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Fan-tagonism

Factions, Institutions, and
Constitutive Hegemonies of Fandom

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Disharmony has long held a contradictory place in studies of fandom and cult television.[1] While early works like Bacon-Smith's *Enterprising Women* (1992) stressed unity within fan communities, Jenkins's *Textual Poachers* acknowledged rifts among fans, producers, and even other fans, stressing the "passions that surround[ed] disputes" (1992: 130). However, Jenkins too deflected attention from conflict and dissent, emphasizing the consensual and positing that "disagreements occur within a shared frame of reference, a common sense of the series' generic placement and a tacit agreement about what questions are worth asking" (137). As Jenkins later explained, he "accented the positive" to distance fandom from perceptions of it as immature, deviant, and ultimately immaterial to academic study (Harrison 1996: 274). While tactically advantageous, this initial focus on consensus and unity underplayed the constitutive centrality of antagonism and power to television fandom.

Since then, Tulloch and Jenkins (1995) have shown that science fiction series attract heterogeneous fan groups with varying interests, diverse reading practices, and unequal positions of stature within the community. Baym (2000) and MacDonald (1998) have examined the internal hierarchical structures that frequently make fandom a site of exclusion. Externally, Gwenllian-Jones (2003) examines tensions between communities and institutions over unauthorized interactions with corporately owned intellectual properties. While these accounts begin to emphasize inequalities of power relative to fan culture, media studies would benefit from

more expansive theorizations of constitutive, hegemonic antagonisms beyond the "moments of friction and dispute" that characterized *Textual Poachers* (Jenkins 1992: 132). Instead of conceiving of antagonism as momentary aberration within unified consensus, I propose that ongoing struggles for discursive dominance constitute fandom as a hegemonic struggle over interpretation and evaluation through which relationships among fan, text, and producer are continually articulated, disarticulated, and rearticulated.

Focusing on the cult television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003), this chapter argues that power-laden discursive struggles play a constitutive role in structuring the fan-text-producer relationship.[2] Through communicative contributions to websites, newsgroups, and bulletin boards, factions of *Buffy* fans construct competing "truths" about the series, its producers, and its relationship to fandom, endeavoring to fix fan identity in respectively advantageous ways. Discussions of the program erupt across a range of online venues, some dedicated exclusively to *Buffy,* others to the works of series creator Joss Whedon, and others to television at large. My sample, collected during the 2001–2002 and 2002–2003 seasons, is neither exhaustive nor does it confirm monolithic, representative attitudes within a singular, generalizable *Buffy* fan community. Rather, in the interaction of opposing factions operating *within* individual communities in defined virtual spaces, this study evidences antagonistic competition between discourses of interpretation and evaluation.[3]

The significance of these struggles for discursive hegemony becomes apparent when considered in terms of the relationships between fans and textual structures discussed by Jenkins (1992) and Hills (2002). Hills coins the term "hyperdiegesis" to denote the consistent continuity that makes cult narratives like *Buffy* cohere overall as ontologically secure worlds (2002: 138). Hyperdiegesis provides audiences with constant, trustworthy, supportive environments for productive practices like discussion, speculation, and fan fiction. While hyperdiegesis is a quality of the primary text, Jenkins's "meta-text" is a tertiary, fan-made construction—a projection of the text's potential future, based on specific fan desires and interests (1992: 97). But diverse, divergent fan interests—generated from the same hyperdiegesis, but leading to different meta-textual conclusions—cannot, I argue, be met by any singular, canonical iteration of the series. Events in hyperdiegetic continuity that please one fan or interest group conflict with competing meta-textual interests of another. Co-present meta-texts, therefore, necessarily exist in opposition. Competing meta-textual evaluations

of hyperdiegetic states will therefore play a crucial role in structuring the antagonistic ways fans relate to one another, producers, and the text.

Ultimately, this chapter proposes that practices of cult television fandom be considered in terms of "fan-tagonism"—ongoing, competitive struggles between both internal factions and external institutions to discursively codify the fan-text-producer relationship according to their respective interests. To illustrate, I will explore discursive conflicts, first within fan communities and, second, between fans and producers of *Buffy*.[4] At both levels, competing interests advocate rival "truths" that codify and recodify fandom within continually contested parameters. While factionalized internal interests vie for discursive hegemony, forces external to fan practice exercise their institutional power to define and delimit relationships among audience, production, and text. The struggles of fan-tagonism not only produce tertiary interpretations and evaluations but also (as I will show) encode contending constructions of the "normative" fan-text-producer relationship into the primary television text. Antagonisms external and internal to fandom structure its practices, with fan and institutional interests competing to establish dominant meta-textual interpretative discourses while legitimizing specific audience relationships to the industrial production of the hyperdiegetic text.

Fan Factions and Aesthetic History

Though acknowledging diverse interests within fan groups, Tulloch and Jenkins stress the importance of shared, restricted meaning making, arguing that a "unified interpretative position is what makes fans a cultural unit, an interpretative community" (1995: 108). In the absence of institutional power, these interpretative communities wield discursive power "to write the aesthetic history of the show—dividing [it] into a series of 'golden ages' and 'all-time lows'" (1995: 145). But if, as Hills argues, communal schism occurs over "favourite characters, actors, periods in a series, films in a franchise, or according to differences in fans' interpretative strategies," the process by which competing interest blocs attempt to secure this aesthetic consensus comes into question (2002: 62). How do inequalities of status and textual interest give way to unified interpretation? Alternative positions and tastes must somehow be silenced so that divergent interests within a community can be unified as hegemonic interpretative consensus.

Within discussions of *Buffy,* interpretative schism frequently occurred in response to the visibility of "shippers" (short for "relationshippers"), fans whose meta-textual conception of the series advocated the romantic coupling of specific characters and whose ongoing pleasure depended in part upon sustained diegetic potential to spark or preserve those romances. While shippers are not limited to cult series, *Buffy* offered numerous dyads to create such interest: Buffy/Angel, Buffy/Spike, Buffy/Riley, Spike/Angel, etc. Shippers often inhabit specialized online communities and discussion venues, but this multiplicity of romantic permutations regularly puts shipper interests in competition within larger *Buffy* fan communities.[5] Although some pairings proved more popular, the inability of the producers' official hyperdiegetic construction to satisfy all these shipper interests created grounds for struggle. While meta-texts coexisted paradigmatically, canonical hyperdiegesis could only syntagmatically fulfill one of them at a time. Thus, when the Buffy/Spike relationship began in season six, the text foreclosed on meta-textual hopes for reunion with previous love interest Angel (or Riley). Thus, debates over hyperdiegetic developments erupted to negotiate the incompatible interests of concerned fans.

Some concerned fans, however, opposed any pairing. Endorsing alternative taste cultures that devalued romance as soap opera convention, these fans introduced further meta-textual incompatibility—intensifying existing antagonisms. As one particularly vitriolic fan wrote,

> There's nothing like wanting to rant and whine about the pathetic state *Buffy* [. . .] has sunk into only to open a message board [. . .] filled with a thousand "This is the best eva because Spike+Buffy 4eva!!!" dumb posts from 'Shippers to make me want to brain myself with a blunt, barbed metallic cleaver to end the pain.[6]

This fan demonstrates passionately, if impenetrably, that fans do not easily agree to disagree—differing opinions become co-present, competing interests struggling to define interpretative and evaluative consensus. While Buffy/Spike shippers welcomed developments furthering that relationship, others articulated such episodes, incompatible with their meta-textual conception of the series, to a decline in quality. Continuing his diatribe, the same fan claimed,

'Shippers don't care that the plot is non-existent, the pace plods, and every-thing sucks[. . . .] It doesn't matter that Spike tried to rape Buffy [. . .] [in] a shocking show of lack of continuity and lazy writing [. . .] because 'Ship-pers know that Spike and Buffy belong together. Just like how Angel and Buffy belong together [. . .] [E]veryone ends up talking about baby names while genuine fans flee in terror.

Coyly demonstrating an inability to reconcile hyperdiegesis with meta-text, this critique imposes a discursive framework not just on *Buffy*'s aes-thetic history but also on *Buffy* fans at large. The equivalence posited here of nonshippers and "genuine fans" raises the stakes of the debate past tex-tual evaluation to include the proper aesthetic orientation of fan to text.

Discursive attempts to retrospectively define golden ages and all-time lows aggravate this fragmentation of antagonistic fan communities. In constructing aesthetic histories, different factions foreground elements from the hyperdiegetic past that most strongly support their meta-textual interests, contrasting them with unsavory elements that do not—knowl-edge claims that, if reiterated, produce norms to either invalidate the series' status quo or legitimate it within a tradition of quality. During 2002–2003, for example, many fans constructed the recent season six as *Buffy*'s aesthetic nadir—a truth claim contested by others in a debate tellingly entitled "Season 6 was the biggest piece of shit ever."[7] This critical deliberation placed individual seasons—and fans who valued them—within hierarchies of taste. According to one fan, "to say that Season 6 was good is almost to dishonor those seasons that were actually good," elabo-rating that *Buffy*

started out as a groundbreakingly great television series. [In Season 6], for whatever reason, they decided to fall back on Soap opera clichés [. . .] [giv-ing] the Up yours to the old school fans who would have loved a return to normalcy[. . . .] That isn't even going into the long term damage to the "heart" of the series that various arcs suggested.

Professing adoration for the series' past, the author nevertheless claimed that "old school fans" had been shortchanged by recent plot developments that veered from their shared meta-textual interests. Because supposedly shared desires for "normalcy" had been foreclosed upon by narrative developments, the author perceived a failure in ontological security, in the

somehow truer hyperdiegetic "heart" of the series in which he or she had become invested—an investment devalued by recent episodes.

Proponents of season six's meta-textual promise, however, launched their own attempts to reify it as a golden age within an alternative aesthetic history. One fan wrote, "Overall season 6 was the most experimental season of them all. A lot of the experiments failed, I'll admit, but a lot of them succeeded with flying colors." Another supporter, attacking a detractor, blasted, "I think you're an arrogant narcissist [. . .] [F]orgive me for not taking seriously your hackneyed, uncreative argument, which by the way has been argued all over the Internet." The evaluative struggle again enlarged, forwarding truth claims not just about season six but also about competing factions of fans. For both sides, "true fan" status necessitated appreciation of one aesthetic, one prescribed evaluative relationship to the text.

Brooker describes similar struggles between "gushers" accused of uncritically accepting drivel and "bashers" charged with gratuitous harshness. Such hostile interpretive stalemates fragment online fan communities into splinter groups with "their own strongholds [. . .] where they consolidate and preach to the choir" (2002: 95–96). Only in rupture could the antagonisms of Brooker's *Star Wars* fans produce the unified consensus of interpretation observed by Tulloch and Jenkins. For the *Buffy* fans observed here, however, "common sense" consensus of interpretation vis-à-vis season six formed hegemonically in debate, where a dominant discourse was legitimated before dissident secession became necessary. Detractors incorporated alternative interpretive values until most agreed that season six "had some of the best ideas of the entire series, but the way they were written was just awful." Even the staunchest season six supporter backpedaled: "this post has made me reconsider my opinion of season 6 as a whole [. . .] I can say that I enjoyed this season more than any other, but I can no longer say it's the best." Those whose meta-textual interests meshed with season six (like Buffy/Spike shippers, for instance) could continue enjoying that season the most, but they lost the battle to legitimize truth claims about its excellence as dominant discourse. Their tastes were subordinated within a hierarchical, hegemonically consensual, group meta-text.

Not all *Buffy* fans, however, consensually accepted season six as a low point in the series; this discussion only evidences the process by which antagonism constituted a single unified reading formation. Although season three compared favorably in 2002–2003 to season six, elements of the former were framed when first aired as "a SLAP to the face," guilty of "turning our beloved show into crap."[8] Thus, fan interpretation is constantly shifting,

never unified or maintaining the same valences over time. Despised eras may later become beloved if they retrospectively satisfy the meta-textual desires of dominant fan interests. This extended analysis of aesthetic debate is therefore representative not in the judgments it contains, but in the process by which those judgments were met. Consensus of interpretation legitimated some meta-textual constructions and evaluative discourse at the expense of marginalized others. By discursively framing textual history, competing power blocs attempt to fix the meta-textual projections that can be made from the hyperdiegetic text in the future. Reiterated over time, these antagonistic debates form a habitus, generating not explicitly declared rules and norms but reasonable, common sense behaviors that reproduce the dispositions most favorable to it (Bourdieu 1999: 110). By reinforcing certain textual contingencies as desirable, fan consensus reproduces tastes predisposed to those particular interpretations. Although golden ages change, factionalized fan interests can provisionally install certain evaluations as hegemonic common sense through antagonistic, intracommunity discourse. By constructing consensual legitimizations of a particular season or storyline, the habitus of fan discourse encourages future interpretations to evaluate narrative elements against a privileged meta-text. The interpretation of the cult text in the future is made to appear as the extension of a supposedly consensual and objective view of the past.

Fan Activism: Vilifying the Producer

While fan-tagonism structures hegemonies of textual interpretation, internal struggles to empower factional meta-texts often expand to challenge the discursive and productive monopolies of institutional forces outside fandom—often those in the industrial sphere of hyperdiegetic production. Corporate producers' creative choices often delimit the range of interpretation possible within fan meta-texts, authorizing some but denying others. While audiences can, via fan fiction, adapt the text to marginalized interests, they can also challenge corporate producers by constructing interpretative consensuses that delegitimize institutional authority over the hyperdiegetic text.

Early studies of television fandom engaged with external fan-producer antagonisms more openly than internal fan schisms. In Jenkins's view, fan fiction "involves not simply fascination or adoration, but also frustration and antagonism[. . . .] Because popular narratives often fail to satisfy, fans

must struggle [. . .] to find ways to salvage them for their interests" (1992: 23). But salvage is not always possible. This antagonism moved into the institutional sphere when Jenkins's *Beauty and the Beast* fans, finding their meta-textual interests foreclosed upon, advocated the cancellation of the series—only a season after fighting to renew it. *Doctor Who* fans launched similar campaigns to "'save the programme' from its producer" (Tulloch & Jenkins 1995: 160). The producers of these series either eliminated narrative elements in which dominant fan factions had become invested, or else introduced new ones that prohibited significant meta-textual contingencies, therefore compelling some fans to defy their authority with what Pam Wilson calls "narrative activism" (2004: 337).

But like *Star Trek*'s Gene Roddenberry, *Buffy* creator Joss Whedon is often deified by the fan base. As an auteur, Whedon's authorial signature linked *Buffy,* spin-off *Angel,* and even the diegetically autonomous *Firefly* in an intertextual relationship (sometimes referred to as the "Whedonverse" or "Jossverse"), reinforcing the hyperdiegetic coherence of those worlds by promising consistency, continuity, and quality within and between texts. The ontological security he provided caused some fans to "agree with Joss that he knows what's best for our own good better than we do."[9] So if the author figure can so defuse fan discontent, where does fan-tagonism come into play?

Enter perceived pretender to the throne, executive producer Marti Noxon, whose collaboration with Whedon challenged the hyperdiegetic security of auteurism. While Whedon nurtured fledgling series *Firefly,* Noxon faced scrutiny and distrust while managing *Buffy*'s sixth season in his stead. The aforementioned hegemonic reading formation that devalued season six worked simultaneously to delegitimize Noxon's productive authority and privileged relationship to the text. Many fans vilified Noxon: one Frequently Asked Questions list insisted she was "widely considered the Devil,"[10] with some fans dubbing her "Marti Noxious." Mirroring evaluations of season six in general, criticisms of Noxon condemned her production of "angsty and depressing episodes" akin to melodrama and soap opera.[11] While it is unclear whether such critics were unwilling to accept a woman as Whedon's show-running successor, the female Noxon was nevertheless assigned the blame for the series' perceived dalliances in devalued, feminized storytelling forms (despite the series' prior melodramatic leanings). Even fans who admired Noxon held her, for better or worse, responsible for both the quality of that season and any problems perceived during Whedon's absence. "I actually think that she 'gets' these characters

better than Joss does," opined one fan, "which is why I was so surprised at how bad season six was with her at the helm."[12]

Not all disgruntled fans delegitimized Noxon in such a direct, constructive manner. One fan authored a *faux* studio press release announcing Noxon as the next "Big Bad" (*Buffy*-speak for each season's recurring narrative antagonist):

> It was easy to make the audience hate [Noxon]. We purposely planted innumerable inconsistencies into the weekly scripts, making the characters act very, well, out of character. According to Noxon, "They hate me. They really do. I've managed to tick off the Angel fans, Spike fans, the Willow fans [. . .] pretty much the whole lot of them[. . . .] Just check out some of the posting boards[. . . .] So, I guess I'm doing a good job. I mean, I'm the one Big Bad you just can't defeat."[13]

Highlighting a number of hegemonic (if often unduly severe) fan discourses surrounding Noxon, this critique charged her stewardship with breaking continuity and, thus, harming the narrative's hyperdiegetic coherence. Perceiving a diversity of fan factions each disgruntled and alienated by Noxon's productive control, this text evidences a potential point of commonality for a hegemonic consensus of interpretation between competing interests all feeling equally betrayed. These sentiments did not go unrecognized: "I get such hate mail, you wouldn't believe," echoed Noxon (Gottlieb 2002).

Fan attitudes toward Noxon, therefore, suggest a struggle for discursive and productive authority between fans and producer. By calcifying perceptions that Noxon had illegitimately taken over and sullied the series, these fans worked to negate her authority in support of their own metatextual interests. Because they so denied producerly and narrative competency, we might be tempted to call these viewers "anti-fans"—a term Gray proposes for audiences who approach texts in negatively charged, uninterested, or irritated ways (2003: 71). However, the militancy of these *Buffy* viewers remained symptomatic of fandom, not of anti-fandom in its own right. Though Gray importantly identifies alternative modes of audience engagement, anti-fans who hate a program (without necessarily viewing it) must be differentiated from disgruntled fan factions who hate episodes, eras, or producers because they perceive a violation of the larger text they still love. Fans may follow programs closely, even when meta-text and hyperdiegesis become so divergent that one would rather see the series

end than continue on its displeasing current course. Fans may hate the current status quo, but their intense feelings and continued contribution to fan discourse stem from pleasurable engagement with the diegetic past. Negative discourse in these instances compartmentalizes dissatisfaction with part of the text so fans may continue enjoying other elements of it.[14]

Fan factions maneuver to secure extra-textual, intracommunal interpretative dominance, but also to counter external threats to their interests posed by institutions, declaring their own authority in legitimizing cultural production and audience relationship to it. Each power bloc, formed around factional meta-textual interests, competes to wield enough discursive power within the community to mobilize appropriate challenges to the productive power of outside institutional/industrial forces. But given the unequal resources available to antagonistic fans, is the battle for authority over the fan-text-producer relationship one that any faction can hope to win? If producers like Noxon are the Big Bad, as some fans contend, what special powers work to prevent their defeat?

The Author Strikes Back: Disciplining the Fan

While besieged producers sometimes defend themselves in online fan forums, they also enjoy privileged means of answering challenges to their discursive, producerly authority. Corporate counterdiscourses discipline and reorient the relationship of fans to textual production, reinscribing unruly audiences who produce their own texts—both fan fiction and tertiary critiques—within consumptive roles that more efficiently translate fandom into corporate profits. Corporate producers intervene in the struggles of fan-tagonism by reasserting their productive dominance, reframing "normative" fandom within "proper" spheres of consumption.

This response often manifests as legal action. Issuing injunctions against online fan productions, *Star Wars* producer George Lucas is "in the ironic position of reclaiming control over an Empire, [. . .] stamping out 'rebel' interpretations such as slash fiction or films that infringe copyright" (Brooker 2002: 88). But his Lucasfilm, Ltd. is not the only corporation to serve cease and desist orders. "The Slayer's Fanfic Archive," a *Buffy*-oriented site, was similarly shut down by Twentieth-Century Fox in 2003.[15] As Consalvo remarks, fans respond to these studio tactics by removing links to official corporate sites and organizing media blackout days that withhold the free advertising provided by fan sites (2003: 78–79). Arguably, such tac-

tics only inconvenience media corporations; moreover, fans confronted by corporations are financially unable to mount a corresponding legal defense (Jenkins 2000: 104). Brooker (2002), Consalvo (2003), and Gwenllian-Jones (2003) have all also noted the assimilative tactics employed by studios; fans who migrate to official sites—submitting to institutional rules and surveillance—receive amnesty from corporate lawyers. Yet these legalistic measures target only those fan uses of copyrighted intellectual property that challenge corporate productive and distributional hegemony. Because copyright law cannot curb consumer dissent, alternative strategies must rejoin the challenges represented by fans' discursive power to construct aesthetic histories of corporate production.

To this end, the television text itself has been mobilized to narratively construct "acceptable" fan activity—bolstering extra-textual legal measures by building critiques of unruly fans directly into the text that supports unauthorized discursive activity. Thus, while defiant fans made her a villain, Noxon concurrently oversaw the narrative construction of fans as the Big Bad in *Buffy*'s sixth season. Fancying themselves super villains ("like Dr. No"), unpopular geeks Warren, Jonathan, and Andrew become "The Evil Trio," the season's ongoing threat to Buffy. Instead of bringing the apocalypse, like most Buffy nemeses, these weak, ineffectual, pathetic villains complicate Buffy's attempts to manage greater (arguably soap-operatic) real-world problems. What distinguishes these flaccid antagonists, however, is their intertextual referentiality to cult texts. Trapping Buffy in a looped sequence of time in the episode "Life Serial," for example, they draw parallels between their actions and those featured on cult series from which they effectively poach:

> Andrew: I just hope she solves it faster than Data did on the ep of *TNG* where the *Enterprise* kept blowing up.
> Warren: Or Mulder, in the *X-Files* where the bank kept blowing up.
> Andrew: Scully wants me so bad.

Tailored to fan sensibilities, these characters make references that audiences with memories of these *Star Trek* and *X-Files* episodes alone would appreciate.

Simultaneously, however, such recognition implicates viewers in the deviance articulated to the Trio's social otherness and inappropriate relationship to media texts. The Trio's obsessive interest in *Star Wars* collectibles evidences their status as undisciplined consumers amassing trivial

knowledge and possessions—an alterity that recalls their prior transgressions of social norms. In the fifth season, Warren had built a submissive robotic slave to replace his flesh-and-blood girlfriend Katrina. After attempting suicide in season three, the eternally friendless Jonathan reconfigured the universe in season four's "Superstar" to make himself the center of Buffy's world—demonstrating a fannish proclivity for unauthorized manipulation of the hyperdiegesis.[16] Though Andrew debuts in the sixth season, he is established as the brother of a previously encountered teen deviant. These outcasts' pathetic villainy therefore derives from substitution of constructs—robots, parallel universes, and media texts—for normative interpersonal relationships. The only chance these infantilized men have for a nonrobotic, hetero-normative sexual encounter lies in placing a spell on Katrina in the episode "Dead Things." When this rape fails, and Warren kills Katrina, the articulation of fandom, social violation, and transgressive alterity calcifies, only reinforced by the devotion shown to Warren by an increasingly demasculinized and suggestively homosexual Andrew. Even as Buffy and Xander protect Andrew from unjust death at the hands of Willow in "Two to Go," they demasculinize him for demonstrating his fan knowledge (in this case, a triple *Star Wars* reference):

> Andrew: You think your little witch buddy's gonna stop with us? You saw
>   her! She's a truck driving magic mama! We've got maybe seconds before
>   Darth Rosenberg grinds everybody into Jawa Burgers and not one of
>   your bunch has the midichlorians to stop her!
> Xander: You've never had any tiny bit of sex, have you?

Amid the "growing up" theme of season six, the fan status ascribed to Xander in prior seasons is interestingly reduced and transferred to these new characters. In condemning fannish behavior, adult Xander understands the social unacceptability of filtering reality through fantasy texts. Xander no longer makes fan references without some kind of conscious self-deprecation to mark himself off from the Trio and thus from fan deviancy. Noxon characterizes the Trio as "trying to do anything to sort of shortcut having to do adult things, like getting a job or going to school" (Sci-Fi Wire 2002). Career and heterosexual relationships thus prevent Xander from being similarly constructed as deviant fan—unlike the Trio, whose inability to form relationships outside of cult media articulates fandom to immaturity, instability, and even the violations of rape.

While embodying cult fandom in general, the Trio also narrativizes *Buffy* fans specifically. Despite their relative insignificance, these powerless fans attempt to insinuate themselves into larger (narrative) on-goings. In posing challenges (like the time loop) that produce diagnostic knowledge of Buffy's abilities, the Trio plans to redirect her attention—and that of the series—away from soapy, real-world dilemmas and towards a more fantastical direction of their meta-textual choosing. While referencing other series at the diegetic level, their extradiegetic role is as stand-ins for outspoken *Buffy* fans. Tom Lenk, the actor who plays Andrew, explains, "We're playing what the truly obsessive *Buffy* fans would be [. . .] the writers have told us that we're basically them personified" (Topel 2002). As part of the industrial discourse working to constitute a disciplined fandom, the Trio reinforces the hegemonic "truth" that fans should be disregarded, mocked, and even feared as obsessive, socially deviant outcasts.

These representations further inhibit fandom's discursive productivity by disarticulating fans from storytelling practice and rearticulating them to compliant consumption. In season seven, Andrew (sole surviving member of the Trio) becomes Buffy's prisoner-yet-pseudo-ally. In "Storyteller," Andrew's fan practices expand from referentiality to unauthorized narrative production; he effectively authors a fan video about Buffy (and, extradiegetically, *Buffy* the series), filtering narrative events through his own interpretative perspective. Andrew also rewrites his own history, excusing his crimes while also embellishing his prior villainous prowess. His sexuality still uncertain, Andrew identifies with Anya, rather than Xander, as he films a romantic conversation between the two. This unruly storyteller is ultimately confronted by Buffy (at knifepoint over the Hellmouth!) and coerced into abandoning these textually productive practices: "Stop! Stop telling stories. Life isn't a story," Buffy commands, demanding that Andrew discontinue his interpretations of the hyperdiegetic past. To be redeemed and socially rehabilitated, deviant Andrew must cease and desist—give up storytelling and submit to the narrative as the authoritative Buffy experienced it.[17] His eventual redemption is punctuated by his transformation from sexually ambiguous nerd into confirmed heterosexual, suave sage, and trusted ally. Appearing on spin-off *Angel* the next season ("The Girl in Question"), a changed Andrew offers Angel and Spike advice about "moving on" before departing with a beautiful woman on each tuxedo-clad arm. Though he still references cult texts, Andrew, like Xander, has replaced fandom with a new social discipline—seemingly that of watcher-

in-training.[18] Andrew's redemption thus promises a more proper, passive, socially acceptable fan consumption.

Deployed within larger institutional discourses, the Trio's reformation of fan-text-producer relationships should not be mistaken as the malicious response of a single producer like Noxon. Leyla Harrison, a recurring character on the The X-Files (named in memory of a prominent fan fiction author), similarly enforces boundaries between the fan and textual productivity. Though a "fan" of Mulder and Scully, untrained Agent Harrison settles for reading reports of their exploits, rather than contributing to them. Even the *Star Trek* franchise, whose generic conventions prohibit overt acknowledgment of contemporary fandom, manages to pathologize unauthorized narrative production. Lt. Barclay, a recurring character on both *The Next Generation* and *Voyager,* is repeatedly disciplined for his addictive, unhealthy use of holodeck technology to appropriate the regular characters in virtual reality narratives. Although Hayward (1997) and Jenkins (2002) suggest that interactions between industry and audience enabled by television and new media convergence might blur the lines between production and consumption, characters like the Evil Trio allow television institutions to redraw that line and increase its resolution, rearticulating distinctions between normative audience and Othered fan, professional and amateur, producer and consumer.

Conclusion

This struggle to consensually legitimate competing knowledge claims about fans, cult texts, and their production—fan-tagonism—operates discursively to constitute hegemonies within factionalized fan communities. But internal constructions of communal interpretative consensus comprise just one front on which the war for hegemony is waged; we must also look outward since it is in the productive authority of external corporate institutions that the greatest power is mobilized. Fans attack and criticize media producers whom they feel threaten their meta-textual interests, but producers also respond to these challenges, protecting their privilege by defusing and marginalizing fan activism. As fans negotiate positions of production and consumption, antagonistic corporate discourse toils to manage that discursive power, disciplining productive fandom so it can continue to be cultivated as a consumer base. Here I have added to our catalogue of the corporate arsenal a textual strategy through which pro-

ducers work to subordinate fans to their discursive authority. However, while textual representations like the Evil Trio constitute an institutional bid to circumscribe fan activity, that textuality is negotiated in turn via interpretative and evaluative debates within fandom that, through their own redefinitions and reevaluations, keep antagonistic, discursive struggles for hegemony in play. As one writer observes of the Trio, "The controversial nerds were either loved or hated by the fan base. Some adored their comedic riffs on everything sci-fi and geek-based while others were irritated by the exact same thing" (DiLullo 2003). Thus, as the Trio and other textual manifestations of the external, institutional dimension of fan-tagonism enter into fan aesthetic historiography, they promise to inspire the same kind of internal, factional fan schism explored at the outset.

Whether through interpretative, legal, or narrative measures, fan activity is discursively dominated, disciplined, and defined to preserve hegemonies of cultural power at local or institutional levels. Ultimately, the multidimensional, antagonistic dynamics of cult fandom demand that we avoid utopian models of fan community and productive participation, and engage more directly with the constitutive negotiations of hegemony.

N o t e s

1. Thanks to Julie D'Acci, Henry Jenkins, Jonathan Gray, Ron Becker, and Aswin Punathambekar for their helpful comments and insights on various drafts of this piece.

2. Theorizing fan-text-producer relationships complicates audience-text relationships as discussed by Nightingale (2003), accounting for both productive and consumptive fan practice and, following Gwenllian-Jones (2003: 174), industrial strategies designed to maximize audience involvement.

3. While relaxing limitations on group dynamic and generating alongside greater diversity of membership more disagreement and antagonism, online communication has not *introduced* conflictual relationships to fandom. Though insufficiently emphasized in previous scholarly work, real tensions, anxieties, and disputes were evidenced in offline fan relations (see Jenkins 1992: 187–91; Bacon-Smith 1992: 229). We might, however, still interrogate the amplifying or foregrounding effect of the Internet.

4. In addition to the dimensions of fans vs. fans and fans vs. producers, other dynamics of conflict could be similarly explored (fans vs. academics, for example).

5. Although I distinguish between larger fan interests, communities, and competing factions within them, the boundaries of discrete interest groups do not prohibit individual fans from enjoying "dual citizenship" or visiting other com-

munities; like-minded, consensual groups rarely operate in isolation without (antagonistic) interaction at a larger level. Thus, we might think of the larger fandom as a site of struggle just as we would the individual communities.

6. "Damn the 'Shippers," retrieved 2 May 2003 from http://mrsg.lunarpages.com/tv/shippers.html.

7. "Season 6 was the biggest piece of shit ever," 5–6 July 2002, retrieved 2 May 2003 from http://fireflyfans.net.

8. "Why is Joss turning our beloved show into crap?" 6 October 1998, retrieved 2 May 2003 from alt.tv.buffy-v-slayer.

9. "The Remote Controllers," 20 October 2002, retrieved 2 May 2003 from http://www.whedonesque.com.

10. "Opinion FAQ," retrieved 2 May 2003 from http://www.slayage.com/articles/000057.html.

11. "Had an Idea," 4 November 2002, retrieved 2 May 2003 from http://fireflyfans.net.

12. "Season 6 was the biggest piece of shit ever."

13. Headline: "Season Big Bad revealed (soilers) [sic]," retrieved 2 May 2003 from http://www.btvs-tabularasa.net/list/taraflash.html.

14. Jenkins recognizes this compartmentalized disappointment in his often overlooked chapter on *Beauty and the Beast* fans (1992: 132).

15. See Chilling Effects (http://www.chillingeffects.com) for more accounts of media corporations taking legal action against fan producers.

16. Larbalestier (2002) discusses Jonathan as a textual embodiment of Buffy fans.

17. Andrew briefly relapses in the later episode "Dirty Girls," including a fight to the death with Mr. Spock in his history of rogue vampire slayer Faith. Andrew was, however, sternly reprimanded.

18. The need to cultivate enthusiastic media consumption makes it counterproductive for corporate discourse to entirely rehabilitate the fan. See Gwenllian-Jones (2003).