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Textual Poachers

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Michel de Certeau (1984) . . . [characterizes] . . . active reading as "poaching," an impertinent raid on the literary preserve that takes away only those things that are 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" (174). De Certeau's "poaching" analogy characterizes the relationship between readers and writers as an ongoing struggle for possession of the text and for control over its meanings. De Certeau speaks of a "scriptural economy" dominated by textual producers and institutionally sanctioned interpreters and working to restrain the "multiple voices" of popular orality, to regulate the production and circulation of meanings. The "mastery of language" becomes, for de Certeau, emblematic of the cultural authority and social power exercised by the dominant classes within the social formation. School children are taught to read for authorial meaning, to consume the narrative without leaving their own marks upon it: "This fiction condemns consumers to subjection because they are always going to be guilty of infidelity or ignorance. . . . The text becomes a cultural weapon, a private hunting reserve" (171).

Under this familiar model, the reader is supposed to serve as the more-or-less passive recipient of authorial meaning while any deviation from meanings clearly marked forth within the text is viewed negatively, as a failure to successfully understand what the author was trying to say. The teacher's red pen rewards those who "correctly" decipher the text and penalizes those who "get it wrong," while the student's personal feelings and associations are rated "irrelevant" to the task of literary analysis (according to the "affective

fallacy"). Such judgments, in turn, require proper respect for the expertise of specially trained and sanctioned interpreters over the street knowledge of the everyday reader; the teacher's authority becomes vitally linked to the authority which readers grant to textual producers. As popular texts have been adopted into the academy, similar claims about their "authorship" have been constructed to allow them to be studied and taught in essentially similar terms to traditional literary works; the price of being taken seriously as an academic subject has been the acceptance of certain assumptions common to other forms of scholarship, assumptions that link the interests of the academy with the interests of producers rather than with the interests of consumers. Both social and legal practice preserves the privilege of "socially authorized professionals and intellectuals" over the interests of popular readers and textual consumers. (Jane Gaines [1990], for example, shows the ways that the primary focus of trademark law has shifted from protecting consumers from commercial fraud toward protecting the exclusive interests of capital for control over marketable images.) The expertise of the academy allows its members to determine which interpretive claims are consistent with authorial meaning (whether implicit or explicit), which fall beyond its scope. Since many segments of the population lack access to the means of cultural production and distribution, to the multiplexes, the broadcast airwaves or the chain bookstore shelves, this respect for the "integrity" of the produced message often has the effect of silencing or marginalizing oppositional voices. The exclusion of those voices at the moment of reception simply mirrors their exclusion at the moment of production; their cultural interests are delegitimized in favor of the commercial interests of authorized authors.

De Certeau's account of academic and economic practice is a highly polemical one; he offers a partial and certainly partisan version of certain traditional beliefs and attitudes. One does not have to abolish all reverence for authorial meaning in order to recognize the potential benefits of alternative forms of interpretation and consumption. Yet de Certeau poses questions that we as scholars and teachers need to consider—the ways we justify our own positions as critics, the interests served by our expertise, the degree to which our instruction may hinder rather than encourage the development of popular criticism. Education can be a force for the democratization of cultural life. If it couldn't be, there would be no purpose in writing this book for an academic audience or committing oneself to a classroom. Often, however, education is too preoccupied with protecting its own status to successfully fulfill such

a role. All too often, teachers promote their own authority at the expense of their students' ability to form alternative interpretations. De Certeau invites us to reconsider the place of popular response, of personal speculations and nonauthorized meanings in the reception of artworks and to overcome professional training that prepares us to reject meanings falling outside our frame of reference and interpretive practice.

De Certeau (1984) acknowledges the economic and social barriers that block popular access to the means of cultural production, speaking of a culture in which "marginality is becoming universal" and most segments of the population remain "unsigned, unreadable and unsymbolized" within dominant forms of representation (xvii). Yet de Certeau seeks to document not the strategies employed by this hegemonic power to restrict the circulation of popular meaning or to marginalize oppositional voices but rather to theorize the various tactics of popular resistance. De Certeau gives us terms for discussing ways that the subordinate classes elude or escape institutional control, for analyzing locations where popular meanings are produced outside of official interpretive practice. De Certeau perceives popular reading as a series of "advances and retreats, tactics and games played with the text," as a type of cultural bricolage through which readers fragment texts and reassemble the broken shards according to their own blueprints, salvaging bits and pieces of the found material in making sense of their own social experience (175).

Like the poachers of old, fans operate from a position of cultural marginality and social weakness. Like other popular readers, fans lack direct access to the means of commercial cultural production and have only the most limited resources with which to influence the entertainment industry's decisions. Fans must beg with the networks to keep their favorite shows on the air, must lobby producers to provide desired plot developments or to protect the integrity of favorite characters. Within the cultural economy, fans are peasants, not proprietors, a recognition which must contextualize our celebration of strategies of popular resistance. As Mike Budd, Robert Entman, and Clay Steinman (1990) note, nomadic readers "may actually be powerless and dependent" rather than "uncontainable, restless and free." They continue, "People who are nomads cannot settle down; they are at the mercy of natural forces they cannot control" (176). As these writers are quick to note, controlling the means of cultural reception, while an important step, does not provide an adequate substitute for access to the means of cultural production and distribution. In one sense, then, that of economic control over the means of production, these

nomadic viewers truly are "powerless and dependent" in their relationship to the culture industries. Yet, on another level, that of symbolic interpretation and appropriation, de Certeau would suggest they still retain a degree of autonomy. Their economic dependence may not be linked directly to notions of passive acceptance of ideological messages, as these critical writers might suggest; consumers are not governed by "a subjectivity that must, perforce, wander here, then wander there, as the media spotlight beckons" as these writers characterize them (Budd, Entman, and Steinman 1990, 176). Rather, consumers are selective users of a vast media culture whose treasures, though corrupt, hold wealth that can be mined and refined for alternative uses. Some of the strategies fans adopt in response to this situation are open to all popular readers, others are specific to fandom as a particular subcultural community. What is significant about fans in relation to de Certeau's model is that they constitute a particularly active and vocal community of consumers whose activities direct attention onto this process of cultural appropriation. As such, they enjoy a contemporary status not unlike the members of the "pit" in 19th-century theatre who asserted their authority over the performance, not unlike the readers of Dickens and other serial writers who wrote their own suggestions for possible plot developments, not unlike the fans of Sherlock Holmes who demanded the character's return even when the author sought to retire him. Fans are not unique in their status as textual poachers, yet, they have developed poaching to an art form. . . .

Reading and Misreading

A few clarifications need to be introduced at this time. First, de Certeau's notion of "poaching" is a theory of appropriation, not of "misreading." The term "misreading" is necessarily evaluative and preserves the traditional hierarchy bestowing privileged status to authorial meanings over reader's meanings. A conception of "misreading" also implies that there are proper strategies of reading (i.e., those taught by the academy) which if followed produce legitimate meanings and that there are improper strategies (i.e., those of popular interpretation) which, even in the most charitable version of this formulation, produce less worthy results. Finally, a notion of "misreading" implies that the scholar, not the popular reader, is in the position to adjudicate claims about textual meanings and suggests that academic interpretation is somehow more "objective," made outside of a historical and social context

that shapes our own sense of what a text means. (This problem remains, for example, in David Morley's *Nationwide* study [1980] which constructs a scholarly reading of the program against which to understand the deviations of various groups of popular readers.) De Certeau's model remains agnostic about the nature of textual meaning, allows for the validity of competing and contradictory interpretations. De Certeau's formulation does not necessarily reject the value of authorial meaning or academic interpretive strategies; such approaches offer their own pleasures and rewards which cannot easily be dismissed. A model of reading derived from de Certeau would simply include these interpretive goals and strategies within a broader range of more-or-less equally acceptable ways of making meaning and finding pleasure within popular texts; it questions the institutional power that values one type of meaning over all others.

Secondly, de Certeau's notion of "poaching" differs in important ways from Stuart Hall's more widely known "Encoding and Decoding" formulation (1980). First, as it has been applied, Hall's model of dominant, negotiated, and oppositional readings tends to imply that each reader has a stable position from which to make sense of a text rather than having access to multiple sets of discursive competencies by virtue of more complex and contradictory place within the social formation. Hall's model, at least as it has been applied, suggests that popular meanings are fixed and classifiable, while de Certeau's "poaching" model emphasizes the process of making meaning and the fluidity of popular interpretation. To say that fans promote their own meanings over those of producers is not to suggest that the meanings fans produce are always oppositional ones or that those meanings are made in isolation from other social factors. Fans have chosen these media products from the total range of available texts precisely because they seem to hold special potential as vehicles for expressing the fans' pre-existing social commitments and cultural interests; there is already some degree of compatibility between the ideological construction of the text and the ideological commitments of the fans and therefore, some degree of affinity will exist between the meanings fans produce and those which might be located through a critical analysis of the original story. What one fan says about *Beauty and the Beast* holds for the relationship many fans seek with favorite programs: "It was as if someone had scanned our minds, searched our hearts, and presented us with the images that were found there" (Elaine Landman, "The Beauty and the Beast Experience," undated fan flier). Yet . . . the *Beauty and the Beast* fans moved in

and out of harmony with the producers, came to feel progressively less satisfied with the program narratives, and finally, many, though not all, of them rejected certain plot developments in favor of their own right to determine the outcome of the story.

Such a situation should warn us against absolute statements of the type that appear all too frequently within the polemical rhetoric of cultural studies. Readers are not *always* resistant; *all* resistant readings are not necessarily progressive readings; the "people" do not *always* recognize their conditions of alienation and subordination. As Stuart Hall (1981) has noted, popular culture is "neither wholly corrupt [n]or wholly authentic" but rather "deeply contradictory," characterized by "the double movement of containment and resistance, which is always inevitably inside it" (228). Similarly, Hall suggests, popular reception is also "full of very contradictory elements—progressive elements and stone-age elements." Such claims argue against a world of dominant, negotiating, and oppositional readers in favor of one where each reader is continuously re-evaluating his or her relationship to the fiction and reconstructing its meanings according to more immediate interests.

In fact, much of the interest of fans and their texts for cultural studies lies precisely in the ways the ambiguities of popularly produced meanings mirror fault lines within the dominant ideology, as popular readers attempt to build their culture within the gaps and margins of commercially circulating texts. To cite only one example, Lynn Spigel and Henry Jenkins (1991) interviewed a number of "thirtysomethings" about their childhood memories of watching *Batman* on television. Our study sought not so much to reconstruct actual viewing conditions as to gain a better sense of the roles those memories played in the construction of their personal identities. The memories we gathered could not have been fit into ideologically pure categories, but rather suggested complex and contradictory attitudes towards childhood and children's culture. Remembering *Batman* evoked images of a personal past and also of the intertextual network of 1960s popular culture. Remembering the series provided a basis for a progressive critique of contemporary political apathy and cynicism, suggesting a time when social issues were more sharply defined and fiercely fought. Participants' memories also centered on moments when they resisted adult authority and asserted their right to their own cultural choices. For female fans, Catwoman became a way of exploring issues of feminine empowerment, of resistance to male constraints and to the requirement to be a "good little girl." Yet remembering *Batman* also evoked

a more reactionary response—an attempt to police contemporary children's culture and to regulate popular pleasures. The adults, no longer nostalgic for childhood rebellion, used the 1960s series as the yardstick for what would constitute a more innocent style of entertainment. The same person would shift between these progressive and reactionary modes of thinking in the course of a single conversation, celebrating childhood resistance in one breath and demanding the regulation of childish pleasures in the next. These very mixed responses to the series content suggest the contradictory conceptions of childhood that circulate within popular discourse and mirror in interesting ways the competing discourses surrounding the television series when it was first aired.

As this study suggests, we must be careful to attend to the particularities of specific instances of critical reception, cultural appropriation, and popular pleasure—their precise historical context, their concrete social and cultural circumstances, for it is the specifics of lived experience and not simply the abstractions of theory which illuminate the process of hegemonic struggle. For that reason, among others, this book is primarily a succession of specific case studies designed to document particular uses of the media within concrete social and historical contexts rather than a larger theoretical argument which would necessarily trade such specificity for abstraction and generalization. Having established in this chapter some general concepts regarding fan culture and its relationship to the dominant media, I want to illustrate these concepts in action, show how fan culture responds to actual historical and social contexts, and trace some of the complex negotiations of meanings characterizing this cultural community's relationship to its favored texts.

Nomadic Readers

De Certeau offers us another key insight into fan culture: readers are not simply poachers; they are also "nomads," always in movement, "not here or there," not constrained by permanent property ownership but rather constantly advancing upon another text, appropriating new materials, making new meanings (174). Drawing on de Certeau, Janice Radway (1988) has criticized the tendency of academies to regard audiences as constituted by a particular text or genre rather than as "free-floating" agents who "fashion narratives, stories, objects and practices from myriad bits and pieces of prior cultural productions" (363). While acknowledging the methodological advantages

and institutional pressures that promote localized research, Radway wants to resist the urge to "cordon" viewers for study, to isolate one particular set of reader-text relationships from its larger cultural context. Instead, she calls for investigations of "the multitude of concrete connections which ever-changing, fluid subjects forge between ideological fragments, discourses, and practices" (365).

Both academic and popular discourse adopt labels for fans—"Trekkies," "Beastie Girls," "Deadheads"—that identify them through their association with particular programs or stars. Such identifications, while not totally inaccurate, are often highly misleading. Media fan culture, like other forms of popular reading, may be understood not in terms of an exclusive interest in any one series or genre; rather, media fans take pleasure in making intertextual connections across a broad range of media texts. The female *Star Trek* fans discussed earlier understood the show not simply within its own terms but in relationship to a variety of other texts circulated at the time (*Lost in Space*, say, or NASA footage on television) and since (the feminist science fiction novels of Ursula Le Guin, Joanna Russ, Marion Zimmer Bradley, and others). Moreover, their participation within fandom often extends beyond an interest in any single text to encompass many others within the same genre—other science fiction texts, other stories of male bonding, other narratives which explore the relationship of the outsider to the community. The *Batman* fans Spigel and I interviewed likewise found that they could not remain focused on a single television series but persistently fit it within a broader intertextual grid, linking the Catwoman across program boundaries to figures like *The Avengers*' Emma Peel or the *Girl from U.N.C.L.E.*, comparing the campy pop-art look of the series to *Mad* or *Laugh In*. Fans, like other consumers of popular culture, read intertextually as well as textually and their pleasure comes through the particular juxtapositions that they create between specific program content and other cultural materials.

On the wall of my office hangs a print by fan artist Jean Kluge—a pastiche of a pre-Raphaelite painting depicting characters from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*: Jean-Luc Picard, adopting a contemplative pose atop a throne, evokes the traditional image of King Arthur; Beverly Crusher, her red hair hanging long and flowing, substitutes for Queen Guinevere; while in the center panel, Data and Yar, clad as knights in armor, gallop off on a quest. Visitors to my literature department office often do a double-take in response to this picture, which offers a somewhat jarring mixture of elements from a

contemporary science fiction series with those drawn from chivalric romance. Yet, this print suggests something about the ways in which *Star Trek* and other fan texts get embedded within a broader range of cultural interests, indicating a number of different interpretive strategies. The print could be read in relation to the primary series, recalling equally idiosyncratic juxtapositions during the holodeck sequences, as when Picard plays at being a tough-guy detective, when Data performs *Henry V* or studies borscht-belt comedy, or when the characters dash about as Musketeers in the midst of a crewmember's elaborate fantasy. Indeed, Kluge's "The Quest" was part of a series of "holodeck fantasies" which pictured various *Star Trek* characters at play. The combinations of characters foreground two sets of couples—Picard and Crusher, Yar and Data—which were suggested by program subplots and have formed the focus for a great deal of fan speculation. Such an interpretation of the print would be grounded in the text and yet, at the same time, make selective use of the program materials to foreground aspects of particular interest to the fan community. Ironically, spokesmen for *Star Trek* have recently appeared at fan conventions seeking to deny that Data has emotions and that Picard and Crusher have a romantic history together, positions fans have rejected as inconsistent with the series events and incompatible with their own perceptions of the characters.

The image could also invite us to think of *Star Trek* transgenerically, reading the characters and situations in relation to tradition of quest stories and in relation to generic expectations formed through fannish readings of popular retellings of the Arthurian saga, such as Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Mists of Avalon* (1983), Mary Stewart's *The Crystal Cave* (1970), T. H. White's *The Once and Future King* (1939), or John Boorman's *Excalibur*. Such an interpretation evokes strong connections between the conventional formula of "space opera" and older quest myths and hero sagas.

The print can also be read extratextually, reminding us of actor Patrick Stewart's career as a Shakespearean actor and his previous screen roles in sword and sorcery adventures like *Excalibur, Beast Master,* and *Dune*. Fans often track favored performer's careers, adding to their video collections not simply series episodes but also other works featuring its stars, works which may draw into the primary text's orbit a wide range of generic traditions, including those of high culture.

A fan reader might also interpret the Kluge print subculturally, looking at it in relation to traditions within fan writing which situate series characters in

alternate universes, including those set in the historical past or in the realm of fantasy, or which cross media universes to have characters from different television series interacting in the same narrative.

Finally, a fan reader might read this print in relation to Kluge's own oeuvre as an artist; Kluge's works often juxtapose media materials and historical fantasies, and encompass not only her own fannish interests in *Star Trek* but a variety of other series popular with fans (*Blake's 7, Beauty and the Beast, Alien Nation,* among others).

Contemplating this one print, then, opens a range of intertextual networks within which its imagery might be understood. All available to *Trek* fans and active components of their cultural experience, these networks link the original series both to other commercially produced works and to the cultural traditions of the fan community. Not every fan would make each of these sets of associations in reading the print, yet most fans would have access to more than one interpretive framework for positioning these specific images. Thinking of the print simply as an artifact of a *Star Trek*–fixated fan culture would blind us to these other potential interpretations that are central to the fans' pleasure in Kluge's art.

Approaching fans as cultural nomads would potentially draw scholars back toward some of the earliest work to emerge from the British cultural studies tradition. As Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson's *Resistance through Rituals* (1976) or Dick Hebdidge's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979) document, British youth groups formed an alternative culture not simply through their relationship to specific musical texts but also through a broader range of goods appropriated from the dominant culture and assigned new meanings within this oppositional context. The essays assembled by Hall and Jefferson recorded ways symbolic objects—dress, appearance, language, ritual occasions, styles of interaction, music—formed a unified signifying system in which borrowed materials were made to reflect, express, and resonate aspects of group life. Examining the stylistic bricolage of punk culture, Hebdidge concluded that the meaning of appropriated symbols, such as the swastika or the safety pin, lay not in their inherent meanings but rather in the logic of their use, in the ways they expressed opposition to the dominant culture.

Feminist writers, such as Angela McRobbie (1980), Dorothy Hobson (1982, 1989), Charlotte Brunsdon (1981), and Mica Nava (1981), criticized these initial studies for their silence about the misogynistic quality of such youth cultures and their exclusive focus on the masculine public sphere rather than

on the domestic sphere which was a primary locus for feminine cultural experience. Yet their own work continued to focus on subcultural appropriation and cultural use. Their research emphasized ways women define their identities through their association with a range of media texts. McRobbie's "Dance and Social Fantasy" (1984), for example, offers a far-reaching analysis of the roles dance plays in the life of young women, discussing cultural materials ranging from a children's book about Anna Pavlova to films like *Fame* and *Flashdance* and fashion magazines. Like Hebdidge, McRobbie is less interested in individual texts than in the contexts in which they are inserted; McRobbie shows how those texts are fit into the total social experience of their consumers, are discussed at work or consumed in the home, and provide models for social behavior and personal identity.

These British feminist writers provide useful models for recent work by younger feminists (on both sides of the Atlantic) who are attempting to understand the place of media texts in women's cultural experiences (for useful overviews of this work, see Long 1989; Roman, Christian-Smith, and Ellsworth 1988; Schwictenberg 1989; Woman's Studies Group 1978). Drawing on McRobbie's research, Lisa Lewis (1987), for example, has explored what she describes as "consumer girl culture," a culture which converges around the shopping mall as a specifically female sphere. Lewis links the "woman-identified" music videos of Cyndi Lauper and Madonna to the concerns of this "consumer girl culture," suggesting that these pop stars provide symbolic materials expressing the pleasure female adolescents take in entering male domains of activity. The young women, in turn, adapt these symbolic materials and weave them back into their everyday lives, imitating the performers' idiosyncratic styles, and postering their walls with their images. Images appropriated from MTV are linked to images drawn from elsewhere in consumer culture and form the basis for communication among female fans about topics common to their social experience as young women.

Following in this same tradition, I want to focus on media fandom as a discursive logic that knits together interests across textual and generic boundaries. While some fans remain exclusively committed to a single show or star, many others use individual series as points of entry into a broader fan community, linking to an intertextual network composed of many programs, films, books, comics, and other popular materials. Fans often find it difficult to discuss single programs except through references and comparisons to this broader network; fans may also drift from one series commitment to

another through an extended period of involvement within "fandom." As longtime fan editor Susan M. Garrett explains: "A majority of fans don't simply burn out of one fandom and disappear. . . . In fact, I've found that after the initial break into fandom through a single series, fans tend to follow other people into various fandoms, rather than stumble upon programs themselves" (personal correspondence, July 1991). Garrett describes how fans incorporate more and more programs into their interests in order to facilitate greater communication with friends who share common interests or possess compatible tastes: "Well, if she likes what I like and she tends to like good shows, then I'll like this new show too" (personal correspondence, July 1991). To focus on any one media product—be it *Star Trek* or "Material Girl"—is to miss the larger cultural context within which that material gets embedded as it is integrated back into the life of the individual fan.

Fans often form uneasy alliances with others who have related but superficially distinctive commitments, finding their overlapping interests in the media a basis for discussion and fellowship. Panels at Media West, an important media fan convention held each year in Lansing, Michigan, combine speakers from different fandoms to address topics of common interest, such as "series romances," "disguised romantic heroes," "heroes outside the law," or "Harrison Ford and his roles." Letterzines like *Comlink*, which publish letters from fans, and computer net interest groups such as Rec.Arts.TV, which offer electronic mail "conversation" between contributors, facilitate fan discussion and debate concerning a broad range of popular texts. Genzines (amateur publications aiming at a general fan interest rather than focused on a specific program or star) such as *The Sonic Screwdriver, Rerun, Everything But . . . The Kitchen Sink, Primetime,* or *What You Fancy* offer unusual configurations of fannish tastes that typically reflect the coalition of fandoms represented by their editors; these publications focus not on individual series but on a number of different and loosely connected texts. *Fireside Tales* "encompasses the genre of cops, spies and private eyes," running stories based on such series as *Hunter, I Spy, Adderly, Riptide,* and *Dempsey and Makepeace* while *Undercover* treats the same material with a homoerotic inflection. *Walkabout* centers around the film roles of Mel Gibson including stories based on his characters in *Lethal Weapon, Year of Living Dangerously, Tim, Tequila Sunrise,* and *The Road Warrior. Faded Roses* focuses on the unlikely combination of *Beauty and the Beast, Phantom of the Opera,* and *Amadeus,* "three of the most romantic universes of all time." *Animazine* centers on children's cartoons,

The Temporal Times on time-travel series, *The Cannell Files* on the series of a particular producer, *Tuesday Night* on two shows (*Remington Steele* and *Riptide*) which were once part of NBC's Tuesday night line-up, and *Nightbeat* on stories in which the primary narrative action occurs at night, "anything from vampires to detectives." . . .

What Do Poachers Keep?

If I find de Certeau's notions of textual poaching and nomadic reading particularly useful concepts for thinking about media consumption and fan culture, I want to identify at least one important way in which my position differs from his. (Other differences will surface throughout the discussion.) De Certeau draws a sharp separation between writers and readers: "Writing accumulates, stocks up, resists time by the establishment of a place and multiplies its production through the expansionism of reproduction. Reading takes no measures against the erosion of time (one forgets oneself *and* also forgets), it does not keep what it acquires, or it does so poorly" (174). Writing, for de Certeau, has a materiality and permanence which the poached culture of the reader is unable to match; the readers meaning-production remains temporary and transient, made on the run, as the reader moves nomadically from place to place; the reader's meanings originate in response to immediate concerns and are discarded when they are no longer useful. De Certeau draws a useful distinction between strategies and tactics: strategies are operations performed from a position of strength, employing the property and authority that belong exclusively to literary "landowners," while tactics belong to the mobile population of the dispossessed and the powerless, gaining in speed and mobility what they lack in stability. The tactical strength and the strategic vulnerability of reading, he contends, lie in its inability to form the basis for a stable or permanent culture; readers maintain a freedom of movement at the expense of acquiring resources which might allow them to fight from a position of power and authority. Tactics can never fully overcome strategy; yet, the strategist cannot prevent the tactician from striking again.

While this claim may be broadly applicable to the transient meaning-production which generally characterizes popular reading, it seems false to the specific phenomenon of media fandom for two reasons. First, de Certeau describes readers who are essentially isolated from each other; the meanings they "poach" from the primary text serve only their own interests and are the

object of only limited intellectual investment. They are meanings made for the moment and discarded as soon as they are no longer desirable or useful. Fan reading, however, is a social process through which individual interpretations are shaped and reinforced through ongoing discussions with other readers. Such discussions expand the experience of the text beyond its initial consumption. The produced meanings are thus more fully integrated into the readers' lives and are of a fundamentally different character from meanings generated through a casual and fleeting encounter with an otherwise unremarkable (and unremarked upon) text. For the fan, these previously "poached" meanings provide a foundation for future encounters with the fiction, shaping how it will be perceived, defining how it will be used.

Second, fandom does not preserve a radical separation between readers and writers. Fans do not simply consume preproduced stories; they manufacture their own fanzine stories and novels, art prints, songs, videos, performances, etc. In fan writer Jean Lorrah's words (1984), "Trek fandom . . . is friends and letters and crafts and fanzines and trivia and costumes and artwork and filksongs 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" (n.p.). Lorrah's description blurs the boundaries between producers and consumers, spectators and participants, the commercial and the homecrafted, to construct an image of fandom as a cultural and social network that spans the globe. Fandom here becomes a participatory culture which transforms the experience of media consumption into the production of new texts, indeed of a new culture and a new community.

Howard Becker (1982) has adopted the term "Art World" to describe "an established network of cooperative links" (34) between institutions of artistic production, distribution, consumption, interpretation, and evaluation: "Art Worlds produce works and also give them aesthetic values" (39). An expansive term, "Art World" refers to systems of aesthetic norms and generic conventions. systems of professional training and reputation building, systems for the circulation, exhibition, sale, and critical evaluation of artworks. In one sense, fandom constitutes one component of the mass media Art World, something like the "serious audience" which Becker locates around the symphony, the ballet, or the art gallery. Not only do "serious audience members" provide a stable base of support for artistic creation, Becker suggests, they also function as arbiters of potential change and development. Their knowledge of

and commitment to the art insures that they "can collaborate more fully with artists in the joint effort which produces the work" (48). Historically, science fiction fandom may be traced back to the letter columns of Hugo Gernsback's *Amazing Stories*, which provided a public forum by which fans could communicate with each other and with the writers their reactions to published stories; critics suggest that it was the rich interplay of writers, editors, and fans which allowed science fiction to emerge as a distinctive literary genre in the 1930s and 1940s (Ross 1991; Del Rey 1979; Warner 1969; Moskowitz 1954; Carter 1978). Since Gernsback and other editors also included addresses for all correspondents, the pulps provided a means by which fans could contact each other, enabling a small but dedicated community of loyal science fiction readers to emerge. Fans, under the approving eye of Gernsback and the other pulp editors, organized local clubs and later, regional science fiction conventions to provide an arena where they could exchange their ideas about their favorite genre. By 1939, fandom had grown to such a scale that it could ambitiously host a world science fiction convention, a tradition which has continued to the present day.

So, from its initiation, science fiction fandom has maintained close ties to the professional science fiction writing community and has provided intelligent user criticism of published narratives. Fan conventions play a central role in the distribution of knowledge about new releases and in the promotion of comic books, science fiction novels, and new media productions. They offer a space where writers and producers may speak directly with readers and develop a firmer sense of audience expectations. Fan awards, such as the Hugo, presented each year at the World Science Fiction Convention, play a key role in building the reputations of emerging writers and in recognizing outstanding accomplishment by established figures. Fan publishing has represented an important training ground for professional writers and editors, a nurturing space in which to develop skills, styles, themes, and perhaps most importantly, self confidence before entering the commercial marketplace. Marion Zimmer Bradley (1985) has noted the especially importance of fandom in the development of female science fiction writers at a time when professional science fiction was still male-dominated and male-oriented; fanzines, she suggests, were a supportive environment within which women writers could establish and polish their skills.

Yet media fandom constitutes as well its own distinctive Art World, operating beyond direct control by media producers, founded less upon the

consumption of pre-existing texts than on the production of fan texts. Much as science fiction conventions provide a market for commercially produced goods associated with media stories and as a showcase for professional writers, illustrators, and performers, the conventions are also a marketplace for fan produced artworks and a showcase for fan artists. Fan paintings are auctioned, zines are sold, performances staged, videos screened, and awards are given in recognition of outstanding accomplishments. Semiprofessional companies are emerging to assist in the production and distribution of fan goods—song tapes, zines, etc.—and publications are appearing whose primary function is to provide technical information and commentary on fan art (*Apa-Filk* for fan music, *Art Forum* for fan artists, *Treklink* and *On the Double* for fan writers, etc.) or to publicize and market fan writing (*Datazine*). Convention panels discuss zine publishing, art materials, or costume design, focusing entirely on information needed by fan artists rather than by fan consumers. MediaWest, in particular, has prided itself on being fan-run and fan-centered with no celebrity guests and programing; its activities range from fan video screenings and fanzine reading rooms to workshops with noted fan artists, focused around providing support for the emergence of fan culture. These institutions are the infrastructure for a self-sufficient fan culture.

From its initiation in the 1960s in the wake of excitement about *Star Trek*, media fandom has developed a more distant relationship to textual producers than that traditionally enjoyed within literary science fiction fandom. If literary fans constituted, especially in the early years, a sizeable segment of the potential market for science fiction books, active media fans represent a small and insignificant segment of the audience required to sustain a network television series or to support a blockbuster movie. Media producers and stars have, thus, looked upon organized fandom less as a source of feedback than as, at best, an ancillary market for specialized spin-off goods. The long autograph lines that surround media stars often prohibit the close interaction that fans maintain with science fiction writers and editors.

Indeed, the largely female composition of media fandom repeats a historical split within the science fiction fan community between the traditionally male-dominated literary fans and the newer, more feminine style of media fandom. Women, drawn to the genre in the 1960s, discovered that the close ties between male fans and male writers created barriers to female fans and this fandom's traditions resisted inflection or redefinition. The emergence of media fandom can be seen, at least in part, as an effort to create a fan culture

more open to women, within which female fans could make a contribution without encountering the entrenched power of long-time male fans; these fans bought freedom at the expense of proximity to writers and editors. Where this closeness has developed, as in the early years of American *Blake's 7* fandom, it has proven short-lived, since too many institutional pressures separate media professionals and fans.

Moreover, since copyright laws prohibit the commercial distribution of media fan materials and only a small but growing number of fans have gone on to become professional writers of media texts, these fan artists have a more limited chance of gaining entry into the professional media art world and thus have come to regard fandom less as a training ground than as a permanent outlet for their creative expression. (A growing number of media fans have "turned pro," writing professional *Trek* novels, contributing to commercial publications, pursuing careers as science fiction writers, or submitting scripts to television programs, a fact that offers inspiration to many current fan writers who have similar aspirations, yet, I would argue that the importance of media fan cultural production far exceeds its role as a training ground for professional publishing.) Some fanzine stories and novels, such as the writing of Jean Lorrah, Jacqueline Lichtenberg, Leslie Fish, and Alexis Fagin Black, have remained in print since the late 1960s while others continue to circulate in mangled second-hand editions or faded photocopies. Works by some respected fan artists, such as Jean Kluge, Karen River, Suzan Lovett, and Barbara Fister-Liltz, may fetch several hundred dollars in convention auctions. There are a sizeable number of people who have been active in fandom for most or all of their adult lives and who are now raising children who are active fans. (Perhaps even a few have grandchildren in fandom.)

Media fandom gives every sign of becoming a permanent culture, one which has survived and evolved for more than twenty-five years and has produced material artifacts of enduring interest to that community. Unlike the readers de Certeau describes, fans get to keep what they produce from the materials they "poach" from mass culture, and these materials sometimes become a limited source of economic profit for them as well. Few fans earn enough through the sale of their artworks to see fandom as a primary source of personal income, yet, many earn enough to pay for their expenses and to finance their fan activities. This materiality makes fan culture a fruitful site for studying the tactics of popular appropriation and textual poaching. Yet, it must be acknowledged that the material goods produced by fans are not

simply the tangible traces of transient meanings produced by other reading practices. To read them in such a fashion is to offer an impoverished account of fan cultural production. Fan texts, be they fan writing, art, song, or video, are shaped through the social norms, aesthetic conventions, interpretive protocols, technological resources, and technical competence of the larger fan community. Fans possess not simply borrowed remnants snatched from mass culture, but their own culture built from the semiotic raw materials the media provides.

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