question "is it or isn't it TV?" has high stakes in hierarchical economies of power, and is addressed with a parallel coyness. Moreover, these taxonomic teases are interlaced and analogous: as slash fandom becomes increasingly visible and pervasive under conditions of increasingly competitive and diffuse distribution and attention, its cultivation (or at least negotiation) takes on increasing importance as an industrial strategy. Convergence, in other words, is queer, in both content and in form. In this milieu, my analysis consists not of cracking the case of Olivia Benson where the aforementioned detectives remain stymied, but rather of mapping the specifically televisual limits that circumscribe their inquiries, especially at the hazardous junctions of epistemological endeavors, erotic investments, and capitalist economics. I can offer no incontrovertible proof that Olivia is a lesbian, no stable hierarchy of meaning among text, subtext, and metatext. Any evidence that might be tendered is always already ensnared in the vortex of the closet, wherein the secret truths of (homo)sexuality are simultaneously exposed and effaced in relentless fluctuations between binary poles. What I present here is the more nuanced claim that Olivia is the fulcrum of an apparatus of lesbian desire that operates at the volatile interchanges permeating these geographies, including those that constitute television as a mass medium.

Fans and scholars alike tend to sidestep the problem of these colliding dimensions by favoring a singular axis of interpretation. Academic analyses in media studies may focus on textual readings of television programs and the ideal viewers they imply, while those in audience studies may describe the rich ecology of fan practices and productions. Fans, for their part, can be dogmatic about the irrefutable status of the commercial creator's authorial intent or, alternately, of their own interpretive community's evaluation of a narrative. Selectively adopting certain evidentiary criteria is a legitimate and necessary aspect of investigation, and moreover, corporate entertainment and scholarly disciplines do strategically promote the systems of epistemological authority that work in their interest. For femslash fans, approaches to media viewership may be steeped in the discourses of identity politics and gay civil rights, which are similarly tactical in closing down ambiguities to produce an orthodox agenda that I would call "lesbian visibility." While not minimizing the value of these stabilizing projects, my intervention here is to delve into the unstable circuits of mutual interdependence between the strata of a textual network. I take seriously the question of how what appears on television can channel fans' deductive and creative activities, as well as the question of how fans' meaning-making can influence the import of television programs. Given television's interpenetration with its social context, with online paratexts, with the competencies and orientations of its viewers, the desires and procedures of my three detectives (the character, the fan, and the critic) mirror and structure each other in their pursuit of a verdict. I maintain that it is ultimately in such irresolvable enigmas that the most fruitful prospects for knowledge, passion, and profit lie.

A / CLOSET CASE

"If Olivia is gay, then she's a closet case." (Sally Forth)

In her introduction to the recent anthology *Televising Queer Women*, Rebecca Beirne opens by reiterating calls "over the years [by] the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities... [for] fairer and more accurate representation of LGBT people on television" (1). This "politics of visibility" has its place, and I wouldn't want to belittle the importance of the "gay character" in an evolving screen economy, or her veneration by deprived queer viewers. However, such pervasive appeals for positive representation depend on drastically simplified and impoverished notions of visibility, sexuality, and community, none of which are "knowable" as naturally as this formulation seems to assume. "LGBT people" never transparently and unambiguously appear, and this is even more so "on television" -- if, in fact, it is even possible to fully distinguish what is "on television" from what is not. This rich indeterminacy is at the heart of Eve Sedgwick's intervention in *Epistemology of the Closet*, which investigates how, around the turn of the 20th century, the homosexual/heterosexual binary was transformed into the privileged, obligatory taxonomy for classifying all persons and all permutations of sexuality. Not only did this discourse manage crisis in the realm of sexual demarcation, it was also entangled with an array of other constitutively modern predicaments, among them knowledge/ignorance, public/private, inside/outside, and masculine/feminine. Because "the structuring of same sex bonds [is] a site of intensive regulation that intersects virtually every issue of power and gender" (2-3), the borders of heterosexuality and homosexuality are incessantly policed (for their own sake and for the sake of the

other fraught domains they intersect), but they can never be definitively stabilized. The closet is Sedgwick's figure for this profoundly contradictory organizing principle, not only of sexual identity, but of all oscillations of secrecy and disclosure that are primordially filtered through the "one particular sexuality that was distinctively constituted *as* secrecy" (73). The exasperating and oppressive paradoxes of the closet, wherein that which is unknowable, unspeakable, and invisible is at the same time relentlessly studied, discussed, and represented (and vice versa), are emblematic of "the cumulative incoherence of modern ways of conceptualizing same-sex desire and, hence, gay identity; an incoherence that answers, too, to the incoherence with which *hetero*sexual desire and identity are conceptualized" (82). The primordial interdependence of binary terms, whose opposition is at the same time axiomatic and irresolvably oscillating, produces an experience of being "bayoneted through and through... by the vectors of a disclosure at once compulsory and forbidden" and tyrannized by "an excruciating system of double binds" (70). This aporetic logic is all the more insistent when operating within the already highly compromised and overdetermined domain of TV representation.

Lynne Joyrich's article "Epistemology of the Console" offers a comprehensive model of how epistemology and consumption are fundamentally intertwined with sexuality in the televisual economy. Her premise is that "U.S. television both impedes and constructs, exposes and buries, a particular knowledge of sexuality" (440) as one of its structuring projects, to the point that "the closet becomes an implicit TV form" (450). The incessant swinging of the closet door (445) is an effect of the ways television relies on homosexuality as "the sexuality produced precisely *as* obstacle, necessarily inside and

outside the televisual domain... [its] disclosure seemingly compulsory yet forbidden, demanded yet contained" (449). Like most scholars of queer representation and reception, Joyrich observes that the media have managed homosexual desire through deliberate ambiguity, with contradictory consequences: "Held 'definitionally in suspense' through connotation, homosexuality became impossible either to confirm or to disprove, with the unsettling (or heartening) effect that heterosexuality itself could no longer be absolutely guaranteed " (442). This "subtextual" strategy, wherein coded desire is readable only to viewers properly qualified to decrypt it, is typically condemned (by all but slash fans) as coy, mercenary, and apolitical at best. Joyrich's mobilization of Sedgwick's framework, however, leads her to caution that "in formulating a politics of representation, we need not -- indeed, should not -- simply ask for more... the explicit revelation of sexuality on commercial television need not explode the logic of the closet" (467). In fact, the appearance of explicit "gay characters" on TV programs can serve to localize and thus contain what are otherwise more pervasive and destabilizing homoerotic undercurrents, implying that, enmeshed as we are in the inexorable seesaw of binaries, "subtext" or "connotation" is in some ways the more progressive mode.

According to Joyrich, this strategy is a key permutation of "the [TV] industry's attempts to define sexuality as product while retaining its simultaneous anxiety around sexuality as practice" (451), an economic bargain often facilitated by "encourag[ing] an epistemology (and erotics) of 'knowing viewers'" (453) (or, in my terms, trained detectives). She contends that "the logic of the commodity is already related to the logic of the closet. In other words, there is no pure space of gay self-disclosure uncontaminated by relations of consumerism and commodification, just as there is no

pure space of consumerism uncontaminated by what we might see as closet relations" (462). In "The Epistemological Stakes of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*," Amelie Hastie similarly calls attention to the "inherent overlap between consumerist and epistemological economies present both in television itself and in television criticism" (91). She notes that *Buffy* explicitly thematizes the search for knowledge by including research, historical information, and "watching" as characteristic plot points. By absorbing this focus, fans "are trained in epistemological viewing practices" (85), indoctrinated into "a desire for and production of knowledge" (83) and a "historical consciousness" that works against "the ephemeral nature of television" (76) (e.g. its "liveness" or present tense, an effect of ongoing episodic series; its resistance to archivability). Show tie-ins (whether in the form of commercial merchandise or fan productions), then, capitalize on viewership's coupling of desire and pleasure with the project of investigation to promote a realm of supplementary texts that drive and are driven by TV as a consumerist medium. At the same time, "This production of a knowing fan and an investment in knowledge -- by both the series and its ancillary texts -- naturally links *Buffy* to the work of the critic" (88). If, in the consumer logics of television itself, the desire to watch is linked with the desire to know, than it is also true that "Television criticism depends upon consumption" and its pleasures -- another of the open secrets that the closet both exposes and conceals. In other words, Hastie's analysis dovetails with my own by theorizing the practices of screen, fan, and academic detectives as congruent and interdependent, shaped by corresponding investments in epistemology and consumption as interlocking modes of engagement. Each is enabled and constrained

by closet formations wherein binary terms continually reassert their authority in spite of their manifest instability and contradictions.

1 / OUTSIDE/INSIDE

The epistemological project of decoding sexuality onscreen is thus unavoidably complicit in the coy convolutions it tries to arrest. Both academics and fans have sought out the "queer character" as an object of knowledge through the same self-perpetuating ciphers that seem to propel her ever further from reach. At issue is what register of evidence for Olivia and her ilk's orientation is ultimately definitive:

- the television text, which offers proof in the form of mysteriously cathected scenes with Alexandra Cabot, short hair and butch accessories;
- the legitimacy of audience interpretations, viewing practices and communities that resoundingly proclaim Olivia's lesbian desirability;
- the extratextual milieu: the conscious intentions of the show's producers for the character and the economic necessity of keeping her palatable to a broad audience, the (perhaps excessively) open heterosexuality of actor Mariska Hargitay, homophobia and the dearth of "real" lesbians in the mass media.

Alexander Doty's book *Making Things Perfectly Queer* takes up the project of theorizing where we can place homosexual desire within media texts themselves (setting aside, for the moment, the study of exterior tactics of queer audiences). In this respect, it is exemplary, but equally exemplary of how criticism cannot fully escape the closet's double binds. The way that "the concept of connotation allows straight culture to use queerness for pleasure and profit in mass culture without admitting to it" (xi) (the same strategy that Joyrich references above) is a central preoccupation of his analysis, but he raises more questions than he answers about the status of this queerness. On one hand,

connotatively queer conventions can be understood as empowering for viewers and destabilizing for heteronormativity, and even tropes like sudden onscreen boyfriends may function as overdetermined markers of the places where lesbian desire most threatens to erupt. On the other hand, though, such open formations are "performing certain homophobic cultural work as they construct and encourage pleasures that seek to have fundamentally lesbian narratives and enjoyments pass as straight or as 'just friends' homosocial" (44). Television simultaneously encourages us to see queer desires everywhere and authorizes us to see them nowhere, and this tension between optimistic and pessimistic outlooks on polysemic texts is symptomatic of what is ultimately an ambivalence on Doty's part about whether mass culture is "perfectly queer" after all -- one that mimics the coquettish "closet of connotation" (xii) that he himself critiques.

At times, he states unequivocally that gay desire is "inside" mass media, writing that "Queer readings... result from the recognition and articulation of the complex range of queerness that has been in popular culture texts and their audiences all along" (16), and denigrating "straight culture['s]... readings of texts" as "desperate attempts to deny the queerness that is so clearly a part of mass culture" (xii). Only sentences before this declaration in his introduction, however, he preemptively backtracks, writing that "unless the text is *about* queers, it seems to me the queerness of most mass culture texts is less an essential, waiting-to-be-discovered property than the result of acts of production or reception" (xi), and "As long as the analysis of mass culture remains dependent primarily upon texts... the queerness of and in mass culture will remain 'essentially unsubstantial,' as it will remain in the twilight zone of connotation" (xii) -- in other words, it is in the interpretive practices of the audience that the *real* queerness is located. "I realize that at a

number of points in this book I use language suggesting that the queerness I am discussing is incontrovertibly *in* the text" (xi), he confesses, but eventually lets us in on the fact that this is a strategic falsehood in the service of a political cause: "If mass culture remains by, for, and about straight culture, it will be so through our silences, or by our continued acquiescence to such cultural paradigms as connotation, *sub*cultures, *sub*cultural studies, *sub*texting, the closet, and other heterosexist ploys positioning straightness as the norm" (104). Doty's analysis, driven by this utopian notion that there might someday be an as-yet-undiscovered way for queerness to unambiguously become visible *in* the text, is thus infiltrated by an unrealizable imperative: the mandate to reinscribe the boundaries between inside and outside, text and audience, gay and straight to pave the way for future representations, even as he embarks on the project of problematizing those boundaries.

I'll admit to leveraging Doty's excellent and important book here as a kind of straw man example for some of the unavoidable difficulties in analyzing queer representation. His study and mine are necessarily engaged with a broader ongoing debate in the discipline of television studies about how to theorize the interfaces between text, audience, and sociopolitical context. Over several decades of interdisciplinary ferment, these have been transformed from more or less stable and opposable categories to a more postmodern assemblage where all familiar borders seem to become permeable. Textual critics, for their part, have developed a model of television itself as a quintessentially postmodern media form characterized by intertextuality, self-reflexivity, seriality, and the continual play of segmentation and flow. Audience theorists like Fiske have similarly wanted to "dissolve" the classification of the audience too into "a

multitude of differences" that "makes nonsense of any categorical boundaries" (56). Ien Ang summarizes the state of affairs when she writes that "in our media-saturated world, media audiences can no longer be conceived as neatly demarcated categories of people, collectively set in relation to a single set of isolated texts and messages, each carrying a finite number of subject positions" (126). This distributed and localized matrix undergirds Doty's opening acknowledgement of "how difficult it can be to attribute the queerness of mass culture to just one source or another" (xiii). What we can draw from this ultimately unresolved enigma, I argue, is an appreciation of the interdependence of queer interpretive work and specific codes and conventions of screen representation.

The quandaries of textuality and sexuality continue to merge in the present-day turn to media convergence, wherein subtext (and its ensuing slash communities) becomes increasingly foregrounded as a platform for fan engagement in overlapping academic and industrial discussions (see Chapter I). By all accounts, then, we arrive (willingly or no) at an epistemological diagram of sexuality where inside and outside interpenetrate, where the borders of the television text are porous, compromised by intertextual relations and infiltrated by audience readings, and where the presence of desire is polymorphous. This is not to suggest that no distinctions or hierarchies can be recognized across these registers. Episodes of *SVU* are obviously distinguishable from fan fiction stories, for example, as *SVU*'s producers are from fans as producers, and each are differently interfaced with apparatuses of power. By the same token, not all readings are created equal, and it is important to maintain an awareness that seeing Olivia with Alex and seeing Olivia with her partner Elliot, for example, are likewise divergent positions differently inflected by power relations. The point is that discourses of sexual knowledge

-- on the part of fans who refer alternately to episodes, fanworks, actors and industry in attempts to find evidentiary purchase, as much as on the part of academics like Doty -- make it apparent that crucial televisual boundaries stubbornly elude efforts to render them fixed and impermeable.

2 / PUBLIC/PRIVATE

In her foregoing exploration of television's closet logics, Joyrich observes that "the institutional organization of U.S. broadcasting situates television precisely on the precarious border of public and private, 'inside' and 'outside.' Here it constructs knowledges identified as both secret (domestically received) and shared (defined as part of a collective national culture)" (445). In other words, television's textual contortions around homosexuality are not only akin to those of the culture at large (in Sedgwick's terms), but also interlaced with them -- and related binary hazards. If television compromises familiar boundaries, this is in part because it has its roots as a mass medium in postwar transformations that were culturally destabilizing. In an article about television as "The Suburban Home Companion" in the 1950's, Lynn Spigel maintains that, during an era when the frontiers of (the domestic) inside and (the economic) outside were being renegotiated, "Television was caught in a contradictory movement between private and public worlds, and it often became a rhetorical figure for that contradiction" (213) -- the home's "antiseptic" "window on the world," but also a breach in its walls that lets in social contagions. Such ambivalence had gendered ramifications, as television "became a central trope for the crisis of masculinity in post-war culture" (229). The volatile public/private nexus is at the heart of television's gendered economic deployment

as much as of its discursive features. Streeter and Wahl write that "The idea of the living room as the center of leisure in the modern TV household is part of a broader... discourse of the 'consumer'... Assumptions about domestic space, and its function within a capitalist economy, are built on the gendered roles of married couples" (249). That is, the stability of consumer capitalism, from its inception, depended upon the segregation of public and private domains that were constructed as masculine and feminine, but by a wholly ideological fiction: "women became involved in the market because of the simple necessity of purchasing goods to maintain a household... This hidden economic influence hints at the fallacy of the 'separate spheres' theory, of the idea of a private space disengaged from the marketplace" (250-51). Thus though, as Spigel reminds us, a "fear of feminization has characterized the debates on mass culture since the nineteenth century" (229-30), this already rich ambivalence about the literal and symbolic role of women in the economy (particularly in relation to consumption) took on new intensities when television entered the picture.

As Serafina Bathrick writes, "the new [post-war] economic reality that... middle-class women, wives and mothers were entering the labour force as never before" (100) was an especially fraught node in these gendered networks, and the professional woman became a privileged emblem of the anxieties stimulated around the shifting public/private border. While television is thoroughly entangled with the gendered contradictions and transgressions that span public and private spaces, the overdetermined figure of the working woman is necessarily imbricated with the televisual terrain. The professional woman, in literal terms, crossed onto the TV screen with the popular *Mary Tyler Moore Show* in 1970 (when the reorganization of the workforce had already been underway for

more than two decades, as Bathrick points out). This and other initial portrayals were predictably ambivalent, manifesting "the historical and ideological mandate for keeping the familial intact" (105) via "another, albeit more 'responsive', commitment to family values" (103) displaced onto the "workplace family." At the same time, representing the domestic (or, indeed, erotic) concerns proper to femininity within the public professional setting was often an insurmountably thorny proposition: a 1971 article "asserts that working women portrayed on TV are never granted private lives and that mothers are denied any relationship to the workplace" (102), and we would be hard pressed to demonstrate that the representational landscape has changed much since. Kirsten Lentz argues that, additionally, typical discourses around these programs translated feminist struggles against such double binds into "television's struggle for legitimation" (50), a move that "relies simultaneously upon freeing television from its femininity and conferring new value on that femininity" (51). This strategic maneuvering demonstrates, again, that the uncertainties posed by the changing status of women, and by the disruptive working woman in particular, are bound up with uneasiness around television itself that it must navigate and contain. Finally, Lauren Rabinovitz recognizes that "Network programming executives initially became interested in 'feminist programming' in the early 1970s because it was good business," given "an important national shift in audience" (145) toward the young female professional as the new privileged consumer. In this metatextual sense, too, television's position vis à vis women's roles is inextricable from the complex interdependence of consumer capitalism and gender.

Inhabiting the borderlands of several critical oppositions, then, these negotiations inevitably intersect with erotic peril and discipline (as Sedgwick suggests they must).

The fantasmatic association of lesbian deviance with female autonomy predates post-war economies and media, and in the television age, the specter of transgressive same-sex desire continues to haunt profoundly conflicted portrayals of the working woman. Sasha Torres remarks on "the televisual tendency to use feminism and lesbianism as stand-ins for each other" (177) across the industry's various attempts to capitalize on feminism's potential demographic appeal. She argues that this deployment performed contradictory functions, vacillating between representing the lesbian character (beginning with Marilyn McGrath on the hospital drama *HeartBeat*) as the "privileged signifier of feminism" and thus *like* other women, and as fundamentally *different* from other women to "ease the ideological threat... by localizing the homosexuality which might otherwise pervade these homosocial spaces" (179). In other words, the architecture of the closet reasserts itself over the figure of the feminist or professional woman as the impulse to simultaneously incorporate and displace her violation of the culture's constitutive boundaries. Because Sedgwick's theory of the closet exposes how the homo/hetero frontier is inextricable from other foundational binaries, because television itself and the pleasure we take in it as consumers are deeply implicated in cultural changes that generate ever-intensifying anxieties about such divisions, lesbian desire (as both lure and threat) is integral to televisual domains.

3 / CRITIC/FAN

If sexuality, knowledge, and TV's texts and economics are mutually entrapped in the same insatiable closet, it should come as no surprise that there is something of this logic too in the procedures of television studies. That is, scholars like Doty grapple with

the precarious question of whether meaning is located inside or outside the text, in representation or interpretation, and even as this programmatic binary is extensively rejected in favor of more complex, interactive models, it seems effectively impossible to dispense with these terms completely. Streeter and Wahl point out that the mutual constitution of gendered spheres and consumer economics is inseparable from analytic uncertainties about viewers: "The social fact and assumption of viewing in the domestic space... is one of the principle ways that the industry solves what Gitlin calls 'the problem of knowing,' that is, the difficulty of organizing centralized program production given an invisible and diverse broadcast audience" (248). As for the industry's critics, Joyrich notes that "disputes over the gendered subject -- *women's* place in the public and private spheres -- have been complemented by similar disputes over the subject of reception -- *women's* place within the discourses of and about television" (RR 5). The ideologically constructed femininity of media consumption is necessarily refracted through all facets of the project of televisual representation and inquiry, and academic work is certainly no exception.

The gratifications of TV viewing seem peculiarly unrepresentable in professional scholarship, a casualty of the devaluation of mass culture which is intimately tied to its ostensibly feminine appeal, and of methodological deficits that yoke public discourse (versus private enjoyment) to notions like rationality and objectivity. Charlotte Brunsdon's assessment is that, when it comes to "the characters who are specific to feminist television criticism: the feminist television critic and the female viewer... and the drama of their identity and difference" (114), "It is almost as if the researcher must prove herself not too competent within the sphere of popular culture to retain credibility within

the sphere of analysis" (119). Our pleasure in television is the TV critic's love that dare not speak its name, our version of the open secret., which we allude to discreetly or allow to recede again as soon as it is acknowledged. So, the investigation of television characters who are "closeted" has subtly self-reflexive resonances at the level of analysis itself. Television studies has tentatively ventured further into the borderlands between critic and fan (along with so many others) than most other academic disciplines, a function of the way television itself continually puts this boundary transgression forward. In Joyrich's experience, "what had started off as two separate proceedings -- on the one hand, an intellectual concern with critical and cultural theory, and on the other, my own television viewing -- came to seem more and more intertwined. To some degree, this is symptomatic of the 'nature' of U.S. commercial television" (RR 14). If "current debates over the text and audience have made the intellectual's relationship to television a point of contention, thus demanding that critics place themselves in regard to their objects of study" (RR 14), this is all the more true of scholarship that takes the articulations between text and audience produced by fans as its object.

The fan studies community that has coalesced online has adopted the portmanteau "acafan" to name a position that merges intellectual and libidinal, professional and personal engagements with fandom. In their introduction to the watershed volume *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson acknowledge that it is "trend[s] in academic discourse... as well as the work that has gone before of well-known and well-regarded scholar-fans... [that] have permitted us to take a subject position that melds the fan and the academic" (24). In addition to this disciplinary heritage, acafan coextensivity is predicated on the formal

harmonies of "fannish practice as a model for academic practice" (8), both of which, as collectively-authored "works in progress," "inhabit a fluid space that needs to be continually revised and reconsidered" (7). Their anthology has its genesis in "constant manipulation, renegotiation, commenting, and revising, all done electronically among a group of people, mostly women, intimately involved in the creation of fannish goods" (6). It is thus an artifact of what Busse, Lothian, and Reid elsewhere identify as a community of "vernacular theory" (109): the ongoing critical discourse that is ubiquitous within the particular subculture of self-aware slashers that has been the privileged object of much fan studies. While "meta" -- this tradition of informal self-reflexive analysis by and for fans -- does not originate or end with LiveJournal, it is LiveJournal's technological affordances, in particular, that allow the integration of academic and fan activities to come to fruition in the figure of the acafan. As Busse and Hellekson emphasize, "the threading, hypertextual nature of the blogosphere... replaces targeted content delivery with interpersonal interaction" (14), facilitating the decentralized interpenetration of variant identities, performances, and productions.

This is not to say, however, that this synthesis is effortless, untroubled, or immune to the swinging of the closet door, and what is recognizable as "work" and as "public" within these spheres remains gendered (it is not coincidental that *Fan Fiction and Fan Community*'s contributors are "mostly women"). In a post on her professional (as distinguished from her locked and pseudonymous fannish) blog, Busse theorizes the "semi-public spaces" of fan interaction, where "many of us are quite comfortably hiding in plain sight," mobilizing danah boyd's term "layered public" for "an image of degrees, a continuum of public and private" (¶3). The variable privacies of LiveJournal fandom,

enabled by security features like friendslock, filters, and search engine blocking, are predominantly inhabited by women, and parallel the variable registers of identity and address that acafans must navigate in articulating their professional/fannish pursuits. Much of the anxiety about "privacy" here is tied to the pornographic dimension that often characterizes the fanworks at issue. In their co-written essay "'Yearning Void and Infinite Potential': Online Slash Fandom as Queer Female Space," Lothian, Busse, and Reid formulate a sort of "is she or isn't she?" provocation about fangirls in general, exploring the queer implications of the arousing intercourse between fans across texts. "Again and again," they report, "slash fans invoke narratives of closetedness, of coming out" (107) within an ongoing debate about if or how fannishness can be understood as an identity, perhaps even a "sexual orientation." I'd argue that the rhetoric of the so-called slash closet, wherein female fans may hide their online exploits from "real life" family, friends, and colleagues, is a meaningful symptom of the queer double binds that circumscribe women's activities as erotic producers, media consumers, and professionals (indeed, job security is often mentioned as a rationale for keeping dubious fan activities secret). Negotiating the contested boundary between critic and fan can be not only as treacherous as the one between straight and gay, public and private, or television and audience, but also insistently intertwined with them, ensnared in the same perpetually shifting closet architecture.

B / *LAW & ORDER: SVU*'S SEX DETECTIVES

After the first time [Alex] wondered whether people could tell. She had gay friends who would play "lesbian/straight?" over coffee as if there were secret signs, visible only to women in the know. And maybe there was something in that. She wondered if she exhibited such signs...

When Olivia is near she feels the whole world watching... "We should be more careful," she says, watching the squad room for signs of interest. "We shouldn't... not where everyone can see us"... sometimes she wonders if they know already. There's not much that escapes a detective in sex crimes.

from "Objects in the Mirror" by CGB (fanfic, 2004)

Just as closet formations often intersect with work via the economic underpinnings of public and private spheres, gendered ideologies of work often collide with our perception of sexuality. Fans are working women not only in "real life" careers, but in the passionate, queer work of creativity and criticism; if the latter is sometimes hidden from the former behind the slash closet door, this is in part because the very question of what is recognizable as work is intertwined with hierarchies of power. Working women on screen have in turn been an object of interest for queer and female fans, perhaps since the early days of Mary Tyler Moore's "workplace family" and Cagney and Lacey's police partnership. In her analysis of "feminist sitcoms" across several decades (here, *Murphy Brown* in the 1990s), Lauren Rabinovitz includes a discussion of how Murphy Brown's "assertiveness, independence, brassiness, and 'smart mouth,' as well as her tailored and even sometimes androgynous wardrobe, may suggest her capacity as a lesbian or figure for lesbian identification while references to her active, ongoing heterosexual life and desire undercut such signifiers" (160). The ambivalence of connotation is in full force here, and I'd like to point out that, ten years later, lesbian-

oriented fans describe Olivia, and the oscillation between the eruption and erasure of queer desire surrounding her on *SVU*, in strikingly similar terms. As Angie B observes in an article at AfterEllen.com, Olivia has had brushes with past or potential boyfriends on screen, but these fleeting references to heterosexuality seem far outweighed by the pervasive fact that she is:

> one of the few characters on TV to exhibit what are often considered to be dyke characteristics -- with short hair, a leather jacket, and a gun at her hip, Olivia sits with legs apart, commanding the space around her. She is the protector of the victims who come through her department, a strong woman in a profession filled with men, and often physically or verbally dominates "perps." Her uniform includes t-shirts, sweaters, slacks and sensible shoes -- no heels, no frills, and little jewelry except for what appears to be a man's watch. (1:¶2)

Notably, these qualities (like Murphy Brown's) have, in and of themselves, nothing to do with sex between women. What they do imply is these characters' contravention of the bounds of properly feminine aesthetics and activities, the challenge to stable taxonomies of gender that inheres in their role as successful professionals. Though they may appear superficial and stereotypical, such historically contoured markers for encoding transgression in style and accessories are a crucial dimension of lesbian viewing strategies.

Alongside Olivia's place in a genealogy of television's working women, it is significant that her character is located within a distinct textual milieu: the crime procedural -- a form that John Fiske describes as "the primary masculine television genre," and one of TV's favored workplaces. Because, as Fiske puts it, "'most masculine texts' eliminate 'the most significant cultural producers of the masculine identity -- women, work, and marriage'" (quoted in Cuklanz [18-19]), it follows that the portrayal of

women and private, "feminine" concerns like romance is especially conflicted here. Lisa Cuklanz identifies an economically motivated shift in the textual orientation of detective shows, writing that "In the 1980s the genre became more and more similar to the soap opera, with the aim of attracting a broad-based, mixed-gender audience... the form and content of crime dramas became increasingly feminized" (24) -- but such hybridization may exacerbate rather than alleviate the tensions plaguing this televisual version of separate spheres. As Louisa Stein theorizes, genre mixing is a ubiquitous media strategy, and it offers frustrations as well as opportunities to both producers and fans. In the case of *SVU*, the uneasy amalgamation of Olivia as police heroine and Olivia as romantic heroine, of public justice and intimate "sex crimes," invites deviant desire to erupt in the interstices of deviant genre. In its orthodox capacity as a procedural, *SVU* trains viewers in detective work, provoking them to turn these hermeneutic pleasures back against the clues the show itself generates to its own perverse secrets. In this section, I examine the ways that *SVU*'s closet logics stimulate interpretive modalities that structure the interface between text and audience as a site of perpetual "outing," thwarting easy distinctions between visible and hidden, true and fictional, outside and inside sexual knowledges.

1 / IGNORANCE/KNOWLEDGE

With the procedural as their milieu, the epistemological and sexual violence of such gendered, genre-d interchanges comes to the fore. In her book *Rape on Prime Time*, Cuklanz provides the interesting statistic that, several high-profile sitcom episodes aside, crime shows accounted for approximately 87% of rape-themed narratives on prime time TV between 1976 and 1990 (about 87 of 100 total -- that's if you include *L.A. Law*'s 9)

(23). In "Epistemology of the Console," Joyrich also suggests (less empirically) that there may be a privileged affinity between detective programs and deviant erotics. She argues that a common mode of representing homosexuality on television is via "a logic of detection and discovery -- in which hints of sexuality are offered as clues to be traced," which is particularly evident in "the hermeneutic of suspicion found in several cop/detective shows that... incites a desire to solve its enigmas, be these criminal or sexual -- or frequently... a conflation of both" (452-53). These unavoidable homoerotic reverberations of the sex detective's epistemological project and television's commercial project, across the various levels of an intertextual orbit, illuminate the persistent equivalence of queer and criminal sexuality in mass media representations.

I'd like to propose, therefore, that the procedural genre's investment in producing knowledge of perversion, at its most violent in TV's abundant crime plots thematizing rape, is connected to the more diffuse boundary transgressions I discussed above as constitutive of television itself. In a book on rape in the media, Sarah Projansky notes that "rape narratives historically often linked rape to women's independence" (97), and that a typical device was "a woman [who] faces rape because of her desire to access her equal right to a masculine career" (102). That is, the same figure -- the empowered professional woman -- tends to be, on television, both the fulcrum of lesbian anxieties and the target of sexual violence, and it's no coincidence that "working girl" is a slang term for prostitute. Depictions of rape (sexual violence) and homosexual desire (sexual deviance), women's crossings between the home and the workplace, and televisual havoc with the gendered perimeters of public and private are discourses that are all intimate with each other. Moreover, Projansky claims that the "paradox of discursively *increasing*

(and potentially eliciting pleasure in) the very thing a text is working against" (96) is active in the media's treatments of rape, wherein a violent erotics is represented with the explicit purpose of "educating" viewers about it as a social evil, but functions simultaneously as a titillating incitement to watch. Rape as a subject of television, then, is situated at the charged nexus of sexuality, gender, knowledge, and economics, where it is often the most treacherous aspects of these highly contested domains that are the most valuable commodities.

The imminence of investigating sex and the project of knowledge more broadly is operating here at full capacity, but our various detectives can nonetheless come to divergent conclusions about *SVU*'s erotic enigmas. While the procedural's formal constraints dictate that each of the program's diegetic mysteries is more or less solved by the end of the episode, sexual hermeneutics at large never reaches such closure. Sedgwick offers one approach to the turbulent complexity that permanently defers the resolution of closet-inflected questions like that of Olivia's orientation when she observes that "Ignorance and opacity collude or compete with knowledge in mobilizing the flows of energy, desire, goods, meanings, persons" (4). That is, remaining ignorant can be as vigorous a procedure as seeking knowledge, and, according to Sedgwick, "Such ignorance effects can be harnessed, licensed, and regulated on a mass scale for striking enforcements -- perhaps especially around sexuality" (her germane example is "The epistemological asymmetry of the laws that govern rape") (5). The processes involved, then, in enabling some viewers (and, one might speculate, producers, writers, actors, etc.) to not know of Olivia's lesbian desires are as dynamic and robust as those arrangements that induce these desires to be searched out and seen. Given, also, the multiple subject

positions that TV always makes available (for both formal and economic reasons) by necessarily leaving all its representations (especially of sexuality) open-ended and incomplete (to varying degrees), the fact that televisual lesbianism is selectively imperceptible is no proof that it isn't there. This differential geography of visibility is, however, a sign of the saturation of the landscapes of text, audience, and social context with the aporetic logics of the closet, provoking unpredictable oscillations within and between strata that keep these vistas in a state of perpetual excitation.

2 / INNOCENCE/GUILT

With its defining focus on "sexually-based offenses," *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* is exemplary of these foundational incitements linking genre, knowledge, desire, and violence. Resonances between its stated epistemological mandate to search out the truths of criminal sexuality and a televisually-inflected vigilance around more subterranean investments in family and heteronormativity are typical of *SVU*, and I'd like to illustrate these structuring principles through a detailed discussion of a single episode. This episode, "Sacrifce" (#50/3.07), which involves a case of gay *mis*identification, is not classified as one of *SVU*'s "handful of gay-related episodes" (through season 5) by Angie B (1:¶5). Lesbian themes have since been treated occasionally, but never beyond the program's framework of victimization and criminality, and too rarely to ameliorate what is perhaps a symptomatic absence: if, as I've argued, lesbian desire has an especially overdetermined relationship to TV's working women, this apparent reluctance to include it in the range of sexual sensations that *SVU* mediates may signal the risk already inherent in its hazardous undertow. Nor is "Sacrifce" among the episodes that make frequent

appearances in fan catalogues of onscreen "subtext" between Olivia and Alex. While my example is thus idiosyncratic, I've chosen it to analyze how the logics of *SVU* overall set up epistemological schemas that put forward the possibility of Olivia as lesbian object and subject, even when it doesn't surface in obvious ways. "Sacrifice" demonstrates how homosexuality tends to alternately emerge and disappear in conjunction with violence, family crisis, consumerism and spectacle, and epistemological uncertainty more generally.

The episode's opening tableau is what we might imagine is a stereotypical scene from gay life: a crowd of men loitering outside a bar, as two negotiate their first date. Just as they are making plans to continue the evening, gunshots ring out, and the incipient romance is disrupted (*SVU*'s constitutive coupling of transgressive desire with violence). When the shots go off, one of the men pulls his gun and dashes away -- he's a cop, we are to assume, so personal life is also interrupted by the professional, here. Next, this gay officer (called Steve) meets up with Olivia and her partner Elliot at the hospital where the unconscious gunshot victim was taken. Their conversation establishes, first of all, the detectives' fluency with the city's licentious gay subculture, perhaps a necessary part of their purview as "panty police" (or, one might speculate, a particular competency of Olivia's, as she does most of the talking). Steve informs them that he believes he spotted the victim in "Puffy's" (near the scene of the crime), and Olivia responds with surprise, "Inside the bar?" "I was on a date," Steve confesses, clarifying what he was doing in what she evidently knows to be a gay establishment, and activating the significance of inside vs. outside so characteristic of the closet. Elliot's main role is to ask, after they've gotten the facts out of the way, if Steve "wants a little discretion on this," making clear

the intersection of this incident with the figures of the homophobic police department and the closeted gay cop (where we can't help wondering about Olivia).

The initial phase of their investigation reveals several assumptions typical of the hermeneutics of *SVU*'s sex detectives. First, the unit is involved because "copious fluids" were found (in the victim), raising the suspicion of gang rape -- as if any non-normative sexual behavior (in this case, having multiple partners) must proceed from violence. Second, their reading of the victim as gay, which you'll recall is based solely on the location of the crime (as they presume the sex with men was non-consensual), is unshaken when they note he's wearing a wedding ring. "If he's in a committed relationship," Elliot muses, to which Olivia replies derisively, "He was in a meat market bar. Let's hope his partner's more committed than he is" -- they rely here on stereotypical models of homosexual partnerships (both positive and negative) to interpret the evidence. Third, they immediately verify that the victim has no prior arrests for solicitation (i.e. prostitution), cluing us in to an implicit connection between (homo)sexual criminality and commercialism. Fourth, Detective Munch's opinion is that "Good money's on a hate crime. Perps are usually hetero or closeted and in denial," referencing an awareness of the very real violence that can be provoked by the closet's oppressive architecture. And most importantly, what the discussion of the facts of the case among the SVU team exhibits is that their procedures for investigating sex consist in large part of applying imagination to the evidence to tell speculative stories that fit the crime (e.g. Elliot's: "maybe he was cheating, went out, picked up the wrong guys in the meat market"). One might say that the pleasure of being a detective (particularly for those detectives playing along in the audience) lies in this creative exercise of conjecture.

The problem with SVU's hypothetical account of the crime, in this instance, is that the victim won't accommodate his tale to theirs. When Olivia and Elliot finally catch up with the elusive Wesley at his apartment he is uncooperative, and denies he was raped. The detectives are incredulously confronting him with the "evidence" when his wife and daughter walk in. In this instant juxtaposition of a narrative of gay violence with a portrait of nuclear normativity, the detectives' (and the audience's) interpretation is thrown into fatal disarray (in the sort of entertaining plot twist that advances virtually every episode of *SVU*). This is the first transposition of the episode, from a sordid saga of homosexual, subcultural sex and violence to a drama of an ordinary family threatened -- and I would argue that the combination is not coincidental. The connection is emphasized by an initial period of confusion when it seems that Wesley's family might be endangered precisely by his gay desires. The detectives question him back at the station:

> **Wesley:** "No one raped me."
>
> **Elliot:** "Then how do you explain the semen inside of you -- was it consensual?"
>
> **Wesley:** "I'm married, I've got a kid."
>
> **Olivia:** "Look, lots of people hit for both teams. Now either you were forced, or you weren't."
>
> **Wesley:** "OK, I'm bisexual. Are we done?"

Various unmappable territories of sexuality converge here in a hermeneutic sinkhole that renders rape stubbornly indefinable in the binary terms that Olivia insists should characterize it. In her potent line, retaining the opposition between forced and consensual sex dictates abandoning the one segregating desire into homo and hetero (not an insignificant maneuver given that this is our culture's structuring premise, as Sedgwick

conceives it). In evidence also is the potential boomerang effect of the vague "lots of people": when Olivia is the one who defends transgressive erotics (as she often is, the foil to her more conservative partner), there's always the risk that her sympathy will be viewed as an insinuation about her own sexuality. Olivia presses Wesley for the "truth" with benevolent frustration that he won't allow SVU to "help" him, demonstrating an axiom of *SVU*'s investigative logics (and those of the culture at large): people -- and television characters -- don't often willingly offer up the verities of their desire; this knowledge can only be produced through vigilant observation and inquest. So, at this point in "Sacrifice," the figure of a family in crisis momentarily overlaps with the concurrent difficulties of delineating both desire (which appears mystifyingly bisexual rather than stably homosexual) and violence -- and hence also with the fissures in the supposedly rock-solid reality of rape itself, the show's ostensible *raison d'être* (as Olivia expresses their dilemma: "without a complaining witness [the rape] doesn't exist").

Much of this murkiness is conveniently cleared up, though, when there's a break in the case: it turns out Wesley is a gay porn star. In what I'm identifying as the episode's second transposition, another suspect confirms that their "victim" is "not gay... Wesley's strictly gay for pay at 1500 bucks a bang," and any exploration of homosexual (or even bisexual) desire, whether violent or consensual, quite effectively vanishes from the episode as the detectives wholeheartedly adopt this rather simplistic explanation. Thus, homosexuality as the episode's framing perversion is displaced quite baldly onto the commercialization and spectacularization of sexuality, the moral debate transferred from the peccadilloes of (married, closeted) homosexuals to those of pornographers. Whether Wesley is a closeted homo or a closeted porn star, however, the effects of the closet are

still in force. The detectives aren't surprised that Wesley refused to come clean, and Tutuola states the obvious: "a straight guy wouldn't want the world to know he's doing gay porn." The SVU team's own moral judgments remain in force: while Elliot tetchily reminds Wesley that "Pornography isn't illegal. Making it isn't illegal" (establishing that, in this episode of *SVU*, there isn't any bona fide sex crime involved), Wesley responds, "I see the way you're looking at me. I'm scum because I make money having sex." Later, Alex goes to court to remove Wesley's daughter from her parents, on the grounds that "pornography is a form of legal prostitution. The minor's physical, mental, and emotional welfare was corrupted... [by] exposing her to an environment of wanton sexual activity." These attitudes are representative of how *SVU*'s narrative language is shaped by imperatives of normative containment as much as by the legal enforcement of sexuality, whether the deviance in question is homosexuality or another eminently substitutable threat to the conventional family.

The pivotal revelation of Wesley's reluctant stardom comes out simultaneously in two interviews that are intercut with each other as SVU personnel watch through one-way mirrors. Shooting windows and through windows, particularly during interrogations at the station, is a signature visual device of *SVU*, one that could be interpreted as a self-reflexive commentary on television itself ("Your Window on the World"): an allusion to the privileged point of view of the audience, and to the affinity of this position with the diegetic detective work. The new pornography angle is, of course, even more insistently self-reflexive (as are *SVU*'s many instances of videotaped evidence). When Olivia expresses incredulity about the suspect's gay porn story, he volunteers "I could screen the film for you if you'd like." The detectives don't respond, but the unfulfilled promise of

explicit images hovers over the rest of the episode, functioning both to differentiate *SVU*'s text from porn (educating us about the difference between good sex TV and bad sex TV) and simultaneously to destabilize this very distinction -- as *SVU* is obviously portraying porn (albeit with some delicacy) even as it condemns it. Elliot and Olivia drop in on a porn set, where the camera tracks tightly behind them as they stride through a labyrinthine corridor from the respectable outer office into the sordid interior, passing by the video equipment and crew before they stop short, their backs framing a tableau of Wesley's wife Jaina, in a tawdry maid's outfit, kneeling on the floor between two buff, shirtless men -- a titillating picture indeed. On their second visit, the shots track across the literal border between realist illusion and televisual apparatus, crossing walls sporting lifelike domestic interiors on one side and scaffolding, machinery, and lounging talent on the other. The flick's director goads Olivia by asking her, "You ever thought about doing a movie? You look like you'd be a real natural" -- calling attention, perhaps, to her existence onscreen in a sensationalistic show about sex. In summary, then, "Sacrifice" serves as an example of the ways *SVU*'s language of investigation mediates the normative, as well as criminal, boundaries of sexual acts and desires, mobilizing critical ambivalences at the multivalent intersections of (homo)sexuality and perversion, family and eroticism, consent and violence, sex and consumerism, private acts and public performance, truth and simulation, revelation and concealment -- a diegetic network of structuring ambiguities that reverberates intertextually and metatextually as well.

3 / RAPE/ROMANCE

Most importantly, my discussion of "Sacrifice" outlines the hermeneutic strategies that are the currency of *SVU*'s onscreen detectives but also of the competencies of its audience. That is, by relentlessly thematizing the investigation of desire through watching for signs, searching for clues, interrogating recalcitrant suspects, and fabricating plausible stories to fit the evidence, *SVU* is training its viewers to do the same. I've argued that the suggestion of Olivia's lesbianism is insistently activated by the gendered logics of televisual representation overall, and their interpenetration with the precarious homo/hetero binary. And I've argued that *SVU* as a text demonstrates this topography in its narratives, which symptomatically interweave the quest for truth and justice with the search for the elusive frontier where normal sexuality and relationships cross into deviance, perversion, and violence, where private acts and desires cross into the public discourse of crime and the televisual spectacularization and commodification of sex. Additionally, I'm claiming here that *SVU* actively invites its viewers to scrutinize these contradictory fields of overlap for the illicit specters that haunt them -- its marketability depends, after all, on the pleasure of learning the ways of sex detectives. Given a series whose premise is discovering clandestine sexual transgressions, how can we not be ever vigilant, as an audience, for even the subtlest signs and clues? This exercise expands as fans convene their own detective squads, collectively reviewing the facts and producing explanatory narratives in their own gratifying inquests.

The interpretive networks of fans who see Olivia in an erotic relationship with Alex (or other female characters) synthesize and rework *SVU*'s on screen languages to articulate the results of their libidinal investigations [Figure 2]. Shaping this process is a

critical awareness, first of all, of the televisual constraints circumscribing the portrayal of sexuality -- particularly, I've emphasized, in "masculine" genres and at the perilous junction of women and the workplace. Angie B reiterates the widespread recognition that the generic conditions of this detective series dictate that "the show deliberately does not focus on the personal lives of its characters" (1:¶3). This attribute incites and justifies disproportionately intensive deductive formulas: in the rubric of one group (Baby Lurches; now offline), for example, "one drink" between characters in the diegetic realm equates to a sexual liaison, once you control for the program's acute representational restraint. Moreover, I'd contend that many fans are also consciously engaged with the ways the more enfolding contortions of the closet manipulate the visibility of lesbian eroticism, both on screen and off. One fan fiction author, LostinTranslation, had this to say about the inspiration for the novelette "Held Within the Beat of Your Heart" {http://www.ralst.com/Held1.HTM}:

> SVU is a television series about crimes involving sex that rarely explores sexuality itself. Often times SVU traffics in stories involving extreme sexuality, but the underpinnings for such forms of sexual expression are rarely considered beyond a simple psychology that is often heavily moralized. Too often on SVU sexuality is understood within an uncomplicated dynamic of direct cause and effect. Of course, this is nonsense. With Held, I wanted to write a story about a sex crime and sexual expression, I also wanted to write a story in which the two topics would collide in unpleasant ways. I picked a horrific situation because I wanted to use such a thing as the most unlikely of backdrops for a love story. (personal correspondence [email], 11 June 2004)

In other words, Lost's work is a response to some of the limitations, contradictions, and erasures that mark *SVU*'s texts, to the inescapable infusion of the show's lexicon with normative hierarchies of power that are often rigid and binarized. Lost's project is to deliberately and interactively formulate an alternative vocabulary that reveals the

intimacies that *SVU* attempts to repress between opposing terms like natural and criminal sexuality, romantic and violent erotics.

The endeavor of selecting an illustrative fan fiction story is even more precarious than with *SVU* episodes. Even within the loosely-organized agglomeration of web sites, archives, bulletin boards, and blogs that are identifiable as an *SVU* slash community, there is a staggering diversity of styles, interpretations, and approaches exhibited in fan works. That said, I think "Held Within the Beat of Your Heart" can be taken as typical of the classic subgenre of long stories that mobilize the conventions of lesbian romance, while also engaging slash's beloved "hurt/comfort" trope, wherein one character nurtures another through profound trauma. In a rendition tailored to *SVU*'s signature traumas, "Held" recounts the aftermath of a horrific, almost unthinkable crime: Olivia and Alex have been kidnapped, and our heroine is forced by their captors to sexually violate Alex. While this assault is both an extreme instance and a patent echo of the "sexually-based offenses" *SVU* screens each week, the text emphasizes that this was one case that was "kicked under the rug as soon as possible" (pt. 1). In a striking contrast to SVU's customarily zealous detective work (one the characters perceive as well), bloody clothes from the scene are given back to the women to be destroyed, and Tutuola "accidentally" wrecks the camera that the perps used to record their brutality (a figure for the television camera, perhaps) -- these are "evidence no one wanted to process" (pt. 2). As in the TV series itself, it is clear that the specter of Olivia and Alex having sex exceeds the bounds of the detectives' epistemological capabilities, and all signs that indicate this prospect must be hastily recontained.

"Held" highlights the precariousness of the boundaries of consent and perversion that *SVU*, for the most part, works to shore up. Alex's determination to convince Olivia that the latter isn't a rapist is a key element of the story's plot; when Alex first asserts that she "wasn't raped," Olivia bitterly counters that the hospital did a rape kit (pt. 1). By turning to "standard procedure" to classify their experience, Olivia makes manifest the inadequacy of the juridical infrastructure that provides *SVU*'s discursive framework. Alex, in Lost's version, has decidedly kinky tastes that were sickeningly parodied in her non-consensual submission at the hands of the kidnappers. In the course of confessing her proclivities to Olivia, they have this conversation:

> "There's one other thing, isn't there?"
>
> Her breath leaving her body in a panic, Alex tried a joke. "No wonder the perps confess to you."
>
> Olivia almost missed it. She stopped from denying their conversation was an interrogation by only a split second. Instead she responded to the assumption underneath Alex's bantering.
>
> "Alex, you're not a perp."
>
> "Are you sure?" (pt. 4)

That is, any hint of sexual deviance, even on the windward side of consensuality, brings the weight of the sex police's criminalizing logics down upon them. The fact that it takes such an excruciating journey through physical and emotional violation to bring these characters to the point where they can love each other and still say "We're not monsters" (pt. 6) calls attention to the ways the closet architecture operating in *SVU*, and in its televisual and social context, circumscribes the desires that can freely emerge -- and demonstrates fans' engagement with these mortal constraints in their own readings.

If, as I have argued, the sexual violence that *SVU* investigates is linked to the discursive violence of the border wars that televisual lesbianism epitomizes, "Held" literalizes this connection. The atrocity of the circumstances that bring Olivia and Alex together seems to suggest that the barrier keeping them apart is so potent that it could only be breached by an act of unspeakable brutality. The fact that, here, Olivia and Alex's first sexual experience together is actually an assault recodes the ideologically-charged indictment of slash as "character rape" because it is "a total violation of established characterizations" (Jenkins 466). It is relatively axiomatic in Olivia fan fiction that she and/or Alex are hindered in expressing their desire for each other by their professions or backgrounds -- just as, on the series, any exploration of their personal lives is almost completely precluded. Following the contours of this loaded configuration, "Held" stipulates that Olivia and Alex weren't romantically involved and never communicated their love before they were abducted. Referencing the diegetic restrictions and intensities that draw the outlines of their relationship, Lost writes that, in Olivia's opinion, "Keeping a distance between herself and her investigators could only help Alex maintain her professional integrity," and as a result, "In all the years they'd known one another, last night's dinner [the occasion of their kidnapping] was probably only the fourth or fifth time they'd dined together without Elliot playing the role of the unacknowledged chaperone" (pt. 1). Thus, the despotic vectors that obstruct Olivia and Alex's desire on TV are translated into a fictional labyrinth of agonizing violation and guilt from whence our heroines, in the end, triumphantly emerge.

Giving poignancy to the women's original enforced distance in the story is a recurring motif of each of the characters remembering watching the other. Many of these

memories are, in fact, recapitulations of favorite onscreen moments from episodes of *SVU*: among Olivia's, "the night she and Elliot surprised [Alex] while she was out on a date, her hair up and dressed in a stunning red cocktail dress;... arguing about a case in the hallway outside her office" (pt. 3); among Alex's, "Olivia incongruously dressed in a shimmering black evening dress, standing next to her in front of the window looking into an interrogation room, their fingers accidentally brushing" (pt. 6). The latter passage continues, "Memories segued into fantasies: Olivia and she walking down a corridor and Olivia suddenly pushing her against the wall and claiming her mouth in a kiss, Olivia showing up late one night at her apartment and taking her from behind as she lay sprawled over the dining room table" (pt. 6). That is, observation and imagination, television and fiction, slide effortlessly into one another, often in the substance of a single event: Alex confesses, "The other night when I asked you out to dinner, I was half pretending it was a date" (pt. 3) -- echoing in a more hopeful erotics the rich leveling economies correlating various planes of sexual violence.

As I (along with commentators like Sally Forth and Angie B) have theorized *SVU* as a TV program, the elements that conspire to render Olivia unrepresentable as a lesbian on screen are ultimately extratextual: our culture's pervasive homophobia; the economic imperative to appeal to a mass audience; the gendered hazards bequeathed to television by historical hierarchies and transformations; the insidious ubiquity of the closet. Fan fiction stories like "Held," however, transpose the impediments to Olivia and Alex's romance from outside the text to inside the characters' psyches, reconstituting these oppressions as their individual fears and inhibitions. Even when fics thematize, as they often do, Olivia's or Alex's struggle with prejudice or internalized homophobia, these

conditions are still located as hang-ups that, while they may seethe with acknowledged violence, can be processed and (usually) overcome privately. Simultaneously, "Held" (and many other stories) also transpose the fans' procedures of watching (obsessive scrutiny of the characters' attire, vigilance for suspect looks and touches), as well as their tendency to fantasize about what they see, into the heads of the characters, converting the viewers' competencies as sex detectives into Olivia and Alex's erotic waltz. What appears is a kind of machine for collapsing TV's divergent registers into each other, a libidinous interface with the perpetual flows of meaning wherein *SVU* episodes, industry gossip, and fan production penetrate and transform each other. It is in this interactive destabilization of the ostensibly obvious perimeters distinguishing text, audience, and metatext that lesbian desire in the televisual sense operates.

C / Is She or Isn't She? Olivia vs. Oliska

MARISKA: A week ago, I'm walking down Seventh Ave. [...] and all of a sudden this guy yells, [...] "Damn! I thought you were a lesbian!"
CONAN: Really? Because of your character [Olivia Benson] on the show?
MARISKA: Yes, everyone thinks that, and I don't know why.

Mariska Hargitay on *Late Night with Conan O'Brien* (April 2003), transcribed/quoted by Angie B at AfterEllen.com (pg. 2)

"Held Within the Beat of Your Heart" is only one node in a vast matrix of textual production, and while I have selected it as an exemplar, all *SVU* slash to some degree engages the circulation of sexuality across variable strata. In an influential early essay, Henry Jenkins demonstrates the tangled intersections between three hermeneutic levels in a reading of early debates about Kirk/Spock slash that revolved around it's "plausibility." In contention here is the proper equilibrium at the inside/outside nexus: how much

responsibility fan writers have to "textual fidelity" from within versus how much leeway they have to "transform" the "primary text" from without (a dispute rendered in fan jargon as "canon" versus "fanon"). Fought on a muddy middle ground where "all fan writing necessarily involves an appropriation of series characters and a reworking of program concepts" (467), this sparring over whether to privilege on or off screen knowledge, or how even to draw the border between the two, will never yield an undisputed victor. Ultimately, Jenkins concludes that "The reason some fans reject K/S fiction has, in the end, less to do with the stated reason that it violates established characterization than with unstated beliefs about the nature of human sexuality that determine what types of character conduct can be viewed as plausible" (468). In other words, a verdict in Olivia's case could only be provisionally negotiated among three epistemologically incommensurate but inseparable layers: screen texts, fan texts, and the social context that mediates between them.

However, Jenkins's study skirts the question of what elements of the text itself open up (or close down) queer interpretive spaces, taking *Star Trek*'s explicit portrayal of Kirk and Spock as devoted yet platonic companions as given. Sara Gwenllian Jones critiques this tendency in "The Sex Lives of Cult Television Characters," pointing out that "In such formulations, slash is interpreted as 'resistant' or 'subversive' because it seems deliberately to ignore or overrule clear textual messages indicating characters' heterosexuality" (81). As such, these analyses are trapped, like the disdainful reactions to slash fiction that Jenkins evaluates, in the homophobia of "a wider cultural logic [that] dictates that heterosexuality can be assumed while homosexuality must be proved" (81). Jones asserts, rather, that slash is "an actualization of latent textual elements" (82). In

another article on *Xena: Warrior Princess*, she elaborates on the theory that connotative clues, or "heteroglossic cultural references which are easily read one way by queer viewers and quite differently by heterosexuals unfamiliar with the queer lexicon" (SLL 19), are a deliberate component of the TV industry's market strategy. This perspective relies on a more nuanced understanding of television as a textual form (she is specifically describing "cult television series," but I'd maintain that similar conditions are characteristic of TV in general): "There is always a deficit between what is (or can be) shown and what the avid audience wants to see, explore, develop and know.... It is this deficit between what is presented on screen and what is implied or omitted that cult television formats exploit in order to enthrall viewers" (SLL 13). In other words, following Hastie, the diverse pleasures fans glean from imaginatively filling in what their favorite shows formally and strategically leave out is a crucial element of marketability. In this sense, Olivia's chronically boyfriend- and girlfriend-less condition is an impetus of *SVU*'s popularity because it stimulates much of the speculation and argument that swirl around her.

The dynamism of these colliding registers is also apparent in the aforementioned article about Olivia at AfterEllen.com, which corroborates her status as a popular lesbian icon. Angie B observes smugly that, "While the producers might not understand why a strong androgynous female character works better without a boyfriend, we do" (1:¶4). With these connotative tactics in mind, she is less inclined to privilege onscreen evidence: "What little we have seen of Olivia's romantic life has led us to believe she's straight, but the fact that those references are few and far between makes it easier for viewers to speculate about the character's sexuality" (1:¶3). Instead, she reverse

engineers Olivia's lesbian desire from the proof of fans' desires, to which "almost 200 stories, across at least 30 websites and mailing lists with sections devoted to the examination and expansion of the show's subtext" (2:¶8) attest (years later, the numbers are far greater). If this many people see it, the argument goes, there must be something there to see. At the same time, this is at best an ambiguous brand of visibility, and for Angie B too "subtext" points toward social inequalities: "It may be an indication of how far we need to go in the portrayal of lesbians and bisexual women on television that viewers get excited about a character like Benson despite no clear evidence that she's gay" (2:¶4). The dilemma of the vitality of connotation versus the politics of denotation can never be resolved, because it is itself caught up in the closet's aporias, as the homophobic social field structures what differently positioned viewers can and can't see. As an active fan penning a journalistic account, Angie B (and AfterEllen.com overall) thwarts the critic/fan border as well, further destabilizing authoritative knowledge. In this section, I will explore how vernacular discourses arguing the case of Olivia Benson promiscuously intersect the structuring oppositions of sexuality and television alike.

1 / TELEVISION/INTERNET

Such boundary confusions are figured in fiction, but they are more than just a metaphor. The unreliability of its own perimeter was a founding condition of television: because "experts of the period [the 1950s] agreed that the modern home should blur distinctions between inside and outside spaces," as Lynne Spigel notes, "television was the ideal companion for these suburban homes" (212-13). At the same time, this ambiguity was the source of acute "anxieties," as "popular media expressed uncertainty

about the distinction between real and electrical space" (219). In his essay "Television: Set and Screen," Sam Weber theorizes that, "by definition, television takes place in at least three places at once" (117): the places of production, of reception, and the "in between" place of transmission. Television's tendency to perforate and compromise the frontiers between discrete spaces, generating contradictory overlaps and simultaneities, only intensifies with media convergence. Resolution to the enigma of where diegetic authority stops and audience interpretation begins is frustrated by design as paratexts -- including online promotions, interactive network Web sites, and fan sites -- further erode the circumference of the medium and the brand.

Thus, the mystery "is she or isn't she?" is inextricable from the mystery of what television itself is: if we can't determine the boundaries of television, then evidence for our mystery will never be stable, rendering convergence a closet brimming with speculation and creativity. Just as television technology -- the signal's perpetual transmission through the walls of the home, the scanning beam or pixels that only simulate a fixed image -- is central to the difficulty of confirming its limits, the internet platforms of television fandom are integral its border wars. In her "Brief History of Media Fandom," Francesca Coppa observes that, from the 1990s, "The movement of fandom online, as well as an increasingly customizable experience, moved slash fandom out into the mainstream" (54), making it more influential in both the production and consumption of mass media. In an initial shift from fan activity on Usenet, "mailing lists customized fandom by allowing fans to select from among their fannish interests, [then] blogs such as LiveJournal.com... began to be widely adopted across fandom around 2003, where it caused a wide-scale reorganization of fandom infrastructure" (57). *Law &*

Order: SVU, which has aired from 1999 to the present, spanned this transition, which is a factor in the varied geography of its slash following: a compendium of links to author pages, Yahoo! mailing lists, LiveJournal communities [Figure 3 and Figure 4], multimedia archives, and official web sites at {http://xenawp.org/svu} offers some sense of the broad scope of slash activity around Olivia (pairing her with Alex as well as other female *SVU* characters).

One artifact that captures the vitality of this network is Cabenson's magnum opus "The Case of the Butch and the Blonde" {http://ship-manifesto.livejournal.com/43570.html}. Written for the LiveJournal community The Shipper's Manifesto (short for "relationshipper"), which invites essays introducing the rationale for and appraisal of a couple in any fandom, this Olivia/Alex handbook provides an invaluable chronicle of the interpretive practices of lesbian-identified viewers. Cabenson's extensive acknowledgements of others' contributions of "feedback, information, and time" (as well as illustrations) reveal the collaborative labor and passion that goes into narrating Olivia and Alex's romance. The post, framed by the community's administrative architecture and with pages of feedback, displays the affordances of LiveJournal's interface, which allows for longer-form and multithreaded discussion (in comparison to a bulletin board or mailing list), relying on the username as a personal space and identity. Nonetheless, Cabenson also thanks the denizens of Television Without Pity (or TWoP, an irreverent TV clearinghouse that hosts a popular *SVU* forum) and elsewhere, while her manifesto is mirrored at a popular static archive {http://ralst.com/Manifestos.html} and included in the ship_manifesto community's off-LJ search engine. Thus, while sympathetic fans have evidently clustered in an intimate nexus, it is one with fluid margins, and at least in

the case of *SVU*, the walls between LiveJournal slashers and other factions are low. Cabenson demonstrates even more meticulously the porousness between the television diegesis and online fanworks: humorously formulating a legal argument, she presents the "evidence" for Olivia and Alex's lesbian relationship as an encyclopedic catalogue of subtly homoerotic onscreen moments, collectively compiled by a squad of fan investigators and annotated with the fanonical readings that cobble them into an epic love story (complete with links to relevant fan fiction stories alongside the screencaps in the "defense exhibit"). Finally, the personal anecdote with which Cabenson opens ("All Rise for the Honorable Cabenson"), as per ship_manifesto conventions, offers a snapshot of a trajectory of fannish desire via cultural and technological cartographies: finding *SVU* via familiar femslash OTPs at a seminal multifandom archive, passing through search engines to concentrated *Law & Order* femslash and the TWoP discussions, and catching up on the show only after-the-fact with USA's reruns. Cabenson's backstory illustrates the increasingly typical pattern of experiencing a television program as subsequent and subordinate to the online interpretive community surrounding it. Her essay serves, in turn, as a central precinct for evangelizing new fans of *SVU* and the Olivia/Alex pairing. Such complex, protean fan formations indicate that the straight/gay closet is symbiotic with the television/internet closet, revealing that the success of the ostensibly discrete screen text owes more to its unacknowledged subtext and fan text than TPTB would perhaps care to admit.

2 / STRAIGHT/GAY

As in the instance of the Olivia/Alex Shipper's Manifesto, it is online fandom's technological substrate that capacitates particular registers in the open casefile on Olivia Benson's sexuality. Although *SVU* fans of various orientations display an intense investment in definitively determining the truth, there is significant confusion about where to locate legitimate evidence. The hermeneutic uncertainties of fan discourse parallel those that vex scholarly discourse (to the extent that these domains are distinct), revolving around the axes between television's inside and outside, knowledges private and public, and media producers and consumers. Given the indeterminacy of the borders of both heterosexuality and textuality, there is little hope of closing the case once and for all, but the inquests and debates can illuminate the prolific operations of the closet. While social networking interfaces tend to gather like-minded fans to discuss a loose cloud of topics, more linear message boards may invite fans from diverse subcommunities to discuss a clearly defined topic, and as such, they are a platform where such debates almost inevitably erupt.

One notable thread, on the officially sponsored yet largely umoderated *SVU* board at USA Network's web site (the program airs on USA in syndication), can serve as an example of the vehemence and complexity of the testimonies mobilized in attempts to prove that Olivia is gay or straight {http://web.archive.org/web/20040720081022/ http://63.240.52.141/ubb/usa/html/ubb/Forum24/HTML/000155.html (the usanetwork.com forums have since undergone a redesign, and content prior to 2005 is no longer available; unfortunately the second page of this discussion is not archived)}. It begins with a cautious, open-ended query by **mariskafans**: "So, would anyone be too

terribly offended if Olivia started dating a girl?" Tellingly, the question is immediately transmuted into a dispute over Olivia's probable sexual orientation. Some fans consider only the most explicit textual citations admissible as evidence, and say so quite emphatically:

> **dtobe2008**
> She is DEFINITELY straight. There have been many episodes where she's had a date with a man and you've seen a few.
>
> **teresa985**
> The fact that she's dated men before on the show, and no women, leads me to believe that she's straight. Unless she flat out says: "I'm dating a woman" or something of that nature, I'm not going to believe she's a lesbian.

Others respond to this literalism by pointing out the inherently partial picture of Olivia's desires that the screen text offers, alongside the possibility of a less rigidly binary sexuality:

> **Bekster**
> We don't know that she's straight -- she's mentioned a significant other, what, once? She could definitely be bisexual, which would be great, she's gorgeous!
>
> **Kloie**
> And... just because a girl's slept with men doesn't necessarily mean she's straight. lol

This tactic is then countered with references to extratextual gossip (the avowed heterosexuality of Mariska Hargitay, who portrays Olivia) and TV industry logics (the imperative to appeal to a mass audience and remain within the program's formal constraints):

> **svu junkie**
> They will never make Olivia gay 'cause her heterosexuality has already been established. If she decided to 'jump the fence' then they would have to focus on her personal life and we all know they

> would NEVER do this!! Heck... the show's been on 5 years and we've seen the interior of Olivia's apt. ...what...maybe once??
>
> **SVUFreak107**
> OMG YOU GUYS ARE CRAZY!!! Mariska/Olivia is not gay no matter what it will just screw up her image in real life and no one will like her. It will take people away from teh show not to it!!!

A later poster objects on political grounds, lamenting the casualties of the closet's gendered double binds:

> **SVUAddict**
> I find it very frustrating when females who are strong and assertive immediately get labeled lesbians. Yes, Olivia is tough and independent, but she's also straight and I've grown tired -- in my own life and in Hollywood -- of seeing powerful women labeled as gay. To me, at least, it undermines the potential of straight women to possess these characteristics.

Meanwhile, what is perhaps the most fascinating response overtly describes the influence of fan production on Olivia's hypothesized sexual orientation:

> **Munchz Hunch**
> as far as olivia and being gay goes, the only reason i ever thought she WAS gay was because of all the fan fics about her BEING gay! that was what made me question her sexuality... people write fan fics from what they got off the show, and i havent seen every episode, not even CLOSE, so i was wondering after reading those fics if they [Olivia and Alex, etc.] truly WERE gay couples on the show. but that was put to rest after seeing her with cassidy [1.10 "Closure"] and with that reporter dude [1.16 "The Third Guy"]... so i have had my suspicions, but they were all eventually cleared up.

In this viewer's hierarchy, fan fiction has substantial authority in the investigation of Olivia's sexuality because it is written by those with particular expertise in reading television's signals. However, diegetic verification trumps these fan interpretations, providing a stable resolution to the mystery (at least if one conveniently overlooks the option of bisexuality, as noted above). When priority is given to clues located inside the television text, the implication is that if some are arriving at the wrong verdict, their

viewing strategies must be perverse or deluded. **Spank** puts this dismissal most succinctly: "This is ridiculous... You lot look for things that aren't there." I would argue, however, that the significance of these processes of looking should not be underestimated: what popular debates such as this one illustrate is that commercial authority over textual conclusions is dynamically negotiated and always provisional.

Far from the message board debate in both degree and kind, one fan under the pseudonym Sally Forth composed an elaborate riposte to these sorts of scornful reactions to the proposition that Olivia isn't quite straight. Her exhaustive, expansive, and often excessive "rave," rendered as a static web page dated 2006 {http://web.archive.org/web/20060423012451/http://www.sallyforth.info/}, is an idiosyncratic and remarkable document of vernacular theory, detailing her observations and arguments concerning Olivia's intimacies with lesbian desire through both textual analysis and broader political critique. Covering everything from obscure inside jokes to the moral, legal, and conceptual battles over social issues such as gay visibility and same-sex marriage, Sally's content and links manifest her engagement with fan and media networks even in the absence of technical interactivity. Confirming that "On every *SVU*-related message board I've seen, the issue of Olivia's sexual preference comes up at some point," she gripes, "Any time I posted that Olivia might be gay or bi, well, let me say, I got my ass kicked. 'You're crazy. That scene / look / action / appearance could mean anything. Olivia Benson is not gay. Get over it!'" Sally, like some of the posters quoted above, is not optimistic about the prospect of Olivia coming out within the constraints of commercial television, writing, "IMHO, TPTB [The Powers That Be] will keep Olivia as she is. No boyfriend. No girlfriend. That is the only way to avoid alienating any fans." But she

nonetheless champions the integrity of spectatorial practices, asserting, "The whole point behind subtext is that people can enjoy the show however they wish, without having someone tell them that they're wrong or reading things into the show that aren't there." Her claims are not based solely on a revaluation of fan readings, however: she supports this call for interpretive pluralism with a humorous but meticulously impartial account of the textual "evidence" on both sides of the question "is she or isn't she?", making the case that those who consider the inquest over at the first glimpse of an on screen boyfriend just aren't looking hard enough. That is, although she self-identifies as a lesbian fan, for Sally too, the figure of Olivia's lesbianism is a shifting jumble of diegetic references and absences, audience competencies and investments, industrial conditions, and political context that is not easily stabilized (and at the same time not easily dismissed). Both ephemeral online discussions and Sally's more concerted manifesto are artifacts of fans' struggles with the complexity and contradictions of the project of representing or locating lesbian desire in the televisual landscape -- its frustrations and its inexhaustibly generative potential.

3 / REALITY/FICTION

The fluctuating topology of television's text and metatext, denotation and connotation, canon and fanon is a conceptual challenge to sexuality as an epistemological project, but it also intrudes quite concretely at the points of contact between the territories of production and consumption on either side of the screen. I have already noted television's formal and historical inclination, as a medium that endeavors to be coextensive with everyday life, to unfocus comfortable demarcations of all sorts. Jane

Feuer writes that "Television as an ideological apparatus strives to break down any barriers between the fictional diegesis, the advertising diegesis, and the diegesis of the viewing family, finding it advantageous to assume all three are one and the same" (105). The commercial advantage of this blurring of fiction and reality, always manifested in the flow between programs and commercials and between programs and behind-the-scenes gossip and personalities, becomes increasingly conspicuous as the internet renders the perspectives of fans and media professionals increasingly accessible to each other. The *San Francisco Chronicle* infamously reported that "[*SVU* executive producer Neal] Baer admits tweaking fans with veiled references to Sapphic love. 'We read the fan sites. We know that people are into the Alex-Olivia thing. All the codes are in there'" (Chonin) -- a confession that is less interesting as an outright legitimization of "subtext" than as a junction in the ongoing course of Olivia-centric negotiations across shifting valences of textual meaning and power. The fourth wall was even more dramatically breached when, after her tremendous investment in analyzing Olivia, Sally Forth contacted portraying actress Mariska Hargitay to share her commentary: Hargitay responded directly and allowed Sally to post a synopsis of their phone interview on her web page. Such close encounters between the organs of fan production and the organs of media production are a corollary of the industry's intensifying attention to modes and sites of fannish engagement.

Among Hargitay's "candid and sincere" answers: "She greatly appreciates all the mail she receives, including the letters from gay viewers who relate to Olivia Benson... It saddens her to think she has hurt anyone's feelings... The fact that Olivia is seen as ambiguous is interesting because her character clearly engages the viewers' imagination."

Her apologia alludes to the background of the 2004 conversation: a comment Hargitay made on *Late Night with Conan O'Brien* in April 2003 that turned out to be a PR blunder (one that addressing the fandom via Sally Forth might rectify). During her interview with O'Brien, Hargitay expressed what some took to be homophobic discomfort with aspersions cast on her own heterosexuality by lesbian readings of Olivia [Figure 5]. The phenomenon she reacted to -- a certain slippage between Olivia's character persona and Hargitay's star persona -- relies on a multifaceted intersection of real and fictional worlds:

- *SVU*'s positioning as a drama that engages social issues "ripped from the headlines" with sensationalized realism (no doubt one reason why many rape victims contact Hargitay, which led her to include extensive sexual assault resources and information on her personal web page {http://mariska.com/resources/});
- particular parallels between Mariska's and Olivia's personal lives (until the point, not long before this appearance, when the former began publicly dating a male actor, who she later married and had a child with while continuing her role on *SVU*): both were single workaholics whose careers seemingly kept them too busy for a relationship;
- persistent rumors that Hargitay is herself in the closet, which are perhaps especially compelling to fans seeking "real" evidence about Olivia's orientation;
- *SVU*'s aforementioned detective training program: if we accept the procedural's premise that the truth must be precisely what is not visible at first glance, following Olivia's trail routinely leads to probing for the real person behind her.

The *Conan* incident, in this broader context of actor/character intermixture, catalyzed a conspiracy theory that a fan community elaborated collectively over *SVU*'s ensuing seasons. They hypothesized that the explanation for a pronounced transformation in Olivia's gender presentation was a systematic "de-dykefication" orchestrated by Hargitay (among the clues catalogued: the lengthening of Olivia's near-crewcut through awkward

stages of dyed and hairsprayed shags, mullets, and bobs; fake tanning and other unfortunate skin treatments; plot contrivances that called for Olivia to dress up in high-femme "drag"; an overall shift to more feminine fashions; the advent of equally feminized character traits, such as baby-craziness and emotional outbursts dubbed "unpretty crying"; increasing threat of "manvils" [clumsily manufactured boyfriends or exes]; even a noticeable change in the way Olivia walks). Although we cannot solve the mystery of the motives behind what amounted to an assault on the character beloved by lesbian fandom, fans' arguments for a guilty verdict [Figure 6 and Figure 7] are themselves evidence of a volatile collision of instabilities and inequalities around television's deployment of the subtextual closet, exacerbated in an era when television's own identity is increasingly suspect.

If, in its early days, slash was sometimes condemned as "character rape," for fans of "butch" Olivia, her feminization was the true violence, and their vehement expressions of rage and betrayal were commensurate with such an atrocity. In a "rant" on the subject from September 2005, one LiveJournaler captures the intractable, intolerable position that results:

> I really feel that the consumption of fandom has changed my opinions. Because, while reading these MH [Mariska Hargitay] articles, seeing the pictures, I get the picture of a woman who's trying to reclaim ownership of her character from the fans who see the character as gay. There is no separation between actor and character... And it pisses me off because Olivia Benson is NOT the property of Mariska Hargitay. Once those little images leave the cathode ray clutter, it becomes the property of the audience. (trancer21) {http://trancer21.livejournal.com/8081.html?format=light}

In other words, the entanglement of "actor and character" is itself inextricable from the entanglement of the "cathode ray" and the audience that generates interpretive concords

about Olivia and Hargitay's text and paratext, and these epistemological snarls are in turn ensnared in the economics of the industry. For Olivia is certainly not "the property of the audience" proportionally to her status as property within the apparatus of corporate ownership, buttressed by the legal mechanism of copyright and the system of mass distribution and financing. However, the devices of ownership are still unable to contain her in these bounds, and in keeping with the futility of binary enclosure, the siege of Olivia on screen stimulated an efflorescence of "snark" (that is, sarcastic criticism) online. Following the conjecture that elements of Mariska Hargitay's persona were forcibly grafted onto Olivia Benson, much of it lampooned the resulting monstrous mutant: Oliska Hargenson. As far as I can tell, this portmanteau was coined in October 2005 as the punch-line of the parodic fanfic "It Ain't Her" by newbie_2u {http://community.livejournal.com/ob_fangrrl/217186.html}, which features Detectives Munch and Tutuola investigating Olivia's apparent disappearance. It is an example of a smattering of "meta" stories treating this theme, and others often refigure the extratextual battle fans framed in terms of Olivia versus Mariska as an angst-ridden erotic drama of Olivia/Mariska. One rendition reverses the familiar hierarchy, portraying Olivia as the stronger and more real double, and Mariksa as the television viewer who falls prey to her charms:

> She grew Olivia out, strand by re-touched strand. She tried to stop herself from disappearing, as she felt the camera draw her inside it... But she still felt herself fading. Watching Olivia, failing to see herself, falling helplessly in love with her possessor... Mariska was afraid to sleep. She was afraid that she *wanted* Olivia to find her. Afraid of her dreams that bled into reality. (giantessmess) {http://community.livejournal.com/ob_fangrrl/197094.html}

Here, it is Olivia who "possesses" Mariska, in both spectral and propertied senses, infiltrating "reality" with uncanny spectacle. It is not incidental that the memetic conspiracy in which these artifacts participate was largely located in a LiveJournal community: this and comparable distributed, interactive web networks haunt television like fanon Olivia haunts Mariska, perturbing the economies of corporate possession. In this context, paranoia on both sides about Mariska and Olivia commingling seems well-founded: today, TV's existence depends on its interpenetration with fan fictions.

D / MY GIRLFRIEND OLIVIA

After previewing selections from the original version of this chapter while it was a work in progress, Sally Forth jokingly told me that she "Can't wait to get to the 'Olivia is really gay' part" (personal correspondence [email], 26 June 2004). Needless to say, there is no such part: my analysis has not solved any of the enigmas of the closet, whether on the axis of straight/gay, TV/internet, or any of its other intertwined polarities. The price to be paid for such complexity is a refusal of the sort of politics of representation that Sally Forth rousingly renders in the "rave" discussed above:

> In order to be free, we must be seen... For this reason, the struggle to become visible has been part of every civil rights movement in this country. Conservatives are constantly fighting against the realistic portrayal of gays and lesbians in the media. By making us invisible, they can define us, control us, and stop us from fully participating in this culture... It is why the closet is so destructive.

While this call can be deployed strategically, the threshold of hidden/visible is itself caught up in the closet's structural logic. As the case of Olivia Benson demonstrates, seeing a lesbian on television is far from a simple procedure, and what looks like a

"realistic portrayal" is contingent on localized viewing strategies. Because visuality seems to promise transparency, I have elided it, here, in favor of the density of textual hermeneutics. In the epistemological labyrinth of subtext (the diegetic zone of connotation), extratext (the program's outside, so far as it is delineable), paratext (its official framing materials), metatext (its nebula of ancillary knowledge), and intertext (its promiscuous network of connections), I root some of the irrepressible fertility of the closet. If the "private eyes" of my title are watching, they do so in ways that cross the borders of both privacy and seeing, performing detective work that illuminates a tangled ecology of meaning, power, and desire. The closet is their terrain, and despite its oppressive fickleness I'd venture that it generates as well as conceals truths, opens as well as closes doors.

This returns me to the provisional distinction between what I would qualify as lesbian versus queer readings. As a TV fan, I occupy both positions, and I can appreciate the desire for a sexuality -- lesbian -- that appears conclusive and legible as a political identity. Given that a queer perspective thwarts closure and boundaries, it is understandable that it might be considered pessimistically as its own sort of "closet of connotation," refusing any authoritative findings and relegating all meanings to perpetual subtext. Arguably, however, fandom's drive is itself a queer one because it is openness that inspires the creative engagements and interventions that aim to but never fully succeed at filling in a program's gaps. This tension between lesbian and queer modes, without any final resolution, defines *SVU* femslash fandom during its most dynamic era. In the context of media studies, I am committed to a queer methodology at the cost of any decisive outcome because I believe that it accentuates the dimensions of fan production

that resist, even if they do not topple, the epistemological regime that is most convenient for capitalism. This is perhaps little consolation, though, to the bitter fans who called for Olivia to come out, struggling with TPTB over ownership of her image.

My traitorous restraint in refusing this opportunity to return a verdict in their favor does little to settle the critic/fan conundrum, either. As my own rejoinder to those who insist on enforcing Olivia's heterosexuality, my work here is conceived as engaging with rather than merely commenting on this expansive and interactive battleground. This chapter, which has been posted online in various incarnations since mid-2004 (and which can thus itself be considered a node in the diffuse matrix of Olivia fandom), also has permeable boundaries and is open to wanton intersections and continual reconfiguration. If, in one sense, I've created a colossal tease for those who may wish to prove conclusively that Olivia is a lesbian, in another, this ardent critique has been the supreme erotic encounter between Olivia (my fellow detective) and me, in defiance of the frontier dividing the real world from the one on the TV or computer screen -- and what could be more substantial evidence that Olivia swings my way than that? Nonetheless, it remains unclear how Olivia can be my girlfriend within an academic project, or how such a project can satisfy fandom's desires.

Part of the puzzle is differentiating serious work from salacious leisure, a margin that late capitalism renders ever more coy. The explicit incorporation of fan labor into the media industry undermines the distinction between professional and amateur production, which debunks the fantasy that consumers inhabit an entirely separate sphere from producers. Following a contrasting strategic imaginary, it can be in the promotional interest of creators to present themselves as familiar with (and to) fandom. Meanwhile,

as consumer engagement is increasingly valued, the importance of desire as an interface between media commodities and their reception, as a form of productivity in itself, comes to the fore. The industrial escalation of television's identity crisis makes it imperative to consider the confluences between outside and inside, public and private, reality and fiction that lend the libidinal economies of slash and its closets their powerful vitality. What I offer here is my own fannish reworking of some of the scholarly traditions of television studies that intensifies their linkages with these emerging systems.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

FIGURE 1

Olivia Benson (NBC promotional image)

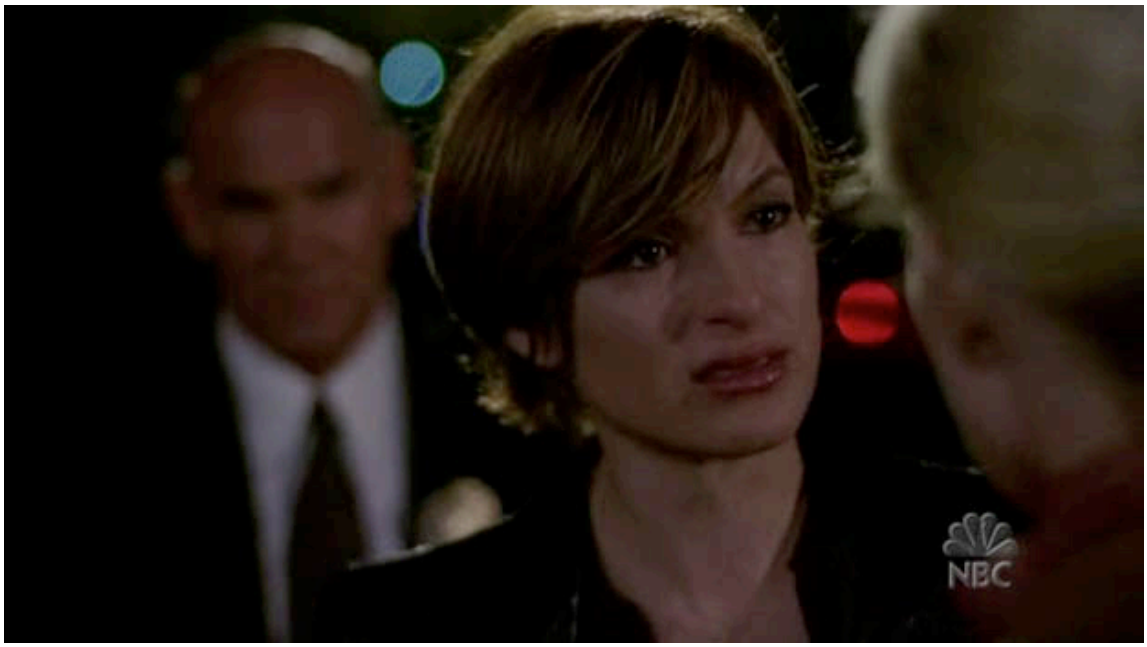

FIGURE 2

VIDEO: http://j-l-r.org/media/alexleaving.wmv

Alex, going into the witness protection program, says goodbye to Olivia (5.04 "Loss")

FIGURE 3

community header image by p_inkjeans for the LiveJournal community ob_fangrrl

FIGURE 4

community header image by aleatory_6 for the LiveJournal community alex_liv_lovers

FIGURE 5

VIDEO: http://j-l-r.org/media/mariska_conan1.wmv

Mariska Hargitay on *Late Night with Conan O'Brien* (April 2003)

FIGURE 6

Graphic by aqua_blurr, posted 10/18/2004 to the LiveJournal community ob_fangrrl. This image adds a humorous internal monologue to a screencap by aleatory_6 in which Olivia is dressed up in high-femme "drag" for an undercover sting (6.02 "Debt").

FIGURE 7

Graphic by newbie_2u, posted 11/02/2005, to the LiveJournal community ob_fangrrl. Fans saw the changes in Olivia as so dramatic that they declared the original character a "missing person."

III / THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

Battlestar Galactica (*BSG*), a Sci-Fi Channel original series (2003-2009) that "reimagines" a goofy genre classic from the late 1970s, has been critically acclaimed as the rebirth of television science fiction. It descends from familiar, almost cliché tropes: the cataclysmic near-extermination of humankind by their robot servants, the Cylons, who accomplish this holocaust by fabricating infiltrators who are able biologically and emotionally to mimic humans [Figure 1]. The ensuing narrative cosmos, however, evolves into more than the sum of its parts, generating complexities that stretch even sci-fi's already postmodern renditions of such oppositions as "us" and "them." The upgraded "skin job" Cylons are, in effect, the hybrid offspring of the conflict between humans and machines, and, despite or because of this status, they refuse attempts to contain the threat that they pose within a stable "alien" classification. *BSG* the program is, like the hybrid Cylons it portrays, a version 2.0, grafting together its fictional legacies and real world politics to produce an intertextual mongrel with unpredictable potential. As such, it exemplifies the reproduction of television itself, which mediates a cross-species love affair between program and viewer by promising fans that, if our passion is strong enough, we can penetrate the dimensional barrier of the screen and join with this parallel universe.

If my discussion of *Law & Order: SVU* in the previous chapter emphasized the impossibility of closing the mystery of desire and arriving at a unified truth, science fiction inflects that indeterminacy more positively than the procedural. It is, after all, by

inspiring our love across gaps and borders that TV succeeds in spawning the serials, franchises, and spinoffs that are its forms of self-perpetuation. On *Battlestar Galactica*, love is also the Cylons' reproductive technology -- despite their capacity for perfect replication, they are obsessed with breeding biologically. After their initial experiments fail, they believe love is the crucial ingredient in the inter-technic romance that produces Hera, the first bio-Cylon/human hybrid baby and, in their theology, "the shape of things to come." *Battlestar Galactica*, in parallel, epitomizes "the shape of things to come" for television at large. While always characterized by repetition, diffusion, collaboration, and contingency, mainstream TV is increasingly embracing cult genres' strategies for generating engagement, including endlessly recycling and reworking the show's text and putting the show's metatext in intercourse with fans. Television is learning that its progeny can be most fruitful when, like Hera, they're orphaned: disseminated outside their biologically, technologically, and patriarchally authorized families and adopted by their audiences.

Like Cylons, fans of *Battlestar Galactica* threaten the established order through their intimacy with technology and their networked proliferation. But like on *Battlestar Galactica*, as the story unfolds, it becomes less and less clear that fans are in fact either alien or genocidal, and more and more conceivable that they will merge with or become truly indistinguishable from civilization as we know it. Nobody can predict, yet, whether "the shape of things to come" as embodied in Hera or the offspring of TV and the internet will be an apocalypse or a fruitful hybridization of humans and machines. Moreover, the anatomy of the "love" required to produce the future of Cylons or television remains shrouded in mystery -- witness, for example, Nielsen's scramble to update its metrics for

TV ratings with a "three screen" strategy {http://en-us.nielsen.com/main/measurement/a2m2_three_screens}. Desire is defined by a lack that can never be satisfied or a gulf that can never be crossed, as fans' ultimately fruitless urge to claim Olivia for themselves illustrates. Love, by contrast, is a movement toward generative potential for contact and co-existence within difference. Chela Sandoval returns to the late work of Roland Barthes to theorize how third world feminists have taken love as a "puncture, passage, or conduit... a 'breaking' through whatever controls... a 'rupturing' in one's everyday world that permits crossing over to another" (140). In keeping with the theme of occupying a border between two worlds, this modality evokes hybridity as the fruit of a coupling: "Barthes's postulation is that entrance to that somewhere else of the abyss is constantly invited through the medium of the 'third meaning,' which is that which always haunts any other two meanings in a binary opposition" (144). Here, I attempt to parse the economies of media reproduction through love -- within theory, within *Battlestar Galactica*, and within its queer communities of production. Turning to several species of fan video in Section C, I will examine the tactics of material and discursive control that structure the possibilities for spawning televisual offspring and the bastard children that escape or exceed these bounds. As in the case of *SVU*, the particularities of girlslash fandom parallel more diffuse libidinal operations, and I'd like to consider how technological affordances enable media "families" to parlay such loves into their own hybrid progeny.

A / Media Hybrids

In contrast to what I've characterized as an efflorescence of vitality, media scholar Mark Pesce hailed *Battlestar Galactica*'s premiere on the British satellite network

SkyOne in October 2004 as "the day TV died" ("Piracy"). *BSG* was a joint US-UK production that began its life as a stand-alone miniseries, and the decision to hold the stateside launch of the series until 2005 was only the first salvo in an ongoing battle between corporate owners and fans over its distribution (for example, the network has raised ire by scheduling extended hiatuses between and sometimes during seasons). In an article titled "Piracy Is Good? How *Battlestar Galactica* Killed Broadcast TV," Pesce points to the dissemination of episodes online via the BitTorrent peer-to-peer file-sharing protocol to prove his eponymous point. As he puts it elsewhere, "once the broadcast networks moved to digital, they became entirely obsolete, because I can get a stream of bits from anywhere in the world that I can get a high-speed connection to the internet" ("Redefining"). In addition to noting the technological convergence that makes television and the web functionally equivalent as screens that display digital streams, Pesce remarks on the cultural affinities between socially constructed practices of TV viewership and the emerging configuration of internet video, which joins the throng of consumer options that, since the VCR, have progressively liberated TV from a fixed schedule and put it at the disposal of the viewer. Pesce astutely notes that television has long promoted itself as a "free" entertainment medium that is coextensive with everyday life and available on demand. Illegal file-sharing aligns with this preexisting sense of entitlement and extends the ways that the domestic, serial, and immediate temporality of TV was already being taken up (and even taken over) by the internet.

Many BitTorent tracker websites have faced lawsuits for facilitating intellectual property infringement, even though they don't host copyrighted content themselves. One commentator on these skirmishes observes, "unsurprisingly this high-tech larceny has a

strong sci-fi bent, betraying the geeky culprits, with two *Stargate* shows, one *Star Trek* show and *Battlestar Galactica* in the top 10" (Sturgeon). If *Battlestar Galactica* is among the most popular TV downloads, that is, then this status is tied to the interpenetration of audiences, technologies, and narratives, each of which works through and by the tensions of the others. A perfect example is *BSG*'s TV movie *Razor*, which originally aired on November 24, 2007, midway through a year-long hiatus between the series' seasons three and four. Diegetically, *Razor* revisits one of the pivotal arcs of season two to fill in further backstory on the actions of guest character Admiral Cain, while intermittently flashing both forward (to a new storyline inserted after Cain's death) and backward forty years (to events of the first Cylon war, including visual references to the original 1970s *BSG*). Metatextually, *Razor*'s timelines are equally nonlinear: in addition to the authorized overlap of season two hindsight, season three narrative, season four speculation, and series prehistory (also doled out in advance webisodes as seven promotional "flashbacks"), *Razor* leaked online prematurely in the last days of October. In keeping with the same conditioned impatience that made fans seek out the delayed premiere, *Razor* soon hit the BitTorrent portals and became freely, which is to say illegally, available to technologically-enabled renegades (our metaphorical Cylons). With *BSG*, and *Razor* in particular, the producers erect a reproductive mechanism that links narratives, technologies, and viewers whose temporalities and imperatives often crisscross and collide. File-sharing is one instance of the ways that the operation of this network, with its unpredictable connections and fissures, exceeds full corporate control.

In addition to the unsanctioned distribution of *Razor*, its proprietary jurisdiction has to contend with the accumulation of conjecture and creativity around these storylines

since season two. The TV movie is derivative of *BSG*'s established narratives in much the same way as are typical fanworks, reinserting itself into the program's own latencies. These apertures are already avidly occupied by fans, however, and, long before the screen text existed, it was anticipated by fandom's apparatus for spreading spoilers (details about entertainment that is yet to be released). On June 18, 2007, for example, a cult media news site released some insider information, including this juicy tidbit about two female characters on the program:

> "Cain and Gina were quite close," a source tells *SyFy Portal*. "In fact, they were lovers[...]" Some viewers who had been pushing for some sort of homosexual representation on 'Battlestar Galactica' should finally get their wishes answered with this revelation, especially since many viewers speculated that Cain might be a lesbian previously. (Hinman)

Audience interpretations are usually considered to antecede the media source on which they are based, but here it is fans' appropriation of Admiral Cain as a queer character that is seen to prefigure the official narrative and viewer activism that is seen to drive plot decisions. Indeed, far in advance of the announcement of plans to expand on Cain's story onscreen, elaboration of her projected romance with Gina existed in online fan fiction, some of which is strikingly similar to *Razor*'s eventual rendition. The "cycle of time," a conception of destiny as repetitive that is summed up in the aphorism "all this has happened before, and all this will happen again," is a cornerstone of *BSG*'s diegetic religious faith; as the case of *Razor* demonstrates, it is also a cornerstone of *BSG*'s televisual reproduction, wherein textual material is repeatedly reworked across various intersecting registers (TV texts and online promotions, "extended" DVD releases, spoilers/reviews, BitTorrent, fan works, and all further combinations). Within this technocultural constellation, it becomes less convincing to model a television program as

original, bounded, and primary rather than as collective, multiple, and hybrid. TV, that is, starts to resemble the Cylons, with their capacity to combine heterogeneous anatomies, mythologies, and projections, more than their technophobic human progenitors. While queer "subtext" and queer fandom most certainly predate digital media, the contradictions and gaps in which non-normative readings thrive are becoming increasingly expansive as mass texts become increasingly diffused over disparate sites and times. Given these diffusions, I will argue that the difficulty of stabilizing authorized meanings is related to the difficulty of enforcing authorized uses of content in digital networks. This connection is practical as well as theoretical, since the internet is the homeland where contemporary fan communities (many of them queer) disseminate, dissect, and regenerate the shows they love.

This is not to say that the technical, legal, or socioeconomic power of TV producers and networks is at an end, however. The explicit acknowledgement of Cain and Gina's relationship onscreen still has greater legitimacy than a much vaster accretion of "fanon" (collectively established narrative circumstances), even for the very fans whose "wishes" *Razor* "answers." Nor does it end all problems of queer visibility on *Battlestar Galactica*, just as illegal file-sharing doesn't end the corporate regime of media production and distribution. Legal confrontations over BitTorrent and streaming portals for bootleg television are only one example of the ways that difference remains in dispute. On the other side, there are signals that piracy may not necessarily run counter to profits -- as Pesce reports, after leaking online, *BSG*'s first season went on to garner some of the Sci-Fi Channel's highest ratings ever. While there are a number of neologisms available to encapsulate current transformations in media consumption and

production, in this chapter I root my analysis in *Battlestar Galactica*'s own term: "hybrid." According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word originated in agriculture to signify the cross-bred issue of two plants or animals of different species. This construction indicates both the constitutive bifurcation of the parents and the disintegration of their defining boundary, evoking an unresolved tension between reinscribing binary difference and erasing it. As neither a radical break with its twofold heritage nor a sterile joining which leaves twoness intact, hybridity is an apt staging ground for the marriage of broadcast and broadband, which continues to be negotiated and metamorphosed. The contours of its ultimate progeny are far from a foregone conclusion, and in the next section, I explore theoretical approaches to modeling this process of media hybridization.

1 / THEY EVOLVED

The classic source for a nuanced theory of media development is Raymond Williams's critique of facile notions of both fully determined and fully determining technology in *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*. We wouldn't want to dispute, surely, his proposal that media form and social context are mutually constitutive. But while Williams takes Marshall McLuhan as his techno-determinist straw man (Williams), this formalist method is not necessarily so far removed from the acuity that Williams advocates. McLuhan's aphoristic pronouncement that "the medium is the message" is a ready scapegoat, but it goes beyond simplistic transparency to signal his more rarefied idea that all media are prosthetic amplifications of the human body -- placing him in the orbit of poststructuralist connections between inscription, substrate, and subjectivity (I

discuss this heritage further in Chapter V). McLuhan's theory of media thereby raises the question of evolution, coupling its biological and historical permutations. His insistence on the determining influence of technologies on the reproduction of their corresponding individual and social formations initially appears to leave little room for reciprocity: according to him, media "alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without any resistance," until "we become what we behold" (18-19). Yet if man [sic] is "the servomechanism of his own extended or repeated image" (41), it is the copy (or at the very least, the prosthesis) that replicates the original, raising the question of how man "finds ever new ways of modifying his technology" (46). McLuhan answers with recourse to a medical model of bio-equilibrium: "In the physical stress of superstimulation of various kinds, the central nervous system acts to protect itself by a strategy of amputation or isolation of the offending organ, sense, or function. Thus, the stimulus to new invention is the stress of acceleration of pace and increase of load" (42). For example, he suggests that it was "the pressure of new burdens resulting from the acceleration of exchange by written and monetary media" that led to the innovation of the wheel (42). That is, cultural formations like capitalism are yoked to physiology through technology, and their co-evolution is driven by the tensions and excesses they generate, which necessitate the constant adaptation of the (perceptive and social) body.

Given this view of mutual change, then, reproduction is a dynamic rather than a linear procedure, ultimately far more complex in McLuhan's view than his totalizing catchphrases evince out of context. Already engaging figures from biotechnology, incorporating the cultivation of hybrids into his vision of media futures is an intuitive move. Hybridization figures in this matrix as the coupling of divergent media, which

"interact and spawn new progeny" (49): "The hybrid or the meeting of two media," McLuhan writes, "is a moment of truth and revelation from which new form is born" (55). Since "it is from such intensive hybrid exchange and strife of ideas and forms that the greatest social energies are released, and from which arise the greatest technologies" (47), this generative process is associated with historical development and transformation, linking hybridity to global temporality and geography. McLuhan is concerned, in particular, with what he calls the "electric age" (characterized by simultaneity and awareness of the whole), wherein "all such extension of our bodies, including cities, will be translated into information systems" (57), as a radical break from the previous mechanical era. As a further instantiation of this shift to late capitalism that McLuhan grasped in 1964, digital networks are hybrid in at least two senses: 1) Like cyborgs, they merge human and machine components into a composite artifact. 2) They are one pivotal site where hybrid intercourse among media themselves is reshaping our subjective and social landscapes.

Several recent works have revisited the theoretical question of media hybridization as a historical process, within a framework more thoroughly informed by the methodologies of poststructuralism and archaeology than McLuhan's visionary fancies. In *Remediation*, Bolter and Grusin return to the scene of the Williams-McLuhan dispute, stating that "to avoid both technological determinism and determined technology, we propose to treat social forces and technical forms as two aspects of the same phenomenon: to explore digital technologies themselves as hybrids of technical, material, social, and economic facets" (77). This reiterates the negotiated materialist stance I established above, formulating the interpenetration of substrates and discourses

explicitly as hybridity. Bolter and Grusin convincingly inhabit this terrain via their signature term "remediation," or "the representation of one medium in another" (45). In fact, all media operate by remediation, since a medium is, by definition, "that which appropriates the techniques, forms, and social significance of other media and attempts to rival or refashion them in the name of the real" (65). Remediation, they argue, relies on a particular hybrid pairing, as interdependent and contradictory as all such duos: that of "immediacy" (the inclination to efface the interface) and "hypermediacy" (the inclination to valorize the interface). These poles "oscillate" as each claim to a more transparent and authentic representation calls attention to the apparatus of media form (19).

While Bolter and Grusin observe that the two tendencies are in conflict throughout the history of media, they suggest that this interplay is especially acute and significant in the digital age, and a number of their examples detail ways that television and the internet, specifically, remediate each other. Transmedia franchising, or "pouring a familiar content into another media form... to spread the content over as many markets as possible," is one instance of remediation by "repurposing" and this strategy's tensions: "Each of those forms takes part of its meaning from the other products in a process of honorific remediation and at the same time makes a tacit claim to offer an experience that the other forms cannot" (68). Such endemic variances among desires, ideologies, technologies and profit models that work at cross-purposes to each other account for some of the vertigo that accompanies convergence. By making an analogy between the role of hypermediacy and Judith Butler's assertion that homosexuality is necessary to stabilize heteronormativity, Bolter and Grusin propose that these transactions can be read as queer: "hypermediacy is multiple and deviant in its suggestion of multiplicity... [and]

as the sum of all unnatural modes of representation... [it] always reemerges in every era, no matter how rigorously technologies of transparency may try to exclude it. Transparency needs hypermediacy" (84) in order to appear natural. Thus, Bolter and Grusin have again outlined a scenario that posits irrepressible deviance as inherent to the turbulent network of mediation, creating problems of control that erupt with particular urgency in today's convergent formations.

In *Media Ecologies*, Matthew Fuller offers a comparable rendering of the centrality of queer orientations to media economies, though more obliquely. Like Bolter and Grusin, he maintains that non-normative movement is integral to representational flows, and must always be negotiated in the operation of any nexus of power. In contrast to the parallel status of hypermediacy and transparency, however, in Fuller's account "'hidden' dimensions of invention and combination are embedded and implicit in particular dynamics and affordances of media systems and their parts" (8), submerged within a provisionally stable hegemony. These deviant vectors grapple with the mass reproduction of the "standard object... a mode of knowing and producing that effects limitations on other forms of understanding and use," that is nonetheless only a precarious "'settlement' of powers, affordances, and interpretations" (9). Fuller adopts the term "ecology," which is deliberately overdetermined, to "indicate the massive and dynamic interrelation of processes and objects, being and things, patterns and matter" (2). From an ecological vantage, "the only way to find things out about what happens when complex objects such as media systems interact is to carry out such interactions... Every element is an explosion, a passion or capacity settled temporarily into what passes for a stable state" (1). Because of this complexity, Fuller's theory remains intentionally

inchoate, performed rather than stated in a series of case studies. This simulation approach is engaging and exemplary of the networked relations I'm trying to activate here, but restricts the transferability of his model.

The simulation of complex systems is precisely the ecology that N. Katherine Hayles surveys more expansively in *My Mother Was a Computer*, which founds a theory of media, in the broadest sense, on principles ported from the scientific study of emergence. In the field, this term refers to "properties [that] come about from interactions between components... [and that] typically cannot be predicted because [of] the complex feedback loops that develop" (25). Hayles recognizes a kinship between her project and Bolter and Grusin's "remediation," wherein the dynamic interaction between immediacy and hypermediacy represents a "coevolution of apparently opposed trends... characteristic of complex systems with multiple feedback loops" (32). She argues, however, that their label (with the re- prefix implying an origin, even as they insist that "all mediation is remediation") is limited by "locating the starting point for the cycles in a particular locality and medium" rather than in "multiple causality," and by "the specific connotation of applying [only] to immediate/ hypermediate strategies" (33). Hayles ventures a more sweeping intervention with her term "intermediation," repurposed from scientist Nicholas Gessler and elsewhere. Intermediation refers to "multicausal and multilayered hierarchical systems, which entail distributed agency, emergent processes, unpredictable coevolutions, and seemingly paradoxical interactions between convergent and divergent processes" (31). These systems function by generating what are known scientifically as "dynamic hierarchies" (Hayles later redefines them as "heterarchies"): massively emergent networks wherein the complexity precipitated at one level becomes

the raw material for further levels, producing even greater complexity. Thus, intermediation is characterized by the confluence of the following conditions ("Intermediation"):

1. Different systems of increasing complexity
2. Different media
3. Results of lower-level system(s) re-represented in higher-level system(s)
4. Heterarchical dynamics (feedback/forward loops interconnect media)
5. Emergent complexity

As Hayles amply demonstrates, this constitutes a rich and versatile framework for conceptualizing a wide range of reproductive and evolutionary phenomena. I'd contend that it is the most rigorous heir to McLuhan's reveries about media hybridization.

Key sites of intermediation in Hayles's schema include the co-evolution of language and code, of humans and machines, and of analog and digital (which, in practice, always appear in combination). I propose that intermediation is also a fruitful model for analyzing transmedia formations as mobilized in today's entertainment industry. One of Hayles's aims is to reconfigure the typical understanding of textuality, which remains largely a relic of literature even as works move online: "rather than holding up as an ideal a unitary convergent work to which variants can be subordinated," she urges, "we should conceptualize texts as clustered in assemblages whose dynamics emerge from all the texts participating in the cluster " (*Mother* 9). She applies this topography explicitly to transmedia, if only in passing, when she mentions the constellation of novels, promotional web pages, fan web pages, and other official and unofficial material surrounding many computer games or feature films as an example of such a "Work as Assemblage" (105-6). Hayles's methodology requires reconceiving subjectivity and authorship as "dispersed, fragmented, and heterogeneous... multiple in

many senses, both because they are collectivities in and among themselves, and also because they include nonhuman as well as human actors" (106-7). This enmeshing within and between the variegated levels of a dynamic heterarchy (people and computers, television and the internet, corporations and fans) also leads Hayles to reiterate that the Work as Assemblage's "components take forms distinctive to the media in which they flourish, so the specificities of media are essential to understanding its morphing configurations," and that "a robust account of materiality focusing on the recursive loops between physicality and textuality is essential" (107). Intermediation thus incorporates the vital theoretical vistas I've attempted to bring into focus here, taking a hybrid outlook on the constitution, propagation, and interpenetration of discursivity, subjectivity, technology, and materiality. Implicit in Hayles's account is a critique of "convergence," as the buzzword is sometimes rendered: "the current tendency to regard the computer as the ultimate solvent that is dissolving all other media into itself" (31). The critics discussed in this section reject the notion that a formerly discrete assortment of media (computation, print, television, telephony, etc.) are converging into a digital alignment wherein they are unified or interchangeable. Instead, they excavate the protean, embodied networks through which media constantly re-represent each other, and seek to chart the unpredictable and irreducible complexity of these economies.

2 / THEY LOOK LIKE US NOW

The media hybrids being cultivated today will form the future of the entertainment industry. But as McLuhan envisions in his conception of media as prostheses of the body, the implications of this evolution are far broader. Fan

communities represent a nexus of technology, subjectivity, and economics, and as such are instructive in understanding the stakes of the transformations in progress. One tradition that delves into the robust intersections between media, bodies, and culture is cyborg theory, founded by Donna Haraway's influential essay "A Cyborg Manifesto." Diagnosing contemporary experience, which is permeated by the hybridization of familiar oppositions, Haraway writes that "we find ourselves to be cyborgs, hybrids, mosaics, chimeras. Biological organisms have become biotic systems, communications devices like others. There is no fundamental, ontological separation in our formal knowledge of machine and organism, of technical and organic" (177-78). She references Rachel, a cyborg character in the film *Blade Runner*, as an exemplar of these disorienting and inspiring conditions, but the correlation is equally apt for the themes of *Battlestar Galactica* (the program is openly influenced by the Ridley Scott film) as it works through the politics of our posthuman era.

We might find an earlier origin story for *BSG*'s Cylons in A. M. Turing's seminal treatise on artificial intelligence, published in 1950 in the journal *Mind*. Therein, he proposes that "thinking" should be solely defined by a (human or machine) entity's ability to succeed at a puzzle he calls "The Imitation Game," which consists of convincingly mimicking, in typewritten responses, the distinguishing characteristics of the other (a man, in the case of a machine; a woman, in the case of a man). In reducing intelligence to the performance of intelligence, and asserting that any more transcendental standard is merely "the polite convention that everyone thinks" (446), he challenges long-treasured essentialist and depth models of consciousness and identity. Turing's test undermines fixed differences between genders and between the biological and the technological while

nonetheless reinscribing the classic divide between mind as privileged and body as peripheral. But, as Hayles argues in *How We Became Posthuman*, this metaphysical duality is nevertheless a (re)productive one: the Imitation Game "necessarily makes the subject into a cyborg, for the enacted and represented bodies are brought into conjunction through the technology that connects them" (xiii). As a hybrid of human and machine, the cyborg is closely linked to Hayles's pivotal concept of the posthuman, which "implies not only a coupling with intelligent machines but a coupling so intense and multifaceted that it is no longer possible to distinguish meaningfully between the biological organism and the informational circuits in which the organism is enmeshed" (35). In this construction, difference remains in dispute: neither distinctly binary as in the case of the parent opposition nor fully resolved in favor of its amalgamated offspring. The hybrid persists as an awkward and conditional synthesis of modern and postmodern topographies of identity, and it is this terrain that *Battlestar Galactica* so fruitfully inhabits.

Accordingly, the program's premise is one generation in a lineage of science-fiction and cyberpunk narratives that intervene in these questions as part of a technological imaginary in its own hybrid intercourse with the material evolution of mediated bodies. In *Zeros + Ones*, Sadie Plant weaves a genealogy of android ingénues and femme fatales stretching back to Hadaly, the "virtual woman" who is the subject of Villiers de l'Isle Adam's 1884 novel *The Future Eve*. A robot bride constructed by a fictional Thomas Edison, she is succeeded by figures that include the cyborgs of *Metropolis*, *The Stepford Wives*, *Blade Runner* and *Eve of Destruction*; as Plant remarks, "of course the makers of all these machines were aware that they might break down or

run wild, away, and out of control" (87-88). According to Plant, it was cybernetics, the science of self-regulating systems, that ironically "exposed the weaknesses of all attempts to predict and control" (159) in the course of its mission to understand and promote order within an entropic universe. The very feedback loops that enable a system to regulate and coordinate itself ensure that it is in constant circulation, its boundaries never fixed. I'd add that the hybrid has a certain affinity with these "runaway effects." Dynamic processes have a tendency to favor the production of hybrids over the preservation of bounded differences: "Continually interacting with each other, constituting new systems, collecting and connecting themselves to form additional assemblages, [cybernetic] systems were only individuated in the most contingent and temporary of senses" (162). Moreover, the resultant hybrids are prone to continuing the runaway drift through undisciplined and unpredictable behavior -- one of the dangers of reconfiguring ontological essence as technologically negotiated simulation, as in Turing's reonfiguration in the Imitation Game. The hybrid (in this case, the cyborg or otherwise simulated or simulatable human, with its bipartite disposition), as the provisional fusion of two into one, always leaves a gap where the intended and anticipated operation of the system can and does run amok.

In *Battlestar Galactica*'s rendition, an advanced human civilization exists on twelve planetary Colonies somewhere in the universe. In Colonial mythology (a polytheistic religion based on an amalgamation of Greco-Roman and Mormon traditions), all of us had a common origin on the planet Kobol, but in the exodus from this paradise several thousand years ago (in Colonial history) a thirteenth tribe was separated from the rest and settled a legendary homeland called Earth. The miniseries opens forty years

after the end of a bloody war with the Cylons, a breed of intelligent machines that humans created to serve them. The Colonies have had no contact with the Cylons during the intervening decades, and they are just beginning to relax security measures. This involves reintegrating advanced technology into their society: during the first war, they were forced to revert to more primitive systems, since the Cylons could remotely interface with and instantly disable the newer, networked ones, but, in the diegetic present, trust in technology has returned. Yet, without warning, the Cylons mount a massive attack that wipes out the entire civilization of billions, with the exception of less than 50,000 people who manage to flee the genocide. The ensuing series follows this small fleet of ships as they attempt to survive and continue to evade the pursuing Cylons (the eponymous Battlestar Galactica is the only military ship among them, and thus is solely responsible for defense). The battle lines become ever more indeterminate, however, as intimacy and kinship between humans and Cylons, as well as dissent and enmity among and with human and Cylon communities, gradually unfold.

Central to this trajectory of the reimagined TV series is the twist (an upgrade from the original 1978 series' concept) that the robot insurgents infiltrated the Colonies by synthesizing their own cyborg impostors who, like the artificial intelligences of Turing's Imitation Game, are able to "pass" as human through perfect mimicry. There are twelve models of these "humanform" Cylons, with unlimited clones of each, and it is an alluring Model Six who is sent in undercover to seduce senior scientist Gaius Baltar and thus bring down Colonial defense systems. Apparently made of flesh and blood, these "skin jobs" (as one diegetic slang term names them) eat, sweat, think, pray, feel pain, have sex, and are extremely difficult to detect (although at one point Baltar implements a

specialized biological test, Cylon models are more often "outed" when multiple copies are spotted). Their provenance and makeup remains ambiguous; while their bodies can interface with computer networks, while their anatomy is vulnerable to a machine virus, and while their spines glow dubiously red during orgasm, their technological components are evidently too well camouflaged to show up on conventional scans. Moreover, humans and Cylons alike wrestle with associated questions of self-determination: are these "toasters" (another derogatory term used by the humans on the show) creatures of programming or free will? can different copies of the same model be fully individual? can Cylons truly experience emotions like love? By presenting the status of these pivotal figures as decidedly indefinite, both in terms of their material constitution and in terms of their autonomy, *Battlestar Galactica* illustrates the instability that the hybrid introduces into supposedly fixed categories like human and machine. As Turing proposes, what conclusive criteria could there be for humanity beyond the ability flawlessly to imitate it? It is this tension -- between the preservationist imperative categorically to divide and demarcate and the treacherous ecology of hybridity -- that fuels the narrative engine of this critically acclaimed cult television hit. Its heterogeneous, unresolved meditations on processes of self- and species reproduction and evolution are a powerful instrument of the program's own perpetuation.

3 / Created By Man

Cyborgs are never purely biotechnological hybrids, however, and even Turing needs gender to allegorize his intervention. This is another important complement that cyborg theory offers to the abstract frameworks for media hybridization outlined above.

Being what Chela Sandoval paraphrases as "the 'illigitimate' child of human and machine... indeed, of every binary... a being whose hybridity challenges all binary oppositions and every desire for wholeness" (167), the cyborg organizes itself around the imbrication of varied technological and cultural layers, rendering media theories inseparable from their social contexts. One particularly significant axis in the history of intersections between technology and the embodied organism has been the conception of race, although through its ideological operations the interdependence of race and media often remains submerged. As Sandoval points out, Haraway's manifesto is far from innocent in this department, and Haraway later revised her position to suggest that we "find a name or concept that can signify 'a family of displaced figures, of which the cyborg' is only one" (172). Excavating the heritage of these formations, Wendy Hui Kyong Chun observes that "The premise of [late 19th century] eugenics -- which seemingly defined race as biological -- was the breedability of the human species.... The term *breeding* exemplifies human races as technologically manipulable, while also muddying the boundary between culture and biology" (16-17). That is, despite a long-standing debate about whether racial identity is natural or socially constructed, in even its early iterations these two poles were always already intertwined, contaminating essence with engineering (and vice versa). Visual media are especially crucial to this history because, while race is often understood as a visual category, 19th century science began turning to biological structures invisible to the eye, and "race became an even more important means by which the visible and the invisible were linked" (9). Thus, the thematics of race is fundamental to media hybridity as a theoretical scaffold for the

processes and fantasies of convergence, especially, we will see, as materialized in *Battlestar Galactica*'s portrayal of cyborg identities.

Jennifer Gonzalez elaborates on the mediation of race in her article "Morphologies: Race as a Visual Technology," giving particular attention to the ways that advances in digital imaging both challenge the "truth claims" of the racial gaze and highlight how all media technologies are similarly implicated in reproducing it. This "complex web of intertextual mechanisms tying the present to the past through new and familiar systems of representation" (393) gains new purchase in an era when "genetic engineering turns to the computer... [and the] human body is no longer conceived primarily as a mechanical device... but rather as a complex structure of codes" (392). At this point in the "feedback loop" whereby "Racial hegemony informs the design and use of these technologies, and in turn racial discourse is articulated and defined by them" (387), it comes to appear that "computation is the proper locus and mode of a new racial mixing" (385). Thus today's hybrids and cyborgs are not sanitized techno-utopians but rather are deeply entwined with histories of social control. In *Digitizing Race*, Lisa Nakamura mobilizes the term hybrid to describe both new technological formations and the racial formations that they intersect and invoke, especially the internet itself as "the hybrid form to end all hybrid forms... [that] brings together graphics and textuality, both streaming and still images, synchronous and asynchronous communication" (5). If some "seem to welcome the opportunity that multimedia may give them to produce new cultural forms that are hybrid, multicultural, and by implication multiracial," this optimism is in tension with "colonial fears of racial and cultural miscegenation [that are] resurfacing in discussions of the Internet and new media" (92) (and, I would add, in the

representation of these anxieties in "old" media like television). These theorists assert that cyberculture's utopias and dystopias, including *Battlestar Galactica*'s fabrication of a world where the only significant axis of difference divides humans and Cylons, do not so easily sidestep the racial heritage of today's technological configurations.

Stuart Hall posits that "ethnicity" overtakes "race" as the dominant term when a politics of representation, encompassing critical attention to media representations themselves, unsettles essentialist notions. Although according to modern science, race is not itself an ontological or biological taxonomy, ethnicity comes to the fore because it more explicitly "acknowledges the place of history, language, and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity, as well as the fact that all discourse is placed, positioned, situated" (168). Thomas Foster proposes that the term "technicity" can, in turn, capture aspects of the ambivalent networks that link transformations in racial discourses to new technologies. The word was coined by David Tomas in his work on cyberpunk fiction, but Foster takes it further by tracing the ways that "the idea of technicity and the exact nature of its relation to ethnicity are contested in seemingly contradictory ways... it [sometimes] names a new logic of identity or nonidentity that subsumes and replaces ethnicity, while in other versions it displaces but continues to function as ethnicity used to... [or] constitutes an intervention in and critical reflection on ethnicity" (150). Navigating this morass of contradictory interactions between the historicity of ethnicity and novel technological categories, Foster calls for a "kind of technicity [that] would not be sharply distinct from ethnicity... foreground[ing] this dimension of constructedness... [while it] challenges prior understandings of ethnicity and points toward forms of newness" (154). This approach to technicity, which balances

respect for the persistence of racialized forms of domination with awareness of their changing coordinates and new dimensions, is one I adopt in this chapter.

As Sandoval outlines in her return to Haraway's work on cyborgs and in her own "methodology of the oppressed," however, technicity is not the first or the only theoretical idiom to engage the interchanges between technoscience, identity, and hegemony. In her classic opus of Chicana feminism, *Borderlands / La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldua positions the experience of hybridity, via genetics, cultivation, and geography, as the defining multiracial experience of postmodern others:

> At the confluence of two or more genetic streams, with chromosomes constantly 'crossing over,' this mixture of races, rather than resulting in an inferior being, provides hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with a rich gene pool. From this racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollination, an 'alien' consciousness is presently in the making -- a new *mestiza* consciousness (99)

While honoring the origins of this identity in Latino communities, Anzaldua maintains that its transformative potential lies in the capacity of hybridity to forge intersections across categorical boundaries. This includes recognizing an alliance between hybrid figures and queer figures, because "Being the supreme crossers of cultures... The *mestizo* and the queer exist at this time and point on the evolutionary continuum for a purpose. We are a blending that proves that all blood is intricately woven together" (106-7). Paralleling racial others and queer others as part of a shared evolution toward new forms of affinity is a hallmark of the theorizations of queers of color. José Muñoz, for example, writes that "Identity markers such as *queer* (from the German *quer* meaning 'transverse') or *mestizo* (Spanish for 'mixed') are terms that defy notions of uniform identity or origins. *Hybrid* catches the fragmentary subject formation of people whose identities traverse

different race, sexuality, and gender identifications" (31-32). In keeping with the muddied boundaries of biology versus culture discussed above, in these theories one's position within taxonomies of identity is rendered less as a fixed biological status and more as a dynamic representational network that spans a variety of media, including the body itself.

For the Cylons, the human form factor is a medium for what they believe to be their souls. On *Battlestar Galactica*, they are continually obsessed with the social project of reappropriating humanity, imitating its divinely or strategically valuable properties while evolving their own distinct identity. They are hybrids of their robot and human progenitors but, in the narrative's discursive and reproductive operations, this twoness tends to dissolve into the more expansive sense of hybridity theorized by queers of color: an emergence characterized by multiplicity and "differential consciousness" (Sandoval). The Cylons' efforts to "pass" as human echo Homi Bhabha's diagnosis of the significance of mimicry to the colonial scene, and as such they are not categorically progressive. But as Bhabha explains, this "desire to emerge as 'authentic' through mimicry -- through a process of writing and repetition" (126) does some work toward disrupting the coherence and authority of the human. Because ethnic or technic ideology requires "a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*... in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference" (122). I propose that this difference or excess, as a necessary effect of reproductive processes (whether through imitation or hybridization, modalities that I here suggest can be closely related), challenges the systems of containment operating in the corporate media and other hegemonies. In the case of *Battlestar Galatica*, these attempts

at containment span both the diegetic narrative, as it ultimately imposes closure on the Cylon threat, and the management of the program's fan community. I now turn to the question of reproduction across these registers, presuming, based on this theoretical framework, that it has rich implications for the future of media economies.

B / CONCEPTIONS OF *BATTLESTAR GALACTICA*

Whether we're concerned with media convergence, cyborg technicity, racial technologies, or fan production, new hybridities are inextricable from sexuality in its relation to procreation. Siobhan Somerville traces this intimacy back to the historical context of late 19th and early 20th century America, when eugenics coalesced as "a form of racial science explicitly entwined with questions of sexuality and reproduction" (29). Because eugenics, first systematized by Francis Galton, was concerned with improving the human gene pool through selective breeding, it necessarily linked the biopolitical management of race, class, and disability to interventions in sexual behaviors and discourses. According to Somerville, these connections were borne out in the ways that sexologists "invoked the concerns of eugenicists in pathologizing homosexuality," as exemplified by Dr. William Robinson's 1914 article that claimed, "Every sexual deviation or disorder which has for its result an inability to perpetuate the race is *ipso facto* pathologic, *ipso facto* an abnormality" (31). Remarkably, this condemnation extended to the term "homosexual" itself: coined by Krafft-Ebing out of a combination of Greek and Latin roots, this linguistic miscegenation rendered it, in the words of another contemporary sexologist, "'a barbarously hybrid word'" (32). The label took hold nonetheless, "thus yoking together, at least rhetorically, two kinds of mixed bodies -- the

racial 'hybrid' and the invert" (32). In parallel, early proponents of homosexual rights also mobilized racial notions, analogizing mulattos with "'shades' of gender and sexual 'half-breeds'" (33) who similarly occupied a place in between binary poles. On the basis of these intersections, Robert Ferguson asserts that we must "debunk the idea that race, class, gender, and sexuality are discrete formations" (4), given that "the distinction between normative heterosexuality (as the evidence of progress and development) and non-normative gender and sexual practices and identities (as the woeful signs of social lag and dysfunction) has emerged historically from the field of racialized discourse" (6). With theories of hybridity as a starting point, then, we necessarily arrive at queer dynamics as a problem for biopolitical control.

Fast-forward to the present day. Discussing a *Wired* cover featuring an orientalized Indian woman holding up a palm hennaed with lines of code, reminiscent of the Sharon Cylon using her hands as an interface with the baseship's datastream and Galactica's wiring, Foster suggests that "the image also dramatizes a shift and destabilization in the racial character of 'geek culture'... [which] allegedly migrates to a nonwhite, nonmale body" (153). This drama is also playing out across the representations created by *Battlestar Galactica* and its geeky fan communities. Abigail De Kosnik (nee Derecho) considers the "remix" in terms that indicate its salience not only for fan works and indeed for the "reimagined" *Battlestar Galactica*, but also perhaps for the Cylons as a figure for new media formations. There is a striking parallel between her description and my explanation above (influenced by Bhabha) of the Cylons as mimics:

> The broadest definition of 'remix' might be 'textual appropriation,' which implies more than imitation, or rather, 'more-than-imitation'... textual appropriation, or remix, exemplifies Gilles Deleuze's concept of 'repetition with a difference,' not only in the sense that an act of textual appropriation *is* a repetition of a source text with some sort of differentiation or distinction made from the source, but also in the sense that Deleuze uses 'repetition with a difference' to name what he perceives to be a pervasive drive in contemporary thought and artistic production, just as I (and many others) regard remix a (if not *the*) characteristic cultural practice of our day (9-10)

In addition to this theorization of remix that highlights its connection to fundamental postmodern mediations, though, De Kosnik's crucial intervention is to excavate the importance of hip hop and fan fiction subcultures to its emergence. By thus "plac[ing] African Americans and women at the beginning of the history of popular digital culture," she makes the case that "their genres of remix have been subjected to so much censorship and restraint, from outside and in" (30), precisely as a hegemonic move to preserve the marginalization of these groups. If "remix texts are the 'bastard offspring,' the unauthorized derivatives, of preexisting texts" (30), this illegitimacy stems from their impure parents, who are others "passing" as authors or, we might say, consumers "passing" as producers.

Foster's reading of the *Wired* cover and De Kosnik's cultural history, along with their theoretical scaffolds, point to an affinity between ethnic identity and fan identity in their intimacies with technological systems. However, it is essential to recognize that, in practice, female fan communities in this tradition remain predominantly white (decades after the trail blazing that led De Kosnik to compare them with hip hop). According to a dialogue in *Transformative Works and Cultures* about a 2009 confrontation in the blogosphere dubbed "RaceFail," "Debates about racism and other forms of global

structural inequality -- seen as unproductive Internet drama to some and as a form of social justice activism by others -- have increasingly shaped the public online landscapes of some sectors of science fiction and media fandom in recent years" (¶1.2). Faced with an intensifying awareness of intersectionality, structural privilege, and institutionalized bias, fans are developing vernacular engagements with the issue of racism in their subcultures and representations (one example is Laura Shapiro's post assessing the 2009 convention for fan vidders, which discussed behavior at the con and responses to premiering works in terms of race, gender, and disability, garnering over 500 comments {http://laurashapiro.livejournal.com/279323.html}). Fan production is thus intertwined with both the cultural heritage of race and technology as mutually constitutive and present-day struggles over media politics. In this section, I will demonstrate that *Battlestar Galactica*'s narratives of reproduction, as generated within this context, can be instructive in working through the implications of queer fan practices at this ideological nexus.

1 / BE FRUITFUL

Reproduction is, by definition, a question of media technology: to make a copy requires a means of transmitting an encoded identity from the old body to the new. As with any transmission or iteration, this gap is dangerous to fantasies of self-contained presence or unity. *BSG*'s Colonial Fleet contends with problems of inscription and deciphering: how to maintain historical memory and records after the holocaust; how to legitimize and register one true account of guilt and innocence; how to translate the map to their promised land which is coded in myths and oracles, in holy texts, and in the stars

themselves. If the Cylons appear as a mortal threat to humanity, it is perhaps because of their superhuman facility at copying: like fans, who can interface with and share a vast digital archive at will, Cylons can jack into their machines and "download" their consciousness upon death. The brain of their ships is a "Hybrid": an ethereally beautiful humanform biomass integrated into its data conduits. While the human leaders are attempting to interpret sacred stories, Cylon gurus are listening for prophetic messages that might be encrypted in the Hybrid's babble, the nonsensical stream-of-consciousness of the computer itself.

And yet these advanced technologies are not without their limitations: from what we know of them, Cylons have no "live" linkup with each other that would allow them to communicate wirelessly and in realtime. Information must always be embodied -- literally, here, in a humanform body (while there are many copies of each model, a unique identity can be materialized in only one copy at a time). Violence is indelible, its memory transmitted from one painful download to the next like trauma inscribed on the unconscious as described by Sigmund Freud's "mystic writing pad." The Cylon body is itself a medium, and, to network with each other, Cylons seem to operate by touch, placing their hands into a liquid datastream to communicate [Figure 2]. This corporeal intimacy can evidently bring pleasure as well as agony, judging from the Hybrid's orgasmic expression when instructed via this haptic interface to initiate the ship's faster-than-light jump [Figure 3]; it is a small step from haptics to erotics. The deferral inherent to mediation structurally mirrors the deferral inherent to desire, and the necessary intercession of a material substrate means that desire will always be reaching through bodies when it yearns to touch unmediated information (for example, Three kills herself

repeatedly as a spiritual journey, in hopes that, in the instant of disembodiment between one form and the next, she will see her *objet petit a* of divine revelation). In this yearning, in their vain quests to find stable meanings, identities, and lineages, humans and Cylons come to share common ground. Industry and fans likewise cohabit the conditions of embodied media formations, with their circulatory passages in which promiscuous relations, mongrels, and runaways can germinate, but their reproductive doctrines and tactics may still be at war.

Battlestar Galactica's very premise, a machine uprising, is an object lesson about runaway reproduction: any attempt to contain the propagation of a dynamic system, any attempt (whether heteronormative or human-normative) to limit its development into greater degrees of complexity and hybridity is likely to go awry. On the level of the series' production and reception, the program's ardent audience suggests a similar moral about the fragility of technological control and corresponding survival tactics. While, within the story, the Colonial Fleet adopts a restrictive scheme, forbidding computer networks because they're vulnerable to Cylon hacks, *Battlestar Galactica*'s Powers That Be (i.e. the writers, producers, and network executives behind the show) open their textual networks to fandom's hive mind, harnessing its procreative excess to drive a web of modes and sites of engagement. Diegetically, *BSG* struggles with this as yet unsettled interplay between conventional discipline and more fluid strategies of mediation.

In terms of reproduction (in the more literal sense of making babies), the program has certainly been criticized for a reactionary fixation on the heterosexual couple and its potential progeny. Weighed down by President Laura Roslin's running whiteboard tally of humanity's remaining numbers, the Colonials adopt a recognizably conservative

reproductive politics in their post-apocalyptic desperation to make the total rise rather than fall (going so far as to ban abortion, for example). Cylons, for their part, as monotheistic religious fundamentalists, believe their god has commanded them to "be fruitful": a conviction that inspires various initiatives to birth a Cylon-human hybrid heir, from nightmarish "farms" where humans are held captive for breeding purposes to a ploy to ensnare Karl "Helo" Agathon (a Fleet officer) in a loving relationship with Sharon (a Model Eight) to make a baby the old fashioned way. However, these orthodox diagrams inevitably unravel into far more complex and ambiguous familial networks: Sharon falls in love with Helo in earnest and defects from the Cylon cause to be with him; Lieutenant Kara "Starbuck" Thrace must grapple with her role in the life of a toddler whom the Cylons claim is her daughter, whether the baby is the product of her violation in the farms or of a ruse that leaves them with no blood ties; even the most traditional family -- Specialist Cally, Chief Tyrol, and their son Nicky -- are revealed to be part Cylon when the Chief is "outed" as a new kind of Cylon at the end of season three. Thus, the predicament that the program raises -- how to evolve while controlling runaway reproductive energies -- continues unresolved, as familiar and familial hierarchies of containment are challenged while the outcome of the heterarchies that multiply in their place remains to be seen. And, importantly, the same could be said for the developing system of televisual reproduction, *Battlestar Galactica*'s extratextual ecology, as it attempts to spawn hybrid offspring that could lead television to a new homeland or to a final apocalypse.

Admittedly, *Battlestar Galactica* imposed a provisional resolution to these diegetic uncertainties in its series finale (although the franchise lives on in the spinoff

series *Caprica* and another TV movie, both set earlier in the universe's timeline). Its conclusion validates, at least superficially, the most regressive coordinates of the narrative's reproductive economies. To analyze this ending, Anne Kustritz proposes that we take *Battlestar Galactica* as an exemplar of a trope she calls "postmodern eugenics," a kind of "pastiche [that] represents a project of collective forgetting and deliberate un-knowing of a patchwork of related historical disasters" (1), often mobilizing the science fiction and fantasy genre for this purpose. In the pre-war heyday of eugenics, some African Americans were among its advocates, including "those (admittedly few) eugenicists (many, although not all, of them African American) who believed in 'hybrid vigor' and therefore advocated racial mixture as a means to improve the individual American and the nation as a whole" (English 17). "Hybrid vigor," the hypothesis that cross-breeding improves genetic stock through diversification, seems akin to the Cylon reproductive agenda promoting inter-technic pregnancies over asexual replication, and it runs counter to the obsession with racial purity that characterizes the majority of eugenic discourse.

In the course of its final season, however, *BSG* retreats from hybridity as an all-encompassing project to deify Hera as a single, exceptional hybrid. As Kustritz notes, baby Nicky's hybridity is revoked when he turns out to be the product of Cally's affair with a human man, while a miraculous Cylon-Cylon conception miscarries in the midst of (and, it is strongly implied, as a result of) its father's dalliances with an ex (who has returned from the dead as the final Cylon). With Hera's uniqueness secured, the series unfurls its splashy finish: on the heels of an epic battle to rescue her from a Cylon kidnapping, the Fleet finds and colonizes our Earth in the era of early Homo Sapiens,

where apparently Hera will ultimately mate with a prehistoric African and fulfill her destiny as our own "mitochondrial Eve" (as scientists have dubbed the common matrilineal ancestor of all living humans). Kustriz goes on to explain:

> In an act of cultural self-destruction which further underscores the purely biological, genetic, and racial definition of survival favored on *Battlestar*, the human and Cylon allies destroy all their technology to start fresh, rooted in the promise embodied by Hera of a future with no division and thus no conflict between humans and Cylons.... Thus, *Battlestar Galactica* proposes a happily ever after based on breeding difference out of humanity by breeding in hybridity, an oxymoronic offer of simultaneous inclusion and erasure. (11-12)

According to this pessimistic interpretation, *BSG*'s conclusion reinforces a reactionary reproductive politics that values life only according to its capacity to procreate heterosexually, dismissing any racial inequalities, technological advances, or queer relationships in what amounts to a eugenic utopia. While I acknowledge the appalling multicultural violence of the series finale and the conservative trajectories that precede it, I disagree that any fiat of narrative closure can wholly undo the program's counter-narratives of post-humanism and hybrid futures. I go on to explore *BSG*'s Cylon technics and Hera's queer families, with the assumption that these possibilities can't simply be countermanded by an authorized extinction.

2 / SKIN JOBS

Since these negotiations of reproduction are rooted in media technologies, it is fitting that, in *Battlestar Galactica*'s symbology, most figures of danger and deviance are displaced onto the mediated bodies and desires of the Cylons. They operate as a paradigmatic example of technicity, which facilitates a bilaterial ideological move:

historically anterior categories of racial and ethnic otherness are reconfigured in terms of technological variations, while familiar racial and ethnic discourses are overlayed on emerging technological threats and anxieties. The intervention of technicity as an apparatus enables the Cylons to stand in for these tensions within a world that diegetically excludes racial inequality proper. While Colonial society displays certain prejudices among humans based on planet of origin, these are minor plot points that seem to correspond most closely to class. Cylons, by contrast, are explicitly racialized when Six denounces "toaster" as a "racist" epithet, for instance, or when their vulnerability to a machine virus biologizes their essential difference from humans. But (following the typical symptomology of racial knowledge) attempts to stabilize the categorical distinction between human and Cylon continually break down, compromising the purity of any such demarcation. The program carries the economy of technicity even further by exploring inter-technic relationships and offspring, such as the Agathon family (Helo, Sharon, and their human-Cylon hybrid child Hera). As an artifact of our own culture, *Battlestar Galactica* cannot erase ideologies of race simply by substituting technicity for it in the diegesis: the persistence of racial vision colliding with a "color-blind" multicultural cast reiterates troubling iconography, like the invocation of the "mystical Negro" (Elosha and Sarah Porter, the program's only two middle-aged female characters of color, are a priest and a religious fundamentalist), and even composer Bear McCreary's score liberally appropriates from Asian musical traditions to evoke the series' exotic world (including using a Sanskrit hymn in the title theme). These overlapping valences suggest an intersectional interpretation of the Cylons as machines for amalgamating raced

bodies, queer desires, and media technologies in a richly ambivalent reflection of/on human rights and social justice.

In keeping with this analysis of the Cylons' capacity to encode all vectors of difference on *Battlestar Galactica*, various dimensions of ambiguity have a tendency to coincide and blend in fan interpretations as well. One example involves the character Felix Gaeta, a young and handsome tactical officer who has inexplicably never been drawn into the soap operatic sexual networks that drive many of his peers' storylines. He is portrayed by Alessandro Juliani, who is reportedly of Italian and Chinese descent and, within our extratextual context, appears decidedly on the outskirts of whiteness [Figure 4]. Fans had long speculated that Gaeta was one of the unrevealed Cylon models, no doubt in part because there is no diegetic framework for his distinctiveness except technicity; meanwhile, his queer positioning had become such an open secret that even other *BSG* actors would joke that Gaeta is gay (both these readings play out largely via Gaeta's highly charged relationship with effete Cylon-lover Gaius Baltar). Hermeneutic outbreaks like these highlight the absurdity of *BSG* executive producer Ron Moore's apologia, when asked about the program's conspicuous dearth of gay characters: "I think homosexuality definitely exists in the world of *Galactica*, but I frankly haven't found a way to portray it yet" (Moore, "News") -- as if Moore could assert his authority over the reproductive excess of texts, as if he could possibly avoid portraying the non-normative desires that erupt at every turn. Following the pattern established with Admiral Cain in *Razor*, wherein fans are treated to official confirmation of their suspicions through an ancillary narrative (structured so that it can enhance the main story while staying optional for casual viewers), Gaeta is ultimately "revealed" to be queer -- although not Cylon. A

second series of webisodes (*Face of the Enemy*) leading up to the final season indicates, in a short scene with an awkward kiss, that he is in a same-sex relationship (while still giving more screen-time to his heterosexual liaison with an Eight). Gaeta and his fleeting boyfriend Hoshi remain the series' only canonical gay romance between two humans. Galactica accommodates a military culture that is relentlessly egalitarian, complete with co-ed uniforms, quarters, and washrooms, while the civilian government is plagued by controversial sexual politics (such as debates around abortion) familiar to US audiences from our own anti-gay "religious right." Nonetheless, among the televised *BSG*'s humans, these complexly gendered elements only ever explicitly resolve into heterosexual relationships and conflicts.

The Cylons, as a mechanism for mediating all forms of otherness, thus not surprisingly provide a ready enclave for representing deviance. On the one hand, *Battlestar Galactica* makes a good faith essay at offering, through its elaboration of Cylon society and subjectivity, a queer phantasmagoria that calls hegemonic mores into question. Lucy Lawless (who plays Model Three) described her character's liberated perspective: "Cylons haven't attached some sort of morality to nudity and sexuality and all that stuff, and they're extremely experimental" (SCI FI Pulse). On the other hand, this move marks sexual "experimentation" as categorically alien, confined to the program's presumptive "bad guys" (or, as I've mentioned, to the program's marginal installments: a self-contained TV movie and pre-season webisodes). In the battle that ends the Cylon occupation of New Caprica, a perverse collective within the Cylon community takes custody of baby Hera [Figure 5]: found by her supposed spiritual parents Six and Gaius amidst the carnage, she is handed off to Three, who was linked to her in dreams and by a

human prophecy that the child will teach her love, and subsequently the Cylon character Boomer (another Model Eight, like Sharon Agathon, Hera's birth mother) becomes her primary caretaker. This unconventional kinship network sets the stage for an onscreen manifestation of queer desire in the form of a triadic romance between Three, Six, and Gaius [Figure 6]. While the three are scandalously shown sleeping naked together, and while Six is eventually dumped by both partners, Six and Three express meaningful intimacies that take this plot beyond cliché titillation [Figure 7]. However, such non-procreative relations trouble reproduction even within the unrepressed Cylon family. Three's desires for corporeal and divine communion threaten the replication of Cylon-kind enough that she is condemned to their version of death for her spiritual, if not sexual, depravity. The Cylons' organic breeding project is equally flummoxed by the multiplication of mothers, as evidenced when Hera falls ill under their care, and only a return to her biological parents offers hope for a cure. So, while the fluid and prolific resonances of technicity open the Cylon narrative to alternative passions and bonds, heteronormative containment is also in operation.

3 / Hera Has Six Mommies

The alternative families that self-organize around the human/Cylon hybrid child Hera are one example of how conventional reproductive schemas (like the Cylons' belief that their infertility can only be surmounted by a monogamous heterosexual couple in love, a model their society has in short supply) can unravel into multiply cathected webs. Cylons Six, Three, Boomer and Sharon aren't Hera's only mothers; preceding their guardianship, before she is even born, this messianic baby is tied by blood to President

Laura Roslin, who is miraculously cured of cancer on her deathbed by a transfusion of hybrid fetal cells [Figure 8]. This is to say that the synergies of mediation work in reverse as well: if information is embodied, than biology is also a code, and one more transmissible between species than either humans or Cylons might like to admit. When blood becomes a life-giving inoculation, Hera's hybridity is rendered backwards compatible, diffusing retroactively into the older generation. Like this somatic vitality, love circulates increasingly across boundaries, complete with its own technologies of dissemination. For instance, Six and Gaius, another Cylon-human couple, turn to theological texts, symptomatic visions, and the baseship's Hybrid's raw data to interpret the place of their bond in the cosmic ecology, as Six tries to inculcate the humans with her newfound credo of peace. Fans' passion for *Battlestar Galactica* is analogously inter-species, and likewise its promiscuous propagation transgresses borders, capacitated by a distinctive media apparatus.

Chela Sandoval proposes that the methodology of the oppressed requires that we "develop technologies to 'see from below,' and, as Haraway points out, learning to do so requires 'as much skill' with bodies, language, and vision as learning the most sophisticated forms of 'technoscientific' visualization" (174). In the previous chapter, I explored epistemological procedures for investigating undisclosed desires. Here, my artifact is a technology in the fan's toolkit, one which we might say facilitates this sort of "seeing from below": a spectatorial mechanism known colloquially as "slash goggles." This witticism evoking the image of specialized eyewear (my literal pair are always big, round, and pink) is a metaphor for a queer mode of viewing that interfaces with television's contradictions, excesses, gaps, and fragments -- the orphans of its

reproductive overabundance. Like Hera, who gains many more mothers when her parents lose her, these remnants often end up with a surplus rather than a dearth of willing guardians. The rich residue can take a number of forms, mobilized in erratic combinations and not limited to:

- characterization: including the overdetermined cultural codes that we all use, however unjustifiably, to read the stereotypical markers of sexuality in appearance, accessories, and mannerisms
- mise-en-scene: how characters are shot, framed, lit, scored, etc.
- performance: the wealth of non-verbal information loosely gathered under the umbrella of "subtext" (how close a duo stand together, the duration and the weight of their gazes...)
- narrative: the explicit plot and dialogue elements, especially intrigue or emotion that is not fully elaborated, and extending to the more indirect connections between characters, which may remain vital even when shared screen-time is limited (the love triangle being a classic example of a geometry that often links characters of the same gender)
- metatext: the whole constellation of extra-diegetic minutia and speculation that permeates interpretive communities (as only one of the infinite details: the fact that Lucy Lawless is best known for her role as the eponymous lesbian icon in *Xena: Warrior Princess*, rendering her *BSG* character Three to some degree pre-queered)

Such free-flowing bounty is endemic to media's volatile passages of transmission, and it is impossible to arrest the non-normative currents within a massively intricate discursive network. Different sources offer different figures to the dynamic feedback loops between text and audience, accounting for some of the obvious variation in popularity among slash fandoms, and the requisite components are idiosyncratic and highly variable. Thus, while slash goggles, an imaginary ocular prosthesis that mediates the proliferation of fans' desires, aren't necessarily at odds with the industry's economy, there is no guarantee that these bespectacled cyborgs won't rise up against their masters.

Hera is herself at the heart of a multivalent matrix of affinities that is the battleground for a campaign to populate the future, and her story serves as my example of the slash goggles' operation on raw materials furnished by the mass media. President Roslin ordains the genesis of a new family for Hera when she secrets the newborn away from Helo and Sharon and gives custody to a foster mother, Maya, with the collusion of Roslin's trusted advisor Tory Foster. This arrangement is thus authorized under presidential control, while nonetheless venturing outside the control of closed lineages of biology and parentage; it's already, in this sense, a queer family. To look at one non-linear narrative orphan through our slash goggles: season two of *Battlestar Galactica* closed with a disconnected 20-minute segment previewing life on the New Caprica settlement "one year later" in the program's timeline. With explanation of the political and interpersonal configurations implied here deferred over the summer hiatus, this stray scenario offered a rich medium for the cultivation of fans' desires, and for their preemptive reimaginings of the lost year. A 90-second scene of Roslin and Maya co-teaching and, as many conjectured, co-parenting at the settlement's school is a case in point. This quasi-domestic tableau is ripe with disproportionate intimacy, in large part because, instead of the typical shot-reverse-shot structure, the conversation is edited with both women in the frame, standing close and touching easily [Figure 9]. The triangulation of this familiarity through their concurrent kinship with Hera, even or especially in such a minute installment, spawned a full-blown and deeply invested maternal lesbian romance between Roslin and Maya -- in the vision of certain fans.

This dyad was amplified in season three by equally fleeting scenes that projected Tory into Roslin's inner circle during the missing year planet-side and thereafter, and this

storyline bred its own orphans in turn. In the podcast for the episode "Collaborators" (3.05), for example, producer Ron Moore describes shooting a subplot wherein Tory betrays Roslin politically, feeding information to her rival that results in underground executions. When these events were cut during the editing process, the remaining interactions between Roslin and Tory were sutured back together around the death of Maya and the loss of Hera, whose escape Tory was supposed to help orchestrate. The inevitable disarray of television production works against the notion of any unified and coherent authorial intent, and imperfections that may look like blunders from behind-the-scenes can be fertile ground for fans' own authorship. The fervor of Tory's emotional apology, which now exceeds the pared down narrative basis of its reorganized timeline [Figure 10], screened by the goggles' optical algorithm, materializes as love -- the love of these women for the child, for her adoptive mother, and for each other. Fostering this prophetic and apocalyptic baby, outside the bounds of an authorized origin story, is what brings Roslin, Maya, and Tory together within the program. In parallel, this frayed maternal thread provides the seam for similarly unauthorized modes of seeing and desiring among queer fan families. Unlike Gaeta, Tory never comes out, but her status as a conduit for unnatural passions reverberates further when she is outed instead as one of the final five Cylons at the end of season three, in keeping with technicity's queer resonances. Forming a support group for the closeted Cylons, Tory finally breaks with Laura when their secret is revealed, seeking new intimacies with those who might better respect and value her new identity. As I hope I've demonstrated, the implications of such formations aren't confined to the diegesis: the narratives of *Battlestar Galactica* are one

dimension in a dynamic heterarchy that embodies an interactive struggle among industry and fan producers over the evolution of television.

The series finale is an object lesson in these dynamics, because the definitive version aired only on the internet. I'm referring to *Battlestar Redactica*, an ambitious re-edit of the concluding episodes by an anonymous fan, created to vivisect the given text and reassemble the treasured storylines, themes, and values of previous seasons. Including two remixed movies totalling about four hours of material and a collection of original bonus features (and combined with two aired episodes that were spared the knife), *Redactica* amounts to a three-DVD set replacing all of season 4.5 {http://cvm-productions.livejournal.com}. This project is itself the hybrid issue of television broadcast and internet file-sharing, of authorized inscription and viewer interpretation, and of the collaborative meaning-making of a communal fan family. Fittingly, *Redactica* is concerned with recuperating hybridity as an inclusive agenda for the future, reversing the repressive gesture that it became on *BSG*. Limited to the existing footage, the alternate finale supplants pat plot-driven closure with an open-ended visual reverie on/in the Opera House (a mystical dreamscape that runs throughout the program, envisaging a prophecy about Hera and shared by several of her mothers). CVM-Productions explains the significance of this phantasmagoria with a clarity that RDM (Ronald D. Moore) productions never achieved:

> I cannot explain why the chosen form is an ancient Opera House, but the space it represents is a place of interconnection between both human/cylon and also life/death. It is reached in altered states (moments of death and near-death, experiences similar to Cylon projection) and inhabited by those who are not yet alive (Hera before she is born, the Final Five before they are conscious).... Hera Agathon is the shape of things to come, raised as an acknowledged hybrid without learning, consciously or subconsciously to suppress

> that side of herself.... "You are the harbinger of death, Kara Thrace, you will lead them all to their end"... [is] metaphorically relevant to [Kara's] role in bringing about a hybridised human/cylon society... a welcoming speech to the shape of things right now, because, *it's already happened*.... Hera gets taken into the Opera House to witness the Cybrid Revolution; it's the birth of her nation and her world. {http://cvm-productions.livejournal.com/1585.html}

This analysis in fact coalesced post facto in conversations between CVM-Productions and vidder Chaila43 about a music video that the latter created to expand on the *Battlestar Redactica* universe -- that is, "a transformative work of a transformative work" {http://chaila43.livejournal.com/53267.html}. Quantitatively, the reach of *Redactica* is limited, but "Order in the Sound" is one testament to its qualitative fecundity in realizing a complex narrative cosmos. With media economies in transition, who's to say which is the "real" ending to *Battlestar Galactica*? I, for one, see *Redactica* (through my slash goggles) as the more credible conclusion for Hera and her queer families, and as the more reproductive genesis for the hybrids of the future.

This rendition of human/Cylon convergence may seem to diverge only nominally from the endpoint at mitochondrial Eve, but as Kustritz emphasizes, the purely genetic and otherwise invisible hybrid is crucially different from Hera as the "first of her generation" of hybrids in a more encompassing cultural sense. This projected reproductive network would be accessible to all and socially negotiated within diversity, without requiring the rejection of technology or the colonization of prehistoric natives -- ideally, Hera's Revolution could embody the kind of differential consciousness advocated by Sandoval and other third world feminist and queer theorists. If we might take the aired finale as a metaphor for "old" media's desire to regress to analog discipline and hegemonic ideologies, *Redactica* offers a counter-metaphor for the possibilities of "new"

media (in the guise of Hera) to transform the terms of reproduction. Queer representation, viewed through this lens, is circumscribed by discursive and material affordances but tested by excess vitality, and, as with all emergent systems, its ultimate complexities cannot be predicted in advance. In this spirit, I now turn to the question of how a particular transmedia brood reproduces itself as a dynamic heterarchy, with attention to its mechanisms of control and to their junctions of excess stress and potential failure.

C / Many Copies: Video Maker vs. Fanvids

I've argued that *Battlestar Galactica*'s narrative and formal elements emphasize the reproductive potential of hybridity across media (that is, across both human/machine and television/internet divides). Like the Colonial leadership, who, for the sake of their species' survival, must forge an uneasy peace with an enemy that threatens from within, *BSG*'s official relationship with its army of fans takes the shape of a multiplex negotiation. In this encounter, the show's permeable textuality and its convergent strategies go hand in hand. As the industry as a whole gets turned on to audience "engagement," it has been more common to venture into these murky waters from the terra firma of monetizable metrics, but the *BSG* franchise (along with other "cult" television programs) was at the forefront of this trend, making ancillary materials freely available on the internet since the reimagined series premiered in January 2005. In addition to the aforementioned commentary by showrunner Ron Moore in the form of a blog and audio podcast and the more anarchic space represented by the show forum, the Sci-Fi Channel's official website offers an extensive menu of video content

{http://video.syfy.com/shows/battlestar} as part of its so-called "broadband network" ("SCI FI Pulse"). In recognition of digital commodities' divergence from a traditional economy of physical scarcity, season one's DVD extras, for example, are mirrored online (under "Features"). And a selection of deleted scenes (renamed "bonus" scenes for season three, when they also aired on television) compromises the priority and linearity of the episodes' narrative, here without the stabilizing frame of Ron Moore's authorial voice. In addition, there's an array of web-native promotional content, including co-producer David Eick's often humorously self-reflexive video blog, interviews where cast members answer fans' questions, and two series of original webisodes tied into the premieres of seasons three and four. By using the internet to recycle and rework the show's text and to put the show's metatext in intercourse with fans, these elements invite us to fall in love with *Battlestar Galactica* and to involve ourselves in its propagation in turn.

However, the Sci-Fi site's design also places limits on fans' ownership and authorship of these materials. Its video and interactive features are built in javascript and flash, and external and embedded functions make it impossible to save and share the exclusive content without specialized software hacks [Figure 11] (unlike Comedy Central's "Motherload" interface, for one, which makes videos "grabbable" for other pages). And some components, like the webisodes, are blocked for all but U.S. IP addresses. The official website is thus an artifact of a double-edged relationship with fans, genuinely wooing us with an expanding transmedia text and participatory opportunities, and then exerting protocological control once we've been coaxed into proprietary space. Ron Moore articulates a version of this Janus-faced approach when

answering, in his blog, a question about fan fiction: "If you want to write a story about Starbuck being Adama's illegitimate daughter and how she's carrying on an illicit affair with Laura... be my guest... ([BUT] it should go without saying that there is a very bright and bold line between writing for fun and writing for profit and only the foolish would care to mess with NBC-Universal's legal department)" (Moore, "Q & A"). Needless to say, the legal and (hetero)normative bounds of (girlslash) fan production are not nearly as "bright and bold" as he claims. In this section, I'll discuss one initiative in more detail: a fan filmmaking contest dubbed Video Maker Toolkit that exemplifies this dance of permissiveness and containment. I will then contrast it to fan works, particularly music videos, created in the context of online communities, demonstrating that the show's open networks, like the Fleet's networked computers, are vulnerable to fan media and their technologies of seeing.

These divergent mutations of television textuality are rooted in the larger technological and cultural evolution of internet video, which has populated our media ecology with remarkable speed and thoroughness. While there has been video online since the late 1990s, of course, in forms including Quicktime streaming, flash animation, and downloadable files, YouTube's 2005 launch and the subsequent proliferation of similar portals represent a maturation of the broadband infrastructure and embedded software requisite for social media. The resulting ease of posting, finding, watching and sharing videos, along with the incorporation of webcams and basic editing tools like *Windows Movie Maker* into standard computer bundles, facilitated an eruption of user-generated media. At the same time, the digitization of mass media, including the compulsory conversion to digital television in the US, have made commercial texts more

readily available for appropriation and manipulation, as these video files are now directly transferable between the devices formerly known as the TV and the computer. These conditions have contributed to the profusion and pervasiveness of diverse species of video mashups. This dynamism in turn sparked increasing interest by the industry in harnessing some of this reservoir of creative labor for monetizable purposes (above and beyond the fact that YouTube and its ilk are ad-supported commercial enterprises), including exploiting it for promotional ventures like Video Maker Toolkit. This encroachment provokes antagonisms over the limits of participation, as the legitimacy and even survival of forms of vernacular creativity may hinge on the degrees of poaching, hybridizing, and queering that processes of commodification are able to tolerate and incorporate.

1 / "TOASTER LOVER"

Video Maker Toolkit is a fan-driven promotion that is heavily advertised on the official Sci-Fi Channel *Battlestar Galactica* web site. Its instructions invite us to "be a part of *Battlestar Galactica*" by creating a four minute tribute film, the best of which will be selected to air on television. In order to "help give your videos the *Battlestar* look and sound," a menu of downloadable audio and video clips is provided, while the rules place a premium on an archaic *ex nihilo* model of originality by stipulating that the only additional material permitted is that which "you [have] created." Moreover, these "tools" are limited to less than 40 short CGI-based establishment and action sequences (divided into "land" and "space" and including mostly ships, architecture, and explosions), plus a number of signature sound effects and only seven partial music tracks (also included is

the show's logo image and, significantly, a required ending clip plugging "new episodes of *Battlestar Galactica*" and Video Maker itself) [Figure 12]. That is, Video Maker's conception of sanctioned derivative filmmaking is extremely narrow, notably excluding the character-based dramatic scenes that make up the majority of the show. This constriction is a by-product of at least two larger contradictions in which the project is embroiled: first, its conflicting creative and promotional imperatives to pay homage to the show thematically and formally (using its "look and sound"), while nonetheless generating a work that is otherwise wholly original and non-infringing; second, television and the internet's conflicting regimes of distribution and value, wherein the existence of a fanbase skilled in internet video production is assumed, while it is simultaneously assumed that recognition by and on television is incentive enough to channel this artistic labor out of the internet at large and into Sci-Fi's walled garden.

Given the over 100 approved Video Maker submissions, these contradictions don't seem to be crippling, but neither are they likely to be easily expelled from the burgeoning brood of fan-driven promotions. Delving into the contest's Terms and Conditions, it becomes evident how entrenched these two conflicts are in the byzantine folly of current intellectual property law. The former, here most succinctly stated in the claim that "SCI FI is only interested in your original work," simply ports over copyright's founding ideology of self-contained artistic production. Notably, Sci-Fi claims only non-exclusive rights to Video Maker submissions (outside of Toolkit materials); the imperative, in the instructions, to "not post your film on other sites, such as YouTube, MySpace, Google, etc." is thus more a polite request than a binding condition. This slight loosening of Sci-Fi's juridical border patrol can also serve to remind us that

Battlestar Galactica's production team is far from equivalent to the NBC legal department (as Ron Moore suggests in his schizophrenic disclaimer about fanfic, quoted above), and their untenable position between a creative rock and a legal hard place may be similar to that of fans. Copyright is equally entangled with the latter issue: that of the changing architectures of digital distribution. The lawyers have come up with a remarkable catalogue of verbs enumerating everything that can or conceivably could be done to a media object, one practically worthy of science fiction itself:

> you are granting SCI FI, its licensees, successor and assigns, the perpetual and irrevocable, non-exclusive right and license to (a) reproduce, distribute, display, exhibit, host, cache, store, archive, index, categorize, comment on, tag, transmit, broadcast, stream, edit, alter, modify, synchronize with visual material, create algorithms based thereon, and transcode the Submission to appropriate media formats, standards or mediums**…** throughout the world in perpetuity, in any and all media, whether now existing or hereafter devised... (SCIFI.com)

The legal terms must here contend not only with present-day conditions of media reproduction, but with the futures and fantasies of remediation. These fantasies of transcoding media "hereafter devised" are not unrelated to *BSG*'s Cylons' fantasies of hybrid offspring, and they pose similar challenges of containment to their more hierarchical human counterparts.

If both Colonial and corporate authorities respond to runaway procreation with a combination of force and subterfuge, both also recognize that it would be a death sentence to shut out the possibilities of hybridity entirely. While Video Maker attempts carefully to channel and circumscribe audience labor, it has nonetheless become a vibrant occasion for and celebration of fan creativity. Unlike many internet promotions, this project assumes and allows a broad technical latitude among its participants, who are

expected to use their own video equipment, software, and expertise (rather than a "user-friendly" web-based interface) to produce their submissions. This expectation demonstrates an understanding of and respect for the community of science fiction fans, who historically tend to be aficionados of real-world as well as imagined technologies. In Jenkins' chapter on fan filmmaking in *Convergence Culture*, he takes *Star Wars* as a case study, describing various films and several web sites that have collected them, including Lucasfilm's official clearinghouse Atomfilms.com (launched in 2000, and running contests in 2003 and 2005). Like Video Maker on a grander scale, Atomfilms attempts to draw bright lines around fan production, offering its stamp of approval (as well as a library of audio clips) in exchange for strict adherence to intellectual property law (parody and documentary only, no "attempts to expand on the *Star Wars* universe" (quoted in Jenkins, *Convergence* 154). As Jenkins points out, "these rules are anything but gender-neutral" (155): the "original" (ostensibly materially and critically distanced) genres that enjoy legal and corporate sanction are disproportionately produced by men, while creative works that explore relationships between characters and "expand the universe" are the almost exclusive preserve of women. This schism yoking gender and genre is generated, perpetuated, and negotiated in complex ways, but it remains baldly entrenched: in the case of Video Maker, 81 of the authors listed for the first 100 submissions have typically male names, by my count (eight have typically female names, and eleven are indeterminate or collaborations). This hierarchy is one example of the Gordian snarls of power that arise as media producers and fans (and their respective products) become increasingly interdependent and indistinguishable.

Take, for instance, one of the two initial sample videos posted in Video Maker Toolkit: "Toaster Lover" [Figure 13] (written, directed and edited by Margaux Luciano and Randy Giudice, who we might assume to be a male-female team). "Toaster Lover" takes the form of a fake movie trailer, a parodic genre recognizable from YouTube. Ordinarily, fake trailers combine an edited sequence of video clips with new or borrowed trailer audio to suggest a humorous reinterpretation of the source (one popular variant is the *Brokeback Mountain* spoof: these highlight the gay subtext between everyone from *Star Wars'* R2-D2 and C-3PO to *He-Man*'s title character and sidekick Man-at-Arms). As such, they are formally similar to fan videos, while differing greatly in tone and context. "Toaster Lover" obeys the contest's stipulation of originality by using homemade instead of appropriated video (adeptly integrated with stock establishing shots from the Toolkit), but it includes the framing captions and voiceover of a trailer, as well as *Brokeback Mountain*'s famous line "I wish I could quit you." Its imagined movie tells a tale of star-crossed love between a male pilot and a robotic Centurion (that is, one the big metal "toasters" who were among the first Cylon models), with the tagline "for years they were enemies, until the day that chance brought two lonely souls together." "Toaster Lover" thus showcases the ways that Video Maker can mobilize hybridity on multiple registers: it (like other *Brokeback*-style trailers) combines the parodic distance typical of the male-dominated world of fan films with the focus on same-sex romance that is a signature of female vidding communities, and (like all Video Maker submissions) it toes the line between ostensibly original and derivative production.

"Toaster Lover" is particularly effective as a spoof and as an exemplary Video Maker film because it comments astutely on a key aspect of *Battlestar Galactica*: the

queerness that infuses its narratives of alternative relationships and families. Centurions are not explicitly gendered, and the fact that, with its quotations from stories of forbidden love, "Toaster Lover" draws a parallel between inter-technic and same-sex romance highlights the overarching queer subtext of human-Cylon connection and conflict. Beyond the diegetic parallels, I'm also tempted to read "Toaster Lover" allegorically as a romance between big media producers and fanboys: the monstrous automaton and the scrappy softie find true love as war between their kinds wages around them. Certainly this is the fantasy that Video Maker itself embodies, with its show of community participation in the "rate this video" stars, comment box, and "send to friend" button -- while at the same time reinscribing normative boundaries through the control it exerts over the process (the viewer ratings, for example, have no discernable importance or effect). Given this allegory, we might ask whether derivative labor overall is metaphorically queer, since it is a form of reproduction that mates supposedly incompatible parents ("original" media source and "original" creativity) to spawn hybrid offspring. *BSG*, Video Maker, and "Toaster Lover" as it marries them foreground the way that mediation is itself a species of forbidden desire. Both Cylons and fans are threatening because they're in networked communication with technology and because their desires to be mediated dispute sanctioned boundaries and generate rogue progeny. It remains to be seen whether the constraints of sponsored initiatives like Video Maker, with their intrinsic compromises and contradictions, can adequately channel these desires into one big happy capitalist family.

2 / And They Have a Plan

Video Maker, however, represents only one possible familial and reproductive structure among many. We find another in the tradition of fan song videos: montages of visual material culled from mass media source texts and set to music. This underground art form, which has been part of media fandom since the mid-1970s, was inaugurated using slide projectors and has evolved through consumer VHS technology and into the era of ubiquitous digital video. For a more detailed historical analysis of vidding I refer you to the work of Francesca Coppa, who charts, among other things, how the technical hurdles involved in VCR editing encouraged artists to cluster into groups of enthusiasts and mentors, thereby developing distinct aesthetic conventions in turn. My concern is with the present-day evolution and hybridization of vidding as the boom in internet video since the mid-2000s renders it more accessible and visible than ever before, both inside and outside its fannish milieu. The fact that Video Maker's fan films reference fake trailers and other YouTube genres attests to the riot of cross-pollination among moving image mashups that the code and infrastructure for web video sharing has enabled, including the multiplication of fanvids that adopt and propagate the format on YouTube without evincing strong ties to the customs and resources of the more established and insular vidding community.

Contrarily, this creative jungle has sprung some classic vids into the limelight while uprooting them from their interpretive landscape, most notably Killa and T. Jonsey's Kirk/Spock vid "Closer" {http://youtube.com/watch?v=1PwpcUawjK0}, which took the blogosphere by storm in the Fall of 2006. This is one test case for the ways in which the outbreak of viral video can generate problems as well as possibilities for

grassroots art: in addition to the critical impoverishment that is a side-effect of "decoupling amateur media from its original contexts of production and consumption" (Jenkins, "Fan-Vid"), such mainstream attention (which went as far as "Closer" being quoted on television) can be directly threatening to creators because of the potential legal and personal repercussions of unauthorized and non-normative appropriations of proprietary media source. Killa took most of her work off the internet in response {http://seacouver.slashcity.net/vidland/vids.html}, and hers are not the only famous fanvids uploaded to YouTube without the artists' permission. Fan producers are thus no more able to control the dissemination of their texts than commercial producers (in fact they may be less able, since the derivative status of their oeuvre, not to mention their lack of corporation-sized resources, puts them in a weaker position with respect to copyright law). Such interplay and conflict is one instantiation of the vagaries of the digital archive, in both its technological and discursive dimensions: its oscillation of persistence and ephemerality, publicity and privacy, openness and closure structures the possibilities for fan engagement and production.

Concern over the decontextualization of fanvids like "Closer" might appear hypocritical, since the form itself relies on the possibility of multiple readings and on the selective repurposing of footage. However, what is at issue is not the prerogative of an intended meaning, but the ideological implications of the mutations that such meanings can undergo when deracinated. While both fake *Brokeback Mountain* trailers and slash vids edit appropriated source to foreground gay subtext, they do so with very different orientations:

	BROKEBACK TRAILERS	SLASH VIDS
form	narrative editing; musical score + narration + dialogue fragments	balance of narrative, textual associations, + spectacle; song as audio track
tone	parodic	sincere, at least on one level; deeply invested in the source
audience	accessible with a minimum of pop culture knowledge	speaking to a specific interpretive community
context	shared openly on YouTube; considered public	shared via subcultural channels; considered semi-private
values	effective humor > broad appeal > quantifiable popularity	effective communication > community recognition > feedback + joy

Although it would be rash to generalize either category completely, it is safe to say that, as straightforward spoofs, *Brokeback* parodies often embody a homophobic response to homoerotic outbreaks. A fanvid thrust into this milieu is likely to be read according to these prevailing conventions, falling into step with a politics hostile to that of its indigenous community. Here, queer politics intertwine with anti-capitalist politics, because the question of what interpretations can be visible is yoked to the question of what interpretations can be profitable. Without some degree of mainstreaming, vidders' rich ecology of queer viewing practices would be relegated to obscurity, ceding YouTube to gay caricatures. However, we must also ask what dimensions of this queering are available to be popularized or commercialized, and what is conversely lost or sidelined through these incursions into a relatively underground gift economy.

Vidders are avidly debating how to engage tactically on this uneven and shifting terrain. At Vividcon 2007, the sixth annual convention for and by the vidding community, a "Town Hall on Vidding and Visibility" panel explored the stakes of

subcultural seclusion, which offers safety, sisterhood, and shared language while threatening fanvids with misunderstanding and marginalization. Concerns on both sides are fused with gender issues, as vids (like fan fiction) have been created almost exclusively by women throughout their history (an oft-repeated statistic is that the greatest number of men thus far at Vividcon, an event with over 100 attendees, has been five). The painstaking and meticulous labor that vidding requires has been likened to traditional "women's work" such as quilting and needlepoint -- not to mention early film cutting and computer programming. The technological mastery intrinsic to vidding and other media craft has gone largely unrecognized, however, because it is conducted out of view and contradicts ideological expectations for female behavior. It is only with the recent mainstreaming of various species of fan film online, and with advancements in the consumer apparatus that allow the best vids to look every bit as polished as professional music videos, that vidding may appear, within the overdetermined framework of gender stereotypes, to be taking on some of the "masculine" characteristics of other genres of DIY video. Concurrently, as influential sectors of the community have come to value a "shiny" aesthetic that emphasizes matching rhythm, motion, color, and other visual attributes to the music with increasingly elaborate and technical editing, vids that carry on a "feminine" tradition of melodramatic romance may now be relegated by some to the category of "Lord King Bad Vids," a tongue-in-cheek modality that self-consciously both celebrates and mocks passionate sincerity. While vids that privilege emotion and/or narrative certainly present a critical interpretation, and while even more openly analytical vids don't necessarily adopt the same register of distance as fan parodies or critiques produced within male artistic conventions, the perceptible shift in tone away from the

intimacy of traditional relationship-focused vids nonetheless raises questions about the implications of the changing technological, social, and economic environment for this women's subculture. The developments are complex and defy attempts to map them on binary axes, but they do indicate the array of hybridizations that are among the issue of digitally enabled intermixtures of form and context, including (for better or worse) the possibility of layers of gender blending.

While some might be tempted to respond by retreating further into the closet, in her post "You Can't Stop the Signal," eminent vidder Laura Shapiro points out that, under these circumstances, debates about visibility are to some degree moot; "The minute we put our vids online, we expose ourselves to the world... We can't control the distribution of our own work in a viral medium" (Shapiro). This pragmatism animates a collective campaign to stake out a consolidated public enclave for vidding -- an opt-in archive calculated to support this family of practice. In the absence, for now, of a hosting infrastructure that is fan owned, vidders deliberately adopted the multimedia social networking site imeem.com en masse {http://community.livejournal.com/vidding/tag/all:+streaming+sites:+imeem+youtube}. Imeem was judged to have a number of advantages over other video-sharing services (YouTube in particular) in terms of its mechanics, components, and policies: for example, its streaming quality is high, its feature set is rich (including group hubs, embeddable playlists, searchable tags, and customizable profiles), and according to its TOS {http://imeem.com/terms.aspx}, "imeem does not claim any ownership rights in any articles, information, materials, data, files, programs, photographs, concepts, communications, footage, ideas, opinions, and other materials ('Member Content') you post, store, or exchange through the imeem Site or

Service; you continue to retain all ownership rights in such Member Content." And while these generous licensing terms technically apply only to "Member Content" that is within "appropriate rights," leaving derivative works vulnerable to unilateral suspension, enforcement still relies on copyright holders to flag potentially infringing cases, a far more forgiving system than SCIFI.com's proprietary vetting. So, as the advent of digital and then internet video makes vidding both more accessible and more difficult for its practitioners to superintend, the architecture of imeem provides the ground for a tactical intervention: a hybrid position that gives vidding a public face while demarcating and reinforcing the community, that renders vids widely shareable while asserting their creators' authorship, and that trades some loss of control for some gains in usability. In contradistinction to Video Maker Toolkit's top-down arrangement, which attempts through its interface and conditions to recontain excessive fan productivity within Sci-Fi's exclusive perimeter, the distributed network of vidders on imeem (best indicated by the 200+ members of the vidding "meem") reproduces their fantext without a patriarchal center. Fanvids deploy love via the raw material of television programs themselves, fragmenting, recombining, and multiplying them with a fertility of which official transmedia can tap only a fraction. This propagation is still delimited by the lattice of power that is materialized in available technologies -- of media, but also more broadly technologies of law, commerce, and desire.

More recently, however, imeem has followed YouTube's lead in implementing automated filtering schemes to flag potential copyright infringement and unilaterally suspending content (including fanvids) for vague and indiscriminate Terms of Service violations, once again driving home the vulnerability of derivative artworks. Finally,

bearing out the worst case scenario for vidders, imeem decided in 2009 to close down its video sharing features, giving users only five days notice before removing all uploaded videos, as well as the video favorites and playlists that many had relied on as part of the vidding community's infrastructure {http://blog.imeem.com/2009/06/25/simplifying-imeem/}. At this and other pressure points, the compromises and constraints that structure the relationship between the media industry and fans are undergoing a continual process of negotiation. As long as the infrastructure for video hosting remains prohibitively expensive, not to mention legally delicate, vidders who wish to participate in the culture of streaming are dependent on commercial social media sites for distribution. As private companies, YouTube and its clones have no mandate to make copyright determinations and no obligation to host legal content, while having every incentive to reduce their own legal impediments by complying with the industry's demands, resulting in a lack of recourse for users. For this reason, policy initiatives in support of Fair Use, including the Center for Social Media's "Code of Best Practices in Fair Use for Online Video" {http://centerforsocialmedia.org/resources/publications/fair_use_in_online_video}, are crucial to protecting the possibilities, realized in artifacts like slash vids, of queering both media form and media content.

3 / I THINK WE'RE ALONE NOW

While there are debates about the degree to which predominantly female fan communities legitimately embody a queer experience, I'd like to honor the metaphorical affinities between Hera's cluster of lesbian mothers and the family of vidders, where love by women in collaboration is the genesis of a hybrid brood that, like Hera, is part of "the

shape of things to come." Fanvids are one manifestation of the irrepressible excess of media reproduction in today's technological context: digital video, in particular, levels the barriers between television and the internet, between producers and consumers of entertainment, making commercial texts available as raw materials to anyone with computer file sharing and editing capabilities. With growing volume and diversity as their tools become increasingly accessible and sophisticated, vids capitalize on this condition to celebrate, critique, and de/reconstruct mass media in what Anne Kustritz calls a "genre commensurate form." This is to say that they engage the source via its own visual language, appropriating its images (along with their webs of intertextual connotation) and instilling coherence across a fragmented re-edit by means of the music and lyrics of a song. As such, there's an ongoing debate among fans and fan scholars about how to assess fanvids' "transformative" status in comparison to medium variant derivatives (such as fan fiction and fan films that use original video): vids make something new out of the text itself, but, for the same reason, their divergence from it is often less stark. In addition to the ideological dimensions of this discourse, infused as it is with assumptions about what genders/races/classes/nationalities of people are creatively enabled, the question has concrete legal ramifications: "transformative" standing is a key axis of a fair use defense of appropriative art. Certainly vidding articulates very different evaluative criteria from orthodox IP law or from a project like Video Maker in its form, themes, and orientation. While fanvids proper span a growing range of distinct genres and approaches, they may appear overly formulaic to outsiders because they rarely deviate from the conventional music video format. This uniformity, however, is a technique for building an interpretive community, wherein what's

privileged is not novelty and widespread appeal, but rather the ability to speak compellingly through and about media to an intimate audience within familiar constraints. What's "original" about vidding is a technology of seeing: it is a literalization of fans' ocular prosthetics (the girlslash goggles, for one), rendering as montage the strategies of active viewing that are animated by love.

While "meta" (critical) and "gen" (general, including character study) vids are garnering increasing attention and acclaim, relationship and slash vids (such as Killa and T. Jonsey's famously erotic "Closer") are still at the heart of the form. Here I'd like to look in detail at a vid that manifests the girlslash goggling of *Battlestar Galactica* directly: "Save Yourself," a Kara/Sharon vid by Jarrow [Figure 14]. This project, which screened at VividCon in 2007, is representative of an orthodox aesthetic within today's vidding community. It simultaneously addresses the core vidding audience, who are familiar with the genre's conventions but not necessarily with the nuances of the source; the assemblage of *BSG* enthusiasts situated within online media fandom; and the more localized coterie of *BSG* femslashers (as it implies a tragic amour as a preferred reading, although its tone is not overtly romantic). Kara "Starbuck" Thrace, the gender non-conforming and ambiguously divine hotshot pilot, and Sharon "Boomer" Valerii, the rogue "sleeper agent" persona of Cylon model Eight, had a history together serving on Galactica in Sharon's pre-activation past, but in the course of the show's canon their relationship has accumulated only a few isolated moments of shared screentime. These scenes are intensely charged with both characters' ambivalence about the contradiction between their human friendship and Sharon's newfound Cylonicity, but the rest of the available lesbian reading inheres in the gaps and latencies of *BSG*'s multidirectional

narrative. "Save Yourself" occupies these conditions strategically by highlighting and capitalizing on the fragmentation of television editing, which typically represents affect via shot-reverse-shot patterns that are replicated here (and in many slash vids) using originally unrelated close-ups to evoke mutual emotion and desire. It also encodes the thematic question of the degree of permeability and transmissibility between the consciousness of individual copies of the Sharon Cylon (plus the ramifications of that for Kara and the ways she can know, and has known, "Boomer" Sharon) by indiscriminately mixing images of Boomer and the other important Sharon copy, later distinguished with the callsign Athena. A heartfelt conversation in the brig wherein the characters broach this issue explicitly is cited as a pivotal moment in the vid (this is its first clip of them together, and it occurs more than two minutes in). Outside such judicious glimpses of onscreen Kara/Sharon snippets, however, "Save Yourself" is primarily staked on paralleling these two across multiple registers: movement and gesture (pairing shots of their eyes, hands, and pacing feet, for example) as well as circumstance (pairing the women firing guns, captive in hospital beds, and so on), suggesting the similarities of their experiences despite the fact the one is human and the other Cylon. With the strident, angsty rhythm and lyrics {http://lyricwiki.org/Stabbing_Westward:Save_Yourself} as a unifying element, "Save Yourself" constructs a metatexual explanation in music video form for the conspicuous under-elaboration of Kara and Sharon's relationship in canon (a common necessity of femslash interpretations of *BSG*, given that, for its rich abundance of female characters, it portrays few interactions between women). Justifying yet negating this canon separation, the vid implies that their

love for each other cannot transcend the brutality to which they are individually subjected.

Narratively, "Save Yourself" presents an impressionistic chronicle of violence, opening by introducing Kara and Sharon in close-ups and locating them within the apocalyptic context of space battles and explosions. The body sections are composed around occasions of trauma: Kara's intimate losses and crash landing and Sharon's dawning panic about her activities as a Cylon saboteur (season 1) in the first verse, and their separate experiences of hospitalization and incarceration (season 2) in the second verse (though the topical segments don't break cleanly with the musical divisions, for the most part, fostering a seamless feel). While numerous physical assaults against Kara are included, her main thread in the vid is her terrifying detainment in a covert Cylon facility on Caprica after being shot (and, it is strongly hinted, having surgery performed on her ovary). The most concentrated and disturbing Sharon passage begins during the song's bridge, and it incorporates her outing as a Cylon, her own horror and attempted suicide, the ensuing barbarity of her tenure in shackles and aborted rape, and the faked death of her child. Just as the vid touches visually on Kara and Sharon's relationship at the beginning ("searching for an angel") and middle (their scene in the brig) for emphasis, the fulcrum here (at 3:05) flashes back to the standoff involving the two of them upon their return from Caprica, leading into a fluid concluding section punctuated by Sharon's multiple shootings. At the end, Kara escapes from her Cylon captor, while the final image is of Boomer's dead body (though of course, in the program, she survives by downloading, and both characters go on to have further near-death experiences in season 3).

"Save Yourself"'s panorama of physical and emotional abuse, inscribed across two interconnected women, evokes the specter of homophobic and/or racist violence as much as the recuperation of homosexual and/or interracial love. The pathos of the closet Cylon is unavoidably inflected as a queer allegory, and this dimension is even more strongly accented in the vid, wherein Sharon is kept from Kara by a catalogue of cruelty (from insults scrawled in her locker to punitive sexual assault). The conjectured relationship between Sharon and Kara is thus transgressive by virtue of being same-sex and of being inter-technic (human-Cylon), and the vid's tragic saga of forcible heartbreak yokes these two registers together. While "Save Yourself" is hardly a celebratory slash romance, metatextually it, in this sense, gleefully exposes a submerged intimacy -- its own existence as an artwork, that is, contradicts its pessimistic diegetic implication that Starbuck and Boomer will never be together. This buoyancy is perhaps most apparent in Jarrow's second-order mashup of the vid which, as per an informal divertissement among vidders, plays the existing video montage against a different audio track -- a commentary in itself on the malleability of media in this technological context. The "I Think We're Alone Now" version {http://jarrow272.inverteddungeon.com/videos/alone.avi}, which sets "Save Yourself" to Tiffany's classic anthem of forbidden love {http://lyricwiki.org/Tiffany:I_Think_We're_Alone_Now}, is exuberantly perverse in its juxtaposition of brutal images and candy pop, and features uncannily and hilariously perfect alignments at points between the vid's narrative and the song, between its images and the lyrics. "We gotta hide what we're doing / Cuz what would they say / If they ever knew," Tiffany sings, "And then you put your arms around me / ...I think we're alone now," and it sounds like a happy ending for Kara/Sharon and illicit couples everywhere (human-Cylon, girl-

girl, and otherwise subtextual). This is not to mention a happy ending for vidders and other creative fans themselves, running away from admonitions to "watch how you play" to tumble into their hideaway where they can be alone, "holding on to one another's hand," (re)producing to "the beating of our hearts." But reappropriating and remediating love undercover and on the run is only a provisional triumph, of course, easily evading vain attempts at enforced textual containment but not escaping normative and protocological hierarchies of power.

D / ALL THIS WILL HAPPEN AGAIN

The vision of clandestine romance that brings fans and television together via subterranean channels into a creative economy is complicated by its rapidly evolving hybrid progeny. On *Battlestar Galactica*, when humans and Cylons couple, the consequence is not merely an unpredictable future generation but a breakdown in the classificatory order that allowed the species to be distinguishable in the first place. Corporate media face a similar dilemma: as the industry relies with increasing openness on the labor of fans to produce and promote the value of its properties, it becomes ever more difficult to hold in place the distinctions between owners and consumers. This newfound permeability can jeopardize traditional practices on both sides, as formerly binary conflicts and alliances become murkier. And the promiscuous textuality spawned by today's convergent approach to entertainment makes control of this intercourse ever more difficult to maintain. Preceding season three, for example, the Sci-Fi Channel deployed a promotional blitz geared to attract new viewers and to leverage *Battlestar Galactica*'s critical acclaim into a more mainstream market share. In addition to

advertising a tendentious opening storyline evoking the contemporaneous Iraqi occupation, the network assembled an online initiative that included free recap videos pieced together from clips and an automated emailer that encouraged fans to "spread the word" [Figure 15]. Headlining the publicity package was an original web series, *The Resistance* [Figure 16], with an unenviable compound enterprise: telling ten self-contained several-minute stories, adding up to a coherent whole that would be accessible and interesting to both uninitiated and avid viewers alike, and tying substantively to the upcoming televised arc while not being necessary to understanding it (Glater). In keeping with the pressing power issues threaded through its transmedia milieu, this reticulated narrative explored characters' divergent attempts to navigate the muddy moral landscape of Cylon-human relations under the Cylons' paternalistic occupation of the human settlement on New Caprica, their quandary being whether to risk participating in a violent guerilla resistance or to "collaborate" with the Cylons by joining the peace-keeping secret police. While the network put a positive spin on the outcome of the web series, posting a statement by SCIFI.com senior vice president Craig Engler that "The phenomenal success of *The Resistance* proves that there is a definite audience for webisodes that can have an impact on TV viewing" (Sci-Fi Channel), season three's ratings were ultimately lackluster, making the claim (or fantasy) that such official tie-ins can single-handedly catapult the program to popularity seem over-inflated. Perhaps the most interesting question to ask of the webisodes is not whether they succeeded or failed, but rather how they can illuminate ongoing negotiations of who will collaborate or resist when it comes to conflicts within and around the industry.

Notably, *The Resistance* provoked a pitched battle between Sci-Fi/NBC executives and creative personnel, the former designating the webisodes promotional material not subject to additional wages, while the latter contended that they were original content qualifying for union rates. Ron Moore described the escalation of the hostilities:

> We got in this long, protracted thing and eventually they agreed to pay everybody involved. But then, as we got deeper into it, they said 'But we're not going to put any credits on it. You're not going to be credited for this work. And we can use it later, in any fashion that we want.' At which point I said 'Well, then we're done and I'm not going to deliver the webisodes to you.' And they came and they took them out of the editing room anyway -- which they have every right to do. (Goldman)

This fallout highlights that the altercation was not only a matter of money, but also of who counts ideologically as the owner of entertainment commodities (Moore's last word was to post the complete production credits for *The Resistance* on his SCIFI.com blog). The above statement is from a picket line interview with Moore in the early days of the industry-wide screenwriters' strike in 2007, an entertainment cataclysm that the antagonism over *BSG*'s webisodes seems to directly prefigure (at that time, NBC-Universal filed legally against the Writers Guild of America, charging that Moore and company were violating their contracts by holding the material hostage). The issue of compensation for new media content like webisodes, as well as of residual payments for traditional screen works repackaged for digital distribution, is the principal deadlock of the labor dispute, and again, the corporations (via the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers, their collective bargaining organization) seem far more concerned with reigning discursively over definitions of media property and artistry into the era of convergence than with profits per se (fighting the union was costing them billions more

in lost revenues than it would to accede to the writers' relatively modest demands). The ecumenical consequences of digitization are well known, and Moore also emphasizes this dimension, and its high stakes, in his WGA activism: "The notion that just because it's on your computer as opposed to your television set is absurd. It's an absurd position for [the AMPTP] to take, but, you know, if they can pull it off, they're at the moment of a watershed change of how your media is delivered to you. Your television and your computer are going to become the same device within the foreseeable future" (Goldman). This inexorable hybridization, like the interbreeding of humans and Cylons, is both an upgrade and a threat to the species, and the WGA could be seen to challenge our understanding of what "television" is much as the Cylons challenge our understanding of what "humanity" is, with both sides vying for the first glimpse of their heirs' future home. The fate of Earth hangs in the balance -- as does the fate of *Battlestar Galactica*'s final ten episodes, which are expected to thematize in large part the search for this promised land, since production on the show is suspended until the strike was resolved.

This labor negotiation, in the classic sense, is situated within more shadowy mediations of the unruly fan production that has been called immaterial labor, a term I'll explore further in the following chapter. Official and unofficial authors were perhaps surprised to find themselves on the same side of the battle lines, allied as creative workers. Participants in online fandom, who are uniquely equipped to realize the web's status as a commercial platform, banded together to support television writers by picketing, educating, and fundraising. Meanwhile, fans too are wondering how they will be contracted and compensated in a media economy that increasingly attempts to harness and monetize their activities. The AMPTP would like to strong-arm a scenario wherein

Battlestar Galactica's textual proliferation doesn't escape a hierarchy with the television episodes at the top, disowning its transmedia kindred and its fan families as bastard children. But as in the program's tales of replication gone awry, all this procreative potential is not easily contained within authorized channels. The franchise is most reproductive in its transactions with interpretive communities, who inseminate it with their own desires and narratives. *Battlestar Galactica* offers the ground for collective cultivation of queer love stories, in the furrows between textual flows and technologies of seeing. At the same time, however, it offers conditions of visibility that make these liaisons always possible but rarely perceptible to the naked eye. And just as it is the fertility of queer readings that necessitates such regulatory protocols, it is the "queerness" of convergence itself, transgressing the accepted boundaries of media formations and making for strange bedfellows and hybrid offspring, that capacitates such propagation. If "all mediation is remediation," we are experiencing a reconfiguration of material and ideological control that repeats and cannibalizes prior forms. *Battlestar Galactica*'s theology turns on an analogous cycle of time: because "all this has happened before," we can look to theories of technologies, bodies, and cyborgs for insight into our present, and because "all this will happen again," we should join now to engender knowledge, tactics, values, and passions for an intermediated world.

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NB: In 2009, the Sci-Fi Channel rebranded under the name SyFy. The links in this chapter have been updated to reflect the new URL, but references in the text stand under the old name (correct as of the time of its writing and most of *Battlestar Galactica*'s airing).

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ILLUSTRATIONS

FIGURE 1

explanatory captions from *Battlestar Galactica*'s opening credits

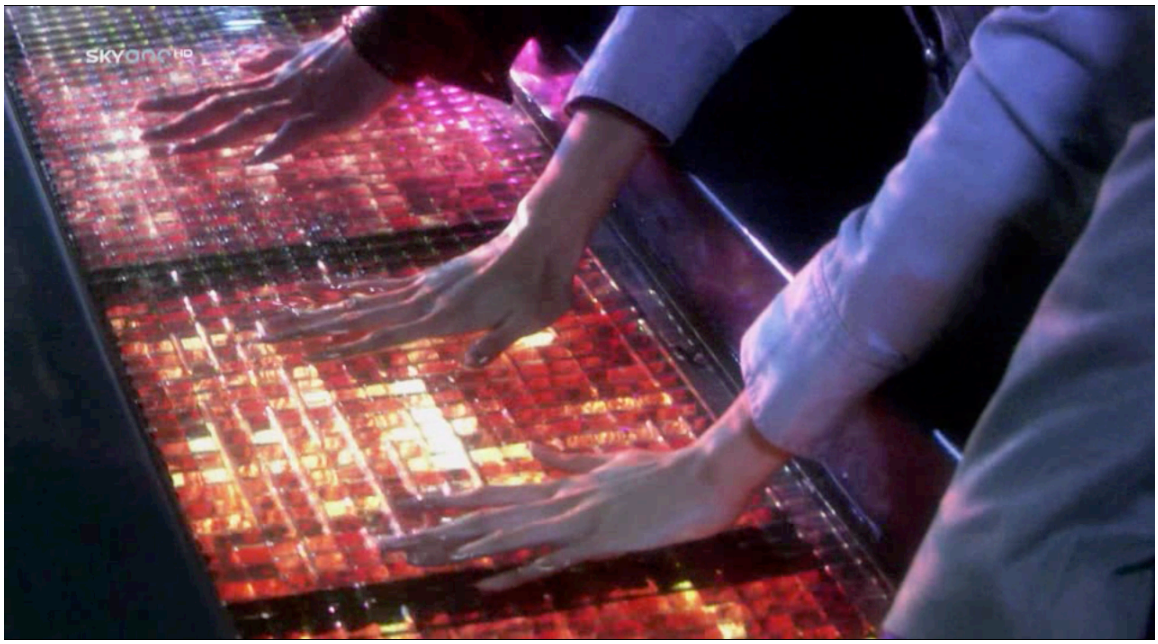

FIGURE 2

"Torn" (3.06)

FIGURE 3

"Torn" (3.06)

FIGURE 4

Lt. Felix Gaeta and Three (undercover as reporter D'Anna Biers)
"Final Cut" (2.08) [http://bsg-caps.com]

FIGURE 5

promotional image for "Torn" (3.06) [http://bsgmedia.org]

FIGURE 6

"Hero" (3.08)

FIGURE 7

"Hero" (3.08)

FIGURE 8

promotional image for "Downloaded" (2.18) [http://bsgmedia.org]

FIGURE 9

"Lay Down Your Burdens II" (2.20)

FIGURE 10

"Exodus II" (3.04)

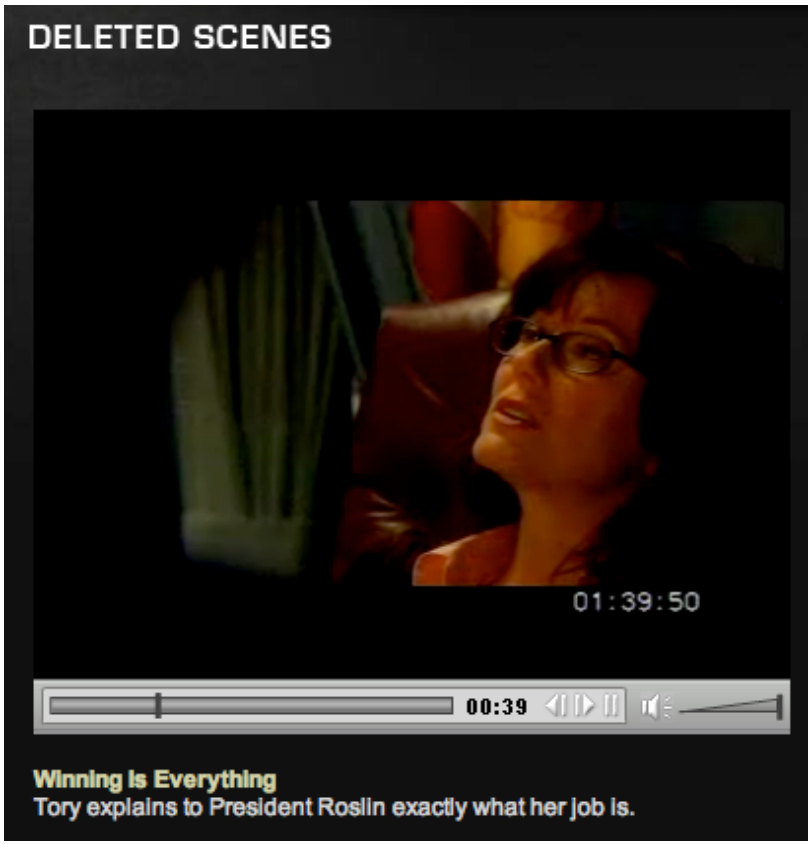

FIGURE 11

This image is from the video section of SCIFI.com (now updated to SYFY.com).

The clip played in a javascript application with the following HTML source code (note that it would be difficult to extract the video because no link to the file appears):

```
<img src="/battlestar/images/video/title_deleted.gif" border="0"></div></td>
<td valign="top"></td></tr></table><table width="646"><tr><td valign="top" width="396">
<script type="text/javascript">
vidid = 22420;   doAfterLoad(function(){
    embeddedPlayerManager.BASE_LOCATION = "http://video.scifi.com/embed/300/";
    embeddedPlayerManager.embedPlayer("videoplayer", "ad", vidid);
    embeddedPlayerManager.getPlayer().setMetadataContainers
("clipTitle","clipSubtitle","clipDesc","clipAirtime"); }); </script>
<div id="videoplayer" class="videoplayer"></div>
<div id="ad" style="width: 1px; height: 1px; display: none; visibility: hidden"></div><br />
<span id="clipTitle" class="title"></span><br />
<span id="clipDesc" class="body"></span><br />
```

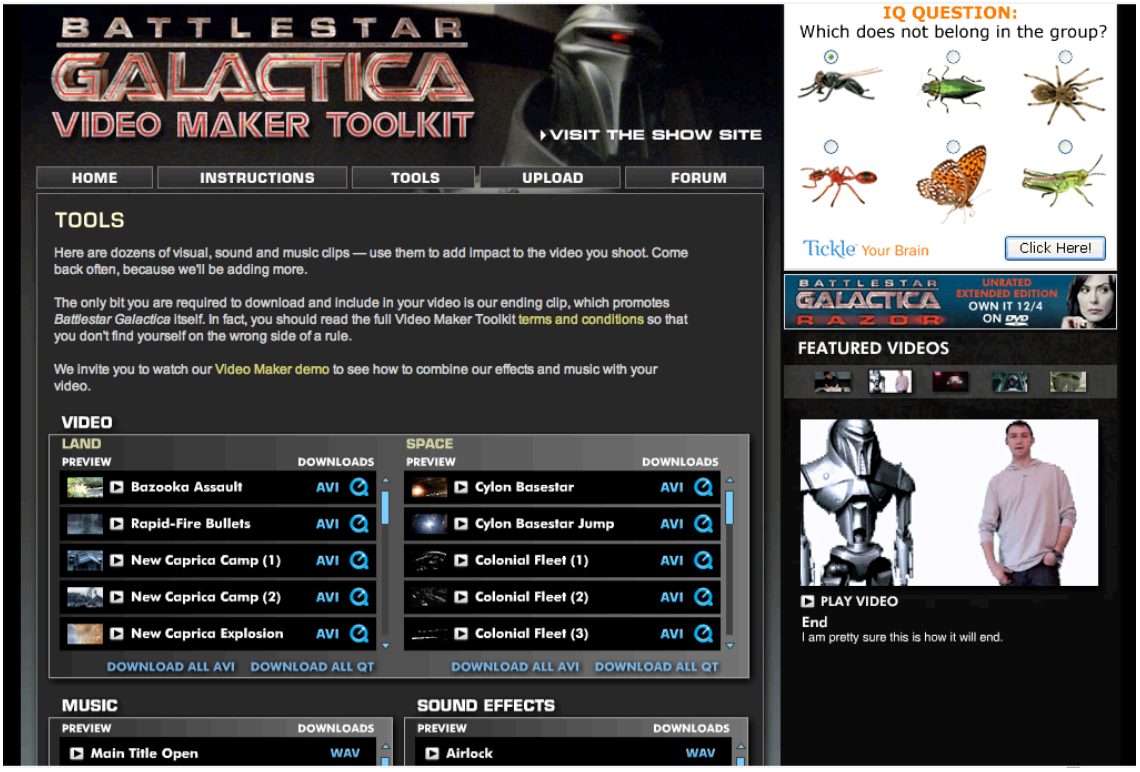

FIGURE 12

formerly http://scifi.com/battlestar/videomaker/tools/

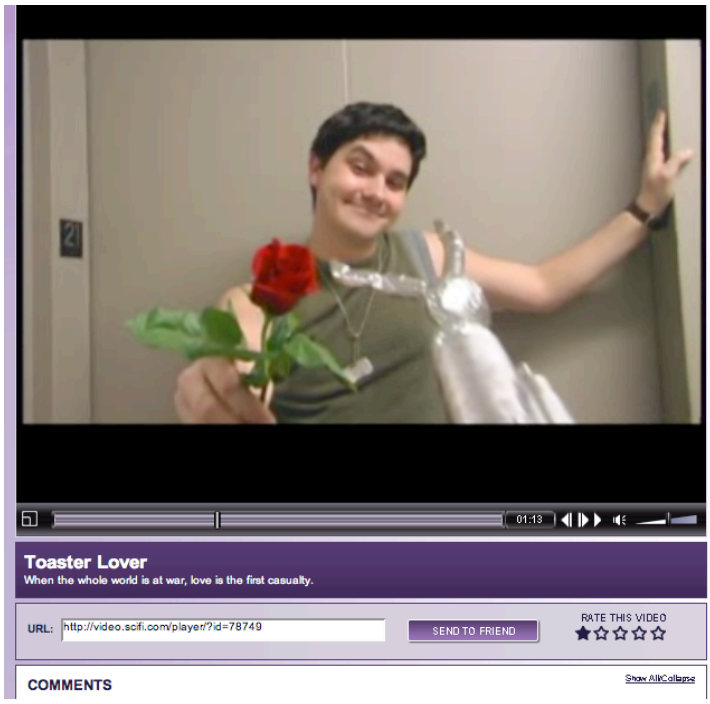

FIGURE 13

now found at http://video.syfy.com/toaster-lover/v64712

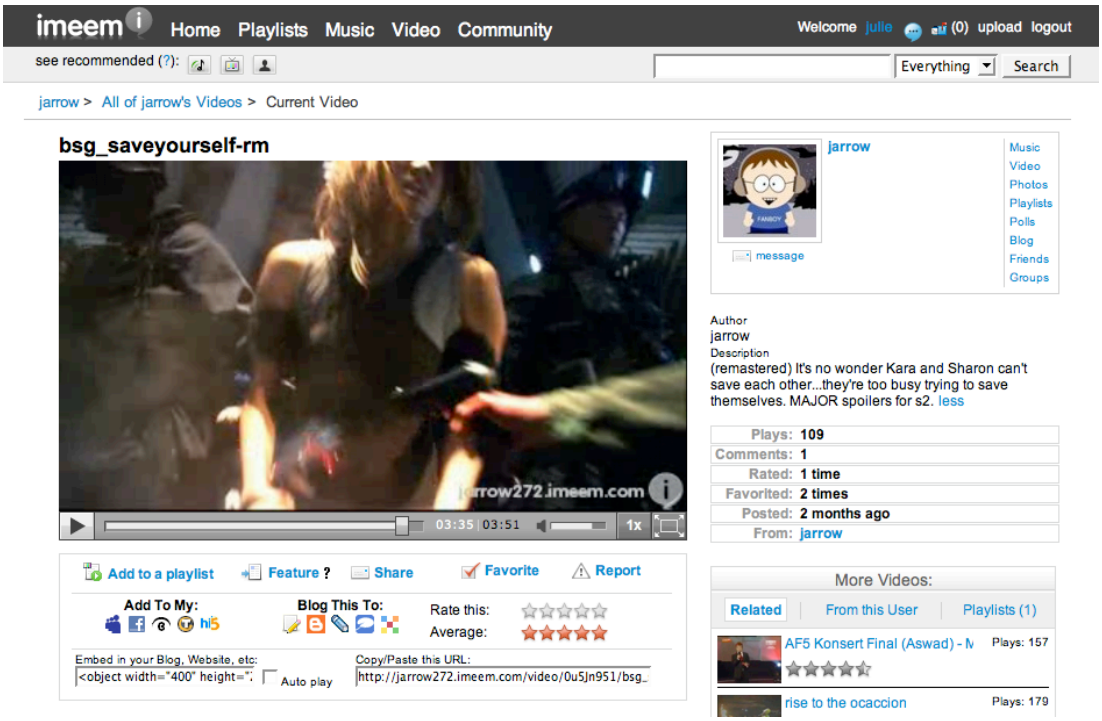

FIGURE 14

now found at http://youtube.com/watch?v=9wK7S6RH1gk

FIGURE 15

formerly http://scifi.com/battlestar/storysofar/spreadtheword/

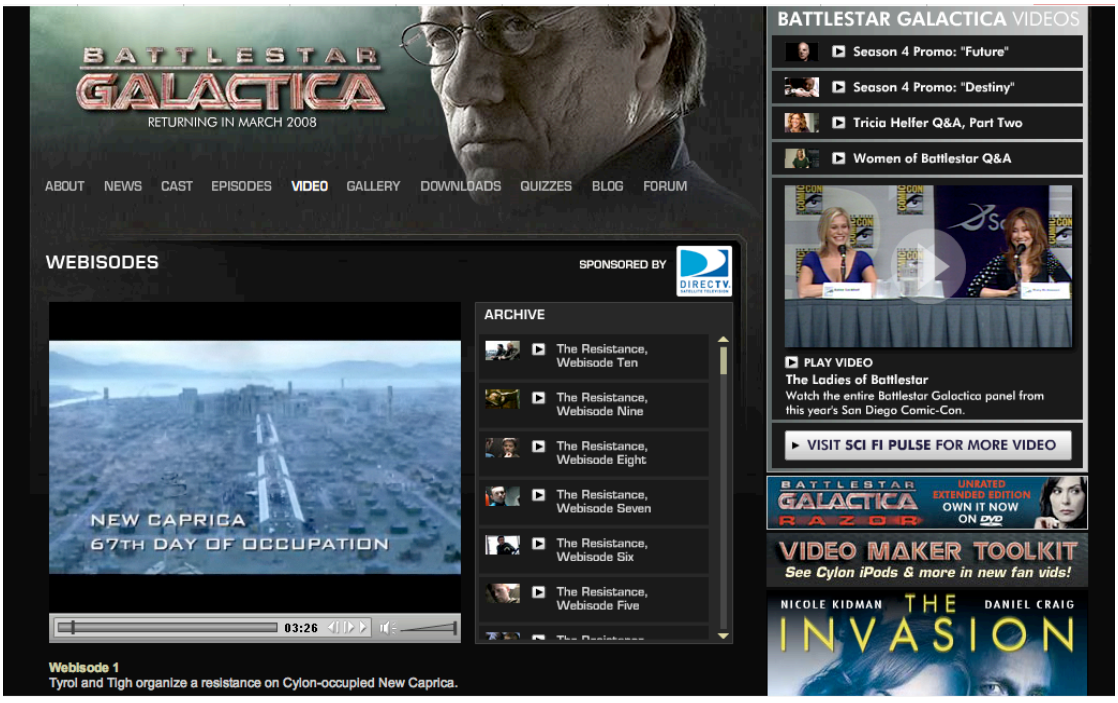

FIGURE 16

now found at http://video.syfy.com/shows/battlestar/the_resistance/v29339

IV / LABOR OF LOVE

As I have explored in the preceding chapters on *Law & Order: SVU* and *Battlestar Galactica*, new textual and technocultural formations are intensifying the stresses in today's media ecology. Among these stresses, managing the production of queer readings, desires, and appropriations is a nexus of particular concern in the shift from broadcast's centralized and vertical model to the more decentralized and horizontal configuration of digital distribution. The 2007 Writers Guild of America strike foregrounded the bottom line of such transactions for the entertainment industry: labor. This dispute between screenwriters and executives illuminated the present-day predicament of mass media, which is hard pressed to keep up with a proliferation of content and platforms while squeezing ever greater efficiency out of its creative workers. It is these conditions that have spurred not only the official exploitation of paid labor as expressed in the AMPTP's demands at the bargaining table, but also the industry's turn to a far more vast, dynamic, and affordable resource: the free labor of fans. Fan production has no doubt always held indirect economic value for corporations as a form of promotion and a stimulus to consumption, but, until very recently, this phenomenon was rarely considered openly outside the science fiction niche. Now, as convergence puts pressure on television's obsolescing profit models, hit network shows like *Lost* (ABC, 2004-present) and its derivatives are adopting cult media's tactics for attracting a loyal and engaged audience -- in short, a fandom -- as marketing's next frontier. In addition to the presumptive value of active and insatiable consumers, the internet's characteristics as

a distributed, immediate, and continuous network make it practicable for the industry to exploit fan labor directly as "user-generated content." By contrast, it is now equally practicable for fans to exploit media commodities directly, since TV and movies, along with their multiplying complement of bonus features, can be downloaded at will to serve as the raw material for unauthorized creative work. Whereas earlier chapters evaluated this juncture in terms of its representations and technologies, I here examine its economic dimension: the emerging labor relations that will shape the future of television and of its queer subcultures.

My coupling of queer subjectivities and post-industrial capitalism is not arbitrary: as commodities themselves become increasingly immaterial, the affective labor of desire, identification, and meaning-making accrues greater economic value. Paraphrasing a 1999 *Wired* article that boldly proclaimed the death of the "Old Web," Tiziana Terranova suggests that, with "new ways to make the audience work... television and the web converge in the one thing they have in common: their reliance on audience/users as providers of... cultural labour" (95). This labor, which is the productive force behind media convergence, exemplifies the architecture of the larger "digital economy":

> It is about specific forms of production (web design, multimedia production, digital services and so on), but it is also about forms of labour we do not immediately recognize as such.... These types of cultural and technical labor are not produced by capitalism in any direct, cause-and-effect fashion.... However, they have developed in relation to the expansion of the cultural industries and are part of a process of economic experimentation with the creation of monetary value out of knowledge/culture/affect. (79-80)

Such relatively autonomous and freely conducted labor schemes, fan production included, break down the distinction between waged work and leisure, but this does not place them outside of capitalist demands. In comparison to the sunny forecast for our

much vaunted "participatory culture," this view of convergence as expropriation may seem pessimistic: fandom is more commonly celebrated as a "gift economy" or alternative system of exchange that circumvents or even resists capitalism. Terronova argues that this outlook on free labor effaces the reality of its functional integration into the post-industrial economy. Her position does not, however, reduce fans and other digital enthusiasts to unwitting dupes of capitalism, colluding with the incorporation of their authentic practices into a monolithic machine. Terranova emphasizes, by contrast, that "such processes are not created outside capital and then reappropriated by capital, but are the results of a complex history where the relation between labor and capital is mutually constitutive" (94). Given this interdependence, the entertainment industry and its audiences each have collective bargaining power in their immaterial labor negotiations. Resistance exists within the flows of capitalism, and the political project is to boost the turbulence that overflows corporate channels of containment.

These channels are fabricated from reactive discipline in the guise of copyright enforcement and ideologies that devalue fan labor, but also increasingly from proactive enticements toward modes of participation that enrich the brand. Outside of cult genres, one of the earliest forays into this terrain among television programs came from *The L Word* (Showtime, 2004-2009), the first American TV series to make lesbian romance its primary focus. In addition to thematizing issues of lesbian identity and representation onscreen, *The L Word* has innovated through online promotions that leverage its projected lesbian audience into an interactive fan community. At the intersection of lived subculture, virtual world, and marketing spectacle, the web-based tie-ins OurChart.com (a content portal and social networking site) and "You Write It!" (a platform for fan-

written script contests) attempt to mobilize subjectivity as labor, exposing both the possibilities and the limits of such transmedia ventures. *The L Word* Showrunner Ilene Chaiken has spoken of the push to dismantle television's fourth wall in the era of convergence:

> In the beginning I said -- and was given a very hard time for saying -- "I don't listen, I write what I want to write." But another way the world has changed since I started doing the show is that the internet has become a big part of our lives. Anybody who writes a TV show would be a fool not to interact with her audience. Our audience is particularly passionate and engaging, so I talk to them and I listen to them. I can't always do what they want to do, but there's an effect of hearing their voices and then deciding what stories to tell. (Wilkes)

Chaiken's growing willingness to listen and interact through the internet is more than a minor update to her job description. Implicit in her comments is the "L word" of her title: Lesbian as a commodity that is produced as much by the "voices" of a "passionate" audience as by the program's own portrayals. There is thus another "L word" here, the one from my title: Labor as an audience asset that the industry must now integrate. Both words -- lesbian and labor -- are taboo in the orbit of television but, as rendered in the case of *The L Word*, both are central to key transformations in the mass media landscape. In this chapter, I analyze the role of lesbianism as labor in *The L Word*'s commercial empire and, by extension, the role of subjectivity as labor in the emerging economy of convergence. My argument is that, even while more and more of fan production is subsumed into a capitalist topology, these conditions correspondingly intensify the underlying antagonism between audiences and corporations. As Terranova puts it, the "desires [of capital and living labour] cease to coincide" when "capital wants to retain control over the unfolding of these... processes of valorization" (84), and it is our task to counter that control by sustaining divergent values and desires within it.

A / CHARTING *THE L WORD*

An hour-long special created to air with the series finale of *The L Word* on Showtime pays tribute to the program's heritage and legacy. Here, producers and writers, cast members, minor celebrities, and an omniscient female narrator reflect on *The L Word* -- purportedly the culmination of years of media history, beginning with prime-time TV's first lesbian kiss on *L.A. Law* in 1991 -- as a force for social change. Although interviewees always return to this refrain about the program's positive influence on gay equality at the level of the personal (by speaking to isolated or underprivileged youth) and the political (by portraying national issues like the military's "don't ask don't tell" policy and the lack of rights for same-sex parents), the special also reviews some of *The L Word*'s more controversial and problematic choices. Mixing contradictory narratives of inclusivity ("it's not about being gay, it's about being human," opines classical guitarist Sharon Isbin) and exclusivity (it's "a place of collective belonging" characterized by weekly viewing parties at lesbian homes and bars), this dialogue captures the dilemma of a niche show that must simultaneously appeal to a mainstream audience. Before *The L Word*, the fact that "lesbians on TV served more to titillate than to illustrate" was a common complaint; nonetheless we should respect *The L Word* because it "unapologetically went 'all the way'" in its sex scenes to ensure that "straight people watched." By staking its very premise on the commercial viability of this overlap between the interests of gay and straight viewers, *The L Word*'s 2004 premiere heralded a moment when "lesbianism seemed poised for popularity." But according to the narrator, this alchemy did not come easily in the program's early seasons, as "its assumed audience

felt most left behind. Many lesbians felt the show had failed to deliver on its central promise: to represent the community in an accurate way." *The L Word*'s producers thus found themselves trapped between irreconcilable imperatives to be realistic and to be aspirational, to reflect lesbians authentically and to "break out of stereotypes" by rendering lesbians more conventionally appealing (with the latter leanings preferred due to the wider allure of glossy fantasy). One solution was to intervene in our cultural understanding of what constitutes "real" lesbianism. Amidst criticism that the program portrayed only rich, beautiful, feminine women with no "Birkenstocks and flannel" in sight, for example, costume designer Cynthia Summers took it upon herself to "challenge the way lesbians think they should be looking or need to be looking to be able to be identified as 'a lesbian.'" We must then acknowledge that *The L Word* is "definitely representative of some lesbians" (Kate Clinton), a concession that leads Hilary Rosen to claim that critiques of the program's inauthenticity are inauthentic themselves, since they evidently come from "people who don't know that many lesbians." These tensions -- between normativity and sexuality, between lesbian and mainstream audiences, between "realistic" and "positive" representations, and between portraying and fabricating a community -- structured *The L Word*'s achievements and limitations throughout its six-season run.

The program's farewell special -- with its melange of talking heads, staged interviews, behind-the-scenes footage, public events, news headlines, flashbacks, snapshots, and clips from the show -- also encapsulates *The L Word*'s multiplying and intersecting layers of reality and fiction. It could neither execute nor escape the mandate to translate lesbian culture faithfully onto the small screen, but the program deployed its

alternating declarations of either transparency or escapism strategically. This prevarication over *The L Word*'s relationship to real life settled into a reliable circular logic: obviously, the more deeply it penetrated into society, the more representative it was; and, obviously, the more it represented current events, the more deeply it had penetrated into society. Thus, the creators' response to criticisms of its bland homogeneity (which was, in the words of writer/director Angela Robinson, "trying to represent an array of different types of lesbian representations") was rendered as a multicultural menu of bite-sized political references. The examples given in the special, which dedicates four minutes to celebrating the transgender character Max, who is working class, and the butch character Tasha, who is black, typify *The L Word*'s tendency to bundle minority identities while preserving the white femme consumer as the lesbian norm. Max, initially a woman named Moira who chooses to undergo a medical gender transition, starts out as a recognizable point of contact with the queer communities that exist in parallel to *The L Word*'s West Hollywood fantasia. He is quickly assimilated into stable masculinity, however, and devolves into a caricature of testosterone-induced abusiveness and ripped-from-the-headlines male pregnancy. Tasha, whose relationship with Alice triumphs over personal differences and professional conflicts with her military career, exhibits the program's signature approach to incorporating racial difference. As in the case of other black characters, including straight lead Kit and her bi-racial half-sister Bette, "a figure of racial authenticity" is periodically invoked "to ventriloquize racial transcendence" in order to "depoliticize" an issue (Osucha). Eden Osucha argues that, by "stressing individualizing, privatized aspects" of a political conflict, characters of color facilitate "the elision of 'community' by consumerism." *The L Word*'s open

acknowledgement of its commercial dictates, however, effectively inoculates it against such critiques: as entertainment (or so its alibi goes), the program's only option is to portray political realities by packaging identities as commodities.

Although the special was created to commemorate *The L Word*'s finale, it conspicuously foregoes any discussion of the final season, an incoherent fiasco that was reviled by fans and critics. Apparently conceived more as an extended promo for Chaiken's unsuccessful spin-off series (a prison drama called *The Farm*) than as a consistent conclusion to the characters' narratives, season 6 melds a murder mystery into the program's soap operatic format. In the opening of the premiere, one character drowns under suspicious circumstances; after immediately flashing back several months, the remainder of the season consists of a string of storytelling contortions that provide everyone else with a motive for killing her. The final episode withholds the promised resolution to this whodunit, however, retreating instead into maudlin reminiscences, complete with a diegetic tribute video that mirrors the extra-diegetic tribute special. As the characters film, edit, and finally watch their teary farewells to lead couple Bette and Tina (whose story ends with a move to New York), *The L Word* waxes nostalgic about its own history, evoking in particular its history of self-reflexive gestures. These include the character Jenny's autobiographical memoir retelling the events of the program's early seasons, later adapted into a (diegetic) film production that furnished the primary motif for season 5, and season 2's subplot about a male roommate who was videotaping the women using hidden cameras, as if to comment on the line that *The L Word* walks between documentary and soft porn. Such elements foreground the interdependence of media form and the program's claims to authenticity -- none more so than a series of

webisodes, *The Interrogation Tapes*, that continued after the television finale. These online bonus features enticed viewers once again with the answers that the episodes deferred, a tease involving even the contradictory codes that characterized the "tape" of each character's questioning by police (including video noise that referenced gritty realism but appeared highly stylized and an evidentiary time counter that continued across cuts between multiple cameras and takes). And in place of criminal revelations, the extreme close-ups draw out histrionic confessions about past trauma and emotional relationships, making the characters under "interrogation" seem more akin to the special's interview subjects than to murder suspects. This jarring lurch between genres offers one last rendition of *The L Word*'s structuring paradox: charged with providing both reality and melodrama, both truth and spectacle, what the program does best is leverage one to sell the other. In this section, I propose labor as a framework for understanding how *The L Word* negotiates this terrain by putting authentic identities to work, and I now turn to Marxist theory for the underpinnings of this term.

1 / IMMATERIAL LABOR

There is one obvious term we could deploy to elucidate *The L Word*'s teetering edifice of authenticity: ideology. But the status of ideological analysis today is dubious. The theory originates in Marxist thought, but its position within dialectical materialism has always been ambivalent. In orthodox Marxism, all ideas arise from the system of production as a set of material relations. However, this system cannot exist without the ideologies that naturalize it, nor are material conditions and ideology clearly separable. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels write, "The phantoms formed in the human brain are...

necessarily sublimates of their material life-process.... Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and the corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence" (47). Not only is ideology virtually material itself, certain ideas are necessary to the material economic relations of capitalism. Production, for example, cannot exist without consumption, which "*posits* the object of production as a *concept*, an internal image, a need, a motive, a purpose" -- as a "desire," in short -- and "Production accordingly produces not only an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object" ("Introduction to a Critique of Political Economy" 132-33). In *Capital*, Marx explains further that the commodity form on which capitalism depends is fundamentally a mystification, "a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things" (321). Thus it was never clear how we would study the ideological superstructure, society's accumulation of ideas, in isolation from its material base in production -- or vice versa.

The impossibility of extricating supposedly superstructural fictions from the economic base comes to fruition in the work of Louis Althusser. Acknowledging that the "reproduction of labor power" (that is, of the entire economic system) "reveals as its *sine qua non*... the reproduction of its subjection to the ruling ideology" (133), he ventures the theory of ideology that Marx never fully elaborates (158) (perhaps precisely because it requires engaging the interpenetration of base and superstructure). Althusser insists that ideology must be understood as having a "material existence" and, furthermore, that this materiality is contextualized in psychoanalytically-inflected subjects: "1. there is no practice except by and in an ideology; 2. there is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects" (170). Already in Marx, desire is posed as central to consumption, and

Althusser draws on psychoanalysis to theorize this function, defining ideology as the process that constitutes subjects and therefore their desires. He thus posits that ideology and materiality are articulated together via subjectivity, but he doesn't necessarily resolve the binary between them inherited from Marx.

Gramscian thought offers another potential revision of the untenable base/superstructure opposition in the concept of hegemony. Antonio Gramsci, according to Stuart Hall, "recognizes the 'plurality' of selves or identities of which the so-called 'subject' of thought and ideas is composed... a consequence of the relationship between 'the self' and the ideological discourses which compose the cultural terrain of a society" (433). Gramsci's model, that is, accommodates a more multiple, rather than dual, understanding of subjectivity, capitalist power, and ideology's role in mediating between them. Building on Gramsci's work, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe identify hegemonic formations with the Althusserian concept of overdetermination -- "the critique of every type of fixity, through an affirmation of the incomplete, open and politically negotiable character of every identity" (104) -- however, they accuse Althusser of drifting away from this territory and into a regressive essentialism (97-98). A resolutely anti-essentialist Marxism, they assert, "affirm[s] the material character of every discursive structure... the progressive affirmation, from Gramsci to Althusser, of the material character of ideologies" (109) and conversely "rejects the distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices" (107) -- that is, between superstructure and base. Laclau and Mouffe ultimately characterize societies as radically open, "precarious and ultimately failed attempts to domesticate the field of differences" (95). Thus, over the past half-century, in dialogue with psychoanalytic and poststructuralist theory, Marxisms have

been reconfigured to reject all stable identities and boundaries, including that between the supposedly material domain of production and the supposedly immaterial domain of ideology.

These theoretical innovations take Marx in new directions but are already implied in his work, where he presciently recognized the incredible vitality of capitalism, which "cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society" (*The Communist Manifesto* 58). As this situation wears on, "the productive forces at the disposal of society... become too powerful" to sustain existing conditions, necessitating "the conquest of new markets, and... the more thorough exploitation of the old ones" (60-61). Frederic Jameson credits Marx with a dialectical outlook on economic transformation, writing that here he "powerfully urges us to... a type of thinking that would be capable of grasping the demonstrably baleful features of capitalism along with its extraordinary and liberating dynamism simultaneously" (*Postmodernism* 47). One of the products not only of dialectical thinking about capitalism, but of the revolutionary dialectic of the capitalist system itself, is the heralding of what Jameson describes as the "inauguration of a whole new type of society, most famously baptized 'postindustrial society' (Daniel Bell) but often also designated consumer society, media society, information society, electronic society... (...a third stage or moment in the evolution of capital)" (3). Also known as late capitalism, this is the capitalist form native to what Jameson anatomizes, more precisely than most, as "postmodernism." While this term is usually deployed in either economic or aesthetic senses, Jameson reminds us elsewhere that "the becoming cultural of the economic, and the becoming economic of the cultural,

has often been identified as one of the features that characterizes what is now widely known as postmodernity" ("Notes on Globalization" 60) -- what he calls "the libidinalization of the market" (69). At this stage, communication and information merge with technology in its materiality as a means of production, while in turn technology merges with the immateriality of commodification in its reliance on communication and information (56).

Among recent Marxisms, there is one heterodox strain that engages most dynamically with the profound transformations of late capitalism. *Autonomia* (Autonomism) emerged from a decade of social unrest in Italy, symbolically dated from 1968 (Bifo 149) but scaffolded by intellectual (Moulier 16) and activist (Moulier 5) schemas beginning by 1962. Its roots lie in protests by workers in northern Italy's large factories -- most famously the FIAT factory, supposedly the largest in the world with around 100,000 employees (Moulier 13) -- but Autonomism was an emphatically decentralized movement, uniting disparate proletarians, local organizations, and theorists under the banner of the *Potere Operaio* (Workerists). Workerism responded to heavy industry's escalating demands that "society as a whole functions and should function like a factory... [moving toward] socialization of all relations of production" (Moulier 17). The activists' tactics of resistance were correspondingly innovative, based in the "looseness," "flexibility" and "fluidity" of an "elusive network" that "develops forms of organization and of subjectivity against which there exists no 'classic' response" (Lotringer & Marazzi 20). Social turmoil intensified in Italy throughout the 1970s, matched by rising unemployment, until it culminated in 1977 with a series of violent mass uprisings (Bifo 157-58). By 1974, the majority of the Workerist movement had

split from a militant wing known as the Red Brigades, with the remainder adopting the name Autonomism (Lotringer & Marazzi 9). But when the Red Brigades kidnapped and assassinated Aldo Moro, President of the Christian Democratic Party, in 1978 (Bifo 160), the state took the crime as a pretense to exile or imprison thousands of Autonomists, issuing warrants on April 7, 1979 for intellectuals and activists including well-known thinker Antonio Negri (Lotringer v). These arrests and related repressions were effective at extinguishing Autonomist dissent in Italy, but collaterally they resulted in exiled theorists making contact with French poststructuralists and beyond, thus expanding the theoretical scope and international reach of their thought (Lotringer vi).

Translations of Autonomist works from Italian are a significant waypoint in this intellectual trajectory, and seminal English collections include the 1980 compendium *Autonomia* (the source for much of the above history) and Virno and Hardt's recent anthology *Radical Thought in Italy*. The latter republishes an influential essay by Maurizio Lazzarato on "Immaterial Labor" (this translation had previously appeared under the title "General Intellect: Towards an Inquiry into Immaterial Labor"). According to Lazzarato's diagnosis, immaterial labor, or "the labor that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity" (132), "seeks to involve even the worker's personality and subjectivity within the production of value" (135). While its "classic forms" encompass "audiovisual production, advertising, fashion, the production of software, photography, cultural activities" and "it exists only in the form of networks and flows" (136), immaterial labor is the hegemonic principle of late capitalist work even for those not directly engaged in these hyperskilled activities within the heterogeneous global economy (135). The pivotal premise of this elevation of mental and affective

work is that "the 'raw material' of immaterial labor is subjectivity and the 'ideological' environment in which this subjectivity lives and reproduces": in a milieu that values intellectual property, branding, libidinalization (in Jameson's terms) over the manufacture of material goods, "[subjectivity] becomes directly productive, because the goal of our postindustrial society is to construct the consumer/communicator" (142). Communication, both in the abstract and as a function of information technologies, plays a vital role as the medium of subject formation and of cooperation between workers -- for Lazzarato, "If Fordism integrated consumption into the cycle of the reproduction of capital, post-Fordism integrates communication into it" (139). It is important to acknowledge the pronounced theoretical lacuna of Lazzarato's work (and indeed of the majority of Autonomist discourse): for a model that relies extensively on subjectivity, it offers little elaboration of this notion or engagement with existing conceptual frameworks (for example psychoanalysis, as per Althusser's approach, or Foucaldian micro-power). Nonetheless, this methodology offers a penetrating explication of late capitalism's directive to "'become subjects'" (134) that is available for enhancement through continuing dialogue with complementary traditions.

Immaterial labor can be the primary diagram of production in late capitalism precisely because the economy depends on a new kind of immaterial commodity, one that finds "its use value being given by its value as informational and cultural content" (137) -- that is, by its meaning for subjects. As Lazzarato succinctly puts it, "prior to being manufactured, a product must be sold" (140), thus reversing the Fordist system based in single-purpose factories and turning to "just-in-time" schemes where supply responds to demand. Moreover, the paradigmatic immaterial commodity, not being fixed in a

physical object (think of a trademark or an mp3 file, for example), "is not destroyed in the act of consumption, but rather it enlarges, transforms, and creates the 'ideological' and cultural environment of the consumer" (137). The crucial ramifications of this ascent of the culture and information industries involve "the integration of the relationship between production and consumption, where in fact the consumer intervenes in an active way in the composition of the product," rendering it "the result of a creative process that involves both the producer and the consumer" (141). Lazzarato's assessment of this transformation is ultimately rather optimistic: since capitalism "cannot abolish this double process of 'creativity'; it must rather assume it as it is, and attempt to control it and subordinate it to its own values" (144), a mechanism that is provisional and precarious. This outlook applies to immaterial labor power as well, for if "the management mandate to 'become subjects of communication' threatens to be even more totalitarian," employers are correspondingly "forced to recognize the autonomy and freedom of labor as the only possible form of cooperation in production" (135). It is this autonomy, the relocalization of value in subjects and their self-organizing networks of communication, that gives Autonomism its name. However, it is critical that we consider, alongside these new possibilities for resistance, the perils of a capitalist regime that subsumes ever more of our identity and sociality under its imperatives.

2 / LESBIAN LABOR

As a melodrama driven by intimate relationships, the dimension of work may seem largely irrelevant to the narrative edifice of *The L Word*, a mere contrivance subordinated to its romantic intrigues. I argue here that this apparent insignificance is in

fact a symptom of the program's perfect rendition of the late capitalist transition to immaterial labor, wherein work is diffused throughout the whole life of the subject. All of *The L Word*'s characters, insofar as their employment is represented onscreen, hold jobs in the services and cultural industries, the growth sectors in a postindustrial economy. Consider these examples (leaving aside Alice, who I will come to in the next section):

Bette Porter (Jennifer Beals) – An art curator and administrator, Bette serves as a high-powered, high-profile, high culture gatekeeper in her positions as Director of the California Arts Center (a small but ambitious museum) and later Dean of the California University School of the Arts. Aggressively out as a lesbian, she often champions the work of controversial queer and feminist artists, an agenda referenced in *The L Word*'s opening credits by scenes of Bette and others in a gallery featuring portraits by Catherine Opie.

Tina Kennard (Laurel Holloman) – Initially a stay-at-home mom, Tina eventually revives her professional experience in development to volunteer for a non-profit and then launch her second career as the executive of a movie studio. In the latter capacity, she is instrumental in the production of Jenny's autobiographical screenplay.

Jenny Schecter (Mia Kirshner) – A struggling writer with literary aspirations, Jenny ends up cashing in on the memoir craze with her semi-fictionalized account of her childhood sexual abuse. Her second work, *Lez Girls*, retells the story of *The L Word* from Jenny's perspective, angering many of her friends with unflattering portrayals. Jenny parlays the success of *Lez Girls* into the rights to write and direct the movie version, despite having no experience in film.

Shane McCutcheon (Katherine Moennig) – A freelance hairstylist allegedly modeled after Sally Hershberger of the reality show *Shear Genius*, Shane's personal brand is fully realized in season 3 with the opening of "Shane for Wax," her own salon chair attached to a hipster skate shop. Shane's signature androgynous look also lands her a gig as a men's underwear model for Hugo Boss, with the slogan "you're looking very Shane today."

Dana Fairbanks (Erin Daniels) – Dana is initially afraid to come out because she worries it would adversely affect her career as a professional tennis player, where her income is largely dependent on endorsements. As it turns out, she gets her biggest sponsorship deal, with Subaru, precisely because they are looking for gay celebrities for their "get out and stay out" ad campaign (in the non-fictional world, Subaru's advertising has targeted lesbians and included out tennis star Martina Navratilova as a spokesperson).

Kit Porter (Pam Grier) – Bette's half-sister Kit, the program's most central straight character, is equally committed to the lesbian community. Beginning the series as a formerly famous soul singer who is now a washed-up alcoholic, Kit pieces her life back together when she buys dyke hangout The Planet, turning the café into a hotspot of lesbian nightlife and later acquiring a second gay club.

The L Word's portrayal of each of these characters exemplifies immaterial skills that are becoming hegemonic under late capitalism: manipulating hierarchies of taste through hype and branding; leveraging personal connections and social networks; communicating productively through various media channels. Moreover, in synergy with the genre of melodrama, the characters exemplify the interdependence of professional

and intimate lives, as their relationships provide the material and the occasions for their career advancement.

To take this even further, we might say that the characters on *The L Word* exemplify the importance of subjectivity itself as labor. It is their work on themselves (Jenny's identity crisis; Dana's coming out process; Shane's ineffable style) and on their communicative capacities (Bette's taste-making; Tina's movie-making; Kit's community building) that makes them successful at their titular jobs. And when it comes to *The L Word*, this labor is all concentrated in the production of "lesbian" as an economically meaningful category. Despite their occasional lip-service against ghettoization, it is ultimately as *lesbian* critic/executive/author/hairdresser/athlete/promoters that the characters thrive professionally, and they model working at being a lesbian as a vocation. Of course, this portrayal is far from disinterested: lesbian is also the category that works as *The L Word*'s brand, the characters' endorsements are the program's ad revenue, and the characters' careers mirror the careers of showrunner Ilene Chaiken and a handful of other professional lesbians in the industry. In a parallel that operates didactically, lesbianism is the program's privileged labor on both sides of the screen, as both its characters and its creators endeavor to render this identity lucrative in capitalist terms. If these characters are employed as lesbians textually, they are also employed as lesbians metatextually in that their job is to be spokeswomen for the program's trademark sexuality.

This strategy is more than an isolated or mercenary symbiosis, however; it is the regime of immaterial labor that makes it viable. *The L Word*'s project to monetize a particular subjective formation is one instance of the generalized subsumption of

subjectivity into capitalist production, and the work of its characters or creators as lesbians echoes the work it asks of its audience. Industrially, that is, what is productive for *The L Word* is not the willingness of its characters to take up the labor of lesbian identification but the willingness of its viewers to do so. These viewers do not have to "be" lesbians, although that approximation is often convenient, but in order to be inspired to watch and thus to generate revenue for Showtime they have to "buy into" the value of that position. The program promises various remittances that audience members might enjoy in exchange -- the voyeuristic pleasure of watching beautiful and often semi-nude women, the narrative pleasure of a soap opera's intimate networks (posited as a particular hallmark of lesbian life), the subcultural pleasure of participating in a recognizable community experience -- but whatever their motivation, viewers must make a connection (however contingent or ambivalent) between themselves and *The L Word*'s manufactured lesbian identity that sustains their involvement with the program. *The L Word*'s self-reflexive storytelling attempts to teach this occupation by example, through its object lessons in laboring to valorize lesbianism. Its characters epitomize the hegemonic orientation of all producer-consumers in a post-industrial era: the imperative to "be subjects" -- to desire and to communicate with relative autonomy from any enclosed proletarian arrangement.

3 / Alice Pieszecki with "The Chart"

The L Word's most literal exemplar of a career in freelance lesbianism is Alice Pieszecki (portrayed by Leisha Hailey, the only out lesbian cast member when the program premiered), a bisexual-identified character who works throughout the series as a

queer culture guru for media outlets including *LA Magazine*, public radio station KCRW, and fictional TV talk show *The Look*. Alice is certainly not the first queer woman to draw a diagram visualizing the complex web of hook-ups and break-ups that form the fabric of her community, but she is the first to make this graphic her trademark. The principle of her "chart" is introduced in the pilot episode when she plays a "six degrees of sexual separation" game with Dana, sketching out the serial couplings that connect the two of them with each other and with several friends. At the end of the scene, the camera tracks over their heads to frame a large bulletin board where Alice keeps a running tally of the links amongst her circle of acquaintances [Figure 1]. But it becomes clear that the chart is more than a personal pastime for Alice when, in the opening of the second episode, she pitches it to her editor as a marketable motif for an article [Figure 2]: "The point is we are all connected, see? Through love, through loneliness, through one tiny lamentable lapse in judgment. All of us, in our isolation, we reach out from the darkness, from the alienation of modern life, to form these connections." Although her boss is unimpressed, Alice (or more properly, *The L Word*'s writing staff) here exhibits a savvy appreciation for the productivity of networked intimacy under late capitalism. In a marked update from her initial pen-and-paper explanation, Alice now demos the chart on her laptop using a graphics tablet. Only a few scenes later, she has implausibly launched a successful user-generated version online [Figure 3]: "You know the chart? OK, I put it on the Internet.... This thing is growing. People are adding names, and it's growing exponentially." This vision of a web platform driven by relationships was prescient for its time (January 2004, just before the inception of Facebook) and already signals the

harmony between *The L Word*'s rendition of sexual community and the development of digital technologies.

While the network ethos of the chart is ever-present throughout the series, most notably in Alice's talk radio show based on the concept, the Chart itself doesn't reappear until the beginning of season 4. Here, in an eruption of metatexual instruction, Alice and Jenny introduce the character Helena to what is now a vibrant online community, telling her "it's so much fun, you don't know what you're missing! [...] It's like a social networking site -- for lesbians" [Figure 4]. In Alice's opinion, the core feature of this diversified portal, now dubbed OurChart, is still its "hook-ups page": an interactive visualization of data on who has slept with who. The graphics that represent this interface on screen are artifacts of the program's technological imaginary, unrelated to any recognizable web browser or platform. Although Alice does describe in detail how to add a link by inviting someone to join, this scene's pedagogy is oriented more toward an ideology of transparency than tangible usage, hyping a fantasy of seamless equivalence between the sexual network and the digital network. OurChart's discourse thus aligns perfectly with late capitalism's marriage of subjectivity and communication. The connectedness that Alice identifies as a hallmark of interpersonal relations in a sexual subculture is likewise a hallmark of the present-day organization of work, which depends increasingly on self-organizing cooperation facilitated by media and information technologies. *The L Word* styles itself to capitalize on those synergies, with the effect that, for example, the mythology of Shane becomes technical as much as sexual, because as a "hub" ("anyone who has slept with over 50 people," although in Shane's case the

number is close to 1000) she is instrumental in binding together the digital as much as the face-to-face social network.

In contrast to season 1's more innocent reveries on the chart, this particular scene functions as an integrated promotion for the concurrent launch of the actual OurChart.com, itself a promotion for the *The L Word* in a sort of *mise en abyme* of transmedia branding. The tie-in website opened in January 2007, the same week as the season 4 premiere, but its interactive features weren't up and running until several months later (Cashmore, "OurChart.com"), during which time the program's improbable vision hovered before fans as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Industry blogs reported that Chaiken, newly minted CEO of OurChart, confirmed that "The idea to migrate the chart to the Web grew out of a story line on the show.... Now, in the upcoming season, that character will realize that the chart has caught on.... At the same time, the real-world chart also will go live" (Davis). In the context of convergence, defined by mobilizing viewership as immaterial labor, harnessing a "real-world" social network to work productively as an online social network is a predictable marketing strategy. But OurChart.com, as portrayed within *The L Word*'s fictional Los Angeles, symptomizes the ideological payload of this move: the fantasy of an unmediated and frictionless correspondence between subjective and digital layers that ignores the intercession of communication technologies and capitalist economies. The site as rendered here is markedly unconstrained by funding or infrastructure -- after Alice "put it on the internet," it just "caught on" with no apparent need for development, staff, advertising, or revenue. Moreover, beyond Alice's assurance that when you add one of your hook-ups to the chart the other party must opt-in, the characters express no hesitancy over the alarming notion

of translating intimate sexual histories into a searchable online database. These convenient erasures make OurChart.com formidable as a cutting-edge promotion precisely because it takes the *The L Word*'s economy of lesbianism as labor to its logical conclusion, enticing viewers-cum-users to work toward producing these values in more direct and centralized ways.

B / "WHERE WOMEN CAN CONNECT": OURCHART.COM

Another fantasmatic equivalence in play at OurChart.com, beyond plotting a sexual network onto a technical network, is its conflation of onscreen and real life communities. *The L Word*'s ultimate alibi is authenticity, and the website is a winning move in that rhetorical game: because "real" lesbians now chart their relationships just like the characters do, Alice and her friends evidently represent "real" lesbians. Thus OurChart.com not only advertises *The L Word* but buttresses its structuring ideology, leveraging user participation to heighten the verisimilitude of its portrayals. This was not the program's first attempt to garner cultural credibility by layering behind-the-scenes narratives over its fictional soap opera, and in addition to amplifying the figurative parallel between production world and story world, OurChart.com provided a distribution channel for this ongoing stream of supplemental content. With regular submissions by Chaiken and actors including Beals, Hailey, and Moennig promising fans insider access to *The L Word* empire and the opportunity to interact with its stars, OurChart.com enhanced the impression that the program engages an actually existing lesbian community (a role played here by the site's users). Blogs and videos by paid contributors augmented this pre-packaged material and its subliminal creed of commodity lesbianism,

with the implied assumption that, in order to appeal to *The L Word*'s audience, the website must be front-loaded for consumption.

The typical layout of OurChart.com's home page supported the impression that professional content was its main attraction, with editorial blogs and videos on display in the central space while recent user-generated content (along with ads) was relegated to a sidebar [Figure 5]. Navigational links led to expanded views of these commercial components, including themed columns by the staff, original web series, and actors' dispatches from the set, as well as to the discussion forums and profiles that comprised the site's social platform. OurChart.com was built on an open-source content management system {http://drupal.org/node/128791}, and its networking features, when they arrived, were relatively commonplace. After filling out a personal profile, users could manage a list of friends, send public notes or private messages, create blog entries, upload pictures, and track their comments on posts throughout the site [Figure 6]. As a whole, the organization of OurChart.com showcases once again the characteristic tension of fan-driven promotions: its challenge was to offer enough open interactivity to attract a productive user base while still expressing and enforcing a homogenous brand.

OurChart.com's particular balance of these demands turned out to be an effective one, as the site gained rapidly in popularity and prompted extensive participation. One article reports respectable usage numbers by July 2007 (Kramer), and though the focus here is the appeal of professional programming, conversation in forums, blogs, and comments was also lively. The corporate strategy underpinning OurChart.com follows a broader trend to position gays as a privileged marketing category, and Pete Cashmore cites data suggesting that this move carries over to the internet, where "gay, lesbian and

bisexual users are an extremely valuable demographic: social networks and blogs targeting this segment of the audience could perform well" (Cashmore, "MySpace"). OurChart president Hilary Rosen parrots a similar doctrine in statements that the site will "present marketers with a great opportunity to reach a consumer market that is targeted, financially independent and loyal" (Announcements) and later that "The lesbian community is Internet-savvy and is twice as likely as heterosexual women to consider the Internet their prime source of entertainment" (Becker). Such mavens, and indeed many of the analyses directed at the commodification of gay identity, see this tendency in terms of an aptitude for consumption -- the inference is that the web's primary innovation is increased opportunities for advertising and sales. What the close relationship between *The L Word*'s onscreen representation and online implementation of the Chart demonstrates, however, is that the transition from broadcast to broadband enables an intensification that becomes concerned with what gay/lesbian demographics can produce as well as what they can as consume. *The L Word* can monetize lesbianism because late capitalism renders subjectivity itself productive through communications networks.

1 / THE SOCIAL FACTORY

Marx already recognized that advancements in information technologies are integral to the expansion of capitalism, writing in *The Communist Manifesto* that it is "by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, [*and*] by the immensely facilitated means of communication" that the capitalist economy "draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization" (59) -- but today this role is escalating. In *The Condition of Post-Modernity*, one of the key texts delineating the transition to late capitalism, David Harvey observes that, in prelude, "the progress of Fordism internationally... relied heavily upon

new-found capacities to gather, evaluate, and disseminate information" (137). What is novel under post-Fordism is that information has progressed from being an important by-product of production systems to a product in its own right, with its own markets and its own producers and consumers. The amplification of concern and controversy over intellectual property controls is one instance of the effects of this decisive shift. Beyond the exchange of informational commodities, however, communication furnishes the platform for subjectivity, which is now an equally vital axis of economic value. According to Harvey, the late capitalist manufacturing regime of "flexible accumulation has been accompanied on the consumption side, therefore, by a much greater attention to quick-changing fashions and the mobilization of the artifices of need inducement and cultural transformation that this implies" (156). When affective connotations of lifestyle and identity overtake use value as the key selling point, that is, an immaterial aura of desire becomes the key product. Under these conditions, social communication, or "control over information flow and over the vehicles for propagation of popular taste and culture[,] have likewise become vital weapons in the competitive struggle" (160). Consider, for example, the rise of expansive and multimodal marketing strategies including branding, product placement, transmedia, and the overarching corporate consolidation of entertainment (the other meaning of "media convergence") -- these innovations are evidence that investment in communicative infrastructure and management is essential to maximizing the value of subjectivity as immaterial labor.

Intersecting with these assessments of present-day industry by political economists, social theorists have articulated the notion of an information economy. Hardt and Negri christen this new milieu "Empire," defining its topography as "a

rhizomatic and universal communication network in which relations are established to and from all its points or nodes" (319-20). The network model is simultaneously metaphorical and literal: relations of power in Empire behave like computerized communications systems, and they also are in large part implanted in the deployment of network technologies. In this "information economy" of "deterritorialized production" and "immaterial labor," the methods of production, the commodities produced, and the subjectivities of the producer-consumers become increasingly intertwined. Ultimately, since "the instrumental action of economic production has been united with the communicative action of human relations" (293), "the great industrial and financial powers thus produce not only commodities but also subjectivities... needs, social relations, bodies, and minds -- which is to say, they produce producers" (232). Manuel Castells also blends the figurative and material aspects of networks when he pronounces "a new form of society": this "network society" is "characterized by... the flexibility and instability of work, and the individualization of labor [and by] a culture of real virtuality constructed by a pervasive, interconnected, and diversified media system" (1). Castells' thesis is that, in the network society, "The new power lies in the codes of information and in the images of representation.... The sites of this power are people's minds.... This is why identities are so important, and ultimately, so powerful" (424-25). That is, as the network becomes the dominant organizational form across all cultural registers, the immaterial dimensions of discourse, spectacle, and subjectivity come to occupy a position of unprecedented privilege in the economic landscape. Thus capacities for communication, in terms of both human "software" and technological hardware, scaffold late capitalism's regime of value.

For their part, Autonomists have theorized this conjuncture by refining Marx's concept of real subsumption to provide a diagnosis of our current circumstances. Building on their work and on his own re-readings of Marx's texts, Jason Read explains that the continuum from formal to real subsumption encapsulates the evolution of capitalism. Formal subsumption is characterized by "the imposition of the wage on preexisting social and technological structures" (10) -- in other words, by layering capitalism's structural abstractions, including money as a universal exchange and the mystification that workers must sell their labor power, over given material cultures. At some point, however, the limit of the surplus value that can be extracted by simply extending labor is reached (for example, the length of the workday can be increased by only so many hours), and capitalism must begin to reshape the constraints of work in order to render the available labor time more productive. In the course of this process, capitalism permeates and appropriates more and more domains of life, such that "what is originally outside of capital, the social and technical conditions of labor, becomes internalized" (114). This "transformation... of the knowledges, desires, and practices constitutive of social relations" (113) is the evolution toward real subsumption, and we can say that today, with the incorporation of subjectivity itself into capitalist production, we have fully arrived at this state. In Negri's classic Autonomist text, *The Politics of Subversion*, he maintains that the transition to real subsumption entails a qualitative shift in the organization of work, writing that "the movement from capital's subjection of society to the active prefiguration of society by capital involves, within it, the constitution of an increasingly high and intense degree of productive cooperation.... At this point, in order to exist, individual labour needs to be inserted into the framework of social labour

[and] collectivity is a necessary condition for work" (86). Because labor relations grow in complexity and scope until they are coextensive with the entirety of social relations, real subsumption hinges on the emergence of collective communications networks.

Autonomism has termed this late capitalist schema the "social factory." As Negri describes it, here "work abandons the [literal] factory in order to find, precisely in the social, a place adequate to the functions of concentrating productive activity and transforming it into value. The prerequisites of these processes are present in, and diffused throughout, society... [including] such infrastructures as communications networks" (89). This is to say that the present-day analogue of the Fordist factory's machines, which constitute fixed capital that needs living labor to animate it, is the matrix of technological and cultural assets that are activated by their collective users. Negri contends that, because communication is integral to economic labor, particularly the labor of subjectivity itself, late capitalism dictates that "every subject of this productive complex is caught up in overpowering cooperative networks" (77). So today's "*socialized worker*... is a producer, but not only a producer of value and surplus value; s/he is also *the producer of the social cooperation necessary for work*" (80), that is, a producer of the collective conditions of production as well as of products themselves. Autonomists understand labor power within this system in terms of Marx's concept of the "general intellect," amounting to knowledge -- particularly scientific knowledge, the burgeoning significance of which we now recognize as the information economy. Paulo Virno reconfigured this idea away from what Marx conceived of "as a scientific objectified capacity, as a system of machines" (65), arguing that "the connection between knowledge and production is not at all exhausted within the system of machines; on the

contrary, it articulates itself in... formal and informal knowledge, imagination, ethical propensities, mindsets, and 'linguistic games'... thoughts and discourses which function as productive 'machines'" (106). Virno asserts that, in order for late capitalism to function, "it is necessary that a part of the *general intellect* not congeal as fixed capital but unfold in communicative interaction" (65), thus mandating that the workforce retain a degree of autonomy from objectification and rationalization. This notion of an "intellectuality of the masses," in Virno's words, is akin to what some thinkers today evangelize as "collective intelligence": the idea that a group of organisms can form a symbiosis that is more productive than the sum of their individual knowledge and labor power. From a Marxist perspective, "collective intelligence" is prescribed by the late capitalist economic network, an artifact of its subsumption of all spheres of sociality. However, this does not imply that labor is always fully subservient to capitalist demands.

According to Virno, a consequence of the transition to the social factory is that, in contrast to the Fordist model that divided labor from leisure (when the worker might "read the newspaper, go to the local party headquarters, think, have conversations"), there is now no "threshold separating labor time from non-labor time... since the 'life of the mind' is included fully within the time-space of production, an essential homogeneity prevails" (103). Because a wage is now the only distinguishing factor, Virno suggests "it could be said that: unemployment is non-remunerated labor and labor, in turn, is remunerated unemployment" (103). Think of this in terms of fan production: setting aside the massive scale of the television industry, the activities of paid and unpaid creative workers are not functionally different. Fans research, write, film, edit, and discuss media stories, often with a high level of skill and dedication, while professionals

assert their own fannish credibility by conveying the impression that they work for fun. As labor becomes increasingly nebulous and omnipresent, expanding to encompass all social and subjective activity, "the productive cooperation in which labor-power participates is always larger and richer than the one put into play by the labor process... Labor-power increases the value of capital only because it never loses its qualities of non-labor" (Virno 103). This ecology generates challenges, in turn, for capitalist expropriation.

Among these challenges is the problem of effectively siphoning off surplus value when work is diffuse. As Negri puts it: "Value exists wherever social locations of working cooperation are to be found and wherever accumulated and hidden labour is extracted from the turgid depths of society. This value is not reducible to a common standard. Rather, it is excessive... [so] we must abandon the illusory notion of measurement" (91-92). The Nielsen company's measurement of television ratings, for example, has been pushed toward an assortment of experimental metrics that aim to capture the "excessive" value of subjectivity and collectivity. Among them is 2007's *Hey! Nielsen*, "a new online social community, with... features such as ratings (like Q Ratings), the ability to submit opinions and comments, to connect and to create a network of recommenders.... Its goal is to get fans rating, reviewing and blogging about their favorite shows, movies and stars" (MacDermid). By creating a social networking website in an attempt to mine qualitative data in communicative form, Nielsen acknowledges the unruly, unquantifiable character of late capitalism's immaterial commodities. The reporter quotes Nielsen executive Peter Blackshaw, who says that "understanding passion is the next frontier of market research... we are paying very close attention to the root

drivers and nuances around this level of emotion-charged consumer engagement." Because affective and subjective labor are now the foremost axes of value, Virno proposes that the culture industry occupies a privileged place in this regime:

> [it] is an industry among others... [but] it also plays the role of *industry of the means of production*. Traditionally, the industry of the means of production is the industry that produces machinery and other instruments to be used in the most varied sectors of production. However, in a situation in which the means of production are not reducible to machines but consist of linguistic-cognitive competencies inseparable from living labor... [t]he culture industry produces (regenerates, experiments with) communicative procedures, which are then destined to function also as means of production (61)

Mass media and entertainment are effectively a machine shop for the social factory, furnishing the equipment for immaterial laborers within a communicative network. Autonomism's pivotal argument is that this labor, which is necessarily collective in organization and ubiquitous in scope, is not simply absorbed without resistance into the smooth space of capitalism, but rather negotiated through a process of struggle with capitalism's perpetually insufficient procedures.

2 / "THE OFFICIAL SOCIAL NETWORK"

Much of the existing academic work on *The L Word*'s fan intensities might be fruitfully informed by this theoretical perspective, and this project is likewise informed by recent analyses. Amy Villarejo evokes the excess value enumerated above when she proposes that we "imagine TV as a site of transcoding, where that commodity that is our collective attention is bought and sold (this is, after all, what ratings measure, and what advertisers and networks trade), but where we as spectators also are not entirely equivalent to that commodity" (389). Villarejo reiterates that, in an era when "capital has

been invested at an affective level... [the] labor of the production, circulation, and manipulation of affect... becomes crucial" (391). Because this affective juncture has oriented marketing to minority desires, she asserts that "queer studies needs rigorous economic analysis and intervention into audience research... that can redress the so-called 'research' undertaken by market studies and polling groups who benefit from overemphasizing the riches of the gay market" (396). *The L Word* is a prime example of these tactics of homonormative commodification, and Villarajo writes that the program "is a melodrama for a digital age... [with an] overt sense of a network or set of ties among strangers [that] comes in an early drawing Alice makes of the web that emerges from Shane's sexual life" (398) -- that is, the Chart. Through this trope, "characters' movement between home and work, family and friends, invokes some of the material of lesbian life that has been central to lesbians' political aims, only to defuse that material or transcode it into this loosely-defined sense of 'connection' that is the series' most apt figure" (399). In other words, the Chart is among the media enabling the market logic that renders lesbian identity as commodity rather than as political affinity. For Villarejo, the transition to digital television is a key element in this emerging configuration but, by the same token, "digital television, with its expanded spectrum and hundreds of offerings, has already taught us, I want to argue, how to juggle multiple realities, divergent stories, and not just at the level of what is on television" (402). Thus, convergence furnishes a set of conditions that facilitate capitalist expropriation of a "gay market," but these same conditions provide the ground for queer disruptions of this trend.

Michele Aaron also references today's media transformations when she observes that, in the case of *The L Word*, "the actual airing of the show becomes just one way in

which it is experienced, or bought into, by a queer audience" (66). She therefore suggests an "extraterrestrial avenue" for queer TV studies that takes as its object "this queer community and discourse generated by but existing beyond the analogue... forged via other media (satellite, cable, the internet) and... linked to the television programme from which it originates, [while] it also operates independently of it" (66). This provisional independence could be associated with the ways that "visual pleasure... engages our desire for, or to be, on-screen characters counter to our 'normal' sexual orientation" (70), and Aaron advises that, following psychoanalytic film theory, "television must be reconsidered, therefore, for its potential influence on subject formation" (71) if we are to understand the significance of "extraterrestrial" formations. M. Catherine Jonet and Laura Anh Williams likewise urge us toward more complex models of reception, offering a counterpoint to the many scathing criticisms of *The L Word*'s imposition of normative identities. In their view, "*The L Word* is a 'restive' text" (153): due to its "conflicting impetuses of representational insufficiency and recuperation... [its] representation of lesbians and queer women will always be insufficient. It will never achieve the 'truth,' authenticity, or even the 'inside glimpse'" (155). Rather than regarding the program's relentless claims to authenticity as an unyielding ideological tactic, that is, Jonet and Williams imply that their inevitable failure opens onto an ambivalent terrain that is fertile for queer readings. These articles thus advance a precarious understanding of *The L Word*'s commodified viewer and an optimistic outlook on the possibilities of queer engagement.

Candace Moore has worked on *The L Word* screening parties (plus OurChart.com's "virtual" version) as "peripheral sites of production, where queer female

consumers become incorporated into the production process (through audience surveillance and interaction) and where lines between private/public, producer/consumer, and insider/outsider are blurred" (126). She notes once again "the unquantifiable nature of television consumption and fandom... [g]iven OnDemand, DVRs, TV-on-DVD, online viewing technologies, as well as group screenings" (127) and suggests that one motivation behind OurChart.com, like Nielsen's social network, is veiled market research. While "queer female cyber-identities are 'charted' (i.e. organized) on the site, and thus made ever more accessible to Viacom, the conglomerate that owns Showtime Networks, as a market demographic," it is equally true that identity is not so easily rationalized, since here "anyone can declare him- or herself a 'lesbian,' or indeed a 'friend of'" (134). So if Moore is realistic about the retrenchment of capitalist logics animating *The L Word*'s show of involvement with its fan community, she concludes that the program is nonetheless "dependent upon fan identification, recognition, and at least partial belief in the notions of identity and community which the show founds itself upon and also 'works on'... [and thus] is also predicated on the fan culture it has promulgated" (136). This negotiation between fan communities and the media industry is endemic to late capitalism, and given that both sides have their share of power in this milieu, the outcome of mediations between capital and fan laborers is far from a foregone conclusion.

As a corollary, though, Kelly Kessler emphasizes that capital is rapidly adapting its strategies of containment to optimize the burgeoning gay media market. "As corporations take control of fansites through pimped-out network/studio/label-sponsored sites," she writes, "an increased level of policing of fan art/fiction/chat/use of images or

texts seems to work to limit types of fan activity.... Increased visibility seems to be exchanged for complicity in a vision most conducive to the studios'/labels'/corporations' own economic or ideological goals" (Kessler). This trend was very much in evidence at OurChart.com, where "Showtime took a site once more focused on individual fan postings on random topics [official and unofficial message boards] and molded it to one that foregrounds characteristics seen [as] desirable by dominant culture, the economic imperatives of the culture industry, and the very characteristics of the show critiqued by fans." Corralling the fandom within a corporate framework entailed, in particular, that "the network-sponsored site erase[d] the butch, the bi, the trans, the working class, the Midwestern or rural, all in favor of creating a largely idealized and perhaps marketable (to both men and women) image of lesbianism." Once again, however, these problematic dynamics did not necessarily go unchallenged. Humorist Kim Ficera raises one obvious objection to OurChart's attempt to commodify intimate networks as so much market data. When it was introduced onscreen, she recalls, "we saw ourselves in the Chart," but in addition to the thrill of recognition "we were reminded of exactly how incestuous our sexual behaviors are" (112). The Chart is haunting in its insinuation that "our exes -- four, five or sixty times removed -- aren't really removed at all, but rather re-posited [sic] into a familiar lesbian landscape... [because] one thing the lesbian world isn't is *Large*" (112-13). "Uncomfortable sexual connections are made every day -- that's life," Ficera opines -- "But we really don't need to keep a record of them" (114). This acknowledgement, however oblique, of the contentious power relations of archives indicates that queer subjectivities cannot simply be translated into online databases without resistance. There are certainly losses when an "official social network" is

superimposed onto a fan community, but there is also lossiness (as in data decay): noise and tension that belie doomsday scenarios of total subsumption by capital. I hope that my case study of *The L Word*'s fan-driven internet promotions extends these analyses of their contingent and ambivalent character by offering a theoretical scaffold for the labor negotiations in progress.

3 / FRIENDS PLUS

The implementation of the "chart" on OurChart.com materializes the many contradictions and insufficiencies that delineate *The L Word*'s ideology of commodity lesbianism. Much like the program itself, the website must find an equilibrium between appealing to its niche fan base and to mainstream users and companies. But where the TV series titillates to attract straight male viewers (among others), OurChart.com takes an opposing tack: desexualizing its lesbian orientation in order to render it as a palatable assortment of consumer positions encompassing popular culture, chic style, and liberal politics. With unusual coyness for an *L Word* tie-in, the venture is billed as a "site where women can connect" ("About Us"), thus sidestepping queer sex by emphasizing an assumed gender stability that erases male and transgender fans. In keeping with the franchise's signature circularity, season 5 episodes recapitulated criticisms similar to these, commenting self-referentially on the development of the existing OurChart.com. In the season premiere, Alice (now an executive of the fictional OurChart, just as actress Leisha Hailey is a partner in the actual site) films an installment of her video podcast "Alice in Lesbo Land." Her interview with Phyllis Kroll (Cybill Shepherd), a middle-aged woman who has recently come out, is an occasion for a didactic review of some of

the lesbian buzzwords ("stone butch," "vanilla," "trannies") that comprise the social network's lingua franca. However Max, who is behind the camera, questions the status of this common idiom, arguing with Alice about the eponymous "our" when his transgender identity comes up:

> **Alice:** I feel like we're getting a little off-topic here for OurChart.
>
> **Max:** Why is it off-topic?
>
> **Alice:** Well, I mean, OurChart is for lesbians.
>
> **Max:** I thought OurChart is for everybody. It's *our* chart, doesn't that suggest it's inclusive?

When Max then posts about his gender transition on OurChart "to educate people" [Figure 7], he angers Alice as well as his fellow bloggers, who continue to insist that it's a "lesbian space." By presenting this fabricated outrage over the boundaries of "lesbian" as originating from users themselves, *The L Word* disavows its own role in perpetuating and even constructing transgender exclusion while backhandedly reinforcing the impression that the site is for women only. And when Alice grudgingly concedes that Max can continue writing a featured blog, it appears as if OurChart simply offers a neutral forum where the lesbian community can air existing tensions rather than acknowledging how the site might aggravate those tensions. This fictional narrative thus enables *The L Word* to inoculate the real life OurChart.com against charges of discrimination.

Nowhere is the gap between OurChart.com's claims and its capabilities more stark than in the failure of its hyperbolic promise to tell you who has hooked up with whom (which, according to the program's diegetic logic, has been the Chart's primary impetus all along). Ficera's intuitive skepticism about the database project seems to prefigure its technocultural limitations, and these deficits are compounded by a conflict between the

sexual archive concept and the site's move to advance a desexed brand of lesbianism. On *The L Word*, OurChart's imaginary interface is portrayed as a navigable visualization of its entire user-generated record of intimate entanglements. On OurChart.com, by contrast, "friend" connections conveyed no more information than they would on a typical online social network (send anyone a request, whatever your relationship may be, and they choose whether to approve it), and the Flash animation of its "chart" could only display about fifty of one user's friends in isolation [Figure 8]. In a minor concession to the original idea, a second type of connection was added later, dubbed "friends plus." The site defined this modality in the vaguest possible terms, with no mandate that it involve a sexual entanglement:

> We've created friends plus for everyone who's more-than-just-a-friend: exes, one-night stands, long-term partners, and any other players in your own personal dyke drama. Ever been secretly in love with your best friend? Kept up an intense relationship with an ex? Found yourself in a group of girls who've all slept with each other? Been out with a girl but weren't sure you were on a date? So have we. All of these are your friends plus.

Now, there is a certain radical quality to this open-ended articulation of community, in that it doesn't privilege the expected forms of coupling over more ephemeral interpersonal bonds. But in the context of OurChart.com, this cloud of intimacy functions as a smokescreen for the site's one-dimensional interest in reifying profitable lesbian identity at any of these nodes. Whatever axes of their relationships users might wish to chart, OurChart.com engineered its equivalence between lesbian network and internet network to operate far better ideologically than technologically, at least as far as the "chart" graphics are concerned. The notion of the Chart is a pivotal device in *The L Word*'s framing discourses, but its instantiation in OurChart.com demonstrates that it acts

as an alibi, an ideal of connection for the purpose of community building that masks the franchise's investment in assembling an immaterial workforce in this virtual factory.

Because, in fact, despite OurChart.com's heavy reliance on professional content to impose a consistent tone, its users did work. The site's social network was a lively one, with plenty of conversations, opinions, friendships, and no doubt hookups being forged beyond its "celesbian" encounters with *The L Word* stars. By way of comparison, the offerings in *The L Word* fan fiction are strikingly sparse at the usual online venues for *Law & Order: SVU* or *Battlestar Galactica* femslash (LiveJournal and standalone archives, for example; note that there are around 200 stories for *The L Word* vs. thousands for the other programs at {http://fanfiction.net/tv/}). But at OurChart.com, the fan fiction thread numbered among many active forum topics [Figure 9], and creativity seemed to thrive under the auspices of the official brand. We could speculate that this idiosyncratic pattern was elicited by the ostensible correspondence between the aspirations, culture, and sexuality of the viewers, characters, and producers of the series as "authentic" lesbians, and enhanced by its actors and executives' inviting attitude toward fans. While it is becoming more common for the entertainment industry to celebrate fan fiction in principle, the phenomenon still rarely garners direct acknowledgement or sponsorship due to its potential interference with brand integrity and control, making *The L Word* a notable exception. Because Showtime outsourced much of the labor of OurChart.com to its autonomous user base, the company could not guarantee that the subjectivities and discourses circulating there would conform to its intentions and interests. Certainly, Max's fictional invasion of this "lesbian space" raises the possibility that OurChart's construction of a static, homonormative lesbian identity along gender

lines might be challenged. But if any such challenges occurred under the banner (and literally, the logo) of *The L Word*, could these unruly connections offer any significant disruption to the expropriation of users' work? Much like the reflexive incorporation of fans' objections into the program itself, any unexpected, creative, critical, or even outright rebellious moments that erupted on OurChart.com play into the impression that the site was an authentic reflection of and platform for lesbian community. In an era of real subsumption, simply by following the edict to "be subjects" -- to desire, communicate, and invest immaterial commodities with meaning -- fans are performing lesbianism as labor in accordance with *The L Word*'s teachings. The crucial fault line in this capitalist monolith, however, is that OurChart.com does not capture the whole of this labor and its value: subjectivity is productive in excess of what a corporate schema can rationalize. In the next section, I will locate the tensions and antagonisms that this excess can generate within fandom's queer economy.

C / Archive Wars: FanLib vs. OTW

In contrast to the relatively harmonious deployment of OurChart.com as a user-generated, fan-driven, for-profit corporate promotion, new media marketing company FanLib's dramatic descent into infamy stands as an object lesson in unsuccessful exploitation of fan labor. Beginning in 2003, the start-up licensed custom software for running online fan writing contests to entertainment concerns including HarperCollins Publishers and Showtime. In addition to these commissioned projects, FanLib launched a commercial fan fiction archive in 2007, offering its industry partners the opportunity for "integrated customized marketing... capitalizing on existing communities around media"

(Nicole). To build interest in the site, the company issued flattering invitations to visible influencers and prolific writers in fandom, but, as the people they courted started investigating the business behind the emails, the sense that it was instigated by outsiders and motivated by profit quickly raised hackles. Henry Jenkins summarized the facts that emerged in this grassroots probe, which sent FanLib's image and credibility among their target users into a downward spiral:

> FanLib was emphatically not going to take any legal risks on behalf of the fans here, leaving the writers libel [sic] for all legal actions... all for the gift of providing a central portal where fans could go to read the "best" fan fiction as evaluated by a board of male corporate executives... [who] talked about making fan fiction available to "mainstream audiences," which clearly implied that the hundreds of thousands of fan fiction writers and readers now were somehow not "mainstream".... [T]hey over-reached in asserting their rights to control and edit what fans produced... [and finally] the company only made things worse for itself by responding to the criticism in ways which fans considered haphazard and patronizing... (Jenkins)

While FanLib was blundering its appeal to the established fan community, this community was organizing to publicize its objections, reassert its values, and advocate for its interests. On LiveJournal, a group called "Life Without Fanlib" was soon set up to track the issue and host a firestorm of discussion. According to FanLib's behind-the-scenes promotional materials, they promised to "Produce consumer-generated media that is ready for the marketplace. The result: More value for marketers, more manageability for producers" (McNamara) (corporate rather than fan producers, that is). Yet the company found that it was not as effortless to commodify, monetize, and manage this surplus labor as they had speculated.

To FanLib, the vast commons of freely exchanged fanworks perhaps appeared as if it simply lacked a businessperson with the savvy to privatize it. But in fact, creative

fandom has a rich tradition of conceptualizing its labor in ways that reject financial profit as a criterion for value. For this reason, fan production is often understood as a women's "gift economy" or, in the words of Karen Hellekson, a "gendered space that relies on the circulation of gifts... that deliberately repudiates a monetary model (because it is gendered male)... to permit performance of gendered, alternative, queered identity" (116). This stance is practical as well as principled, because "at the heart of this anticommercial requirement of fan works is fans' fear that they will be sued by producers of content for copyright violation" (114) -- particularly if they seek financial compensation for their work. Abigail De Kosnik has advocated against this position, writing that, since "FanLib will not be the last attempt to commodify fan fiction" (119), fans risk "waiting too long to decide to profit from their innovative art form, and allowing an interloper to package the genre in its first commercially viable format" (120) -- or even worse, "fan fiction may not be monetized at all... [and] only the corporate owners of the media properties that fic authors so creatively elaborate on will see economic gain" (124). The two sides of this debate seem to claim, respectively, that creative fandom is threatened by capitalist procedures like payment or that it is threatened by *not* accommodating these procedures. I would counter that, in either scenario, fans work and profit from their work in some way (remember that the wage no longer defines productive labor), and the crucial question is not whether this work is financially compensated but whether the conditions of this labor are free and fair. In this view, all options would ideally be open to fan communities as they negotiate norms for a changing media ecology, and it is problematic if the industry precludes in advance either the preservation of a gift economy or the extraction of income (futures that are not mutually exclusive within the diversity of fan formations). Because

these negotiations are currently in process, Marxist analysis is critical to mediating today's struggles over fan labor.

In this regard, we can take a cue from Lilithilien, who posted "Workers of the World Unite: An Old School Marxist Analysis of FanLib vs. Fandom" in "Life Without FanLib." She asserts that, according to Marx,

> capitalism deprives our work from being the expression of our creativity and self-realization.... This is what FanLib wants to do with fan-created stories.... The only use they have for stories (their "value proposition," as they keep saying) is as products to be utilized and commodified. In this effort, we are merely workers in their fanfic factory. This is pure and simple fetishization -- the rewards FanLib offers are a stand in for what we (or at least some of us) really want: good stories to read, a receptive audience for what we write, and a place where our creativity and uniqueness is valued. (Lilithilien)

For Lilithilien, that is, there is more at stake in the expropriation of fan labor than whether or not fans are the ones reaping the profits. She urges us to consider what may be lost if fanworks are reified as commodities and the value of fan communities is mystified so that it appears to be commercial rather than social. Before fans either reject or embrace capitalism's terms for participation in the media economy, then, we should assess our structural position within this system as workers. FanLib's emphasis on "mainstreaming" fan fiction evokes the multiple axes of domination that constrain working conditions, and the normative assumptions of the "mainstream" seemed to persist unmarked in the company's willful ignorance of their repugnance to many fans. These assumptions include equivalences between market price and value, between value and public recognition, and between recognition and hierarchical authority, and, as Hellekson suggests, they are entangled with patriarchal and heteronormative coordinates of gender and sexuality. One of FanLib's ads vividly illustrates the clash with the

feminist and queer ethos that delineates the fan fiction subculture in question: the "Pink Guy/Blue Dude" image [Figure 10], which figured "Life without Fan Fiction" as a skinny, nerdy boy and "Fan Fiction at FanLib.com" as a muscular, shirtless man, implied that FanLib's corporate model masculinizes an activity that is otherwise markedly effeminate. This offended a predominantly female community that nurtures alternative and perverse expressions of gender and sexuality, raising ire at the insinuation that FanLib's macho brand of commodification is the only legitimate way to envision fanfic. Fandom's response was to form, through grassroots mobilization online, a non-profit organization with the mission of protecting the self-valorization of this anticommercial, egalitarian commons (a project I will explore in section C/3). As for FanLib, their archive was shut down in prelude to a buyout by Disney in 2008 (Ali), no doubt rendering them a success in their terms whether or not the site was able to recoup its $3 million in venture capital, which seems unlikely (Cygnet). In order to untangle the competing conceptions of fan labor embodied in FanLib and *The L Word*'s promotions versus a subcultural gift economy, I will now turn to Marxist theories of the antagonism between workers and capital.

1 / ANTAGONISM

The emerging struggles of late capitalism, including fans' negotiations over compensation and ownership in the context of convergence, bear little resemblance to the class struggles of traditional Marxism. For what was once a revolutionary theory, the disintegration of any effective framework for mass resistance has been conspicuous, and today Marx's predictions that capitalism would inevitably collapse under the strain of its

own contradictions ring hollow. Autonomist Marxism relocates resistance in the constitutive autonomy of the immaterial laborer, who works within collective networks and through subjective communication that cannot be fully rationalized or contained. We might envisage fan communities, for instance, in Negri's assurance that "during the course of capitalist development, there have always existed gaps -- partially in the sphere of circulation -- which are independent of direct capitalist control. In these gaps, certain use-values have been defined, and sometimes, communities which are rooted in such values have come into existence" (98). Today, workers' "antagonism which has never ceased to exist" (84) gathers new intensity "by virtue of the socialized worker's independence" and "*capacity to reappropriate control of the labour process*" (85). Moulier's introduction to Negri's book summarizes the fundamental doctrine of Autonomism, which harmonizes with other poststructuralist formulations of resistance from within: "On a theoretical level *operaismo* affirms the internal and structural limits of capitalism's capacity for integration. For *operaismo* in fact, the working class must certainly be *within* capital, but above all *against* it, otherwise capital could no longer function. Therefore the unilateral domination of capitalist control can never obtain. Subversion and revolution constitute a permanent possibility which lies at the very heart of the system" (25). This viewpoint is conceptually seductive, but suffers some of the same difficulties as Marx's original hypothesis, in that it seems to assume subversion as an automatic function of immaterial labor, with little attention to the specific praxis that might constitute cohesive antagonism as opposed to reincorporation. In his analysis of Lazzarato, Alberto Toscano suggests that the reconstitution of the idea of a general intellect "is in a sense an attempt to prolong the autonomist belief in the priority of

productive or constructive resistance over its capture by the mechanisms of power and its reproduction, a way of thinking cooperation as prior to and relatively independent from capitalist self-valorization... it might be worth pausing to question the almost unbridled optimism of this thesis" (79). In answer to this provocation, I pause here to scrutinize the Autonomist concept of antagonism more closely.

I turn to Jason Read for the most trenchant and measured synthesis of this position, which effectively mediates between the optimistic and pessimistic poles of the Marxist continuum. Read opens with an acknowledgement that, today, "it is more and more clear that the world is made and transformed by the immense productive powers of labor, which produce not only the wealth of objects but also the knowledge, affects, and desires that constitute the lived world, and yet capital's domination of this productive power seems to me more and more entrenched" (15). His book is an attempt to puzzle out this apparent contradiction between intensifying "subjectification" and "subjection," that is, "between the total subjection of sociality and subjectivity to capital and the concomitant development of a subjective and social power irreducible to abstract labor" (119). Read argues that we should understand the antagonism intrinsic to this contradiction not as a by-product of capitalist domination, but as the very productive force driving capitalist development toward real subsumption, as Marx chronicled in his account in *Capital* of the proletarian struggle to shorten the length of the working day. Following Marx, Read theorizes that "the technological and social transformations of the capitalist mode of production are neither the pure product of capitalism nor of resistance to capitalism but rather are formed by the antagonistic interplay of their competing strategies: capitalist strategies to expand surplus value and the workers' strategies to

expand needs and desires" (111). He thus posits the coextensivity of expanding techniques of both domination and resistance as a defining characteristic of the capitalist system.

Our contemporary circumstances are no different, and "subjection too produces, or at least makes possible, its own resistances.... The subjection/subjectification of living labor does not resolve the basic antagonism of living labor but, rather, displaces it" (144). Late capitalism brings an amplification of this dynamic, however, because "as real subsumption penetrates all social relations, it increasingly puts to work forms of social knowledge that it neither owns nor directly controls" (133). Building on the Autonomist assessment of today's configuration of immaterial laborers in the social factory, Read observes that, "in continually stressing the active participation of living labor and of cooperative networks" (149), industry "produces fixed capital not as machinery but in the subjectivity of the worker... [which] exists and is produced outside of the temporal and spatial control of the capitalist" (130). In other words, as subjection under capitalism escalates, so too does the capacity of subjectification to subvert and exceed its limits. Read's analysis doesn't solve the crisis of advanced Marxism by offering a coherent revolutionary program: his instantiation of resistance remains rather abstract. Yet we must acknowledge that his teleology is different from Marx's -- at issue is not the overthrow of capitalism, but collective interventions in its evolution that wrest control of greater degrees of freedom, creativity, and justice. By continuing to pry open the cracks in capitalism's containment of labor power, we can pressure it to innovate toward increasing accommodation of autonomous subjectivities. The concept of antagonism frames laborers, including fans, as a collectivity whose desires are not commensurate

with those of a corporate system, and this alone is a crucial corrective to the prevailing understanding of convergence culture.

At this point it may seem warranted to investigate another axis of antagonism that is often absent from studies of fan production: namely, queer theories of political action. I view sexuality as integral to the femslash fandoms with which I'm concerned with in this project, and admittedly, the aspiration to preserve such queer subcultures in the midst of transformations in our media economies animates my inquiry. Many scholars have analyzed the homonormativity at work in constituting the ideal "gay" (as opposed to queer) consumer for neoliberal capitalism (most notably Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner) and mounting a critique of *The L Word* on this front is a worthy endeavor. Within a framework that claims subjectivity and collectivity as productive for capitalism, however, I am not convinced that queerness is the sine qua non of resistance, despite my own emphasis on the potential of open erotic fan communities. On the side of skepticism, Rosemary Hennessy conducts a trenchant indictment of a trend she calls "avant-garde queer theory," exemplified by such thinkers as Michael Warner, Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Gayle Rubin, and David Halperin (54). In *Profit and Pleasure*, she positions this nexus as part of the intellectual heritage of a "pervasive ideological mandate to disconnect sexuality from capitalist production" (37) that has plagued Marxist thought since Engels's "historical inability to understand the role of domestic labor in capitalist production" (41) in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State.* This blind spot was exacerbated by psychoanalytic attempts to materialize sexuality, beginning with Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse, who ultimately "contend that sexuality originates in innate instinctual drives... [so it] remains

in fundamental ways outside the social order" (42). After "a short-lived but vital willingness to make use of Marxism as a critical framework to link sexual oppression to global capitalism" (45-46) on the part of the Gay Left in the 1970s was frustrated by "the intractable refusal of many of the existing socialist groups to meaningfully address sexuality" (49), the rise of cultural studies meant that the "retreat from Marxism and alternative rush to Foucauldian materialism virtually dominated the analysis of sexuality" (49). This paved the way for the maturation of queer theory in the 1990s which, following the early prominence of a "textual approach to identity as signification" (53), came of age with a turn to cultural materialism, most significantly by the "avant-garde" theorists listed above.

Hennessey makes a crucial distinction between these resolutely post-Marxist cultural materialists and Marxist historical materialists: the former, while they may discuss capitalism and class relations, are finally "founding their conceptions of materiality only in symbolic processes [which] means that social struggle, or what they call antagonism, is anchored only in the sign" (61). This school of thought unfairly rejects the Marxist approach as necessarily totalizing, when in fact "historical materialism understands social life to be historically and materially produced through relations of labor... [but not] without the ways of making sense, normative practices (culture-ideology), and the laws (state organization) that are part of the material production of social life" (59). The danger of the cultural materialist orientation, according to Hennessy, is that its political program will amount to "a left sexual politics" that focuses on "civil rights within capitalism" (67). A case in point is that the "porous, gender-flexible, and playful subjects" celebrated by avant-garde queer theory are easily adapted

to "postindustrial economies [that] increasingly require a high-tech systems management consciousness that knows that identity, like knowledge, is performative" (68). Given that "since the late nineteenth century the growth of consumer culture has depended on the formation and continual retooling of a desiring subject" (69), desire does not stand outside capitalism and ground resistance in and of itself. Instead of a politics of perversions, performance, and polysemy, Hennessey calls for "a ruthless interruption of the often less visible relations of labor that have made use of dominant as well as counter-hegemonic sexual identities" (68). On this basis, I will set aside, for the purposes of this chapter, queer theory's analyses of how particular normative subjectivities (including heterosexuality and homosexuality) are constructed by capitalism in opposition to queer counterpublics, and ask rather how queer forms of desire sustain the economy of immaterial labor while also exceeding its bounds.

Kevin Floyd's work suggests one avenue for situating this virtual excess within the intrinsic contradictions of capitalism, while proposing (more magnanimously than Hennessy) a potential detente between Marxism and queer theory -- despite noting, once again, that the former has been notoriously insensate to issues of sexuality. While their theory is deeply involved with subjectivity and the economic role of reproductive labor, the Autonomists have hardly been an exception in this regard, despite interventions in the 1970s by important but largely peripheral Italian feminist Marxists Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Leopoldina Fortunati. In his book *The Reification of Desire: Toward a Queer Marxism*, Floyd argues that we could read recent developments in queer theory, characterized by intersectionality and a refusal to particularize and compartmentalize sexuality from other dimensions of cultural experience, as converging with Marxism on

the basis of a shared concern with social totality. He posits that today, "the ever more complex internal differentiation of capitalist social relations, in particular a reification of sexual desire" (197) has paradoxically set the stage for new forms of "queer worldmaking," or, "the production of historically and socially situated, bounded totalities of queer praxis inherently critical of the ultimately global horizon of neoliberalized capital" (199). Floyd observes that political economists (including Harvey) describe capitalism as a system constantly troping toward crisis due to its "constant tendency to undermine the very institutional preconditions that ensure the prospects for additional accumulation" (34). Given this "fundamental social volatility that capital's objective contradictions consistently produce... socially broad, historically conditioned strategies [are] necessary to keep crisis at bay" (34). While Fordism, he claims, was "highly dependent on the corporate and governmental construction of a certain kind of social stability... the breakup of Fordism... makes accumulation increasingly dependent on social *instability*" (195). This instability can furnish the conditions of possibility for "socially subordinate, historically conditioned publics defined by critical practices and knowledges inseparable from the labor of sustaining these publics" (208). However, Floyd also sees in this transition a worrying "dispersal of a queer population... as part of a more general strategy of population dispersal, a strategy that has among its objectives neutralizing the forms of collective praxis of which such populations are capable, privatizing collectivity itself out of existence" (204). Now, Autonomist Marxism would assert precisely the opposite, emphasizing that late capitalism's labor regime requires communicative networks and autonomous collective action. Without necessarily embracing this optimism, queer Marxisms would benefit from an engagement with

Autonomism's sophisticated account of subjectivity's intimate relation to capitalism, particularly its framing of antagonism as constitutive of this relation. Like queer desires, antagonism is situated inside the horizon of capitalism, and I propose that queer desires can in fact be an aspect of antagonism.

2 / YOU WRITE IT!

The media industry's emerging strategies to valorize an established reservoir of fan labor perfectly complement their late capitalist context. However, the subsumption of subjectivities and communities with relatively autonomous traditions under a corporate regime generates new antagonisms that demand delicate control. In the case of *The L Word*, the most heavily engineered expropriation of fan production was a series of user-generated writing contests. Showtime launched this marketing campaign in 2006 with a scheme to prompt a complete "fanisode" (faux television script), contracting the aforementioned company FanLib to design and run the web-based competition as one of the start-up's earliest projects {http://web.archive.org/web/20060831222949/ http://lword.fanlib.com/}. For this initial contest, a member of *The L Word*'s creative team prepared a storyboard that filled in a diegetic gap of several months between the events of seasons 3 and 4, providing descriptions of the individual scenes that would make up an imaginary episode. Participants then voted for their favorite of the user submissions that realized each segment, and finally the winners were awarded prizes and their scenes were assembled into a downloadable PDF version of the final script [Figure 11]. This successful venture garnered a mention in *The Wall Street Journal*'s article about the transformation of fan fiction from a "fringe pursuit" to one that "helps unknown

authors find mainstream success" (Jurgensen). FanLib shares this assumption that fans' labors of love have the same goals, motivations, standards, and economies as professional authorship -- although in their business model, it is the corporation rather than the creators who will reap the profits. Since the "fanisode" wasn't intended for television production, we might speculate that it was organized in script format (as opposed to inviting more familiar prose fan fiction) precisely to appeal to aspiring screenwriters with polished skills.

Whether we read this move as nurturing or mercenary, it follows that certain expectations for a lesbian community of creative professionals are part of the impetus for *The L Word*'s FanLib promotions. In the introduction to the PDF 'zine that resulted from the "fanisode," Chaiken celebrated *The L Word*'s fans, who "came at us enthusiastically with your reactions, your objections, your ideas, passions, preferences and opinions as to whether or not we were adequately and authentically representing the way that we live" ("*The L Word*: A Fanisode"). From the perspective of this politics of representation, which idealizes transparent portrayals *of* and *by* this categorical "we," encouraging involvement with corporate media-making among *The L Word*'s presumptively lesbian audience is necessary to the project of lesbian visibility. However, as we've seen, the price of this brand of visibility is to render lesbian identity as a reified commodity that can be packaged and sold, not only by professionals but by each contest participant and each OurChart.com member. The feminist utopia of an "old girls network," wherein mentorship leads to success within mainstream industries, here butts up against the converse heritage of fans' anticommercial systems of value and recognition. Chaiken says that the writing competitions were inspired by the fact that "the fans of *The L Word*

write a lot of fan fiction on their own" ("Meet Molly"), implying that submitting a scene in script form to a contest would have a comparable charm. But the majority of fan authors aren't professional hopefuls like *The Wall Street Journal*'s winning interviewee (who was, incidentally, the only straight man to place in the "fanisode"). Chaiken's equivalence effaces the autonomous norms of fandom's gift economy, which cultivates alternative modes of sharing the characters and stories that originate in the corporate media. Meanwhile, it disavows the financial considerations underlying this opportunity to give advertisers "an exclusive shot at *The L Word* fans, since Showtime is ad-free... [and] cut marketing costs... [because] fans... will write for next to nothing" (Fine). If, as *The Wall Street Journal* posits, "the rise of fan fiction is part of the spread of amateur-created content online... on sites such as YouTube and MySpace" (Jurgensen), we shouldn't expect ventures like FanLib's to negotiate the friction between capitalist mandates and "amateur" subcultures with any more consideration than these other commercial platforms.

Chaiken's statement is from a promotional video on Showtime's official website that presents a later FanLib installment (dubbed "You Write It!"), featuring the lucky winner Molly as she claims her prize -- a visit to the set to see her contribution filmed [Figure 12]. "You Write It!" was structured similarly to the "fanisode," but its endgame made good on the promise of the script format by including the victorious submission in an actual television episode (much to the delight of Molly, who was indeed a screenwriting student). It also had more open-ended instructions: "Choose a scene from *The L Word* seasons 1 or 2 to rewrite as a scene from 'Lez Girls,' Jenny's thinly-veiled, fictional account of *The L Word* characters' lives." While inviting fan-written scripts may

imply a breakdown of the distinction between amateurs and professionals, this video's rhetoric emphatically reasserts the ideological gulf between fans and producers, quashing any intimation that fans' unpaid work could be afforded equal respect. The comments addressed to Molly, while well meaning, are starkly condescending, informing her of banal aspects of television production as if she didn't already have the knowledge to be a screenwriting success. The "You Write It!" contest was a perfect match with season 5's "Lez Girls," a movie-within-a-TV-show that campily remixed *The L Word*'s early seasons. Molly's scene earned its winning vote tally by enhancing these self-reflexive layers with a *Charlie's Angels* mashup, alluding to the history of lesbian viewing. In contrast to the discourses of "we" and "our" that characterize much of *The L Word*'s marketing, however, the turn to calling fans "you" highlights the restrictions on this openness to appropriation. Chaiken may profess an interest in "the way interactivity is taking over our lives" that is borne out in *The L Word*'s cutting-edge online promotions, but this provocation extends only as far as fan labor channels value into the lesbian brand -- because "you" work for free. Chaiken's outlook on the FanLib project both reflects and forwards this strategy, and like Jenny, Alice, or indeed Chaiken herself, Molly is an exemplar for fans' lessons in commodifying our passions.

3 / THE ARCHIVE OF OUR OWN

The cover of the "fanisode" 'zine features a photograph of *The L Word*'s cast posed around a bed frame on a deserted beach, draped in satiny, revealing garments, and staring vacantly out at their assumed audience. We could take this image as a metaphorical portrait of the network's vision of fan community: a neatly assembled,

perfectly groomed, politically isolated demographic frozen in their consumer rictus. In its online promotions, *The L Word* constantly reasserts its own simulacral portrayals as the coordinates of fan labor, demonstrating the limits of its gestures toward participatory engagement. Again, it is perhaps because of this insistent homology between purportedly lesbian diegetic, production, and audience worlds that *The L Word* fandom has a very different orientation from the two femslash fandoms discussed in previous chapters. While the program's viewers have been vocal in their celebrations, commentaries, and critiques, this productive expression seems to reverberate primarily within the closed circuit of Chaiken's authority, addressed hierarchically upward to its corporate pantheon. But as my other case studies have explored, media fandom manifests alternative aspirations to queer female community that more concertedly oppose schemes like the "official social network" that aim to corral desiring subjects in a virtual factory as immaterial workers. FanLib's gambit to harness creators' labor in a commercial archive foregrounded certain underlying constraints of online fandom, namely its reliance on websites and infrastructure controlled by corporations and on the tacit sanction of media conglomerates. As a response, a watershed LiveJournal post by Astolat called for "An Archive of One's Own" that could materialize fandom's values of autonomy, openness, collectivity and gifting in a platform owned and run by fans {http://astolat.livejournal.com/150556.html}. Her manifesto catalyzed a grassroots campaign to lay the groundwork for this project, headquartered in the LiveJournal community "fanarchive" (later renamed "otw_news"). This insurgency coalesced because it had become essential for the community to react not only to FanLib but to more widespread pressures on fandom's labor relations prompted by the industrial

innovations of convergence. Companies' escalating interest in exploiting productive subjectivities has thus met with resistance -- not necessarily to capitalism as a totality, but certainly to its unilateral imposition of new working conditions.

The consensus among fans active in the archive venture was that protecting their community's traditions of self-valorization would require a cultural and legal scaffold as well as a technological one. Barely a month after Astolat's provocation, a board of directors convened to plan the launch of a non-profit, the Organization for Transformative Works (OTW) {http://transformativeworks.org}, to advocate for the interests of fan producers. The OTW adopted a multi-pronged approach, wherein several distinct projects run by volunteer committees synergistically intervene in fandom's shift toward the mainstream, supporting established practices and representing them to outsiders. In addition to the archive itself, these projects comprise a wiki to chronicle subcultural lore {http://fanlore.org}, other efforts in historical preservation that include a partnership with Special Collections at the University of Iowa, a legal support network, and an academic journal, *Transformative Works and Cultures* (for which I have served on the editorial team). The organizing and unifying figure for these various stratagems is "legitimacy," as the opening of the OTW's mission statement pronounces: "We envision a future in which all fannish works are recognized as legal and transformative and are accepted as a legitimate creative activity" {http://transformativeworks.org/about/believe}. Legitimacy is an overdetermined ambition that permeates the undertaking on all levels, from the OTW's tactical emphasis on the legally defensible notion of transformation to its own bureaucratic structure, which furnishes the anarchic vastness of fandom with a reassuringly centralized facade. Alexis Lothian further observes that legitimacy

motivates the OTW's resolute affirmation of the anticommercial model of fandom, noting that the organization paradoxically "tries to protect fan communities by insisting that these [communities] are subcultural groupings constituted in support of capital... [and for] all its demonization of the for-profit fan archive sites, OTW is keen to point out how the fanworks they archive will continue to aid in others' profit" (Lothian). She is referring to passages from the Frequently Asked Questions, which states (under "Legal > Does the OTW support the commercialization of fanfic?") that the OTW aims "first and foremost to protect the fan creators who work purely for love and share their works for free within the fannish gift economy.... These fans create vibrant and active communities around the work they are celebrating, tend to spend heaps of money on the original work and associated merchandise, and encourage others to buy also. They are not competing with the original creator's work and if anything help to promote it" {http://transformativeworks.org/faq}. These assurances are strategically savvy on the part of a small-scale operation opposing corporate giants, but they demonstrate that the OTW's sphere of action is limited by its given economic conditions, and while it may confront many important injustices, capitalism is not among them.

As the OTW was taking shape amidst a ferment of agitated fans, its commitment to legitimation was not uncontroversial, and its stance on media fandom's gender politics was likewise contentious. The FAQ ambivalently pledges that "OTW values all fans, and the contributions made by fans of all genders. As the Organization grew out of a practice of transformative fanwork historically rooted in a primarily female culture, we also specifically value that history of women's involvement, and the practices of fandom shaped by women's work" (under "Organization for Transformative Works > Why do the

values and mission statements focus on female fans?"). This unique female-centric alignment was perceived by some as discordant with promises of "maximum inclusiveness" {http://archiveofourown.org/tos}, and predictably, it generated "wank," which Lothian defines as "online drama, arguments, and deeply silly conflicts that get out of control." She maintains that the slang term's more familiar connotation remains in play, though, because fandom's truculent wanking is enmeshed with its "sexualized exchange of explicit fiction among women that... not only resembles but often constitutes a kind of ephemeral sexual contact." In keeping with the erotics of fandom's conflict and creativity, the most notable aspect of the OTW's legitimation project is that, while it may willingly apply standards given by the law and the market to fan production, it refuses to concede to sexual normativity. On the contrary, the organization insists that its archive and other endeavors provide a reliable and permissive venue for the full range of perversions exhibited in fan fiction -- a range that is evident in the profusion of terms used to categorize stories. The Archive of Our Own (AO3) itself (which launched in October 2008 and reached open beta in November 2009) offers optional warnings that include "rape/non-con" and "underage" plus a myriad of user-driven tags such as "BDSM... crossdressing... incest... sex pollen... [and] tentacles" {http://archiveofourown.org/tos_faq#content_faq}. In response to incidents like omnibus site http://fanfiction.net's decision to stop hosting sexually explicit stories in 2002 and LiveJournal's 2007 deletion of numerous journals and communities in Harry Potter fandom in a kiddie porn purge {http://fanlore.org/wiki/Strikethrough}, the AO3 vows to safeguard all fic without "illegal or inappropriate content" (as defined by basic rules prohibiting non-fanworks and spam) and never to remove it for "offensiveness"

{http://archiveofourown.org/tos#content}. Thus, as Lothian implies, the archive's most vulnerable content (sexually graphic works) and its context (a collective of women) harmonize to constitute a queer female labor formation.

The Archive of Our Own realizes a very different "our" from the homogeneous community represented by OurChart, but both configurations intersect with a feminist attention to professionalization. The archive's open source software platform was coded from scratch by a predominantly female volunteer team, many of whom had no prior programming experience. The undertaking was therefore an opportunity for women to be mentored in skills with high value in the digital economy, much as the "You Write It!" contest positioned the unpaid labor of fan fiction as training for a writing career. Between its infrastructure and its content, the AO3 exhibits the abundance of productive work that sustains fan communities. But in contrast to FanLib and Showtime's outlook, which is directed at monetizing fan labor within a corporate framework, the AO3 acknowledges its implication in late capitalism while nonetheless insisting on the value of amateurism and autonomy. A "chart" of its network structure would reveal intimate ties between women articulated through the erotics of creative production. I contend that this system is queer, but in an admittedly amorphous sense that resists capture in a reified demographic like OurChart's commodity lesbianism. The AO3's refusal of certain capitalist dictates may seem like a nominal gesture, but it is precisely this divergence between some of the interests of fans and some of the interests of industry that generates antagonism. In this case, it is an antagonism on behalf of queer desires, and this vantage constitutes a demand that workers determine their own working conditions for the labor of subjectivity and sexuality. Even while arguing that the gift economy is integral to the

capitalist economy, Terranova asserts that "free labour... is not necessarily exploited labour" (91); in its stand against exploitation, the Organization for Transformative works embodies a vital struggle within media convergence.

D / QUEER ECONOMIES

The conclusion to the saga of OurChart.com illustrates once again the vulnerability of fan communities when they rely on corporately controlled infrastructure, confirming the importance of efforts like the OTW's to advocate for the autonomy of fan labor. The site shut down abruptly in January 2009, vaporizing the contributions and connections created by its active network of users. In Chaiken's farewell blog entry, which gave one week's notice of the closure, she wrote that "Showtime is not only OurChart's parent but one of Our Community's greatest champions... that's why in our final season of *The L Word*, we've decided to combine forces and host OurChart on sho.com" (Gannon). This explanation was disingenuous, since hosting OurChart on Sho.com meant, in reality, that all the collectively generated content of the social network "chart" disappeared [Figure 13], and Sho.com now simply offered authorized tie-in content with token gestures of interactivity, such as "Q&A [with Chaiken]... behind-the-scenes podcasts... video specials... message boards... swag" and an "official" wiki. In a feeble attempt to continue a social media strategy, the star feature of Sho.com's OurChart page was a text box that allowed fans to post questions for Chaiken directly to an unmoderated twitter account, perhaps an inadvisable move since it was immediately inundated with exclamations of outrage by OurChart.com members [Figure 14]. Their outcry was in vain, however; public information about why the site folded was slim, but

it seems likely that, with *The L Word* entering its final season, the promotional value of OurChart.com was largely exhausted, and Showtime thus eliminated its funding (as in the case of FanLib's archive, it wasn't feasible for such an expensive venture to become self-supporting). The lesson for new media marketers is that, while fan communities encompass a wealth of productive labor, very little of this labor can be monetized directly. Only this profitable surplus is of interest to corporations, but it is subjective and collective desires in excess of this expropriation that sustain the dynamic productivity of fandom. Autonomy is thus vital to the very processes of valorization that the industry is increasingly eager to exploit. The lesson for fans is that, if we depend on proprietary platforms like OurChart.com, our creativity and community will remain at risk until we fully conform to capitalist dictates.

Chaiken's styling of "Our Community" as effectively her trademark points to an issue raised frequently in discussions of OurChart: the status of this "our." *The Wall Street Journal* speculated that the "stigma of slash" may be one factor that "has made some mainstream authors and TV networks wary of... looking for ways to capitalize on fan fiction and its large audience" (Jurgensen). In this context, the relationship of queer fan production to media convergence is embroiled in double binds: would "we" prefer to end up marginalized or assimilated, unpaid or commercialized, subculture or target market? One well founded fear that animates endeavors like the Organization for Transformative Works is that the "mainstreaming" of fan fiction may privilege and aggrandize heteronormative practices that are palatable to the industry while driving fandom's queerer traditions further underground. But *The L Word* is a test case for the opposite concern: what if the same-sex romances that populate slash are commodifiable

after all? As I've explored, the program deploys normative tactics across its textual and metatextual worlds in order to adapt lesbian identities to the ideological, demographic, and economic demands of corporate profit models. I would argue, however, that the fan labor *The L Word* attempts to reify as brand-name lesbianism is nonetheless queer labor. This is not to say that fanworks are necessarily queer in content -- even slash stories often express the same conservative conventions that tend to be represented on television. My claim is that we could conceptualize the labor of subjectification and desire, in form, as queer labor. This libidinal labor is pivotal to the entertainment industry since, as immaterial commodities, mass media products require their audiences to work to valorize them. In addition to the stakes of defining the "our" that echoes through market discourses, then, we might ask for whose interests "we" agitate from a Marxist, feminist, and/or queer perspective. Late capitalism's labor relations are far more enmeshed with gender and sexuality than Marxism has typically acknowledged, and it is vital that we reincorporate these dimensions into our analyses of work in the era of convergence.

My study of the *The L Word*'s onscreen and online mobilization of present-day working conditions is an exemplar of the trend toward commodifying queer labor, but it is not only in instances of gay media or gay fandom that we must consider this issue. Convergence as a whole is characterized by queer dynamics in its epistemologies (Chapter II), technologies (Chapter III), and economies, and fan production accentuates the inherent contradictions and instabilities of this capitalist system. If the value of media properties is produced by the immaterial labor of their consumers, in what sense do corporations own them? If today's social factory relies on autonomous networks of communicative subjects, how can corporations expropriate their work? Fandom is

scrambling to find its own answers to these questions, and despite the fact that fan labor is fundamentally integrated with capitalism, it is crucial to maintain some degree of disaffiliation between fan communities and commercial institutions. Queer female fan practices embody an opportunity to galvanize antagonism within the industrial transformations in progress, and understanding, engaging, and defending the autonomy of these collectives will, I argue, contribute to everyone's freedom to labor queerly.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

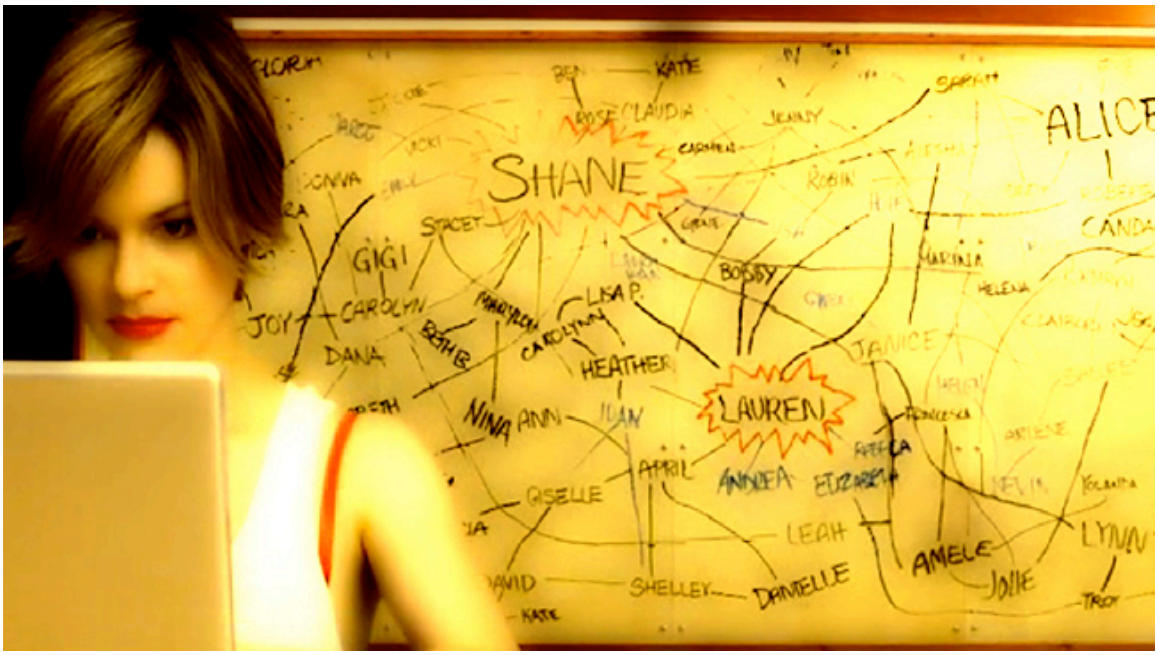


FIGURE 1

Alice and her chart in the opening credits

FIGURE 2

VIDEO: http://j-l-r.org/media/LWord/The.L.Word.102.clip.mov

(1.02)

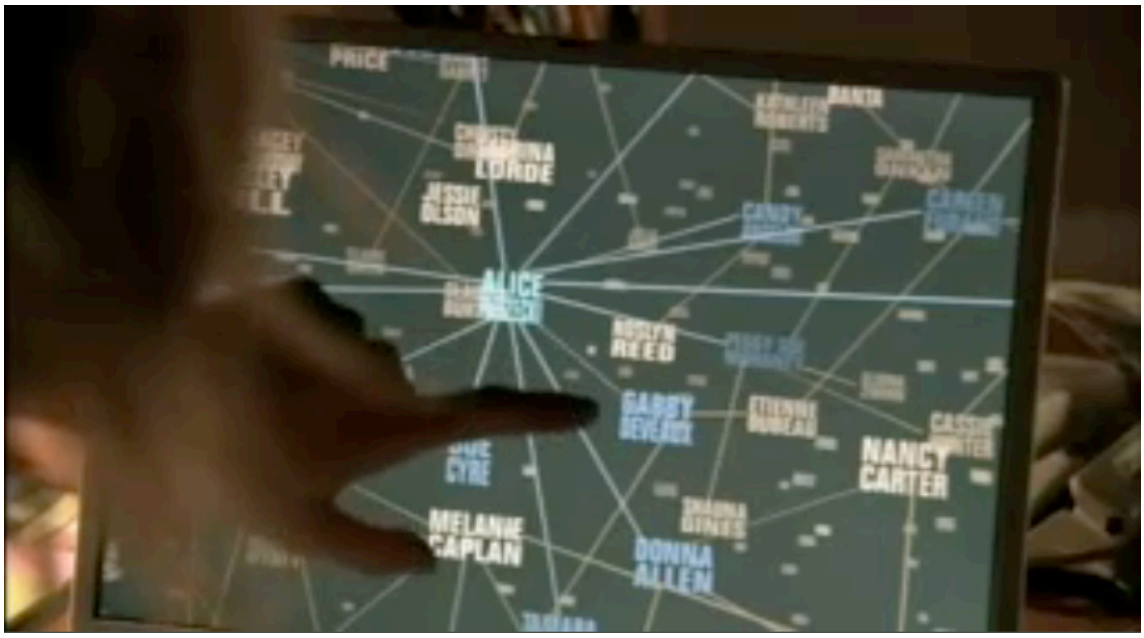


FIGURE 3

"I put it on the internet" (1.02)

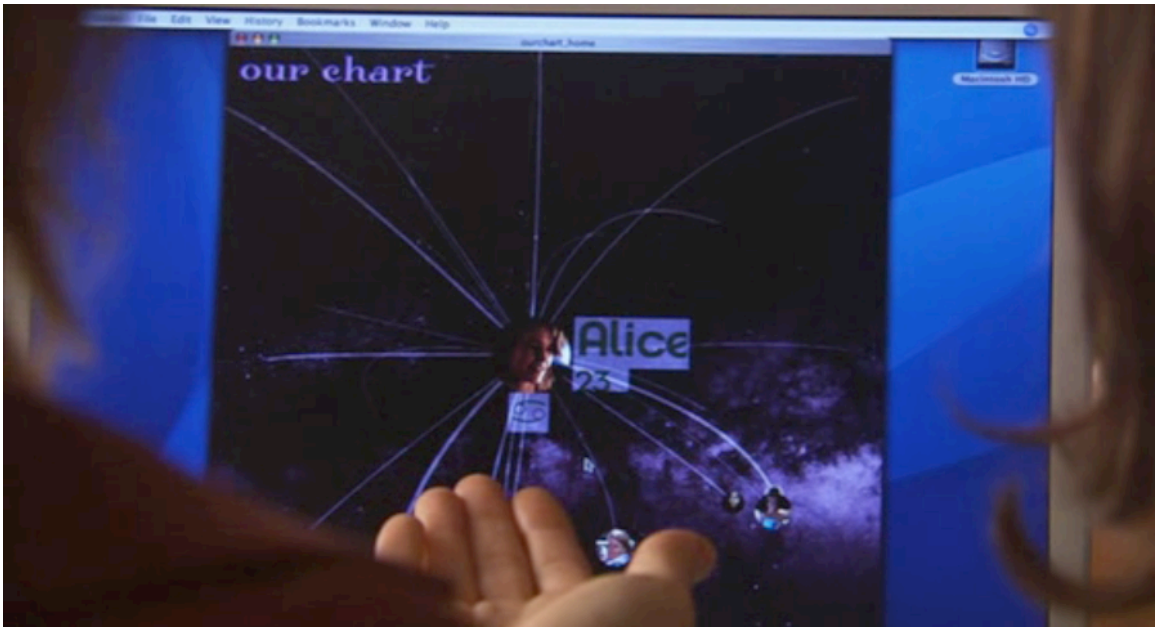


FIGURE 4

VIDEO: http://j-l-r.org/media/LWord/The.L.Word.401.clip.mov

(4.01)

FIGURE 5

OurChart.com front page (October 9, 2008)

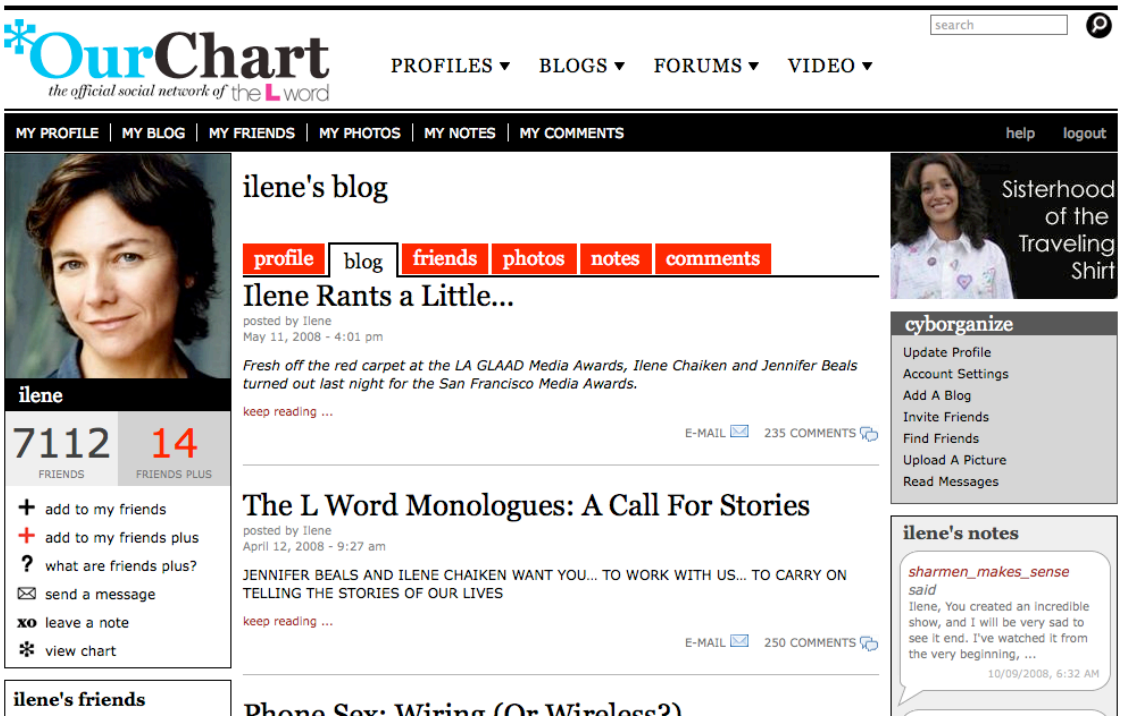


FIGURE 6

OurChart.com profile page (Ilene Chaiken)

FIGURE 7

"This is a lesbian space." (5.04)

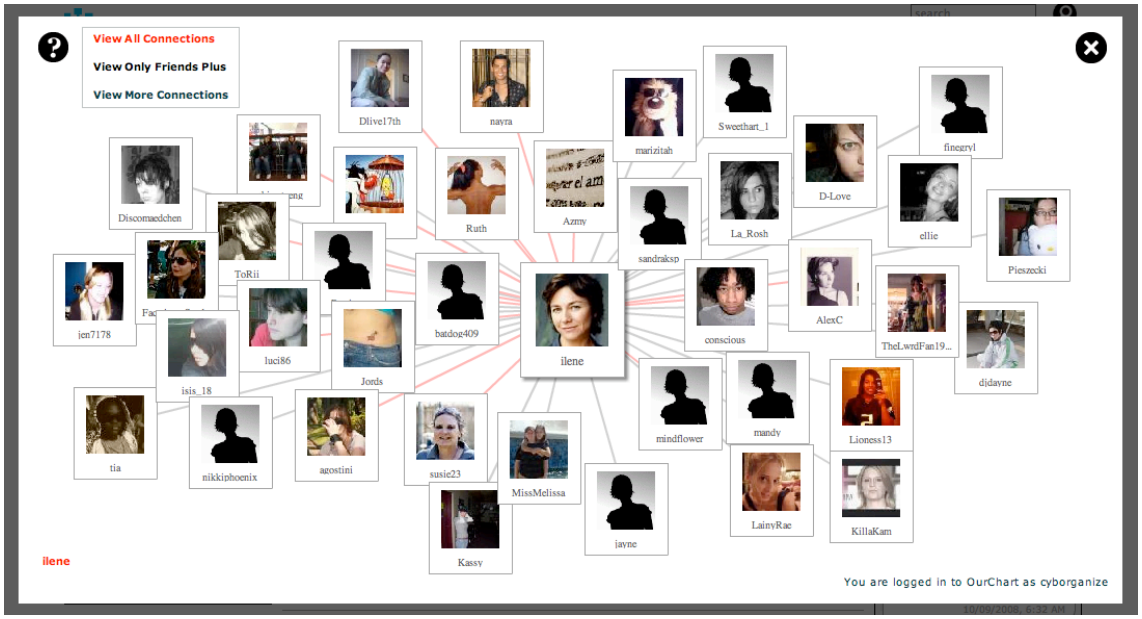


FIGURE 8

OurChart.com "chart"

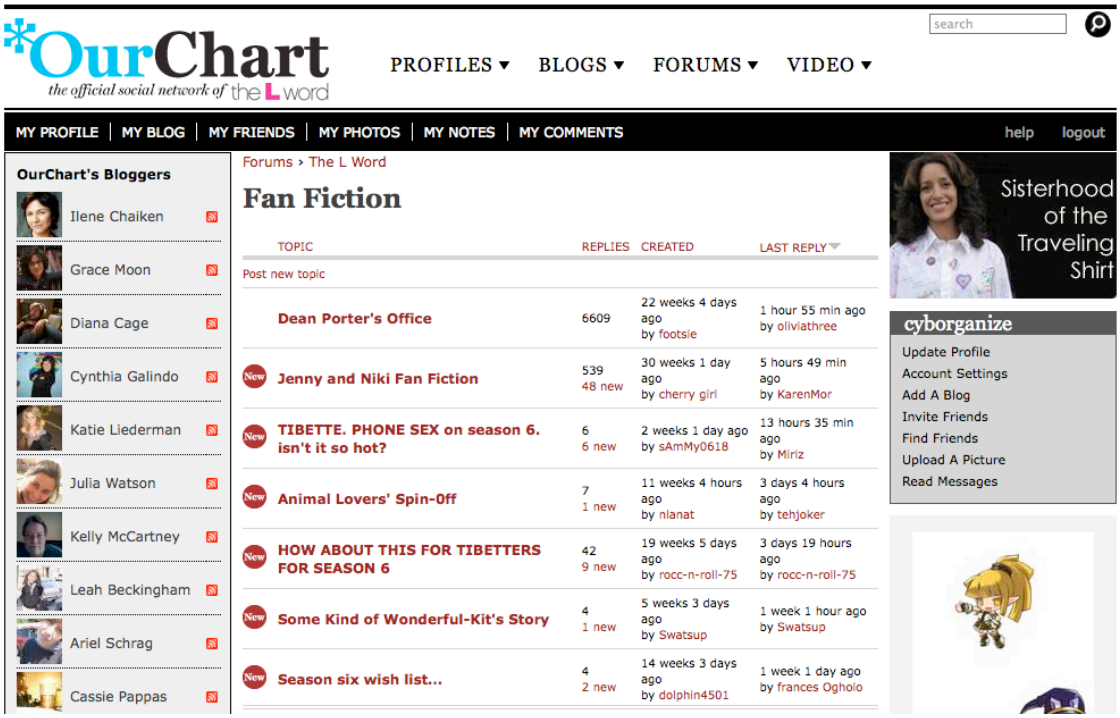


FIGURE 9

OurChart.com forum (under The L Word > Fan Fiction)

FIGURE 11

"*The L Word:* A Fanisode" (PDF), front cover

FIGURE 10

an advertising image for FanLib.com (via Alexis Lothian)

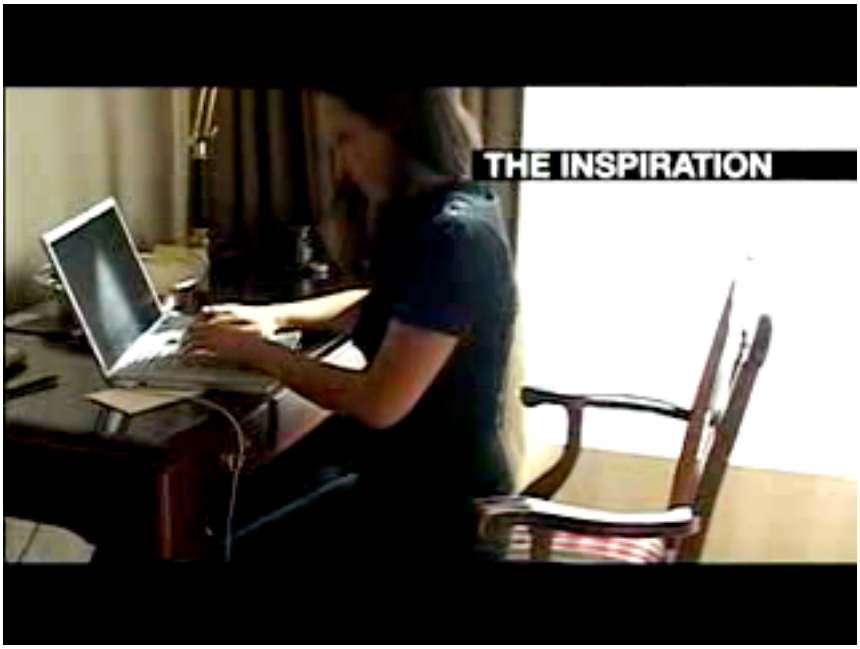


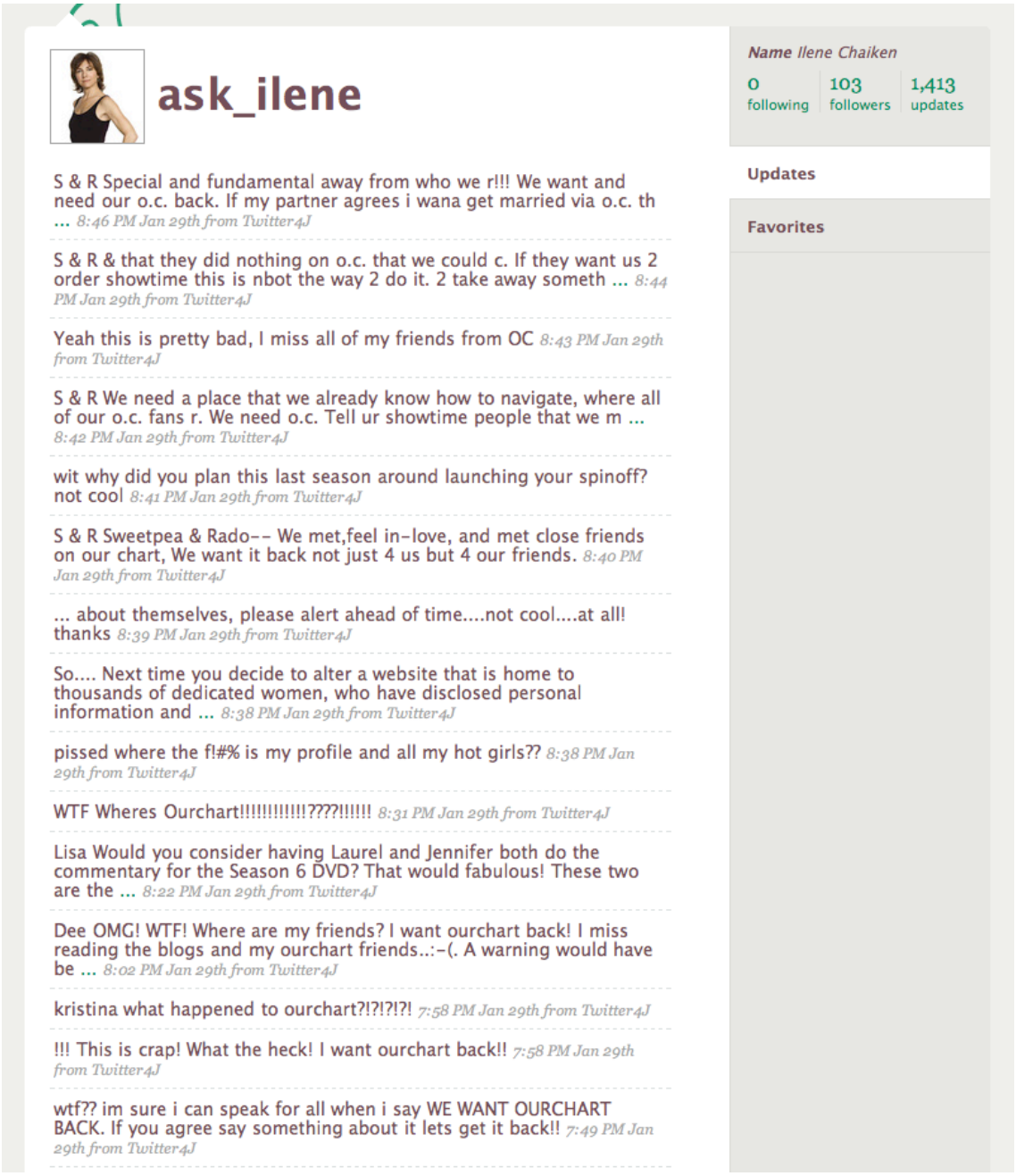
FIGURE 12

VIDEO: http://www.sho.com/site/video/brightcove/series/title.do
?bcpid=1304999811&bclid=1374480000

"Meet Molly"

FIGURE 13

since being shut down, OurChart.com redirects to Sho.com (January 2009)



ask_ilene

Name Ilene Chaiken

0 following | 103 followers | 1,413 updates

Updates

Favorites

S & R Special and fundamental away from who we r!!! We want and need our o.c. back. If my partner agrees i wana get married via o.c. th ... 8:46 PM Jan 29th from Twitter4J

S & R & that they did nothing on o.c. that we could c. If they want us 2 order showtime this is nbot the way 2 do it. 2 take away someth ... 8:44 PM Jan 29th from Twitter4J

Yeah this is pretty bad, I miss all of my friends from OC 8:43 PM Jan 29th from Twitter4J

S & R We need a place that we already know how to navigate, where all of our o.c. fans r. We need o.c. Tell ur showtime people that we m ... 8:42 PM Jan 29th from Twitter4J

wit why did you plan this last season around launching your spinoff? not cool 8:41 PM Jan 29th from Twitter4J

S & R Sweetpea & Rado-- We met,feel in-love, and met close friends on our chart, We want it back not just 4 us but 4 our friends. 8:40 PM Jan 29th from Twitter4J

... about themselves, please alert ahead of time....not cool....at all! thanks 8:39 PM Jan 29th from Twitter4J

So.... Next time you decide to alter a website that is home to thousands of dedicated women, who have disclosed personal information and ... 8:38 PM Jan 29th from Twitter4J

pissed where the f!#% is my profile and all my hot girls?? 8:38 PM Jan 29th from Twitter4J

WTF Wheres Ourchart!!!!!!!!!!!!????!!!!!! 8:31 PM Jan 29th from Twitter4J

Lisa Would you consider having Laurel and Jennifer both do the commentary for the Season 6 DVD? That would fabulous! These two are the ... 8:22 PM Jan 29th from Twitter4J

Dee OMG! WTF! Where are my friends? I want ourchart back! I miss reading the blogs and my ourchart friends..:-(. A warning would have be ... 8:02 PM Jan 29th from Twitter4J

kristina what happened to ourchart?!?!?!?! 7:58 PM Jan 29th from Twitter4J

!!! This is crap! What the heck! I want ourchart back!! 7:58 PM Jan 29th from Twitter4J

wtf?? im sure i can speak for all when i say WE WANT OURCHART BACK. If you agree say something about it lets get it back!! 7:49 PM Jan 29th from Twitter4J

FIGURE 14

outcry from OurChart users on the official twitter account (January 2009)

V / TELEVISION AS NEW MEDIA

As with all major economic transitions, the transformations of late capitalism depend on evolving communication technologies. The entertainment industry is relentless in its attempts to mobilize media innovations to channel ever more surplus productivity into profit. In the preceding three chapters, I explored the risks and opportunities that may arise for both sides when the established subcultural practices of fandom collide with this drive to monetize. My introduction situates this work in the context of convergence and fan studies, but these scholarly networks are emerging at the frontiers of media studies. In the field of film theory, with its distinguished roots in the study of high art, literature, and philosophy, the status of research into popular culture can be ambivalent. Reviewing a 1996 survey about interdisciplinary visual studies in the journal *October*, Linda Cartwright notes,

> Whereas film and digital media are mentioned with some frequency in the various commentaries published in the questionnaire, television is discussed tangentially.... The absence of television except as specter of late capitalism's threat of further image alienation is curious, given its status as a link between the cinematic culture that dominated the first half of the 20th century and the digital media culture that came to the fore by the century's last decade. Not surprisingly, television studies has tended to rely on the methods of sociology and communications foundational to cultural studies, but it remains marginal to disciplines that shun low culture. (15)

As a relatively new field that still faces struggles for its own legitimacy, film studies has a tendency to deemphasize the importance of television. By contrast, it is beginning to embrace the study of digital media, which can connect to film's loftier fixations along the

axes of aesthetics, experimental art, and the technical apparatus. Even more significantly, digital media seems "new" in ways that television, with its recycling of commercial strategies from vaudeville and radio, perhaps never did. In the case of a discipline that, as Cartwright points out, "invokes in its very name a medium, an industry, and a specific set of material referents that make the field's life seemingly dependent on the duration of those entities," the fact that "film has become a medium interlocked with, and perhaps soon to be subsumed in, the broader category of digital media" (9) may, in effect, lend film studies continuing relevance without disrupting its defining preoccupations. However, this alliance does little to clarify the standing of projects like this one that inhabit the intersection of television and digital media.

A variety of thinkers have attempted to define the specificity of "new" media's "newness," often emphasizing its mutually constitutive relationship with the larger cultural context in both its material and ideological dimensions. In 1988, Bill Nichols linked the transition to late capitalism with the advent of the "cybernetic imagination" (an obsession with self-regulating information processing systems, exemplified by but not limited to the computer), which parallels the importance of mechanical reproduction (represented by the camera) to modernity. He is centrally concerned with the ways that "conceptual metaphors [such as cybernetics] take on tangible embodiment through discursive practices and institutional apparatuses... [that] give a metaphor historical weight and ideological power" (636). The interdependence of technology and a technological imaginary is also the theme of Janet Murray's introductory essay "Inventing the Medium," which traces the reticulated history whereby "the engineers draw upon cultural metaphors and analogies to express the magnitude of the change, the shape of the

as yet unseen medium [while] the storytellers and theorists build imaginary landscapes of information, writing stories and essays that later became blueprints for actual systems" (5). Rather than framing this history within a generalized narrative of cybernetics, however, she insists that we are dealing with "a single new medium of representation, the digital medium" (again exemplified by the computer) (3). Although Martin Lister et al acknowledge the overdetermined meanings of the term "new media," they still prefer it to "digital media" as a designation because the latter "presupposes an absolute break (between analogue [sic] and digital) where we will see that none in fact exists" (12). In his landmark new media textbook, Lev Manovich is similarly skeptical of digital evangelism, pointing out that cinema could be described as digital since it works by sampling 24 frames per second. Again, he emphasizes the interlacing of technological and social form in new media, especially its characteristic "transcoding" between "the 'cultural layer' and the 'computer layer'.... The result of this composite is a new computer culture -- a blend of human and computer meanings" (46). As such, Manovich stands as an astute synthesis of preceding and contemporary work that defines a novel media formation. However, Manovich doesn't take the same interest in processes of media transformation or in continuity with popular media like television.

In this concluding chapter, I attempt to situate my work, and research into convergence generally, in the context of new media studies. To do so, I first delve into the theoretical underpinnings of digital media, in particular the tradition known as media archaeology, to highlight properties that invite associations with television as a nexus of remediation. I then outline some of the existing scholarship in television studies that travels along these vectors. My theme throughout is the often vexed endeavor of

modeling the interactions between realities that are material (hardware, bodies, factories) and discursive (software, ideas, texts), a framework that inevitably rests (if sometimes only implicitly) on a theory of subjectivity. The necessity of thinking material and immaterial dimensions as indiscrete suggests that we must analyze media forms through their prolific interconnections with each other and with their larger cultural milieu. Moreover, then, I discuss my rationale for the centrality of queer theory to my project in terms of its often unwritten synergies with the parameters of media studies. The imperative to include issues of subjectivity and sexuality in our accounts of technological formations is more than a luxury of subculture studies. I argue that queer approaches are fundamental to a theoretical heritage that informs the best of humanities research into the histories and futures of today's media configurations.

A / An Archaeology of Media Convergence

In Chapter I, I surveyed important work on media convergence as a technological, industrial, and cultural phenomenon, defined by both the increasing proliferation and interchangeability of consumer media devices and the increasing diffusion of commercial properties and narratives across multiple platforms. These analyses, for the most part, have been grounded in a tradition that can be loosely characterized as cultural studies, which draws on interdisciplinary methodologies that may incorporate elements from qualitative sociology, ethnography, reception studies, and political economy to formulate what Wendy Hui Kyong Chun describes as an "insistence on technology as experienced by users [that] highlights the importance of economics, politics, and culture and relentlessly critiques technological determinism" ("Introduction" 4). This skepticism

tends to divert cultural studies from a largely distinct tradition of media theory that springboards from continental poststructuralism and even sometimes from Marxism, and that focuses on the articulation of sensual things with discursive formations. This tradition, known as "media archaeology," is most closely associated with Friedrich Kittler and a cluster of other German theorists. However, the designation can be applied to any research (including a body of adventurous media histories and the emerging field of Critical Code Studies) that "concentrate[s] on the logics and physics of hardware and software... [and] excavates the technological conditions of the sayable and the thinkable" (Chun 4) -- in keeping with Michel Foucault's conception of the term in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. As such, it could retroactively apply to thinkers from Jacques Derrida to Marshall McLuhan. While I wouldn't want to suggest that the charges of technological determinism and hardware fetishism often leveled at such work are invalid, they may overlook the complexity of the relations these models posit between media form and its social and subjective contexts.

Muddying the debate are conflicting and increasingly compromised notions of materiality itself, the fraught benchmark that is frequently at the heart of attempts to arrive, via theoretical pathways, at judgments relevant to the "real" world. It is the material fixation that enables Kittler to declare, in "There Is No Software," that "all code operations, despite their metaphoric faculties such as 'call' or 'return,' come down to absolutely local string manipulations and that is, I am afraid, to signifiers of voltage differences" (Kittler). Other scholars and approaches, however, have called into question such an easy dismissal of the effects of the discursive dimension on corporeal substance. N. Katherine Hayles, who insists on the importance of embodiment, nonetheless comes to

the conclusion that materiality should be considered "an emergent property created through dynamic interactions between physical characteristics and signifying strategies" (3). Likewise, in his titularly materialist account of new media, Matthew Fuller advocates a "materialism that acknowledges and takes delight in the conceptuality of real objects" (1). We can trace a similar intellectual trajectory in the history of Marxist theory, wherein the original subordination of ideological superstructure to material base gradually disintegrates in its encounter with poststructuralism, until finally Laclau and Mouffe declare, "Our analysis rejects the distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices. It affirms a) that every object is constituted as an object of discourse... [and] (b)... the *material* character of every discursive structure" (107-9). We could even link Foucault to this theme since, in his elaboration of the materiality of power, he rejected the vexed notion of ideology out of hand. The most convincing media archaeologies focus not on the reduction of all discourse to sensual phenomena, but rather on the interdependence of technological form and social and subjective meanings.

A parallel conclusion could be drawn from the interventions of queer theory, which has staged a drama that is strangely analogous to the one Hayles charts in the technological imaginary, with its fantasies of disembodiment. While certain conceptions of queer sexuality, from Foucault to Berlant and Warner, have insisted on the actuality of bodies and acts, making sex in its carnality the ground for a politics, another strand exemplified by Butler and Sedgwick has articulated queerness as a structural property that tends promiscuously to infect a broad variety of discursive and political domains. The opposition within the field is not as stark as I've portrayed it here, but this dialectical tension has been formative for several decades of queer criticism and activism. Using

queer as a theoretical term, defined as a mode within the orbit of poststructuralism, risks accusations of abstracting (or disembodying) the idea to a point that effaces its connection to the experience of queer subjects and communities. Moreover, within queer communities there isn't a consensus about whether the term is a synonym for the umbrella LGBT or whether it designates a radical approach to gender, sexuality, and identity that is not coextensive with or limited to same-sex relations. For me, these questions are contiguous with those surrounding new media because technology is inextricable from the issue of how bodies are articulated with information, and from the larger socioeconomic context of late capitalism within which both these theories and these subjectivities are forged. While I appreciate the importance of retaining some provisional stability in the definition of "queer" that links it to sexual practice, I still believe that this concept contains within itself its own incoherence, precisely because queerness marks the site of impurity, hybridity, and affinity. In this sense, I find the boundaries that the label compromises much more productive than the boundaries it can maintain.

In this project, I do use "queer" both as a descriptor for literally lesbian interpretations and subcultures and as a metaphor for the architecture that characterizes a menagerie of forms populating and copulating in today's convergent mediasphere -- from the status of internet video (a "queer" intermixture of broadcast and broadband) to the position of the fan (a "queer" cyborg who inhabits the liminal spaces within texts and industry). I adopt this rhetoric advisedly, as a tactic in the larger field of discursive and material interpenetration. We can see the friction of queer theory as having made this same border challenge from a different direction: what it indicates is that the corporeal

exercise of sexuality can never be disentangled from its discursive framework and social contexts, even when they seem distant from sex acts themselves. My attention here was to queer female fandom, and I wouldn't want to imply that all convergent phenomena are equally queer, nor that all lesbian readings are equally convergent. I did argue, however, that there is an affinity between more explicitly queer fan activities and the increasingly complex and compound strategies of media reproduction. I made this argument through an analysis of how particular technologies facilitate particular modes of engagement -- specifically, of how femslash fanworks are one instantiation of an emerging technological configuration that makes it increasingly difficult to contain audience desire and use within economically and normatively dominant bounds. Thus, I have approached my object, a localized interpretive community of lesbian viewership, via an expansive vantage on its interconnections with a virtual network of diffuse discourses. Likewise, I turn to media archaeology as a methodology for investigating the structuring power of material technological form, while maintaining an understanding of materiality that does not take it as divorced from metaphor or imagination.

1 / THE DIGITAL ARCHIVE

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault retroactively sets out the methodology that shapes his early work, which excavates discursive formations that he here idiosyncratically terms "the archive." He defined this as:

> first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events... [that] are grouped together in distinct figures, composed together in accordance with multiple relations, maintained or blurred in accordance with specific regularities; ...it is that which, at the very root of the statement-

> event, and in that which embodies it, defines at the outset *the system of its enunciability* (129)

Rendering the archive as the structuring apparatus for "statements," the historically contingent framework of what can be conceived and articulated, may seem like a counterintuitive reappropriation of a commonsense expression. In its colloquial usage, "archive" denotes a localized arrangement of files, "a *place* in which public records or other important historic documents are kept," according to the OED (my emphasis). For Foucault, however, the material dimension is not absent -- "statements" only exist as "events," inscribed in a particular time and space. Materiality is thus folded into the systematicity that is also a defining characteristic of archives, which require a rubric for indexing and retrieval to be anything more than a meaningless accumulation. Another dimension that might seem underrepresented in Foucault's *Archaeology* is subjectivity: who is generating these statements, and by what mechanism? I would propose that Foucault is not excluding subjectivity from his account, but rather repudiating a specific model of the transcendental subject: "the promise that one day the subject... will once again be able to appropriate, to bring back under his sway, all those things that are kept at a distance by difference, and find in them what might be called his abode" (12). Conventional wisdom marks a break in Foucault's work between the archaeologies of statements and the subsequent genealogies of discourses (beginning with *Discipline and Punish* in 1975), which theorize the subject much more concertedly. But in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (as the above passage demonstrates), he is already conceptualizing subjectivity as dispersed, discontinuous, and heteronomous (all the characteristics he claims more explicitly for discourse). His conception of archaeology arguably depends on this poststructuralist model of subjectivity for its coherence, and

thus it's not purely due to a coincidence or rupture that it is Foucault (eminent theorist of sexuality) who founds media archaeology as a discipline. Foucault does diverge openly from psychoanalysis, most crucially in understanding subjectivity as an exteriority materialized in bodily practices and disciplines (like speech acts, sex, or punishment), rather than as an interiority (the depth model of the unconscious, featuring repression and so on). Nonetheless, his work in this area depends fundamentally on psychoanalysis as the first field to posit that subjects are necessarily fragmentary and not fully present to themselves -- which is precisely why they invent compensatory fantasies of plenitude like the notion of transcendental subjectivity. At its inception, the archaeological method searches for the intersection of discursive regularities and material bodies, while insisting on the irreducibility of difference and desire.

In his book *Archive Fever*, Derrida more fully unravels the theory of the archive, including the subjective and political strata that remain submerged in Foucault. Psychoanalysis as an archival framework is Derrida's starting point, in its constitutive reliance on "representational models of the psychic apparatus as an apparatus for perception, for printing, for recording, for topic distribution of places of inscription, of ciphering" (15). Just as, for Jacques Lacan, subjectivity is a radical exteriority, produced in a heteronomous relation with what is irreducibly outside the subject and yet most intimate to him, "[the archive] is entrusted to the outside, to an *external* substrate" (8) -- elementally, "there is no archive without consignation in an *external place* which assures the possibility of memorization, of repetition, of reproduction, or of reimpression" (11). Thus, media technologies and the mechanism of desire are irrevocably linked in that both require inscription in a substrate, an externality which necessarily implies absence and

deferral. The archive, as the fulcrum between discursive organization and embodied record, also articulates both media and the psyche with systems of power. As Derrida explains, etymologically the word "archive" references the house of the superior magistrates: the place itself, but also and unavoidably the site of their ideologically constructed institutional sovereignty. This is why Derrida can posit that archives are located at the "intersection of the topological and the nomologicial, of the place and the law, of the substrate and the authority" (2-3) -- or, we might add, of the material and the discursive. In keeping with both psychoanalytic and Foucauldian theories of resistance, the archive as pivot, as boundary or "passage," as "the unstable limit between public and private, between the family, the society, and the State... between oneself and oneself" (90), unhinges such oppositions even as it constitutes them. As precisely the possibility of repeating, recalling, recording (and thus externalizing, distancing, deferring) knowledge, the archive "always works, and *a priori*, against itself" (12). Archaeology thus mobilizes the archive not to impose order or transparency, but as a technology of theory, to cross-index media, discourse, and subjectivity. It is one approach to reconciling the structuring economies of domination with deconstruction's challenge to any absolute arrival or fixity.

I am setting aside, for the moment, more granular debates about whether particular new media formations qualify as reconfigured archives or whether, rather, they constitute a radical transformation in the relationship of information to power. Certainly there is much to be gained by enumerating historical and formal specificities, but from this vantage on the archive as a fantasmatic topology, I am skeptical of claims that the internet (for example) is a more perfect, more complete, more enduring archive, as if the

former deficiencies were incidental rather than intrinsic. I also remain unconvinced by Wolfgang Ernst's contrasting proposition that computer networks in particular open up liberatory possibilities since, according to him, the virtualization of archival space does away with barriers to access, which depend on the literal sequestering of knowledge, and the fluidity of digital information thwarts methods of capturing it in static hierarchies. Ernst suggests that if we can extricate ourselves from the nostalgic "metaphor of archival spatial order" (109) to which internet discourse clings, we have the opportunity of "dealing with the virtual an-archive of multi-media in a way beyond the conservative desire of reducing it to classificatory order again" (120). He offers a detailed diagnosis of the internet's qualities: the ecumenical capacity of multimedia, which "emulates" any medium (words, sounds, images) in code; the shift from fixed, "space-based" material storage to dynamic, "time-based" streaming storage; rhizomatic, interactive, ephemeral memory; a decentralized, non-hierarchical "machinic net of finite automata... defined rather by the circulation of discrete states" (119). This catalogue problematically minimizes the importance of physical hardware to both storage and access, and moreover even Ernst notes, "although the Internet still orders knowledge apparently without providing it with irreversible hierarchies (on the visible surface), the authoritative archive of protocols is more rigid than any traditional archive has ever been" (120). It is not so easy to transcend the strictures of substrates and regularities embodied in the archive.

Alexander Galloway offers another fruitful blueprint for the architecture of the internet in his book *Protocol*, a term he defines as "conventional rules that govern the set of possible behavior patterns within a heterogeneous system... [and] a technique for achieving voluntary regulation within a contingent environment" (7). Importantly,

protocol also "facilitates peer-to-peer relationships between autonomous entities... engenders localized decision making, not centralized... is robust, flexible, and universal" (82) and "operates largely outside institutional, governmental, and corporate power" (244). This technique is not merely technological, but describes a new configuration of control that is characteristic of late capitalism at large, one which is just as horizontal, localized, and networked as the field of production on which it operates. Rather than enforcing prohibitions, it organizes possibilities and enables free movement within them -- often mobilizing technology to do so. Galloway suggests that today we commonly experience grids of domination that combine contrasting methodologies of control, and he offers the anatomy of the internet an as example, in that it is governed by a "dialectical tension" wherein "one machine radically distributes control into autonomous locales, [and] the other machine focuses control into rigidly defined hierarchies" (8). In this example, the former "machine" is represented by TCP/IP, the internet's suite of open communications protocols, and the latter by the Domain Name System (DNS), centralized databases that are necessary to connect URLs with IP addresses. Protocol, then, is radically effective in a postmodern environment not because it fully supplants vertical models of discipline with horizontal and flexible management, but because it marries them in a composite system in which their contradiction is precisely what is most productive. Likewise, in proprietary fan-driven content initiatives, top-down and bottom-up tactics are combined when the constraining threat of legal muscle is overlaid on a structured platform for creative license.

Even as Galloway continually asserts the "special existence of protocol in the 'privileged' physical media of bodies" (12), though, the status of this materiality in his

text remains ambiguous. Because protocols "encapsulate information inside a technically defined wrapper, while remaining relatively indifferent to the content of information" (7), they veer perilously toward information theory's symptomatic indifference to medium in favor of aspects that can be modeled as universal. Galloway seems far more interested in protocol's cross-platform facility across heterogeneous components than in the vagaries of this hardware, whether technological or organic. For instance, it's hard to grasp how, when he claims, "the key to protocol's formal relations is in the realm of the immaterial software" (72), he isn't contradicting his insistence on materiality elsewhere. Ultimately, Galloway tries to steer a hybrid course here too, concluding that "protocol is not a theory of mind. Nor... is protocol a theory of the body... protocol is a theory of confluence of life and matter" (103). What the corpus of work on archives, as I've glossed it here, suggests is that materiality will always appear as a more or less overdetermined, slippery, and highly compromised category in studies of media. As such, Galloway's equivocation may be a constructive move, akin to the difficulty of holding the statement-event in focus in Foucault's account of the archive as "the law of what can be said" (as, dare I say, a protocol). This semiotic heritage leads us toward discursive composites that are crucial to understanding media reproduction as a complex system.

2 / TELECOMMUNICATING

With protocol, Galloway assembles a theory of power within networks, as both the technical organization of linked computer systems and the more intangible diagram of late capitalism's horizontal flows and affinities. Networks have also been a figure in semiotics, at least since Barthes mobilized the term in *S/Z*, writing, in a striking evocation

of the distributed model, that in his "ideal text, the networks are many and interact... this text is a galaxy of signifiers... it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances" (5). What a large body of Derrida's work elaborates are the distances inherent in this configuration, the gaps between any possible moments of intelligibility, which render all signification perpetually in transit through some technological apparatus. The primary apparatus, for Derrida, is writing itself: the necessary absence of a message's receiver from the site of its sending, the necessary inscription of signs in an iterable form, the necessary reproduction of the play of meaning through this distance-spanning repetition. As Richard Dienst points out in his deconstructionist meditation on television, this constitutes a critique of "the ideal of the perfectly functioning writing machine [that] is the ideal of all communications theory" (131). Dienst is precise about how power is deployed within this schema, suggesting that, despite its irreducible excess and mobility, and like archives or protocols, textuality is structured by "the contingent disposition of signifying forces" such that any inscription is "a transaction in a specific signifying economy" (132). He brings his discussion around to particular media, rather than writing in the abstract, by positing that "different arrangements of senders in general and receivers in general will produce specific kinds of representations, built to endure different kinds of absence" (134). For Dienst, television (rather than digital media, as the inheritance is more often traced) is an exemplar of a Derridian economy of telecommunication.

Dienst implies that television participates in the same challenge to, or compromise of, the ideology of the unified, bounded, self-present work as writing in poststructuralist accounts because of the way in which TV literalizes the notion of perpetual transmission

(television, in fact, requires no substrate more fixed than the pulse of electrons in a continually scanning beam, though today it is more often digital). This property was first theorized by Raymond Williams, who called it "flow," which for Dienst names TV as "an entire network of transmissions, both linear and erratic, humming with excess representational power and clattering with unfinished representational frames" (137). In a lengthy critique, however, Dienst observes that flow doesn't necessarily live up to its deconstructive potential in either theory or experience. For Williams, TV flow is a strategy of domination more than of resistance: the seamless and never-ending succession of fragments offers a mesmerizingly rootless immediacy that serves to "capture an audience." Jane Feuer builds on this work with a related claim for "liveness" (Feuer), which she identifies as a fantasy of transparency and co-presence that sutures over television's formal and ideological disjunctures. The technical capability for live broadcast, though it is very rarely utilized, acts as an alibi for television's (and telecommunication's) fundamental disunity. Television's capacity to represent itself as unmediated -- a desire that Derrida traces to the dawn of Western thought, but which nonetheless has its historical contingencies as it cycles -- relies on the articulation of its physical form with a discursive scaffolding, a structuring archive that activates the whole gendered, classed, raced organization of the socioeconomic field.

As a historically postmodern telecommunication, however, television doesn't enforce its illusion of immediacy with the same tactics or rigidity as classical or modernist modes. It fails, as any writing machine must, to close the gaps between senders and receivers, but television incorporates these failures into its signifying economy. TV doesn't depend for its value on originality or origins, instead embracing

repetition, artificiality, and transmission as its basis. This is what enables Dienst to hold television up as a deconstructive formation, despite the persistence of desires for "liveness" and other forms of unmediated plenitude. The cultural studies approach to television, which emerged in the vicinity of Williams, likewise celebrates television's open, mobile textuality, often in terms reminiscent of Barthes' "writerly text," which he defined as "a perpetual present... before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, plasticized... which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages" (5). Addressing this tradition of television studies, Dienst cautions against the stance of the "semiotic libertine" who, exemplified by scholar John Fiske, assumes that "viewers are free to make 'meanings' and 'pleasures'" from amongst television's "rich morsels of indeterminate meaning, waiting to be brought home and blended into each viewer's polysemic, kaleidoscopic experience" (31). Fiske is a major proponent of the so-called "active audience" model, which does have a tendency to take refuge in moments of both undue fluidity (a diluted patina of "resistance") and undue stability (the viewer as a site of full legibility) in its valorization of the power and freedom we enjoy as media viewers. While audience studies may lack some of the complexity and scope of poststructuralist and media theory, however, I am not convinced that it is either so simplistic or so irreconcilable with deconstruction as Dienst indicates.

Television stakes its economic, cultural, psychic preeminence on its technological and discursive capacity to inhabit mobile flows, continually reproducing an inexhaustible intertextual economy that teeters precariously on the historical scaffold of creator, work, and reader. Audience studies, at its best, has mapped new, networked interactions

between representation, signification, production, and domination with the subtlety merited by this postmodern mediascape. Just as methodologies forged in the context of print may be inadequate to broadcast and digital media, ideologies and other hegemonic systems, such as the mechanism of ownership and intellectual property, may find themselves inadequate to the problems of televisual control. I'd venture that it's no accident that, among its potential web of connotations, Barthes's title *S/Z* refers to the queerly gendered and sexed cathexis between male protagonist Sarrasine and the castrato La Zambinella, using the format now conventional for slash pairings (as in K/S, the notation for romance stories about *Star Trek*'s Kirk and Spock). Irrepressible homoeroticism is only one collateral of the unruly "writerly" possibilities of media in transmission, and their fertility gathers new richness as texts are materialized in new media forms. TV telecommunicates between subjects, codes, technology and power with a complexity that is irreducible, and this complexity continues to evolve and emerge.

These are some of the theoretical foundations for my claim that scholars must take television into account in our archaeologies of digital media and of the transformations that put it forward as "new" today. In the field of television studies, there is already important work that take us some distance toward a rapprochment between cultural studies and media archaeology. From the mid-1990s, Eric Hirsch was researching how "the older screen of broadcast television is now re-figured around a range of new technologies and the screen of the personal computer" (165). Outlining the history leading up to the most recent phase of media convergence, he begins with 1970s television which was shifting away from its mid-century configuration under the influence of a number of technological, industrial, and sociopolitical innovations. Hirsch

emphasizes the revitalization of notions of personal consumption, with new iterations of TV "positioning themselves in a politico-moral environment of 'choice'... [as] the example being promoted is the private individual" (165). Megan Mullen makes a similar claim in her theory of "video bites": self-contained, modular segments of TV programming that are at most several minutes long, exemplified by the music video which catapulted into TV vernacular with the launch of MTV in 1981. While the generalization of the video bite format is a response to particular innovations that enhance channel switching and commercial-avoidance behaviors, Mullen points out that "household flow" was always a factor in structuring television viewing. "Televised material has become progressively more interchangeable throughout the medium's history," she writes, and "programming strategies to accommodate today's fast-paced, remote-controlled, multichannel television environment represent a kind of culmination of this progression" (161). The "privatization" of consumption that Hirsch describes, including the rise of narrowcasting and niche markets, is part of this environment, and together with its bite-sized products paves the way for television to be incorporated into new digital media formations (and vice versa).

Tara McPherson analyzes aspects of this intensifying synthesis by building on Feuer's theory of "liveness" as a defining ideology of television. Taking MSNBC.com as her example, she describes the ways that "Liveness remains with us as a key dimension of our experiences of the internet," while "as with television, this much touted liveness is actually the illusion of liveness" (461). Websites tend to rework TV's familiar language into "liveness with a difference... [that] foregrounds volition and mobility, creating a liveness on demand... often structuring a feeling that our own desire drives the

movement" (462). This is a powerful experiential fiction that "actually masks the degree to which the site already stages a linear, largely unidirectional model of the internet, a model predicated on television's broadcast modes of information delivery" (461), meaning that remediation goes both ways. McPherson's case study is a paradigmatic model of how there's neither total continuity nor a total break between media formations, but rather a process of convergence which is discursive as much as material, repurposing constitutive fantasies like liveness for a changing socioeconomic system (a field that is open to intervention by both corporations and consumers). In order to implement this methodology, I argue that we have to incorporate theories of power as ideology and as technology, theories of media as archive and as protocol, theories of texts as networks and as communication, theories of viewers as consumers and as producers, and histories of television and of the internet. These resources are crucial to the problem of how the expansive media economy, already a massively interdependent nexus of technology, discourse, and subjectivity, develops and morphs over time -- a question that is crucial to the future of television and of the internet.

B / QUEER TECHNOLOGIES

Reconciling archaeological and cultural perspectives on convergence is only one dimension of a theory of television as new media, which necessarily intersects with theories of subjectivity and politics as well. The heady sense of agency that McPherson identifies in her "phenomenology of web surfing" contributes to a larger conversation that links digital technologies and virtual spaces to democratic potential, although the ideal of an online "public" often collides with equally fantasmatic fears about our internet

"privacy." Other scholars have also pointed out the ideological inflection of the tendency to valorize the internet's distributed architecture as a political virtue. In *Control and Freedom*, Wendy Hui Kyong Chun proposes that software offers the internet its constitutive fictions, providing an alibi for technological otherness and vulnerability in a manner analogous to ideology. Through the operations of software, the contradictory schemas of privacy are ported to new media contexts, and "If you believe that your communications are private... it is because software corporations, as they relentlessly code and circulate you, tell you that you are behind, and not in front of, the window" (21). The terrain of the internet's anxieties and contestations thus intersects the most intimate domains of subjectivity -- including race and sexuality. Lisa Nakamura offers a complementary critique of "the disturbingly utopian strain" of internet discourse, which implies that "technology's greatest promise to us is to eradicate Otherness" and promote "an ideology of liberation from marginalized and devalued bodies," one which ultimately "reproduces the assumptions of the old one" by functioning to "stabilize a sense of a white self and identity" (319). Throughout these accounts of media formations and transformations, conceptions of the private self as it is structured by systems of domination are central to cultural negotiations of computerization and digitization.

It is because subjectivity is a component of technological architectures that the media archaeology I've proposed here must incorporate queer theory. Along with the centrality of television to our analyses of today's digital convergence, I insist on the concurrent centrality of gender and sexuality. In fact, within a theoretical tradition that has posed embodied and discursive realities as inextricable, we might say that gender and sexuality are technologies in themselves. This orientation is echoed by Sandy Stone, who

invites us to think of the transsexual body as "a set of embodied texts" with "intertextual possibilities," reproduced through "the clinic [as] a technology of inscription" (296-97) and functioning as "screens on which we see projected the momentary settlements that emerge from ongoing struggles over beliefs and practices within the academic and medical communities" (294). That is, sets of familiar ideological containments (like natural vs. textual and public vs. private) camouflage vast networks of entanglement between the deployments of subjectivity, media, and biopower. Work in queer theory on the political stakes of the ostensibly private domain of sex, from Stone to Judith Butler and beyond, suggests that individual and social bodies are necessarily mediated through representational forms. Classic work in internet studies by Sherry Turkle likewise frames technology and subjectivity as mutually constitutive, because "in our lives on the screen, people are developing ideas about identity as multiplicity through new social *practices* of identity as multiplicity" (646). In her attention to the ramifications of new technological forms for new identity formations, Turkle's theory of the subject begins to sound reminiscent of queer theory: "As a user, you are attentive to just one of the windows on your screen at any given moment, but in a certain sense, you are a presence in all of them at all times... in practice, windows have become a potent metaphor for thinking of the self as a multiple, distributed, 'time-sharing' system" (644). This conception of a plural, discontinuous, modular, networked, and emergent formation echoes across the intertwined registers of subjectivity, culture, and industry under late capitalism, traversing a variety of scholarly approaches to technological change. I argue that by considering the interoperability of such disparate theoretical layers we can better

understand the interfaces between archives or protocols as apparatuses of power and the economies of identity that are at work in media convergence.

Windows have appeared here several times as a figure for media technologies, and Anne Friedberg traces this genealogy back to Renaissance painting. In *The Virtual Window*, she suggests that the growing "codependency of the movie screen, TV screen, and computer screen" (6) may be facilitated as much by the potency of this cultural trope as by the technical capacities of digitization. The allure of the computer's "windows" certainly has an immediate predecessor in the metaphorical experience of television, already recognizable in Hutchinson's 1946 primer *Here Is Television, Your Window to the World*: "Television actually is a window looking out on the world" (quoted in Keenan [130]). This rhetoric evokes the larger stakes of media as political technologies because, as Thomas Keenan theorizes, the window is the symbol "by which [democracy] organizes and secures its inaugural distinction between public and private, "a distinction that "implies a theory of the human subject as a theory of politics" (132). That is, citizenship is the enterprise of moving between the zones behind the window (privacy) and in front of it (publicity), but because this mobility requires the "possibility of permeability" (132), the wall between the two is always already compromised. This respect for permeability has informed my study of the interdependence of technology, subjectivity, and politics in present-day media convergence. Technical, industrial, and cultural innovations have framed new windows between the homespun communities of fan production and the worldwide business of mass media. As their economies become increasingly imbricated, we must renew our calls for accommodations that leave openings for queer views of

entertainment. I've focused here on the indiscretions of fandom because they can be instructive in building a theoretical architecture for our fenestrated media future.

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