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Star Trek Rerun, Reread, Rewritten: Fan Writing as Textual Poaching

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□—*This essay rejects media-fostered stereotypes of* Star Trek *fans as cultural dupes, social misfits, or mindless consumers, perceiving them, in Michel de Certeau's term, as "poachers" of textual meanings who appropriate popular texts and reread them in a fashion that serves different interests. Specifically, the essay considers women who write fiction based in the* Star Trek *universe. First, it outlines how these fans force the primary text to accommodate alternate interests. Second, it considers the issue of literary property in light of the moral economy of the fan community that shapes the range of permissible retellings of the program materials.*

IN LATE December 1986, *Newsweek* (Leerhsen, 1986, p. 66) marked the 20th anniversary of *Star Trek* with a cover story on the program's fans, "the Trekkies, who love nothing more than to watch the same 79 episodes over and over." The *Newsweek* article, with its relentless focus on conspicuous consumption and "infantile" behavior and its patronizing language and smug superiority to all fan activity, is a textbook example of the stereotyped representation of fans found in both popular writing and academic criticism, "Hang on: You are being beamed to one of those *Star Trek* conventions, where grown-ups greet each other with the Vulcan salute and offer in reverent tones to pay $100 for the autobiography of Leonard Nimoy" (p. 66). Fans are characterized as "kooks" obsessed with trivia, celebrities, and collectibles; as misfits and crazies; as "a lot of overweight women, a lot of divorced and single women" (p. 68). Borrowing heavily from pop Freud, ersatz Adorno, and pulp sociology, *Newsweek* explains the "Trekkie phenomenon" in terms of repetition compulsion, infantile regression, commodity fetishism, nostalgic complacency, and future shock. Perhaps most telling, *Newsweek* consistently treats *Trek* fans as a problem to be solved, a mystery to be understood, rather than as a type of cultural activity that many find satisfying and pleasurable.[1]

Academic writers depict fans in many

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of the same terms. For Robin Wood (1986, p. 164), the fantasy film fan is "reconstructed as a child, surrendering to the reactivation of a set of values and structures [the] adult self has long since repudiated." The fan is trapped within a repetition compulsion similar to that which an infant experiences through the *fort/da* game. A return to such "banal" texts could not possibly be warranted by their intellectual content but can only be motivated by a return to "the lost breast" (p. 169), by the need for reassurance provided by the passive reexperience of familiar pleasures. "The pleasure offered by the *Star Wars* films corresponds very closely to our basic conditioning; it is extremely reactionary, as all mindless and automatic pleasure tends to be. The finer pleasures are those we have to work for" (p. 164). Wood valorizes academically respectable texts and reading practices at the expense of popular works and their fans. Academic rereading produces new insights; fan rereading rehashes old experiences.[2]

As these two articles illustrate, the fan constitutes a scandalous category in contemporary American culture, one that provokes an excessive response from those committed to the interests of textual producers and institutionalized interpreters and calls into question the logic by which others order their aesthetic experiences. Fans appear to be frighteningly out of control, undisciplined and unrepentant, rogue readers. Rejecting aesthetic distance, fans passionately embrace favored texts and attempt to integrate media representations within their own social experience. Like cultural scavengers, fans reclaim works that others regard as worthless and trash, finding them a rewarding source of popular capital. Like rebellious children, fans refuse to read by the rules imposed upon them by the schoolmasters. For fans, reading becomes a type of play, responsive only to its own loosely structured rules and generating its own types of pleasure.

Michel de Certeau (1984) has characterized this type of reading as "poaching," an impertinent raid on the literary preserve that takes away only those things that seem useful or pleasurable to the reader. "Far from being writers . . . readers are travellers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves" (p. 174). De Certeau perceives popular reading as a series of "advances and retreats, tactics and games played with the text" (p. 175), as a type of cultural bricolage through which readers fragment texts and reassemble the broken shards according to their own blueprint, salvaging bits and pieces of found material in making sense of their own social experience. Far from viewing consumption as imposing meanings upon the public, de Certeau suggests, consumption involves reclaiming textual material, "making it one's own, appropriating or reappropriating it" (p. 166).

Yet, such wanton conduct cannot be sanctioned; it must be contained, through ridicule if necessary, since it challenges the very notion of literature as a type of private property to be controlled by textual producers and their academic interpreters. Public attacks on media fans keep other viewers in line, making it uncomfortable for readers to adopt such inappropriate strategies. One woman recalled the negative impact popular representations of the fan had on her early cultural life:

> Journalists and photographers always went for the people furthest out of mainstream humanity . . . showing the reader the handi-

capped, the very obese, the strange and the childish in order to "entertain" the "average reader." Of course, a teenager very unsure of herself and already labeled "weird" would run in panic. (Ludlow, 1987, p. 17)

Such representations isolate potential fans from others who share common interests and reading practices and marginalize fan-related activities as outside the mainstream and beneath dignity. These same stereotypes reassure academic writers of the validity of their own interpretations of the program content, readings made in conformity with established critical protocols, and free them from any need to come into direct contact with the program's crazed followers.[3]

In this essay, I propose an alternative approach to fan experience, one that perceives "Trekkers" (as they prefer to be called) not as cultural dupes, social misfits, or mindless consumers but rather as, in de Certeau's term, "poachers" of textual meanings. Behind the exotic stereotypes fostered by the media lies a largely unexplored terrain of cultural activity, a subterranean network of readers and writers who remake programs in their own image. "Fandom" is a vehicle for marginalized subcultural groups (women, the young, gays, etc.) to pry open space for their cultural concerns within dominant representations; it is a way of appropriating media texts and rereading them in a fashion that serves different interests, a way of transforming mass culture into a popular culture.

I do not believe this essay represents the last word on *Star Trek* fans, a cultural community that is far too multivocal to be open to easy description. Rather, I explore some aspects of current fan activity that seem particularly relevant to cultural studies. My primary concern is with what happens when these fans produce their own texts, texts that inflect program content with their own social experience and displace commercially produced commodities for a kind of popular economy. For these fans, *Star Trek* is not simply something that can be reread; it is something that can and must be rewritten in order to make it more responsive to their needs, in order to make it a better producer of personal meanings and pleasures.

No legalistic notion of literary property can adequately constrain the rapid proliferation of meanings surrounding a popular text. Yet, there are other constraints, ethical constraints and self-imposed rules, that are enacted by the fans, either individually or as part of a larger community, in response to their felt need to legitimate their unorthodox appropriation of mass media texts. E. P. Thompson (1971) suggests that eighteenth and nineteenth century peasant leaders, the historical poachers behind de Certeau's apt metaphor, responded to a kind of "moral economy," an informal set of consensual norms that justified their uprisings against the landowners and tax collectors in order to restore a preexisting order being corrupted by its avowed protectors. Similarly, the fans often cast themselves not as poachers but as loyalists, rescuing essential elements of the primary text misused by those who maintain copyright control over the program materials. Respecting literary property even as they seek to appropriate it for their own uses, these fans become reluctant poachers, hesitant about their relationship to the program text, uneasy about the degree of manipulation they can legitimately perform on its materials, and policing each other for abuses of their interpretive license. They wander across a terrain pockmarked with confusions and contradictions. These ambiguities become transparent when fan writing is examined as a particular type of

reader-text interaction. My discussion consequently has a double focus: first, I discuss how the fans force the primary text to accommodate their own interests, and then I reconsider the issue of literary property rights in light of the moral economy of the fan community.

FANS: FROM READING TO WRITING

The popularity of *Star Trek* has motivated a wide range of cultural productions and creative reworkings of program materials: from children's backyard play to adult interaction games, from needlework to elaborate costumes, from private fantasies to computer programming. This ability to transform personal reaction into social interaction, spectator culture into participatory culture, is one of the central characteristics of fandom. One becomes a fan not by being a regular viewer of a particular program but by translating that viewing into some type of cultural activity, by sharing feelings and thoughts about the program content with friends, by joining a community of other fans who share common interests. For fans, consumption sparks production, reading generates writing, until the terms seem logically inseparable. In fan writer Jean Lorrah's words (1984, p. 1):

> Trekfandom ... is friends and letters and crafts and fanzines and trivia and costumes and artwork and filksongs [fan parodies] and buttons and film clips and conventions—something for everybody who has in common the inspiration of a television show which grew far beyond its TV and film incarnations to become a living part of world culture.

Lorrah's description blurs all boundaries between producers and consumers, spectators and participants, the commercial and the home crafted, to construct an image of fandom as a cultural and social network that spans the globe.

Many fans characterize their entry into fandom in terms of a movement from social and cultural isolation, doubly imposed upon them as women within a patriarchal society and as seekers after alternative pleasures within dominant media representations, toward more and more active participation in a community receptive to their cultural productions, a community where they may feel a sense of belonging. One fan recalls:

> I met one girl who liked some of the TV shows I liked ... but I was otherwise a bookworm, no friends, working in the school library. Then my friend and I met some other girls a grade ahead of us but ga-ga over *ST*. From the beginning, we met each Friday night at one of the two homes that had a color TV to watch *Star Trek* together. ... Silence was mandatory except during commercials, and, afterwards, we "discussed" each episode. We re-wrote each story and corrected the wrongs done to "Our Guys" by the writers. We memorized bits of dialog. We even started to write our own adventures. (Caruthers-Montgomery, 1987, p. 8)

Some fans are drawn gradually from intimate interactions with others who live near them toward participation in a broader network of fans who attend regional, national, and even international science fiction conventions. One fan writes of her first convention: "I have been to so many conventions since those days, but this one was the ultimate experience. I walked into that Lunacon and felt like I had come home without ever realizing I had been lost" (Deneroff, 1987, p. 3). Another remarks simply, "I met folks who were just as nuts as I was, I had a wonderful time" (Lay, 1987, p. 15).

For some women, trapped within low paying jobs or within the socially isolated

sphere of the homemaker, participation within a national, or international, network of fans grants a degree of dignity and respect otherwise lacking. For others, fandom offers a training ground for the development of professional skills and an outlet for creative impulses constrained by their workday lives. Fan slang draws a sharp contrast between the mundane, the realm of everyday experience and those who dwell exclusively within that space, and fandom, an alternative sphere of cultural experience that restores the excitement and freedom that must be repressed to function in ordinary life. One fan writes, "Not only does 'mundane' mean 'everyday life,' it is also a term used to describe narrow-minded, pettiness, judgmental, conformity, and a shallow and silly nature. It is used by people who feel very alienated from society" (Osborne, 1987, p. 4). To enter fandom is to escape from the mundane into the marvelous.

The need to maintain contact with these new friends, often scattered over a broad geographic area, can require that speculations and fantasies about the program content take written form, first as personal letters and later as more public newsletters, "letterzines" or fan fiction magazines. Fan viewers become fan writers.

Over the 20 years since *Star Trek* was first aired, fan writing has achieved a semi-institutional status. Fan magazines, sometimes hand typed, photocopied, and stapled, other times offset printed and commercially bound, are distributed through the mails and sold at conventions, frequently reaching an international readership. *Writer's Digest* (Cooper, 1987) recently estimated that there were more than 300 amateur press publications that regularly allowed fans to explore aspects of their favorite films and television programs. Although a wide variety of different media texts have sparked some fan writing, including *Star Wars, Blake's Seven, Battlestar Galactica, Doctor Who, Miami Vice, Road Warrior, Remington Steele, The Man From U.N.C.L.E., Simon and Simon, The A-Team,* and *Hill Street Blues, Star Trek* continues to play the central role within fan writing. *Datazine,* one of several magazines that serve as central clearing houses for information about fanzines, lists some 120 different *Star Trek* centered publications in distribution. Although fanzines may take a variety of forms, fans generally divide them into two major categories: "letterzines" that publish short articles and letters from fans on issues surrounding their favorite shows and "fictionzines" that publish short stories, poems, and novels concerning the program characters and concepts.[4] Some fan-produced novels, notably the works of Jean Lorrah (1976a, 1978) and Jacqueline Lichtenberg (1976), have achieved a canonized status in the fan community, remaining more or less in constant demand for more than a decade.[5]

It is important to be careful in distinguishing between these fan-generated materials and commercially produced works, such as the series of *Star Trek* novels released by Pocket Books under the official supervision of Paramount, the studio that owns the rights to the *Star Trek* characters. Fanzines are totally unauthorized by the program producers and face the constant threat of legal action for their open violation of the producer's copyright authority over the show's characters and concepts. Paramount has tended to treat fan magazines with benign neglect as long as they are handled on an exclusively nonprofit basis. Producer Gene Roddenberry and many of the cast members have contributed to such magazines. Bantam Books

even released several anthologies showcasing the work of *Star Trek* fan writers (Marshak & Culbreath, 1978).

Other producers have not been as kind. Lucasfilm initially sought to control *Star Wars* fan publications, seeing them as a rival to its officially sponsored fan organization, and later threatened to prosecute editors who published works that violated the "family values" associated with the original films. Such a scheme has met considerable resistance from the fan community that generally regards Lucas' actions as unwarranted interference in its own creative activity. Several fanzine editors have continued to distribute adult-oriented *Star Wars* stories through an underground network of special friends, even though such works are no longer publicly advertised through *Datazine* or sold openly at conventions. A heated editorial in *Slaysu*, a fanzine that routinely published feminist-inflected erotica set in various media universes, reflects these writers' opinions:

> Lucasfilm is saying, "you must enjoy the characters of the *Star Wars* universe for male reasons. Your sexuality must be correct and proper by my (male) definition." I am not male. I do not want to be. I refuse to be a poor imitation, or worse, someone's idiotic ideal of femininity. Lucasfilm has said, in essence, "this is what we see in the *Star Wars* films and we are telling you that this is what you will see." (Siebert, 1982, p. 44)

C. A. Siebert's editorial asserts the rights of fanzine writers to consciously revise the character of the original texts, to draw elements from dominant culture in order to produce underground art that explicitly challenges patriarchal assumptions. Siebert and the other editors deny the traditional property rights of textual producers in favor of a right of free play with the program materials, a right of readers to use media texts in their own ways and of writers to reconstruct characters in their own terms. Once characters are inserted into popular discourse, regardless of their source of origin, they become the property of the fans who fantasize about them, not the copyright holders who merchandise them. Yet the relationship between fan texts and primary texts is often more complex than Siebert's defiant stance might suggest, and some fans do feel bound by a degree of fidelity to the original series' conceptions of those characters and their interactions.

GENDER AND WRITING

Fan writing is an almost exclusively feminine response to mass media texts. Men actively participate in a wide range of fan-related activities, notably interactive games and conference planning committees, roles consistent with patriarchal norms that typically relegate combat—even combat fantasies—and organizational authority to the masculine sphere. Fan writers and fanzine readers, however, are almost always female. Camille Bacon-Smith (1986) has estimated that more than 90% of all fan writers are female. The greatest percentage of male participation is found in the "letterzines," like *Comlink* and *Treklink*, and in "nonfiction" magazines, like *Trek* that publish speculative essays on aspects of the program universe. Men may feel comfortable joining discussions of future technologies or military lifestyle but not in pondering Vulcan sexuality, McCoy's childhood, or Kirk's love life.

Why this predominance of women within the fan writing community? Research suggests that men and women have been socialized to read for different purposes and in different ways. David Bleich (1986) asked a mixed group of

college students to comment, in a free association fashion, on a body of canonized literary works. His analysis of their responses suggests that men focused primarily on narrative organization and authorial intent while women devoted more energy to reconstructing the textual world and understanding the characters. He writes, "Women enter the world of the novel, take it as something 'there' for that purpose; men see the novel as a result of someone's action and construe its meaning or logic in those terms" (p. 239). In a related study, Bleich asked some 120 University of Indiana freshmen to "retell as fully and as accurately as you can [William] Faulkner's 'Barn Burning' " (p. 255) and, again, notes substantial differences between men and women:

> The men retold the story as if the purpose was to deliver a clear simple structure or chain of information: these are the main characters, this is the main action, this is how it turned out. . . . The women present the narrative as if it were an atmosphere or an experience. (p. 256)

Bleich finds that women were more willing to enjoy free play with the story content, making inferences about character relationships that took them well beyond the information explicitly contained within the text. Such data strongly suggest that the practice of fan writing, the compulsion to expand speculations about characters and story events beyond textual boundaries, draws heavily upon the types of interpretive strategies more common to the feminine than to the masculine.

Bleich's observations provide only a partial explanation, since they do not fully account for why many women find it necessary to go beyond the narrative information while most men do not. As Teresa de Lauretis (1982, p. 106) points out, female characters often exist only in the margins of male-centered narratives:

> Medusa and the Sphinx, like the other ancient monsters, have survived inscribed in hero narratives, in someone else's story, not their own; so they are figures or markers of positions—places and topoi—through which the hero and his story move to their destination and to accomplish meaning.

Texts written by and for men yield easy pleasures to their male readers, yet may resist feminine pleasure. To fully enjoy the text, women are often forced to perform a type of intellectual transvesticism, identifying with male characters in opposition to their own cultural experiences or to construct unwritten countertexts through their daydreams or through their oral interaction with other women that allow them to explore their own narrative concerns. This need to reclaim feminine interests from the margins of masculine texts produces endless speculation, speculation that draws the reader well beyond textual boundaries into the domain of the intertextual. Mary Ellen Brown and Linda Barwick (1987) show how women's gossip about soap opera inserts program content into an existing feminine oral culture. Fan writing represents the logical next step in this cultural process: the transformation of oral countertexts into a more tangible form, the translation of verbal speculations into written works that can be shared with a broader circle of women. In order to do so, the women's status must change; no longer simply spectators, these women become textual producers.

Just as women's gossip about soap operas assumes a place within a preexisting feminine oral culture, fan writing adopts forms and functions traditional to women's literary culture. Cheris Kramarae (1981, pp. 3–4) traces the history of

women's efforts to "find ways to express themselves outside the dominant modes of expression used by men," to circumvent the ideologically constructed interpretive strategies of masculine literary genres. Kramarae concludes that women have found the greatest room to explore their feelings and ideas within privately circulated letters and diaries and through collective writing projects. Similarly, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg (1985) discusses the ways that the exchange of letters allowed nineteenth century women to maintain close ties with other women, even when separated by great geographic distances and isolated within the narrow confines of Victorian marriage. Such letters provided a covert vehicle for women to explore common concerns and even ridicule the men in their lives. Smith-Rosenberg (p. 45) concludes:

> Nineteenth-century women were, as Nathaniel Hawthorne reminds us, "damned scribblers." They spoke endlessly to one another in private letters and journals . . . about religion, gender roles, their sexuality and men's, about prostitution, seduction, and intemperance, about unwanted pregnancies and desired education, about their relation to the family and the family's to the world.

Fan writing, with its circulation conducted largely through the mails, with its marketing mostly a matter of word of mouth, with the often collective construction of fantasy universes, and with its highly confessional tone, clearly follows within that same tradition and serves some of the same functions. The ready-made characters of popular culture provide these women with a set of common references for discussing their similar experiences and feelings with others with whom they may never have enjoyed face-to-face contact. They draw upon these shared points of reference to confront many of the same issues that concerned nineteenth century women: religion, gender roles, sexuality, family, and professional ambition.

WHY *STAR TREK*?

While most texts within a male-dominated culture presumably have the capacity to spark some sort of feminine countertext, only certain programs have generated the type of extended written responses characteristic of fandom. Why, then, has the bulk of fan writing centered around science fiction, a genre that Judith Spector (1986, p. 163) argues until recently has been hostile toward women, a genre "by, for and about men of action"? Why has it also engaged other genres like science fiction (the cop show, the detective drama, or the western) that have represented the traditional domain of male readers? Why do these women struggle to reclaim such seemingly unfertile soil when there are so many other texts that more traditionally reflect feminine interests and that feminist media critics are now trying to reclaim for their cause? In short, why *Star Trek*?

Obviously, no single factor can adequately account for all fanzines, a literary form that necessarily involves the translation of homogeneous media texts into a plurality of personal and subcultural responses. One partial explanation, however, might be that traditionally feminine texts (the soap opera, the popular romance, the "women's picture," etc.) do not need as much reworking as science fiction and westerns in order to accommodate the social experience of women. The resistance of such texts to feminist reconstruction may require a greater expenditure of creative effort and therefore may push women toward a more thorough reworking of program materials than so-called feminine texts

that can be more easily assimilated or negated.

Another explanation might be that these so-called feminine texts satisfy, at least partially, the desires of traditional women yet fail to meet the needs of more professionally oriented women. A particular fascination of *Star Trek* for these women appears to be rooted in the way that the program seems to hold out a suggestion of nontraditional feminine pleasures, of greater and more active involvement for women within the adventure of professional space travel, while finally reneging on those promises. Sexual equality was an essential component of producer Roddenberry's optimistic vision of the future; a woman, Number One (Majel Barrett), was originally slated to be the Enterprise's second in command. Network executives, however, consistently fought efforts to break with traditional feminine stereotypes, fearing the alienation of more conservative audience members (Whitfield & Roddenberry, 1968). Number One was scratched after the program pilot, but throughout the run of the series women were often cast in nontraditional jobs, everything from Romulan commanders to weapon specialists. The networks, however reluctantly, were offering women a future, a "final frontier" that included them.

Fan writers, though, frequently express dissatisfaction with these women's characterizations within the episodes. In the words of fan writer Pamela Rose (1977, p. 48), "When a woman is a guest star on *Star Trek,* nine out of ten times there is something wrong with her." Rose notes that these female characters have been granted positions of power within the program, only to demonstrate through their erratic emotion-driven conduct that women are unfit to fill such roles. Another fan writer, Toni Lay (1986, p. 15), expresses mixed feelings about *Star Trek*'s social vision:

> It was ahead of its time in some ways, like showing that a Caucasian, all-American, all-male crew was not the only possibility for space travel. Still, the show was sadly deficient in other ways, in particular, its treatment of women. Most of the time, women were referred to as "girls." And women were never shown in a position of authority unless they were aliens, i.e., Deela, T'Pau, Natira, Sylvia, etc. It was like the show was saying "equal opportunity is OK for their women but not for our girls."

Lay states that she felt "devastated" over the repeated failure of the series and the later feature films to give Lieutenant Penda Uhura command duties commensurate with her rank: "When the going gets tough, the tough leave the womenfolk behind" (p. 15). She contends that Uhura and the other women characters should have been given a chance to demonstrate what they could do when confronted by the same types of problems that their male counterparts so heroically overcome. The constant availability of the original episodes through reruns and shifts in the status of women within American society throughout the past two decades have only made these unfulfilled promises more difficult to accept, requiring progressively greater efforts to restructure the program in order to allow it to produce pleasures appropriate to the current reception context.

Indeed, many fan writers characterize themselves as "repairing the damage" caused by the program's inconsistent and often demeaning treatment of its female characters. Jane Land (1986, p. 1), for instance, characterizes her fan novel, *Kista,* as "an attempt to rescue one of *Star Trek*'s female characters [Christine Chapel] from an artificially imposed case of foolishness." Promising to show "the way the future never was," *The*

Woman's List, a recently established fanzine with an explicitly feminist orientation, has called for "material dealing with all range of possibilities for women, including: women of color, lesbians, women of alien cultures, and women of all ages and backgrounds." Its editors acknowledge that their publication's project necessarily involves telling the types of stories that network policy blocked from airing when the series was originally produced. A recent flier for that publication explains:

> We hope to raise and explore those questions which the network censors, the television genre, and the prevailing norms of the time made it difficult to address. We believe that both the nature of human interaction and sexual mores and the structure of both families and relationships will have changed by the 23rd century and we are interested in exploring those changes.

Telling such stories requires the stripping away of stereotypically feminine traits. The series characters must be reconceptualized in ways that suggest hidden motivations and interests heretofore unsuspected. They must be reshaped into full-blooded feminist role models. While, in the series, Chapel is defined almost exclusively in terms of her unrequited passion for Spock and her professional subservience to Dr. McCoy, Land represents her as a fiercely independent woman, capable of accepting love only on her own terms, ready to pursue her own ambitions wherever they take her, and outspoken in response to the patronizing attitudes of the command crew. Siebert (1980, p. 33) has performed a similar operation on the character of Lieutenant Uhura, as this passage from one of her stories suggests:

> There were too few men like Spock who saw her as a person. Even Captain Kirk, she smiled, especially Captain Kirk, saw her as a woman first. He let her do certain things but only because military discipline required it. Whenever there was any danger, he tried to protect her.... Uhura smiled sadly, she would go on as she had been, outwardly a feminine toy, inwardly a woman who was capable and human.

Here, Siebert attempts to resolve the apparent contradiction created within the series text by Uhura's official status as a command officer and her constant displays of "feminine frailty." Uhura's situation, Siebert suggests, is characteristic of the way that women must mask their actual competency behind traditionally feminine mannerisms within a world dominated by patriarchal assumptions and masculine authority. By rehabilitating Uhura's character in this fashion, Siebert has constructed a vehicle through which she can document the overt and subtle forms of sexual discrimination that an ambitious and determined woman faces as she struggles for a command post in Star Fleet (or for that matter, within a twentieth century corporate board room).

Fan writers like Siebert, Land, and Karen Bates (1982; 1983; 1984), whose novels explore the progression of a Chapel-Spock marriage through many of the problems encountered by contemporary couples trying to juggle the conflicting demands of career and family, speak directly to the concerns of professional women in a way that more traditionally feminine works fail to do.[6] These writers create situations where Chapel and Uhura must heroically overcome the same types of obstacles that challenge their male counterparts within the primary texts and often discuss directly the types of personal and professional problems particular to working women. Land's recent fan novel, *Demeter* (1987), is exemplary in its treatment of the professional life of its central character,

Nurse Chapel. Land deftly melds action sequences with debates about gender relations and professional discrimination, images of command decisions with intimate glimpses of a Spock-Chapel marriage. An all-woman crew, headed by Uhura and Chapel, are dispatched on a mission to a feminist separatist space colony under siege from a pack of intergalactic drug smugglers who regard rape as a manly sport. In helping the colonists to overpower their would-be assailants, the women are at last given a chance to demonstrate their professional competence under fire and force Captain Kirk to reevaluate some of his command policies. *Demeter* raises significant questions about the possibilities of male-female interaction outside of patriarchal dominance. The meeting of a variety of different planetary cultures that represent alternative social philosophies and organizations, alternative ways of coping with the same essential debates surrounding sexual difference, allows for a far-reaching exploration of contemporary gender relations.

FROM SPACE OPERA TO SOAP OPERA

If works like *Demeter* constitute intriguing prototypes for a new breed of feminist popular literature, they frequently do so within conventions borrowed as much from more traditionally feminine forms of mass culture as from *Star Trek* itself. For one thing, the female fans perceive the individual episodes as contributing to one great program text. As a result, fan stories often follow the format of a continuous serial rather than operating as a series of self-enclosed works. Tania Modleski (1982) demonstrates the ways that the serial format of much women's fiction, particularly of soap operas, responds to the rhythms of women's social experience. The shaky financing characteristic of the fanzine mode of production, the writers' predilections to engage in endless speculations about the program content and to continually revise their understanding of the textual world, amplifies the tendency of women's fiction to postpone resolution, transforming *Star Trek* into a never ending story. Fan fiction marches forward through a series of digressions as new speculations cause the writers to halt the advance of their chronicles, to introduce events that must have occurred prior to the start of their stories, or to introduce secondary plot lines that pull them from the main movement of the event chain. This type of writing activity has been labeled a "story tree." Bacon-Smith (1986, p. 26) explains:

> The most characteristic feature of the story tree is that the stories do not fall in a linear sequence. A root story may offer unresolved situations, secondary characters whose actions during the main events are not described or a resolution is unsatisfactory to some readers. Writers then branch out from that story, completing dropped subplots, exploring the reactions of minor characters to major events.

This approach, characteristic of women's writing in a number of cultures, stems from a sense of life as continuous rather than fragmented into a series of discrete events, from an outlook that is experience centered and not goal oriented: "Closure doesn't make sense to them. At the end of the story, characters go on living in the nebulous world of the not yet written. They develop, modify their relationships over time, age, raise families" (p. 28).

Moreover, as Bacon-Smith's comments suggest, this type of reading and writing strategy focuses greater attention on ongoing character relationships than on more temporally concentrated plot

elements. Long-time fan writer Lichtenberg (personal communication, August 1987) summarizes the difference: "Men want a physical problem with physical action leading to a physical resolution. Women want a psychological problem with psychological action leading to a psychological resolution." These women express a desire for narratives that concentrate on the character relationships and explore them in a "realistic" or "mature" fashion rather than in purely formulaic terms, stories that are "true" and "believable" and not "syrupy" or "sweet." Fan writers seek to satisfy these demands through their own *Star Trek* fiction, to write the type of stories that they and other fans desire to read.

The result is a type of genre switching, the rereading and rewriting of "space opera" as an exotic type of romance (and, often, the reconceptualization of romance itself as feminist fiction). Fanzines rarely publish exclusively action-oriented stories glorifying the Enterprise's victories over the Klingon-Romulan Alliance, its conquest of alien creatures, its restructuring of planetary governments, or its repair of potential flaws in new technologies, despite the prevalence of such plots in the original episodes. When such elements do appear, they are usually evoked as a background against which the more typical romance or relationship-centered stories are played or as a test through which female protagonists can demonstrate their professional skills. In doing so, these fan writers draw inspiration from feminist science fiction writers, including Johanna Russ, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Zenna Henderson, Marge Piercy, Andre Norton, and Ursula Leguin. These writers' entry into the genre in the late 1960s and early 70s helped to redefine reader expectations about what constituted science fiction, pushing the genre toward greater and greater interest in soft science and sociological concerns and increased attention on interpersonal relationships and gender roles.[7] *Star Trek*, produced in a period when masculine concerns still dominated science fiction, is reconsidered in light of the newer, more feminist orientation of the genre, becoming less a program about the Enterprise's struggles against the Klingon-Romulan Alliance and more an examination of a character's efforts to come to grips with conflicting emotional needs and professional responsibilities.

Women, confronting a traditionally masculine space opera, choose to read it instead as a type of women's fiction. In constructing their own stories about the series characters, they turn frequently to the more familiar and comfortable formulas of the soap, the romance, and the feminist coming-of-age novel for models of storytelling technique. While the fans themselves often dismiss such genres as too focused upon mundane concerns to be of great interest, the influence of such materials may be harder to escape. As Elizabeth Segel (1986) suggests, our initial introduction to reading, the gender-based designation of certain books as suitable for young girls and others for young boys, can be a powerful determinant of our later reading and writing strategies, determining, in part, the relative accessibility of basic genre models for use in making sense of ready-made texts and for constructing personal fantasies. As fans attempt to reconstruct the feminine countertexts that exist on the margins of the original series episodes, they, in the process, refocus the series around traditional feminine and contemporary feminist concerns, around sexuality and gender politics, around religion, family, marriage, and romance.

Many fans' first stories take the form of romantic fantasies about the series

characters and frequently involve inserting glorified versions of themselves into the world of Star Fleet. The Bethann (1976, p. 54) story, "The Measure of Love," for instance, deals with a young woman, recently transferred to the Enterprise, who has a love affair with Kirk:

> We went to dinner that evening. Till that time, I was sure he'd never really noticed me. Sitting across the table from him, I realized just what a vital alive person this man was. I had dreamed of him, but never imagined my hopes might become a reality. But, this was real—not a dream. His eyes were intense, yet they twinkled in an amused sort of way.
>
> "Captain . . ."
>
> "Call me Jim."

Her romance with Kirk comes to an abrupt end when the young woman transfers to another ship without telling the captain that she carries his child because she does not want her love to interfere with his career.

Fans are often harshly critical of these so-called "Lieutenant Mary Sue" stories, which one writer labels "groupie fantasies" (Hunter, 1977, p. 78), because of their self-indulgence, their often hackneyed writing styles, their formulaic plots, and their violations of the established characterizations. In reconstituting *Star Trek* as a popular romance, these young women reshape the series characters into traditional romantic heroes, into "someone who is intensely and exclusively interested in her and in her needs" (Radway, 1984, p. 149). Yet, many fan writers are more interested in what happens when this romantic ideal confronts a world that places professional duty over personal needs, when men and women must somehow reconcile careers and marriage in a confusing period of shifting gender relationships. Veteran fan writer Kendra Hunter (1977, p. 78) writes, "Kirk is not going to go off into the sunset with anyone because he is owned body and soul by the Enterprise." *Treklink* editor Joan Verba (1986, p. 2) comments, "No believable character is gushed over by so many normally level-headed characters such as Kirk and Spock as a typical Mary Sue." Nor are the women of tomorrow apt to place any man, even Jim Kirk, totally above all other concerns.

Some, though by no means all, of the most sophisticated fan fiction also takes the form of the romance. Both Radway (1984) and Modleski (1982) note popular romances' obsession with a semiotics of masculinity, with the need to read men's often repressed emotional states from the subtle signs of outward gesture and expression. The cold logic of Vulcan, the desire to suppress all signs of emotion, make Spock and Sarek especially rich for such interpretations as in the following passage from Lorrah's *Full Moon Rising* (1976b, pp. 9–10):

> The intense sensuality she saw in him [Sarek] in other ways suggested a hidden sexuality. She had noticed everything from the way he appreciated the beauty of a moonlit night or a finely-cut sapphire to the way his strongly-molded hands caressed the mellowed leather binding of the book she had given him. . . . That incredible control which she could not penetrate. Sometimes he deliberately let her see beyond it, as he had done earlier this evening, but if she succeeded in making him lose control he would never be able to forgive her.

In Lorrah's writings, the alienness of Vulcan culture becomes a metaphor for the many things that separate men and women, for the factors that prevent intimacy within marriage. She describes her fiction as the story of "two people who are different physically, mentally, and emotionally, but who nonetheless man-

age to make a pretty good marriage" (p. 2). While Vulcan restraint suggests the emotional sterility of traditional masculinity, their alien sexuality allows Lorrah to propose alternatives. Her Vulcans find sexual inequality to be illogical and allow for very little difference in the treatment of men and women. (This is an assumption shared by many fan writers.) Moreover, the Vulcan mindmeld grants a degree of sexual and emotional intimacy unknown on earth; Vulcan men even employ this power to relieve women of labor pains and to share the experience of childbirth. Her lengthy writings on the decades-long romance between Amanda and Sarek represent a painstaking effort to construct a feminist utopia, to propose how traditional marriage might be reworked to allow it to satisfy the personal and professional needs of both men and women.

Frequently, the fictional formulas of popular romance are tempered by women's common social experiences as lovers, wives, and mothers under patriarchy. In Bates' novels, Nurse Chapel must confront and overcome her feelings of abandonment and jealousy during those long periods of time when her husband, Spock, is deeply absorbed in his work. *Starweaver Two* (1982, p. 10) describes this pattern:

> The pattern had been repeated so often, it was ingrained. . . . Days would pass without a word between them because of the hours he labored and pored over his computers. Their shifts rarely matched and the few hours they could be together disappeared for one reason or another.

Far from an idyllic romance, Bates' characters struggle to make their marriage work in a world where professionalism is everything and the personal counts for relatively little. Land's version of a Chapel/Spock marriage is complicated by the existence of children who must remain at home under the care of Sarek and Amanda while their parents pursue their space adventures. In one scene, Chapel confesses her confused feelings about this situation to a young Andorian friend: "I spend my life weighing the children's needs against my needs against Spock's needs, and at any given time I know I'm shortchanging someone" (1987, p. 27).

While some male fans denigrate these types of fan fiction as "soap operas with Kirk and Spock" (Blaes, 1986a, p. 6), these women see themselves as constructing soap operas with a difference, soap operas that reflect a feminist vision. In Siebert's words (1982, pp. 44–45), "I write erotic stories for myself and for other women who will not settle for being less than human." Siebert suggests that her stories about Uhura and her struggle for recognition and romance in a male-dominated Star Fleet have helped her to resolve her own conflicting feelings within a world of changing gender relations and to explore hidden aspects of her own sexuality. Through her erotica, she hopes to increase other women's awareness of the need to struggle against entrenched patriarchal norms. Unlike their counterparts in Harlequin romances, these women refuse to accept marriage and the love of a man as their primary goal. Their stories push toward resolutions that allow Chapel or Uhura to achieve both professional advancement and personal satisfaction. Unlike almost every other form of popular fiction, fanzine stories frequently explore the maturing of relationships beyond the nuptial vows, seeing marriage as continually open to new adventures, new conflicts, and new discoveries.

The point of contact between feminism and the popular romance is largely a product of these writers' particular

brand of feminism, one that, for the most part, is closer to the views of Betty Friedan than to those of Andrea Dworkin. It is a feminism that urges a sharing of feelings and lifestyles between men and women rather than radical separation or unresolvable differences. It is a literature of reform, not of revolt. The women still acknowledge their need for the companionship of men, for men who care for them and make them feel special, even as they are asking for those relationships to be conducted in different terms. Land's Nurse Chapel, who in *Demeter* is both fascinated and repelled by the feminist separatist colony, reflects these women's ambiguous and sometimes contradictory responses toward more radical forms of feminism. In the end, Chapel recognizes the potential need for such a place, for a "room of one's own," yet sees greater potential in achieving a more liberated relationship between men and women. She learns to develop self-sufficiency, yet chooses to share her life with her husband, Spock, and to achieve a deeper understanding of their differing expectations about their relationship. Each writer grapples with these concerns in her own terms, yet most achieve some compromise between the needs of women for independence and self-sufficiency on the one hand and their needs for romance and companionship on the other. If this does not constitute a radical break with the romance formula, it does represent a progressive reformulation of that formula which pushes toward a gradual redefinition of existing gender roles within marriage and the work place.

THE MORAL ECONOMY OF FAN FICTION

Their underground status allows fan writers the creative freedom to promote a range of different interpretations of the basic program material and a variety of reconstructions of marginalized characters and interests, to explore a diversity of different solutions to the dilemma of contemporary gender relations. Fandom's IDIC philosophy (Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations, a cornerstone of Vulcan thought) actively encourages its participants to explore and find pleasure within their different and often contradictory responses to the program text. It should not be forgotten, however, that fan writing involves a translation of personal response into a social expression and that fans, like any other interpretive community, generate their own norms that work to insure a reasonable degree of conformity between readings of the primary text. The economic risk of fanzine publishing and the desire for personal popularity insures some responsiveness to audience demand, discouraging totally idiosyncratic versions of the program content. Fans try to write stories to please other fans; lines of development that do not find popular support usually cannot achieve financial viability.

Moreover, the strange mixture of fascination and frustration characteristic of fan response means that fans continue to respect the creators of the original series, even as they wish to rework some program materials to better satisfy their personal interests. Their desire to revise the program material is often counterbalanced by their desire to remain faithful to those aspects of the show that first captured their interests. E. P. Thompson (1971, p. 78) has employed the term "moral economy" to describe the way that eighteenth century peasant leaders and street rioters legitimized their revolts through an appeal to "traditional rights and customs" and "the wider consensus of the community," asserting that their

actions worked to protect existing property rights against those who sought to abuse them for their own gain. The peasants' conception of a moral economy allowed them to claim for themselves the right to judge the legitimacy both of their own actions and those of the landowners and property holders: "Consensus was so strong that it overrode motives of fear or deference" (pp. 78–79).

An analogous situation exists in fandom: the fans respect the original texts, yet fear that their conceptions of the characters and concepts may be jeopardized by those who wish to exploit them for easy profits, a category that typically includes Paramount and the network but excludes Roddenberry and many of the show's writers. The ideology of fandom involves both a commitment to some degree of conformity to the original program materials as well as a perceived right to evaluate the legitimacy of any use of those materials, either by textual producers or by textual consumers. The fans perceive themselves as rescuing the show from its producers who have manhandled its characters and then allowed it to die. In one fan's words, "I think we have made *ST* uniquely our own, so we do have all the right in the world (universe) to try to change it for the better when the gang at Paramount starts worshipping the almighty dollar, as they are wont to do" (Schnuelle, 1987, p. 9). Rather than rewriting the series content, the fans claim to be keeping *Star Trek* alive in the face of network indifference and studio incompetence, of remaining true to the text that first captured their interest some 20 years before: "This relationship came into being because the fan writers loved the characters and cared about the ideas that are *Star Trek* and they refused to let it fade away into oblivion" (Hunter, 1977, p. 77).

Such a relationship obligates fans to preserve a certain degree of fidelity to program materials, even as they seek to rework them toward their own ends. *Trek* magazine contributor Kendra Hunter (1977, p. 83) writes, "*Trek* is a format for expressing rights, opinions, and ideals. Most every imaginable idea can be expressed through *Trek*. . . . But there is a right way." Gross infidelity to the series concepts constitutes what fans call "character rape" and falls outside of the community's norms. In Hunter's words (p. 75):

> A writer, either professional or amateur, must realize that she . . . is not omnipotent. She cannot force her characters to do as she pleases. . . . The writer must have respect for her characters or those created by others that she is using, and have a full working knowledge of each before committing her words to paper.

Hunter's conception of character rape, one widely shared within the fan community, rejects abuses by the original series writers as well as by the most novice fan. It implies that the fans themselves, not the program producers, are best qualified to arbitrate conflicting claims about character psychology because they care about the characters in a way that more commercially motivated parties frequently do not. In practice, the concept of character rape frees fans to reject large chunks of the aired material, including entire episodes, and even to radically restructure the concerns of the show in the name of defending the purity of the original series concept. What determines the range of permissible fan narratives is finally not fidelity to the original texts but consensus within the fan community itself. The text that they so lovingly preserve is the *Star Trek* that they created through their own specula-

tions, not the one that Roddenberry produced for network air play.

Consequently, the fan community continually debates what constitutes a legitimate reworking of program materials and what represents a violation of the special reader-text relationship that the fans hope to foster. The earliest *Star Trek* fan writers were careful to work within the framework of the information explicitly included within the broadcast episodes and to minimize their breaks with series conventions. In fan writer Jean Lorrah's words (1976a, p.1), "Anyone creating a *Star Trek* universe is bound by what was seen in the aired episodes; however, he is free to extrapolate from those episodes to explain what was seen in them." Leslie Thompson (1974, p. 208) explains, "If the reasoning [of fan speculations] doesn't fit into the framework of the events as given [on the program], then it cannot apply no matter how logical or detailed it may be." As *Star Trek* fan writing has come to assume an institutional status in its own right and therefore to require less legitimization through appeals to textual fidelity, a new conception of fan fiction has emerged, one that perceives the stories not as a necessary expansion of the original series text but rather as chronicles of alternate universes, similar to the program world in some ways and different in others:

> The "alternate universe" is a handy concept wherein you take the basic *Star Trek* concept and spin it off into all kinds of ideas that could never be aired. One reason Paramount may be so liberal about fanzines is that by their very nature most fanzine stories could never be sold professionally. (L. Slusher, personal communication, August 1987)

Such an approach frees the writers to engage in much broader play with the program concepts and characterizations, to produce stories that reflect more diverse visions of human interrelationships and future worlds, to rewrite elements within the primary texts that hinder fan interests. Yet, even alternate universe stories struggle to maintain some consistency with the original broadcast material and to establish some point of contact with existing fan interests, just as more faithful fan writers feel compelled to rewrite and revise the program material in order to keep it alive in a new cultural context.

BORROWED TERMS: KIRK/SPOCK STORIES

The debate in fan circles surrounding Kirk/Spock (K/S) fiction, stories that posit a homo-erotic relationship between the show's two primary characters and frequently offer detailed accounts of their sexual couplings, illustrates these differing conceptions of the relationship between fan fiction and the primary series text.[8] Over the past decade, K/S stories have emerged from the margins of fandom toward numerical dominance over *Star Trek* fan fiction, a movement that has been met with considerable opposition from more traditional fans. For many, such stories constitute the worst form of character rape, a total violation of the established characterizations. Kendra Hunter (1977, p. 81) argues that "it is out of character for both men, and as such comes across in the stories as bad writing. . . . A relationship as complex and deep as Kirk/Spock does not climax with a sexual relationship." Other fans agree but for other reasons. "I do not accept the K/S homosexual precept as plausible," writes one fan. "The notion that two men that are as close as Kirk and Spock are cannot be

'just friends' is indefensible to me" (Landers, 1986, p. 10). Others struggle to reconcile the information provided on the show with their own assumptions about the nature of human sexuality: "It is just as possible for their friendship to progress into a love-affair, for that is what it is, than to remain status quo. . . . Most of us see Kirk and Spock simply as two people who love each other and just happen to be of the same gender" (Snaider, 1987, p. 10).

Some K/S fans frankly acknowledge the gap between the series characterizations and their own representations yet refuse to allow their fantasy life to be governed by the limitations of what was actually aired. One fan writes, "While I read K/S and enjoy it, when you stop to review the two main characters of *Star Trek* as extrapolated from the TV series, a sexual relationship between them is absurd" (Chandler, 1987, p. 10). Another argues somewhat differently:

> We actually saw a very small portion of the lives of the Enterprise crew through 79 episodes and some six hours of movies. . . . How can we possibly define the entire personalities of Kirk, Spock, etc., if we only go by what we've seen on screen? Surely there is more to them than that! . . . Since I doubt any two of us would agree on a definition of what is "in character," I leave it to the skill of the writer to make the reader believe in the story she is trying to tell. There isn't any limit to what could be depicted as accurate behavior for our heroes. (Moore, 1986, p. 7)

Many fans find this bold rejection of program limitations on creative activity, this open appropriation of characters, to be unacceptable since it violates the moral economy of fan writing and threatens fan fiction's privileged relationship to the primary text:

> [If] "there isn't any limit to what could be depicted as accurate behavior of our heroes," we might well have been treated to the sight of Spock shooting up heroin or Kirk raping a yeoman on the bridge (or vice-versa). . . . The writer whose characters don't have clearly defined personalities, thus limits and idiosyncrasies and definite characteristics, is the writer who is either very inexperienced or who doesn't have any respect for his characters, not to mention his audience. (Slusher, 1986, p. 11)

Yet, I have shown, all fan writing necessarily involves an appropriation of series characters and a reworking of program concepts as the text is forced to respond to the fan's own social agenda and interpretive strategies. What K/S does openly, all fans do covertly. In constructing the feminine countertext that lurks in the margins of the primary text, these readers necessarily redefine the text in the process of rereading and rewriting it. As one fan acknowledges, "If K/S has 'created new characters and called them by old names,' then all of fandom is guilty of the same" (Moore, 1986, p. 7). Jane Land (1987, p. ii) agrees: "All writers alter and transform the basic *Trek* universe to some extent, choosing some things to emphasize and others to play down, filtering the characters and the concepts through their own perceptions."

If these fans have rewritten *Star Trek* in their own terms, however, many of them are reluctant to break all ties to the primary text that sparked their creative activity and, hence, feel the necessity to legitimate their activity through appeals to textual fidelity. The fans are uncertain how far they can push against the limitations of the original material without violating and finally destroying a relationship that has given them great pleasure. Some feel stifled by those constraints; others find comfort within them. Some claim the program as their personal property, "treating the series epi-

sodes like silly putty," as one fan put it (Blaes, 1987, p. 6). Others seek compromises with the textual producers, treating the original program as something shared between them.

What should be remembered is that whether they cast themselves as rebels or loyalists, it is the fans themselves who are determining what aspects of the original series concept are binding on their play with the program material and to what degree. The fans have embraced *Star Trek* because they found its vision somehow compatible with their own, and they have assimilated only those textual materials that feel comfortable to them. Whenever a choice must be made between fidelity to their program and fidelity to their own social norms, it is almost inevitably made in favor of lived experience. The women's conception of the *Star Trek* realm as inhabited by psychologically rounded and realistic characters insures that no characterization that violated their own social perceptions could be satisfactory. 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. When push comes to shove, as Hodge and Tripp (1986, p. 144) recently suggested, "Non-televisual meanings can swamp televisual meanings" and usually do.

CONCLUSION

The fans are reluctant poachers who steal only those things that they truly love, who seize televisual property only to protect it against abuse by those who created it and who have claimed ownership over it. In embracing popular texts, the fans claim those works as their own, remaking them in their own image, forcing them to respond to their needs and to gratify their desires. Female fans transform *Star Trek* into women's culture, shifting it from space opera into feminist romance, bringing to the surface the unwritten feminine countertext that hides in the margins of the written masculine text. Kirk's story becomes Uhura's story and Chapel's and Amanda's as well as the story of the women who weave their own personal experiences into the lives of the characters. Consumption becomes production; reading becomes writing; spectator culture becomes participatory culture.

Neither the popular stereotype of the crazed Trekkie nor academic notions of commodity fetishism or repetition compulsion are adequate to explain the complexity of fan culture. Rather, fan writers suggest the need to redefine the politics of reading, to view textual property not as the exclusive domain of textual producers but as open to repossession by textual consumers. Fans continuously debate the etiquette of this relationship, yet all take for granted the fact that they are finally free to do with the text as they please. The world of *Star Trek* is what they choose to make it: "If there were no fandom, the aired episodes would stand as they are, and yet they would be just old reruns of some old series with no more meaning than old reruns of *I Love Lucy*" (Hunter, 1977, p. 77). The one text shatters and becomes many texts as it is fit into the lives of the people who use it, each in her or his own way, each for her or his own purposes.

Modleski (1986) recently, and I believe mistakenly, criticized what she understands to be the thrust of the cultural studies tradition: the claim that somehow mass culture texts empower readers. Fans are not empowered *by* mass culture; fans are empowered *over*

mass culture. Like de Certeau's poachers, the fans harvest fields that they did not cultivate and draw upon materials not of their making, materials already at hand in their cultural environment; yet, they make those raw materials work for them. They employ images and concepts drawn from mass culture texts to explore their subordinate status, to envision alternatives, to voice their frustrations and anger, and to share their new understandings with others. Resistance comes from the uses they make of these popular texts, from what they add to them and what they do with them, not from subversive meanings that are somehow embedded within them.

Ethnographic research has uncovered numerous instances where this occurs. Australian schoolchildren turn to *Prisoner* in search of insight into their own institutional experience, even translating schoolyard play into an act of open subordination against the teachers' authority (Hodge & Tripp, 1986; Palmer, 1986). American kindergartners find in the otherness of Pee-Wee Herman a clue to their own insecure status as semi-socialized beings (Jenkins, in press). British gay clubs host *Dynasty* and *Dallas* drag balls, relishing the bitchiness and trashiness of nighttime soap operas as a negation of traditional middle class taste and decorum (Finch, 1986). European leftists express their hostility to Western capitalism through their love-hate relationship with *Dallas* (Ang, 1986). Nobody regards these fan activities as a magical cure for the social ills of post-industrial capitalism. They are no substitution for meaningful change, but they can be used effectively to build popular support for such change, to challenge the power of the culture industry to construct the common sense of a mass society, and to restore a much-needed excitement to the struggle against subordination.

Alert to the challenge such uses pose to their cultural hegemony, textual producers openly protest this uncontrollable proliferation of meanings from their texts, this popular rewriting of their stories, this trespass upon their literary properties. Actor William Shatner (Kirk), for instance, has said of *Star Trek* fan fiction: "People read into it things that were not intended. In *Star Trek*'s case, in many instances, things were done just for entertainment purposes" (Spelling, Lofficier, & Lofficier, 1987, p. 40). Producers insist upon their right to regulate what their texts may mean and what types of pleasure they can produce. Yet, such remarks carry little weight. Undaunted by the barking dogs, the "no trespassing" signs, and the threats of prosecution, the fans already have poached those texts from under the proprietors' noses. □

NOTES

[1]An earlier draft of this essay was presented at the 1985 Iowa Symposium and Conference on Television Criticism: Public and Academic Responsibility. I am indebted to Cathy Schwichtenberg, John Fiske, David Bordwell, and Janice Radway for their helpful suggestions as I was rewriting it for *CSMC*. I am particularly indebted to Signe Hovde and Cynthia Benson Jenkins for introducing me to the world of fan writing; without them my research could not have been completed. I have tried to contact all of the fans quoted in this text and to gain their permission to discuss their work. I appreciate their cooperation and helpful suggestions.

[2]For representative examples of other scholarly treatments of *Star Trek* and its fans, see Blair (1983), Greenberg (1984), Jewett and Lawrence (1977), and Tyre (1977). Attitudes range from the generally sympathetic Blair to the openly hostile Jewett and Lawrence.

[3]No scholarly treatment of *Star Trek* fan culture can avoid these pitfalls, if only because making such a work accessible to an academic audience requires a translation of fan discourse into other terms, terms that may never be fully adequate to the original. I come to both *Star Trek* and fan fiction as a fan first and a scholar second. My participation as a fan long precedes my academic interest in it. I have sought, where possible, to employ fan terms and to quote fans directly in discussing their goals and orientations toward the program and their own writing. I have shared drafts of this essay with fans and have incorporated their comments into the revision process. I have allowed them the dignity of being quoted from their carefully crafted, well-considered published works rather than from a spontaneous interview that would be more controlled by the researcher than by the informant. I leave it to my readers to determine whether this approach allows for a less mediated reflection of fan culture than previous academic treatments of this subject.

[4]The terms "letterzine" and "fictionzine" are derived from fan discourse. The two types of fanzines relate to each other in complex ways. Although there are undoubtedly some fans who read only one type of publication, many read both. Some letterzines, *Treklink* for instance, function as consumer guides and sounding boards for debates about the fictionzines.

[5]Both Lorrah and Lichtenberg have achieved some success as professional science fiction writers. For an interesting discussion of the relationship between fan writing and professional science fiction writing, see Randall (1985).

[6]Although a wide range of fanzines were considered in researching this essay, I have decided, for the purposes of clarity, to draw my examples largely from the work of a limited number of fan writers. While no selection could accurately reflect the full range of fan writing, I felt that Bates, Land, Lorrah, and Siebert had all achieved some success within the fan community, suggesting that they exemplified, at least to some fans, the types of writing that were desirable and reflected basic tendencies within the form. Further, these writers have produced a large enough body of work to allow some commentary about their overall project rather than localized discussions of individual stories. I have also, wherever possible, focused my discussion around works still currently in circulation and therefore available to other researchers interested in exploring this topic. No slight is intended to the large number of other fan writers who also met these criteria and who, in some cases, are even better known within the fan community.

[7]I am indebted to K. C. D'alessandro and Mary Carbine for probing questions that refined my thoughts on this particular issue.

[8]The area of Kirk/Spock fiction falls beyond the project of this particular paper. My reason for discussing it here is because of the light its controversial reception sheds on the norms of fan fiction and the various ways fan writers situate themselves toward the primary text. For a more detailed discussion of this particular type of fan writing, see Lamb and Veith (1986), who argue that K/S stories, far from representing a cultural expression of the gay community, constitute another way of feminizing the concerns of the original series text and of addressing feminist concern within the domain of a popular culture that offers little space for heroic action by women.

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