Rethinking Resistance: Nonparticipation, Consumption, and the Recruitment of Affirmation in Internet Fandom

Digital Cosplay as Consumptive Fan Labor

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Abstract

This paper explores the dialogue between fan practices and commercial industries through shifts in technology. It uses Henry Jenkins' work on convergence and spreadable media to explore the changing media landscape, and integrates studies of digital fandom, fan cosplay, and fan performance to situate new types of consumptive fan work within contemporary media scholarship. It focuses specifically on the notion of "digital cosplay," or fans' use of image-based social media to represent the consumption and the reproduction of media characters through online stores. This paper argues that digital cosplay represents shifts in fan labor and media appropriation. Fannish resistance and media appropriation are two sides of the same coin: one feeds the other, just as it too is fed.

Keywords

fandom; cosplay; performance; convergence; digital

Digital Cosplay in Contemporary Media Fandom

In a convergence culture, audiences have the ability to interact, change, and play with the media (Jenkins 2006). But, importantly, media producers have access to those same technologies, and are making use of them to find new ways of marketing and designing media products for those same active audiences. Convergence, after all, is a two-way street, as "both a top-down corporate-drive process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process" (Jenkins 2006, p. 18). As convergence becomes more commonplace, both media fans and media producers are finding new ways to interact with media texts. One method is through the spreadable media text: a text that both amateurs and professionals can circulate through multiple channels and avenues (Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013). The cultural boundaries between creator and receiver are shifting. Media fans are doing more than just "poaching" texts or even "transforming" what already exists (to use a more recent phrase from the Organization for Transformative Works). And in this vein, notions of fan labor are shifting as well.

As knowledge of fandom has grown, fans have become more normalized, and fan activities have become more mainstreamed. And this change is reflected within the style, aesthetics, and economics of contemporary fan texts (Booth 2010). The rise in visibility of fan practices has altered the media landscape, and with this alteration comes a requisite turn from the media industries. This paper examines fan consumption as a key shift in audience engagement with media texts. Specifically, I will look at the online social media service Polyvore as a site of both audience **consumption** of mainstream media texts as well as the clear **reproduction** of those texts. Polyvore is an online, image-based website. It allows users to post content from around the web to a particular user's board, which other users can see and comment on.

The fans that I describe in this paper are using Polyvore both as a tool for consuming corporate images and industrial content from the web, but also organizing it in a particularly fannish, reflexive manner. This reflexivity connects the content to the user, reflecting the user's particular vision of his/her self, but using mainstream commercial media to do so. Importantly, generating this imagery and identity is an act of consumption, as it necessarily imbricates the media text. Yet, at the same time it is also an act of appropriation, pushing media into a specific contour.

The nature of Polyvore media reproduction calls to mind the mode of fandom that sees the performance of fans as elemental to fan studies. Kurt Lancaster (2001) discusses how interpreting fandom through a performance lens opens up scholarship to invite more nuanced readings of cultural activity. Performance is a type of play, then, where fans can "make real" the type of fictions and "fantasies they have only previously watched" (p. xxiv). Fan performance, like most forms of play, is communal. Matt Hills (2002) notes that in this sense, "fan culture" is "made up through creative self-expression as well as communal activities" (p. 42). One of the most popular (and most visible) aspects of fan performance is cosplay, the dressing in costume of media characters. For Hills, costuming plays an important role in the identity of a cult fan: he writes that "the … costumed and/or impersonating body can be usefully explored both through theories of performativity and consumption" (p. 158). Lamerichs (2011) writes that "costuming is a form of fan appropriation that transforms, performs, and actualizes an existing story in close connection to the fan's own identity" (para 1.2).

As a form of consumptive reproduction, digital cosplay describes the playful re-creation and modernization of retro or cult character outfits, clothing, and accessories using digital technology in online spaces. Specifically, Polyvore offers opportunities for fans to enact digital cosplay as users can pick out clothes of various types and construct their own outfits, which can be displayed in a scrapbook-esque design. Each item of clothing can link to an online retailer, from which users can buy the individual items, or even the entire outfit. The site thus allows users to collect images from around the web and create digital "bulletin boards" of these images to complete a full "outfit."

The fannish activity of digital cosplay enacts dual modes of nostalgia and novelty through consumptive behaviors. Some users have created boards of novel takes or contemporary interpretations of classic cult characters. For example, by assembling women's clothes that match the look, style, and feel of the *Marvel Avengers* character Loki, the user character-inspired-style has created a "Loki" outfit that, hypothetically, other users could buy and wear (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Loki digital cosplay, http://www.buzzfeed.com/summeranne/22-of-your-childhood-style-icons-revisited

The "Loki" outfit here updates the normally male character (who tends to wear grandiose clothes drawn more from Norse mythology rather than modern fashion) with a feminine style of contemporary dress.

If the digital cosplay of "Loki" emphasizes novelty, other profiles and outfits emphasize a more nostalgic look at fashion. For example, the Laura Petrie outfit, created by user summeranne, stands out as a retro (re)visitation of a key fashion icon from *The Dick Van Dyke* show (Figure 2). The retro 1960s look, back in fashion thanks to historically stylish shows like *Mad Men*, means that many of Mary Tyler Moore's dresses, shoes, and accessories from the sitcom are back in style. In assembling this outfit, summeranne also choose all black and white items, as if to reference the show's historical televisual roots.
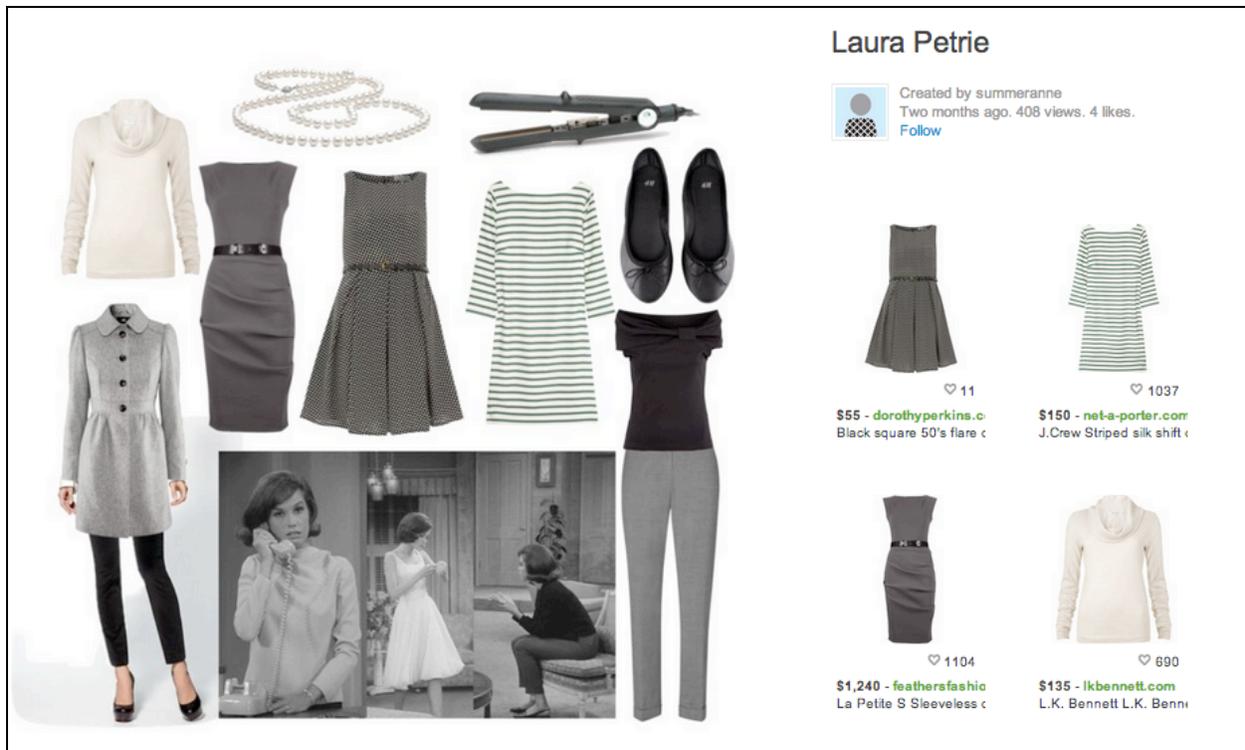
Figure 2. Laura Petrie digital cosplay, http://www.polyvore.com/cgi/set?id=62470132

Importantly, these digital cosplayers do not, it seems, attempt to transform or transfigure the original style; rather, they're looking for fidelity as they consume it in a nostalgic but paradoxically contemporary novelty (a "makeover"). Both nostalgia and novelty exist simultaneously in each act of digital cosplay, but as poles on a continuum. Just as convergence is necessarily two-way, so too does digital cosplay echo with bidirectional nostalgia and novelty. Through the use of repeated motifs and an applicability of historical aesthetics, digital cosplay demonstrates **nostalgic continuity**. At the same time, through the digital commodification of these same (retro) aesthetics and the lack of transformative potential, digital cosplay demonstrates a **novelty and contestation** of contemporary fandom.

On the one hand, this type of commercialization of fannish work appears to synch with what Terranova (2003) has called the "free labor" of the digital economy: it is when fans' "productive activities … are pleasurably embraced and at the same time often shamelessly exploited" by the media industries (para 12). The work of summeranne and character-inspired-style here is being used by zappos.com and Dorothy Perkins to create revenue. On the other hand, as Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013) point out, "audiences are increasingly savvy about the value created through their attention and engagement" (p. 57). In addition to attention and engagement, however, there is also a sense of consumption within digital cosplay. Fans may not be willing (or able) to spend $1240 on the sleeveless dress, but the fans of these characters and these fashions are consuming these materials in the Digi-Gratis economy here: offering gifts of images and retro-humor, but also presenting material and economy opportunities as well. Digital Cosplay defines some contemporary fan engagement, but not necessarily their exploitation.

Acknowledgments

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Lost and Found: The "Non-Participatory" Fan in the Television 2.0 Era

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Abstract

This paper questions the foundational connections made in fan studies scholarship over the past 25 years between fans, community and participatory culture. Being a regular consumer of media content without engaging with others is a practice that has become invisible and devalued as a result. Based on quantitative and qualitative analysis of data from a major research project looking at shifting patterns in consumption and participation in the Television 2.0 era, I make the case that participatory fans are in fact in the minority. In additional to regular consumption, aided by timeshifting technology, many "non-participatory" fans increase their viewing pleasure through viewing with friends and family, in person or through use of social media. Data samples will be used to illustrate and build a new category of "personal-social" fan that wedged open a space between the "indifferent" or "distracted" viewer and the participatory fan.

Keywords

community; fan studies; participatory culture; social media; timeshifting

Lost and Found: The "Non-Participatory" Fan in the Television 2.0 Era

With the publication of *Textual Poachers* (Jenkins, 1992), fandom in general and participatory culture in particular was placed on the academic radar. Jenkins argues that the distinction between the "bystander" or "indifferent viewer" (Grossberg, cited in Jenkins 1992), and the fan is rooted in the "intensity of…emotional and intellectual involvement" (56). To this end, he provides the following detailed description of the practices of these "committed viewers":

> Fans…organize their schedules to insure that they will be able to see their favorite program. Confessions of missing an episode are almost automatically met with sympathetic offers *from other fans* willing to "clone" tapes to remedy this gap. The series becomes the object of anticipation: previews are scrutinized in fine detail, each frame stopped and examined for suggestions of potential plot developments; fans race to buy TV Guide as soon as it hits the newsstands so that they may gather new material for speculation from its program descriptions. Secondary materials about the stars or producers are collected and exchanged *within the fan network*….[T]hese activities provide the fan with the information needed to participate fully in the critical debates *of the fan community*. (57-58, emphasis mine)

Leaving aside the quaintness of references to tapes and the print TV Guide in the contemporary social media-verse, this passage is important because of the clear connection it establishes between fan commitment and fan interaction and community. While Jenkins never intended it to be taken as a definitive and exhaustive list of fan practice, it has had the effect of shaping the direction of fan studies research by establishing a baseline for not only what constitutes a legitimate object of study— participatory fan culture-- but also who gets classified as a legitimate fan. Following Jenkins's lead, the next generation of fan scholars, a number of whom have identified as "acafans," focused on specific fandoms and communities within those fandoms. (See Author, 2005; Baym, 2000; 2005; Gray, Sandvoss, & Harrington, 2007; Hellekson & Busse, 2006; Hills, 2002). Even work that examined "anti-fans" (Gray, 2003) or "lurkers" on discussion forums (Author, 2005) still assumed a participatory culture as the norm. Furthermore, the role of the internet technologies that emerged in the mid 1990s cannot be underestimated in reinforcing the participatory/non-participatory binary. While these technologies may not have created online fan communities, they certainly enabled their rapid expansion and made them more visible to other fans and researchers alike (Author, 2005).

This paper on the invisible and devalued "non-participatory" fan, ironically, comes out of a research project aimed at examining shifting patterns of television consumption and shifts in participatory culture as a result of the spread of downloading, streaming and timeshifting technologies in general and social media in particular. Unlike the author's previous small-scale qualitative and ethnographic case studies, this mixed-methods study used snowball sampling to collect online survey data (n=671) between September 2010 and April 2011. Seventy one semi-structured interviews were then conducted with self-selected survey respondents from March to September 2011.

Statistical analysis using SPSS of the data from the "fan practices" section of the questionnaire serves to cast the "non-participatory" fan into sharp relief. The section began with an exclusionary yes/no question: "Do you consider yourself a fan?". The definition provided was purposely drawn very broadly to include those who only watched at least one series regularly over the course of at least one season in the past year. Perhaps not surprisingly, 89 % of the respondents (91.7 % female; 84.3 % male) identified as fans. Just 12 % of women and 8 % of men stated that they never visited websites, online forums, blogs, social networking sites, including LiveJournal, content sharing sites including YouTube), and/or used other forms of social media. When asked specifically about online discussion forums, less than 40 % claimed to have visited any in the past year and only 15 % claimed to have participated in discussion. Just over 36% used Twitter as a fan and just under 25% visited blogs or blogged as a fan. Similarly, almost half (47 %) had "liked" a series or actor on Facebook but only 11 % had posted a comment on the wall of a series. As for classic participatory/productive practices, less than a quarter claimed to have read fanfiction and 13 % claimed to have written and shared any. A larger percentage of respondents had seen fan videos (31 %) but less than five percent (3.4%) had created a vid and shared it. Taken together, these statistics are strongly suggestive that the participatory fan is in the minority.

To gain a better understanding of the majority "non-participatory" fan, I turn to the interview data. At the time of writing, the qualitative analysis is preliminary. What has emerged is that fans who do little more

than watch their favourite programs regularly ("committed consumers") can be just as emotionally committed as participatory fans. A number talked about their use of DVRs to ensure that they never missed an episode and could keep up with more shows than they had in the past with older timeshifting technology (e.g., VCR). Several spoke about using the DVR to start watching a program about 10 minutes after the start time so as to be able to fast forward through the commercials, which they felt spoiled their viewing pleasure. Interaction was still important to many of these fans but in the familial or social context. A number of participants talked about watching shows with friends and family members, either in person or live-tweeting. When asked if they had any interest in going online to visit fan forums to interact with other fans they did not know, most categorically said no. The few who hedged were generally media studies scholars or students who knew about participatory culture and seemed to feel some guilt in not being active in fandom or tried to make sense of their own lack of participation or desire to participate. Data samples and a more detailed discussion will be presented in the final draft of the conference paper.

In sum, it is clear that at the boundary of "bystander" and "participatory fan" lies the category of what I am now calling (until I come up with a better term) the "personal-social" fan.

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Fandom, Transmedia, and Consumption 2.0

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Abstract

Through analysis of interfaces of websites produced for fans and statements from industry workers about fans, this paper seeks to uncover consumption's explanatory power for the intersection of fandom and the web. While transmedia is usually understood as a Web 2.0 phenomenon and thus premised on an idea of interactivity, this essay contends that when transmedia is industrially orchestrated it is not so much interactive as reactive. With official transmedia, fans are invited to respond to the interactive options as given by the owner of the object of fandom,

maintaining them firmly in a consumptive position. Ultimately, the paper argues that transmedia is inherently consumptive and thus usefully understood as Consumption 2.0.

Keywords

fandom; consumption; normalization; transmedia; interactivity

Fandom, Transmedia, and Consumption 2.0

Though many are ready to declare the distinction between producer and consumer outdated after the internet (Andrejevic, 2008; Bruns, 2012; Jenkins, 2006), they typically do so toward discussing how former consumers are now productive, reducing the entire phenomenon to production and removing consumption from the scene altogether. Consumption is thus conspicuously scarce, and an examination of how it functions in the era of widespread interactive media is overdue.

Through an analysis of web interfaces and industry workers' statements, this paper seeks to uncover what explanatory power consumption brings to bear on the intersection of fandom and the web, arguing that it is a useful way to understand what happens when the media industry provides transmedia experiences. That is, while transmedia, understood not just as expanding **how** one can consume in terms of format but **what** is available to any given fan in terms of content, is usually considered to be premised on a particular interactivity, when such expansion is industrially orchestrated it is not so much **interactive** as **reactive**; fans are invited to respond to the interactive options as given by the owner of the object of fandom, maintaining them firmly in a secondary, responding, consuming position. My argument, that is, is that **transmedia is inherently consumptive** and thus usefully understood as Consumption 2.0.

The relationship of transmedia to consumption is obvious when accessing the expansive information requires buying more stuff. Tanya Krzywinska (2009, p. 396) points to this when discussing "industrial and technological convergence, which depends increasingly on formulating devices to create long-stay audiences/consumers who will spend money to remain in contact with their preferred world." The consumptive logic of transmedia is less obvious when content providers do not charge for additional content, but I want to de-emphasize difference on the basis of buying vs. not in order to see the ways these different activities have **structural commonalities as modes of consumption**.

Transmedia is, first, a mode in which fans are invited to follow an object of fandom beyond its evident boundaries in order to consume more information, more content, or more contact with production personnel (athletes, stars, directors). There are also periodic explicit appeals in interfaces and industry statements to transmedia texts providing a **depth** of knowledge, pointing toward information that is more explicitly insider-y or behind-the-scenes. At other times, what is normative to provide to fans is additional **content** to consume.

Second, transmedia sometimes takes the form of producing a story world or facilitating immersion in the object of fandom. Felicia Day of web series *The Guild* notes in a commentary that "the cool thing about internet video is that you can do things like this [a complex scene] and you kind of assume people will watch it more than once and they can parse it and stuff." The idea of immersion also comes into play with features like the Seattle Mariners browser theme and Berkeley athletics ringtones and phone wallpapers, as they rely on an assumption that fans will want a team cocoon to inhabit in their digital media experience. More intensively, this logic animates the production of websites for diegetic organizations in TV show *Heroes* such as Primatech and the Yamagato Fellowship that fans could visit and interact with, producing a more complete "world" to consume.

Though Consumption 2.0, like Web 2.0, is premised on being interactive, what seems to be interaction is generally reaction, such that interactivity becomes less active than passive. In one sense, both the broad

availability of polls and quizzes and games and fantasy sports on organizations' websites and mentions of them from industry workers in their discussion of fans support the contention that the expectation is of a fan who wants to and will do something, but with finer-grained analysis it is apparent that these features normalize a concept of interactivity as "point and click and be entertained" and as a choice within pre-coded options. This is not to say that fans are always or inevitably passive—clearly they are not—but in intensive consumption that is precisely what is recruited. Fans, that is, are not asked to act so much as react to what they are presented.

I contend that the recent invitation of intensive consumption on the part of fans should be considered in the context of the historical processes by which consumption was taught and people came to be understood as—and understand themselves as—consumers. Kevin Floyd (2009, p. 35) notes that "unprecedented corporate and governmental efforts to manage social demand—to socialize a national population into a consumption norm—have been one of the defining characteristics of capitalism as it has developed in the United States since the early twentieth century." In light of Lynn Spigel's (1992) description of how television was historically used to teach people what to buy and how, it is necessary to consider how a newer medium may engage in a similar education of consumption. After all, new attention to fan desires and the appeal to them as an emerging market replicates much the same pattern Alexandra Chasin (2000) identifies as having occurred with groups such as women, African Americans, and gays and lesbians as they became seen as legitimate citizen-consumers.

It must therefore be taken seriously that consumption is inescapably social. Colin Campbell (2000) identifies the idea that consumers are inherently insatiable as a distinctly modern ideological phenomenon and not a transhistoric desire newly practicable in the era of mass production. Thus, it is vital to understand that "consumer culture also **produces consumers** [. . .] **in a variety of ways**" (Sassatelli, 2007, p. 6, original emphasis). As Hebdige (2000, p. 139) points out, mass producing a new product is so expensive that the only sane thing to do is prepare consumers as carefully as any other component of the process; "corporate viability was seen to rely increasingly on the regulation of desire."

Some previous authors have explicitly linked transmedia to consumption, but these scholars, motivated by other concerns, have not made the systemic intervention I propose. Suzanne Scott (2011, pp. 150–151), for example, notes that there has been "conflict between those who claim that transmedia storytelling systems offer fans sophisticated webs of content to explore and enhance, and those that see these webs as precisely that: a mode of confining and regulating fannish analysis and textual production." These authors see the transmedia intensification of consumption, that is, as a form of entrapment, as when Jonathan Gray (2010, p. 110) identifies "interviews, podcasts, DVD bonus materials, and making-of specials" as modes by which "creators try to exert control" over the meaning of their narratives.

However, in place of the control framing's argument that industry deploys transmedia in a bid to shut fans up, I contend that the extension of Consumption 2.0 is better viewed as normalization. It is a means of pitching intensive engagement to fans such that they get what they want in ways that (conveniently enough) do not challenge industry interests—financial or reputational. It is giving, not so that fans can't or won't take, but so that they don't have to bother. It introduces ease into the process of intensive engagement in a way that acts to shape desire and define fans as consumers.

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"Stay Square!": Fan Address in the Web Series

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Abstract

This paper explores the evolving form of the web series, with special focus on the way in which web series invite fans to consume their unfolding stories. Like television series, web series extend their stories and storyworlds across a range of interfaces; but unlike television series, there is no push to return the audience to the television networks or to their TV sets; all dimensions of a web series story take place online, through digital interfaces ranging from Vimeo and YouTube to Twitter to Tumblr to Pinterest. I draw on evolving discussions of how we might understand transmedia and the text/paratext relationships to consider whether there remains a center/marginal relation in digital-only web series. As digital-only texts, web series deploy the same interfaces that fans use in their authorship and community upkeep. Web series must either work to re-establish or to seemingly erase the boundary between producing author and consuming audience. I examine how web series negotiate their relationship with fans and the potential in the form for a perception of decentered authorship and shared idea-ownership.

"Stay Square!": Fan Address in the Web Series

In 2007, in a web piece entitled "Transmedia Storytelling 101," Henry Jenkins defined transmedia storytelling as a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience" (Jenkins, 2007). This definition reflected an excitement about the possibilities of immersive storytelling offered by digital technologies, and more specifically about the possibilities for an authorial control that could stretch across multiple media forms to create a unified viewer experience. Within this vision of transmedia storytelling, viewers shift from consumers of a single stream story to consumers of a carefully coordinated multimedia storyworld.

But at the same time that transmedia storytellers were figuring out how to tell effective stories through multiple media, fans were using digital technologies to build their own visions of televisual and filmic words. Less concerned with "systematic" dispersion, fan communities embrace a multiplicity of narratives and contradictory cultural authorship, what Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson described as the "**fantext**" which includes a "multitude of interpretations" that are "often contradictory yet complementary" (Busse and Hellekson, 2006, 7). Digital technologies offer fans tools to contribute to and co-create this fantext, producing a larger picture that works against any "unity" potentially desired by the original authors of the commercial (trans)media text. The shift to transmedia storytelling means that the multiplicity of fan production became visible alongside and in conversation with "official" transmedia production, and thus fans became more visible as not only consumers but also as producers who may threaten the integrity of the unified text.

In 2011, Jenkins returned to his original definition of transmedia storytelling, to distinguish in "Transmedia 202" between transmedia storytelling and a broader notion of transmedia, which more amorphously includes branding across media, franchises that circulate across media, and fan participation and authorship in digital media (Jenkins, 2011). This broader definition acknowledges that within digital media not only the official authors but also audience also have control to take storyworld elements in a range of different directions. The two definitions, side by side, of transmedia storytelling and transmedia point to the always-present potential tension between author and audience-turned-author, or, in other words, between producer and consumer-turned-producer.

But how do these evolving relationships between text and "paratext" (Gray, 2010), author and audience, and producer and consumer, shift when the all elements of a storyworld are only online, as in the case of the web series? Some web series strive to replicate a TV-as-core/digital-as-periphery dynamic, establishing YouTube videos or Vimeo videos as the web series' center, with web series thus echoing television's representational tactics and distribution patterns and discourse (see Kohnen, 2012, on web series *Husbands* re-creation of television's cultural, representational, and formal norms). But other web series draw on the cultural norms and expectations of audience and fan cultures as the center rather than the periphery of the text, echoing not television but fan and remix culture's representational and distribution tactics. To different degrees and in different ways, web series selectively construct their digital landscape to orchestrate audience consumption and to cultivate a sense of audience commitment and fan investment, often by drawing on patterns of participation already present within fan and digital culture.

A comparison between three web series suggests the cultural work present in these varying modes of audience/fan address. The web series *Divine* centers on a more traditional web series-as-TV series format, marking the other elements that make up its digital landscape as paratexts. Producer discourse and

audience conversations in the *Divine* forums are relegated to a separate interface of discussion boards, distinct from the web series itself, even though the web series is distributed through YouTube, an interface that the audience/fans also have access to and use for broadcasting of self-authored works. The series' orchestrated use of digital tools strives to give the web series an aura of special status; *Divine*'s digital landscape thus works to mirror the dynamic of the TV/fandom landscape, opting for the discussion board format of such fan/industry spaces as (the now NBC-owned) TelevisionWithoutPity.com and FanPop.com.

In contrast to *Divine,* the web series *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (LBD) mirrors the modes of fan and audience/digital/remix authorship within all areas of its text, and indeed resists having a center or core in its multi-interface digital landscape. *LBD* modernizes *Pride and Prejudice* by depicting Lizzie Bennet and her sister Lydia as vloggers, and their sister Jane as a fashion blogger. Thus the three sisters plus additional cast model a multiplicity of modes of audience authorship through their vlogs, blogs, twitter and tumblr feeds and facebook accounts. *LBD* uses multiple interfaces, deploying each as if they were real rather than fictional uses. The YouTube videos, Facebook posts, and tweets that together comprise the advancing LBD story exist in the same interfaces and digital flows as fan authorship (be it self-authorship in vlogs and fashion blogging or authorship of fan fiction, art, and fanvid). *LBD* also encourages audience members to participate in its authorship by playfully inviting expansive fan production within its diegetic universe.

On the surface, the web series *Squaresville* looks more like *Divine* in that it progresses its narrative through the narrative and visual codes of film and television rather than vlogging. *Squaresville* tells the story of two teen girls who dreaming of getting out of their small suburban town. The story progresses in little vignettes of two to nine minutes an episode. However, like *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, *Squaresville* works to integrate the codes of audience, fan, and digital culture into its core identity. At the closing of each episode, the actors address the audience, directly inviting the audience to respond in comments or in video or tweets or across a wide range of interfaces. The actors draw connections between their own experiences and the experiences of their "everygirl" characters, and then invite viewers to reply in kind. The actors also directly appeal to viewers to "Help *Squaresville* by liking, commenting, favoriting and sharing" thus aiding the series' commercial and financial success. The actors also appeal to viewers to carry the *Squaresville* identity beyond the bounds of each episode, with the call to "Stay Square!" that closes every episode. Fans respond by creating work that carries the series' message, which in turn is featured on the series' website, as in the artwork featured in figure 1, created by fan oh-i-reach-to-a-star and shared on Tumblr as part of *Squaresville*'s "fan art Friday."

Figure 1. Stay Square Squaresville Fan Art http://squaresvilleseries.com/tagged/fan-art-friday

Thus, although *Squaresville* seemingly centers on a more traditional narrative format with filmic or televisual-like vignettes making up its "core" diegetic text, that centrality is somewhat of a mirage; it is the framing of the culture of connectedness that determines *Squaresville*'s branding, so that *Squaresville* becomes more a transmedia culture than a distinct media text.[i]

All three of these series seek to draw on the modes of fan, audience, and digital culture in order to create their own; *Divine* does so by recreating the series-as-center/fan community-as-margin relationship, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* does so by integrating the codes of audience authorship and digital/fan culture into the meat of the series itself, and *Squaresville* does so by embedding its short vignettes in a more pervasive sense of the series as shared culture. Where *Divine* seems to fall short of generating fan and audience energy, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and *Squaresville*'s embrace of a shared participatory culture would appear to be more successful, creating dedicated fans eager to proselytize both web series and create with and beyond their lines.

Acknowledgments

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[i] See Elizabeth Elcessor (2012) and Marwick and boyd (2011) on the related conception of digital "microcelebrities" as "star texts of connection" uniting audiences in a shared culture.