The Clothes Make the Fan: Fashion and Online Fandom when *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* Goes to eBay

by Josh Stenger

Abstract: The public's reception of eBay's auction of Buffy the Vampire Slayer *wardrobe items marked an instructive collision of online fandom, television production/consumption and e-commerce. As opportunities for critique and fantasy production, the clothes crystallized tensions within the series and among fans: between ownership and authorship; a viable feminist politics and the sexualization of cast and characters; the perceived egalitarianism of online communities and eBay's explicit competitiveness.*

> "People will pay anything to get into Sarah Michelle Gellar's jeans!"
>
> —Fan post on alt.horror

Syndication secures for select TV series a media afterlife, as it extends a program well beyond its initial network run. But syndication constitutes only the most long-standing, most official form by which to prolong a series. Today, fan communities accomplish nearly the same task.

As Henry Jenkins has usefully explained, fandom is a "participatory culture," one in which people are bound together by a wide range of desires and expressed through an equally wide range of practices. Thus, even though the official text of a show constitutes an ineluctable precondition of fan devotion; fans nevertheless frequently relate to programs, characters and actors in ways that expand on and move well beyond official narratives, imagery and relationships. Borrowing from Michel de Certeau, Jenkins describes such unauthorized acts as forms of "textual poaching." To the extent that they are undertaken by fans outside the space of official consumption, poaching can constitute a somewhat paradoxical subversion, recognition and legitimization of the commodity status of a show and its stars.[1]

The World Wide Web has multiplied both the commercial and noncommercial forms in which television programs can survive beyond the period of their original broadcast; so too has it exponentially increased opportunities for fans to find one another and to express and cultivate their devotion to a series, character, or actor. That the maturation of internet fan culture has coincided with the increasing popularity and profitability of DVD box sets, online auctions and entertainment memorabilia has given rise to a highly negotiated détente between corporate media

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interests that produce, own and distribute programming content on the one hand and fans who frequently engage in unsanctioned appropriations of that content on the other. Because online fandom and e-commerce alike are rapidly evolving cultural phenomena, their intersections become especially useful in refining our understanding of fans and their relationship to both the internet and consumerism. Such intersections are especially instructive when, for example, a program that at once embraced and satirized conspicuous consumption as well as its own cult fan following auctions off props on a Web site famous for combining the anything-goes ethos of the wild frontier with the name-your-price spirit of the bazaar and the ersatz optimism of the world's largest mall. Thus, when Twentieth Century Fox auctioned props from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* on eBay when the series wrapped in 2003, the auction and the concomitant online reception occasioned a unique and enlightening collision of fandom, consumption and internet culture.

Buffy's long-standing emphasis on style and the program's robust online fan presence had converged in many ways and on many sites, to be sure. But the Fox eBay auction of props served to consolidate this nexus. Far from mere attire, the clothes auctioned on eBay served, alternately, as collectibles, fetish objects and opportunities for role-playing, dress-up, and fantasy production. The auction's emphasis on wardrobe items, combined with the routine yet diverse forms of overvaluation of these items, provided a key register along which to gain an understanding of television and internet fandom generally, and of online fan practices relating to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* more specifically. Given the multifaceted reception of the auction among online fans, the *Buffy* auction crystallized tensions that had existed throughout the show's run. In what follows, I address several of these tensions, paying special attention to how each either revolved around or was catalyzed by fan fetishization of wardrobe items castmembers wore. Specifically, these tensions include disputed notions of authorship and ownership between fans and producers; the struggle to reconcile a viable feminist politics with the recurring sexualization of the cast and characters, both on the show and in fan discourse; and the conflict between the egalitarian model of community idealized by the Scooby Gang[2] and aspired to in countless online fan spaces versus the explicitly competitive and hierarchical structure of the auction.

Online Fandom, TV Fashion, and the Road to eBay. To appreciate either the conjunction of fashion and internet culture in the eBay auction or the impact of that conjunction on online *Buffy* fan communities, it is important to consider how the series itself understood the imbrications of these aspects. From the first season forward, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* positioned style and the internet as constitutive elements of adolescent identity, social belonging and community.

Early into the series premiere, "Welcome to the Hellmouth," prom-queen-in-waiting Cordelia (Charisma Carpenter) guides the newly arrived Buffy through the school's social landscape; along the way, she derisively greets the nerdy bookworm, Willow (Allyson Hannigan) at a water fountain: "Willow! Nice dress. Good to know you've seen the softer side of Sears."[3] The series' eighth episode, "I Robot, You Jane," spoofs the dangers of internet dating when Willow's new online 'boyfriend' turns

out to be an appropriately named demon, "Moloch the Corrupter," who corrupts students' hard drives and sex drives alike.

The centrality of these aspects of teen life and lifestyle resonated with audiences and figured prominently in the series' quickly earned reputation as a 'cult' phenomenon. Although it averaged only about six million weekly viewers in its five years on the WB (1997–2001) and its last two (2001–2003) on the UPN, *Buffy*'s fiercely loyal and highly participatory fan base endowed the program with a popular-cultural significance that far surpassed the size of audience. As Boyd Tonkin noted on the occasion of the series finale, "[*Buffy*'s] impact and influence have always outpaced the viewing figures. . . . [A]bout 1,200 dedicated websites testify to the show's hold on near-obsessive fans, who range from the cult-hungry teens of the first target audience to hopelessly ensnared writers and academics. . . . More than any previous TV cult, *Buffy* sparked a state of creative synergy with the internet generation."[4]

As with other shows that developed their own intricate internal mythologies—e.g., *Xena: Warrior Princess*, *Twin Peaks*, *The X-Files* and of course *Star Trek*—*Buffy* was able to cultivate its multidimensional fan base, in part, through the savvy use of ancillary media, conventions, and internet forums. These in turn provided both products and spaces by which to multiply and strengthen fans' consumption of, and engagement with, the show. Tonkin's nod to the "1,200 dedicated websites of near-obsessive fans" is a reminder that even though the number of *Buffy*-related sites may change, the internet has, from the outset, played the most important role in securing and, to a large part, determining the coordinates of the series' cultural purchase. In their essay "www.buffy.com: Cliques, Boundaries and Hierarchies in an Internet Community," Amanda Zweernik and Sarah Gatson maintain that in an important way, the internet actually centralizes fan activity, for it "accelerate[s] a process that took the original highly public fan-based community—the fans of the original *Star Trek*—decades to achieve [because it] made it easier to find like-minded people on at least one issue: *Buffy*."[5] In short, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, like its core cast of high school do-gooders, came of age with the internet.

As the laptop-toting Willow reminded viewers in episode after episode, fighting demons was made immeasurably easier by a good Web connection—a lesson lost neither on the show's wired teenage audience nor its many academic fans who could easily identify with Willow's penchant for 'online research.' With over a million threads on Usenet news groups and thousands of sites dedicated to star gossip, spoilers, fan fiction and role-playing games, it would be difficult to overstate either the scope or the importance of *Buffy*'s Web-based fan activity.

There is more than a little irony that fans of the show are so active in (for fan culture) traditionally noncommercial ways, given that the show repeatedly affirms consumerism, especially in the realm of fashion. To be sure, just as the internet has been a staple component of *Buffy*'s reception, so too have conspicuous consumption and an emphasis on style been recurring elements of the program's narrative and mise-en-scène. As one editorial to the *New York Times* blithely remarked, the upwardly mobile adolescent Scooby Gang "always battled evil wearing great clothes."[6]

Though a self-evident and inconsequential observation, it is important to understand that, initially at least, 'battling evil' and 'wearing great clothes' denoted two

incongruous lives for Buffy (Sarah Michelle Gellar) and friends. For example, early in season two, Angel (David Boreanaz) tells a very stressed-out Buffy he thought they had a date, to which she can only reply in exasperation: "Dates are things normal girls have. Girls who have time to think about nail polish and facials. You know what I think about? Ambush tactics. Beheading. Not exactly the stuff dreams are made of."[7] When Buffy temporarily joins a paramilitary demon-hunting group called The Initiative in season four, the group's leader sends her on a reconnaissance mission with the warning that she "might want to be suited up for this." Now seeming able to juggle more effectively the fashion and make-up rituals of "normal girls" and the "ambush tactics" required of a Slayer, Buffy dismisses the advice: "Oh, you mean the camo and stuff? I thought about it but, I mean, it's gonna look all Private Benjamin. Don't worry, I've patrolled in this halter many times."[8]

By late in the series, the one-time tension has become something the characters themselves not only resolve but begin to satirize. In "Once More With Feeling," the much-touted musical episode in season six, Buffy offers Giles (Anthony Stewart Head) some perspective on the recent tendency of Sunnydale residents to burst into song and dance: "I'm not exactly quaking in my stylish yet affordable boots, but there's definitely something unnatural going on here, and that doesn't usually lead to hugs and puppies."[9] As the comment suggests, during the course of the series, Buffy and friends not only evolved into formidable fighters who can implement "ambush tactics" while wearing "stylish yet affordable boots," they became exemplary, often self-consciously ironic catalogue models for the teens and young adults who comprised the official target audience of WB and UPN prime-time programming. This evolution gave rise to an interesting inversion late in the series. Early on, *Buffy* eschewed typical high school hierarchies, organizing the adolescent landscape not around the cool kids, jocks and cheerleaders, but around the misfits, nerds and outcasts. By the end of the series, however, the Scooby Gang had become fashionable and cool in their own right, so much so that the villains of season six are not blood-thirsty monsters, demons, or hell-gods with visions of world destruction, but a trio of nerdy, maladjusted boys who use their intelligence, penchant for role-playing games, technological savvy and knowledge of the occult to live out popular fantasies about masculinity, sex, and social and financial power.

The program's investment in fashion was central from the very outset. The series' premiere introduces Buffy as someone who, while hardly obsessed with fashion, trends and popularity, clearly understands they constitute valuable cultural capital in the American high school. Newly arrived in Sunnydale, Buffy scores an invitation to join Cordelia at the local teen hangout, The Bronze. Preparing for her first extracurricular social experience in Sunnydale, Buffy stands in front of the mirror trying on different outfits. As she holds up several dresses, she provides her own commentary as to how each might define her, struggling to decide whether to go with the "Hi, I'm an enormous slut" allure of a skimpy black dress or the "Would you like a copy of *The Watchtower*?" librarian look. She settles on a pair of pants and a blouse, arguably a more functional choice for a Slayer.

Though she struggles with her own style and look, Buffy understands the significance of 'wearing great clothes'—or failing to—when it comes to identifying evil. At

the Bronze, she encounters her Watcher, Giles, who insists that Buffy practice her powers of observation and perception so that she can intuit a vampire's presence. Buffy rejects Giles's call for mental focus and instead spots a vampire using her ability to decode the semiotics of teen fashion:

> Giles: You should know. Even through this mass and this . . . din, you should be able to sense them. . . . Well, try! Reach out with your mind. You have to hone your senses, focus until the energy washes over you, until you, you feel every particle of . . .
> Buffy: There's one.
> Giles: Where?
> Buffy: Right there, talking to that girl.
> Giles: You don't know . . .
> Buffy: Oh, please! Look at his jacket. He's got the sleeves rolled up, and the shirt! Deal with that outfit for a moment.
> Giles: It's dated?
> Buffy: It's carbon dated. Trust me, only someone living underground for ten years would think that was still the look.[10]

Moments such as these inaugurate one of the series' most enduring and least progressive tropes, solidifying a link between style and a specific class position. As Anne Millard Daugherty elaborates in her essay "Just a Girl: Buffy as Icon,": "obviously affluent . . . [Buffy] never [wears] the same outfit twice. She dresses in tight, sexy clothes. . . . She rarely wears 'old' clothes. Often dashing home to change before going on patrol, she frequently slips into leather pants . . . which look comfortable and hard-wearing but also convey a message of prosperity."[11] Daugherty's exposition is useful here in that it strikes close to the show's early acknowledgment, then gradual effacement, of any tension between Buffy-the-feminist-monster-destroyer and Buffy-the-sexy-clothes-horse—a tension the show and its fans actively negotiated in both highly affective and intellectual ways.[12]

The show itself seemed cognizant of the fact that narrative arcs frequently explored the (in)compatibility of an empowering, teen-friendly feminism and an entrenchment in a consumerism that historically has worked to objectify girls and women. Indeed, the series ended by paying homage to both of these totemic concerns. The final episode, "Chosen," sees the Scooby Gang struggling to vanquish the First Evil. Facing insuperable odds, Buffy asks Willow to perform a spell that will transfer her hitherto singular powers to girls and women around the world. As Buffy explains to her small "army" of "potentials": "To every generation a slayer is born, because a bunch of guys who died thousands of years ago made up that rule. They were powerful men. This woman is more powerful than all of them. So I say we change the rule. I say my power should be our power. . . . From now on, every girl who might be a slayer, will be a slayer. Every girl who might have the power, will have the power." The spell ultimately succeeds and the First Evil is defeated; yet while Buffy waxes grrrl-power communitarian, the series ends not with a feminist bang but with a consumerist whimper. Gathered around the crater where Sunnydale used to be, the group contemplates what to do next:

> Xander: We saved the world.

Willow: We changed the world. I can feel them, Buffy, slayers are awakening all over.
Buffy: We have to find them.
Willow: We will.
Giles: Yes, because the mall was actually in Sunnydale, so there's no hope of going there tomorrow.
Dawn: We destroyed the mall? I fought on the wrong side.
Xander: All those shops gone. The Gap, Starbucks, Toys "R" Us. Who will remember all those landmarks unless we tell the world about them?[13]

While the rumination on the recently obliterated mall is played for laughs in the show, Twentieth-Century Fox, which owns the rights to the program, lit upon a more earnest plan to exploit the long-standing confluence of fans' internet savvy and the program's pret-a-porter fashion sensibility: BuffyAuction.com—a high-stakes, high-priced "For the Fans" fire eBay Auction of *Buffy* props. During the summer of 2003, the auction sold off hundreds of items used over the seven years of production. These ranged from instantly recognizable, narratively significant props—like "Olaf's hammer," which Buffy uses to defeat the fashion-forward hell-god, Glory, in season five[14]—to more obscure fare, such as "assorted candleholders" and a "slightly broken" flower pot.

Of all the props, the cast's wardrobe dominated the list both in terms of sheer number and money spent. These items also regularly ignited the fiercest bidding wars and the most spirited online discussions. As fans' sense of ownership of, and devotion to, the show collided with the cash- and competition-based economy of eBay, it quickly became clear that in the space of BuffyAuction.com at least, the clothes made the fan. Far more than a prescient marketing ploy, Fox's deal with eBay effectively transmuted the finale's universalizing feminist impulse into an occasion for free-market enterprise, fantasy production, role-playing and (commodity) fetishism. If you couldn't be a slayer in real life, thanks to the *Buffy* eBay auction, you could at least dress like one.

Consuming Fan(dom)s and Owning the Show. Fox aggressively advertised BuffyAuction.com throughout May and June during commercial breaks on multiple networks, including the WB, UPN and Fox, the three networks on which the show had aired either in original broadcasts or syndication. Ads offered home viewers the *Buffy* auction as a perfect solution for how to shop—and what to shop for—in a land without brick-and-mortar retail and a media landscape without new installments of *Buffy*. The commercial spots framed the auction as being "For the Fans," explicitly addressing the fans *as consumers*. In doing so, the auction at once embraced and elided the many unofficial, often unsanctioned forms of production, revision and 'poaching' in which fans routinely engage. Thus, it worked to bridge a divide that Matt Hills identifies in his book *Fan Cultures* as underpinning fandom generally: the fan's tendency to favor "anti-commercial ideologies" on the one hand, and the expression of fandom through "commodity-completist practices" on the other.[15]

The auction collapsed this opposition in part because fans, not a marketing department, determined the value of each item, giving rise to an anticommercial veneer under which the auction's commodification *of fandom* was effectively, if

ironically, cloaked. For Hills, eBay is at once a singular and a representative online space in which fandom can express itself. This owes centrally to the fact that, as with so many fan practices, eBay radically destabilizes any facile sense of 'value,' making muddle of traditional notions of the commodity in the process:

> Many commodities offered for sale on eBay should, according to the conventional logic of use and exchange-value, be almost worthless. However, due to many of them having been intensely subjectively valued by fans, such commodities take on a redefined "exchange-value" . . . created through the durability of fans' attachments, and through the fans' desire to own merchandise which is often no longer being industrially produced.[16]

Hills focuses on the phenomenon of fans' overvaluation of 'mass produced' items (e.g., action figures, board games) surrounding a show or film. But the *Buffy* auction items were 'one-of-a-kind,' having been used in the production of the official text. This not only amplified the over-determined status of the prop; it also authenticated the object, lending each prop a kind of Benjaminian originality or aura it could not otherwise possess.[17] Consequently, when props are made available for private purchase in a public auction, the items' value becomes at once increasingly unstable and highly expansive. Even a heretofore mass produced 'item' becomes an irreproducible 'prop' from its birth as a set piece.

The worth of a mass-produced prop-object proved to be an oft-contested issue, however. For instance, when a phone that retails for under $20 appears on the auction and sells for over $1,000, a disagreement about 'value' ensues among some fans. One person writes in disbelief, "The phone from the Summers house is going for just over $1,000. Who the hell's going to believe someone that it's the Buffy phone anyway? 'Hey Todd, yeah, do I sound any different? Really. Damn I just bought a thousand-dollar phone.'"[18] Another fan reveals a wholly different relationship to the phone's value: "[The phone is] the one thing I would actually want . . . . I'd probably like to own any piece of crap they offer (ok so the phone isn't the only thing I'd want) if I could point to it in an episode and say 'look, this is it!'"[19]

If fans' abilities to set the material worth of each item destabilized the fan-producer binary, this binary broke down further around the issue of ownership. To be sure, a key allure of the props was the promise of 'owning a piece of the show,' no small thing, for as Henry Jenkins reminds us, ownership over content, characters and imagery is a hotly contested issue.[20] The status of legal and intellectual ownership of any program's content usually amounts to an intractable division between fan and producer, yet the *Buffy* auction worked in part to bridge this gap. With each sale, the producers transferred legal ownership of a piece of the show to a fan.[21] As fan posts made clear, each prop served as a metonymy for the entire franchise, allowing the buyer to cross the line from viewer to part owner. If, as the feminist film scholar Mary Ann Doane once wrote of product placement in cinema, "metonymy is the trope of the tie-in," in the space of BuffyAuction.com, it was the trope of the *buy-in*, allowing bidders, literally, to invest in the 'official' show from which their status as fans had previously served to keep them.[22]

While each prop afforded buyers a sense of ownership of the show, and many sold for considerable sums—the set of three rubber stakes sold for roughly $5,600

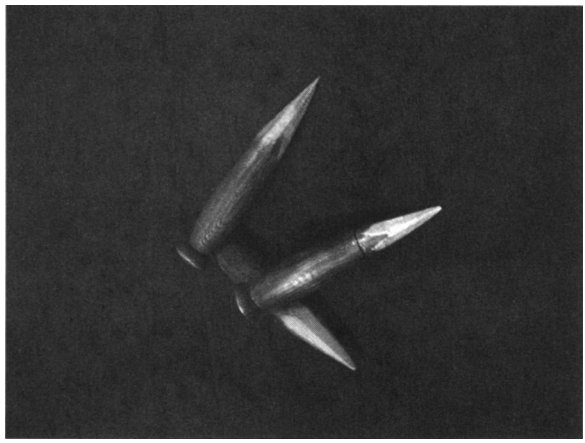

Figure 1. With a winning bid of $5,601.01, this set of three rubber stakes revealed the desire of some to own a narratively significant piece of property from the series. Image as posted by seller on eBay.

and the battle-axe from the series finale garnered over $15,000—it became clear that the most dearly prized and highly valued among fans and buyers alike were wardrobe items worn by cast members.

"B.Y.O. Subtext": (Ad)dressing Desires. The appeal of wardrobe items proved to be sui generis. In part, this owed to the fact that the clothes afforded fans such rich opportunities for fantasy production and role-playing, as well as for the focused festishization of favorite characters and actors. Closely linked to gender identity and sexual desire, to the authentic and the performative, the body and the gaze, these items promised the chance to close—or at least to clothe—the distance between fan, character and actor. To begin, the relationship of fans to the clothing for auction crossed quickly from the structured distance of voyeurism to the more "polymorphously perverse" proximity of fetishism. No longer a mere spectator, the fan who owns a piece of clothing from the show has few if any restrictions on the types of desire in which she or he can indulge. Props of all sorts entered into the overvaluation of the commodity fetish within the space of the auction, to be sure. However, as Stella Bruzzi maintains in *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies*, clothes offer unique occasions for fantasy production and fulfillment. In her work on cinema fashion, Bruzzi contends that clothes can have a "substitutive effect" commensurate with Freudian understandings of the fetish object, working to signify and in some cases even replace the impossible-to-consummate sexual attraction to an actor or character. Moreover, she argues that fashion allows spectators to connect to an object outside the stable gendered hierarchy of the Mulveyan gaze, thereby producing a greater level of gender and sexual mobility.[23]

Bruzzi's model for understanding the function of fashion in cinema extends to the clothes on BuffyAuction.com in interesting ways. For instance, in both spaces, the attachment to the clothes can be eroticized in ways that lend themselves to a high degree of play, both in terms of gender and sexual desire on the one hand, and in terms of the conflation of the actor and the character, on the other. One very

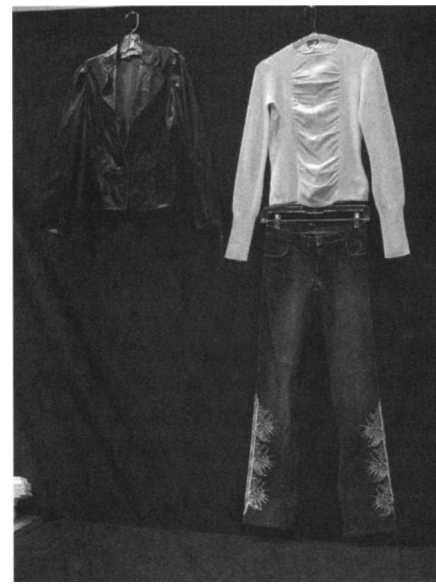

Figure 2. One of the dozens of cast members' wardrobe items auctioned by Fox on eBay, this outfit worn by Sarah Michelle Gellar/Buffy and its nearly $7,000 winning bid gave credence to one fan's insistence on the alt.horror newsgroup that "People will pay almost anything to get into Sarah Michelle Gellar's jeans!"

short post on the alt.tv.buffy-v-slayer newsgroup encapsulated the appeal of corporeal proximity invited by wardrobe items, while also revealing the multiple forms of desire enunciated in fantasy scenarios where ownership becomes tantamount to sexual contact: "I want EVERYTHING that Faith [Eliza Dushku] has EVER worn. Including Xander [Nicholas Brendon]." [24]

As was clear quite early in the auction, fantasies like this were available for bidding, but they often came at dizzying prices. Authenticity and proximity cost far more than mere dress-up; that is, dressing like Faith and having the clothes Eliza Dushku actually wore involved two vastly different sums of money. This was especially true for the actors/characters with the largest fan following, with outfits worn by Gellar/Buffy, Hannigan/Willow and James Marsters/Spike fetching the highest prices. When one of the first Buffy/Gellar outfits appeared on the auction and sold for over $5,000, a disbelieving fan on alt.horror exclaimed, "People will pay anything to get into Sarah Michelle Gellar's jeans!"[25] And the poster was not far wrong. Of course, that the jeans were, in fact, Sarah Michelle Gellar's, was the key to their worth, for again, the distinction between mass-produced clothing and one-of-a-kind artifact derived entirely from the fact that merchandise otherwise easily acquired was actually worn or used by a cast member on screen.

Further, the more closely an article of clothing was associated with a star or character the higher the item's price. For instance, James Marsters had among the largest fan followings of all the cast members. Marsters first appeared as Spike in season two but was not a regular until season four. During four years as a leading character, Spike is rarely seen without his signature full-length black leather coat which, as the final episode of season four jokes, is instrumental to his star persona. The episode, "Restless," is one of the series' most self-conscious installments; at one

point, it takes time to send up Marsters's newfound status as the show's reigning male sex symbol by literally having him 'vamp' in front adoring fans who want to photograph him in his leather coat.[26] When fans eagerly speculated on how much his coat would go for once it came up for auction, several wrote in to share that the coat was actually Marsters's own and hence would not be for sale. No matter. Fans moved on to the next best thing: if they couldn't have *Marsters*'s coat, at least they could have what *Spike* was wearing when he acquired it in the show's diegesis.[27] In the end, that outfit sold for $13,000.08.

If the value fans place on an item's relationship to a character or star cannot be overstated, neither can the value of an item's relationship to existing fan discourse about said character or star. For instance, of all the wardrobe items put up for auction, few generated more buzz or a higher winning bid than an outfit worn by Hannigan in two episodes in season three, in which her character, Willow, appears as a vampire. Consisting of leather pants, a bustier and long-sleeve top, the "Willow Vamp" outfit sold for over $8,000. When it became clear that the outfit was too expensive for most fans, one person posted to alt.tv.buffy-v-slayer with plans to reproduce the item, asking: "Do you think the outfit was a custom job . . . or was it purchased off the rack somewhere? . . . I'm just wondering how hard it would be to put together a facsimile outfit."[28] Yet, as others would point out, to think in such terms would be to miss the whole point. One fan parodied the discourse of a popular consumer credit card campaign in order to remark on the irreproducibility of the costume: "Similar Willow-Vamp shirt: $200. Similar Willow-Vamp pants $350. . . . 'THE' outfit that was on the show . . . 'PRICELESS.'"[29]

The Willow Vamp outfit not only occasioned some of the most pointed discussions about authenticity, it also revealed a correlation between an item's appeal to fans and its significance to both official and unofficial narratives. Hannigan wears the outfit in "The Wish" and "Doppelgangland,"[30] episodes that marked *Buffy* producers' direct responses to online fan fiction and comments widely circulating in the 'Buffyverse' during season three. Series creator Joss Whedon and other members of the Mutant Enemy production company often participated in online discussion boards, especially the "official" board known as The Bronze. On several notable occasions the series' writers, directors and producers responded to fan suggestions and queries from The Bronze posting board by incorporating them into stand-alone episodes.[31] As Justine Larbalestier has noted, such episodes "provided responses to fan speculative scenarios," responses that demonstrated the degree to which "[s]ome ways of reading the show are dependent not only on familiarity with previous episodes but also on participation in *Buffy* fandom."[32] "The Wish," for instance, answered fans' desire to see "what would happen if Buffy Summers never came to Sunnydale," and the "what if Willow and Xander were vampires" scenario.[33]

"The Wish" is a relatively dark episode, while "Doppelgangland" proved far more light-hearted, reveling in the playfulness of Vamp Willow to which fans responded so positively. In this episode, Good Willow accidentally causes Vampire Willow's return to Sunnydale. At one point, a sultry and sexually liberated Evil Willow confronts—and sexually propositions—her bookish, sexually naïve doppelganger in a heavily eroticized staging of a slash fiction[34] scenario to which the real Willow can

only remark, "this just can't get any more disturbing." When Vamp Willow is finally subdued, Willow explains to Buffy her disbelief at her alter-ego: "I'm so skanky and evil. Plus I think I'm kinda gay." Buffy tries to assuage Willow's concern, assuring her that "a vampire's personality has nothing to do with the person it was." When Angel moves to disagree, "Well, actually," the disapproving glance from Buffy signals his need to change course mid-sentence, "that's a good point."[35] In the fourth and following season, however, Willow begins the series' only significant, long-term same-sex relationship when she falls in love with Tara (Amber Benson).

In its own way, "Doppelgangland" can be read as a piece of fan fiction, a producer-as-fan response to a fan-as-producer reading. The episode allowed a popular unofficial subtext to quickly become the official text, thereby making good on one of Whedon's most frequently cited credos about the show. Just two months prior to the airing of "Doppelgangland," Whedon responded to a fan's post about the homoerotic tension between Buffy and Faith on the Bronze VIP discussion board. Channeling the language of Freud to sanction fan rewritings of *Buffy,* Whedon wrote:

> Okay, so I guess I must apologize . . . I just read the piece on Buffy and Faith . . . and by God, I think she's right! I can't believe I never saw it! . . . But then, I think that's part of the attraction of the Buffyverse. It lends itself to polymorphously perverse subtext. It encourages it. I personally find romance in every relationship . . . so I say B.Y.O. subtext![36]

It is no coincidence, then, that the Willow Vamp outfit became the most expensive item of Alyson Hannigan's on the auction. Not only did it crystallize an over-determined narrative history within the program, it also functioned as a site where the fan-producer distinction was abrogated (by Whedon himself no less) and where sexual mobility and gender masquerade were foregrounded rather than suppressed.

A number of fans actively anticipated the outfit's arrival on eBay. Shortly after it appeared, one fan posted to alt.tv.buffy-v-slayer, shouting: "IT'S UP FOR AUCTION!!! °FAINTS° . . . whoever gets that is the luckiest fan in the world."[37] When another fan writes, "I'll probably be sorry I asked but what in the hell would you do with it?" the gauntlet is thrown.[38] "Let's see, my wife's about Alyson's size . . . ," writes a presumably male poster, to which the original questioner replies, "Well, that I can understand, but couldn't you play dress up a lot cheaper . . . ?"[39] Across several discussion threads, a consensus is reached that the outfit is not worth $8,000 even to "play dress up" with one's own sexual partner, at which point talk turns more directly to sexualizing Hannigan herself. "For what they've got the vamp Willow outfit selling for, I'd want to have it delivered with Alyson inside it. (And be allowed to take it off her)."[40] "If Aly came with it for a night, I certainly would [pay that kind of money]," insists a self-identified male poster with a thinly veiled desire for a sexual experience with Hannigan.[41] Others delve into more particular forms of arousal. One fan wonders "has it been washed yet? Oh wait . . . don't answer that. Does it still have Aly scent?"[42] It is worth noting that not all self-identified male fans regard the clothes as occasions for fantasy and fetishism; indeed, as one demurred, "I shudder to think what some people may do with SMG or Eliza Dushku outfits that are up for sale."[43]

In the seemingly all-male discussion that evolved from suggestions of fantasy fulfillment with one's own partner to fantasy projection involving Hannigan herself, one self-identified female poster offered a subtle challenge to the men in the thread in the form of a sarcastic prescription for how everyone can enjoy 'his' own particular 'need': "My suggestion: Get a co-op together and go in on it together. Once a week, the person that has it boxes it up and sends it to the next name on the list. Included is a diary to keep track of the adventures of the Vamp Willow outfit."[44]

As a cultural phenomenon, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* garnered both popular and academic praise for its efforts to promote an image of strong girls and women. The show's feminist gender politics, however, are fraught with contradictions; importantly, these contradictions surpass the simple fact that the show's cast of strong female characters are also conventionally beautiful, thin, white and upper-middle-class. In her essay "'Action, Chicks, Everything': On-Line Interviews with Male Fans of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*," Lee Parpart explored online male fan reception of the program and notes that she was "struck by the number of men who seem able to enjoy the series while feeling no need to concern themselves directly with issues of female empowerment."[45] According to Parpart, for many online male fans gender was either ignored or an occasion for eroticization. However, online posts about the *Buffy* auction reveal a more complex picture of how self-identified male fans relate to gender identity and objects of desire, the earlier discussion of Alyson Hannigan notwithstanding.

For instance, although many fans engaged in the production of sexual fantasies involving the female cast members and their clothes, others displayed an equal if less overtly sexual fascination with the men. One writes, "I really hate Anthony Head . . . the man still wears size 34 . . . pants."[46] In the posts that follow in this thread, male posters routinely pay close attention to the changes the cast members' bodies undergo over the course of the show as signified by the sizes listed on auction items. In these conversations, male cast members are subjected to playful ribbing, as posters ruminate on masculinity and its relationship to a body that changes over time. One fan points out: "It's pretty funny to see that Xander went from a size 30 to a size 38. (I thought he looked like he had put on a few pounds). And Spike went from 32 to 34 (that isn't bad at all though. The guy is 41 years old.)" He goes on to note that "Oddly enough, the females in the show all LOST weight. Weird."[47] Such discussions allow a glimpse into a more complex relationship between fans and gender, one that is not easily reducible to the uniform sexualization of cast members. Indeed, some fans engage in explicit gender play, as when another begins with a remark that is vaguely objectifying—"Emma Caulfield [who plays Anya] is a size five. Any size she is is fine by me"—only to sign the post, "Philip, who wonders whether or not he could squeeze into the vamp Willow outfit."[48]

And squeezing into these clothes, especially the women's, is what most people would have to do. Observing that Sarah Michelle Gellar wears an XS top and has a 25-inch waist, one woman noted the virtual impossibility of buying anything to actually wear: "I suppose there are other women out there who are virtually non-existent enough to wear SMG's wardrobe, but I'm sure not one of them."[49] If most fans couldn't fit into the actors' clothes, however, this was not their fault, one man comforted. Rather, the blame lays on all actors who are, apparently, remarkably undersized: "You'd be

surprised, most male actors are short but the females . . . good god it's like standing by a 12 year old."[50] The obviousness of the dilemma was not lost on other fans: twelve-year-olds were an important part of the WB and UPN audience, after all, yet how many of them could afford $5,000 for a pair of jeans and a blouse?

Fans vs. Fox: Value, Competition and Community Online. In the fine print accompanying each auction item Fox made it clear that these clothes were not, in fact, for wearing, and certainly not for smelling "Aly scent" or engaging in any other kind of sexual pleasure. In a legal disclaimer, Fox warned: "[Items] are not to be used for their seemingly functional purposes and are only intended to be sold as collector's items. DO NOT use the items purchased through this Auction for any functional use." While the disclaimer may have been Fox's effort to avoid any erst-while 'wardrobe malfunctions', many fans nevertheless interpreted the subtext of the disclaimer—along with the undemocratic nature of the auction and the astronomic prices of the items—as signs that the "For the Fans" auction was actually aimed at, and ultimately priced for, merchants and collectors.

This soured the reception of the auction for many who berated its competitive nature and in so doing idealized the perceived egalitarianism of other online fan spaces. Some complained that the show's artifacts were being poached by feckless opportunists, and it quickly became clear that eBay had created a material basis for hierarchy among people who use the internet, in part, to form non-hierarchical communities.[51] Thus, the *Buffy* auction compelled fans to reassess the limits and potential of the web as a truly classless space. Given the prohibitive cost of many items, the auction dramatically altered the currency by which one demonstrated one's fan devotion. Fans used a range of strategies to reconcile the fact that, in the space of the auction, one's bank account trumped one's love for or knowledge of the show, its characters, or even its fans. Early into the auction, posts oscillating between dismissive and resentful began to appear. One fan wrote, "Some people have got more money than sense. 'Ooohhhh look at me I have $8,000 sitting around doing nothing . . . I think I'll use it to buy a Spike outfit.' I'm not bitter I just think it's too much money."[52] A few hours later, another pushed further: "I AM bitter! It's not fair! All of us Buffy fans want something but the rich bitches'll get it all!"[53]

One post to alt.tv.buffy-v-slayer proclaims that had Fox really intended the sale "for the fans," they would have leveled the playing field by hosting a lottery rather than slating the props for sale on an inherently in-egalitarian auction: "The rich fans get what they want (or are willing to spend) and the rest of us (who can't afford even the cheapest of the items) get nada . . . If they were doing it for 'The Fans' they should have sold raffle tickets over E-Bay for $10 bucks each. . . . And they should limit the # of tickets any one E-Bayer can buy to a max of 10 for any one item."[54] To be sure, fan concern over the unequal distribution of goods was well founded. During the auction, users posted feedback on Fox for 482 items; these came from 231 discrete users (or at least discrete user names), many of whom won multiple auctions. The top two individual bidders, for instance, accounted for 48 purchases, or roughly 10 percent of the total number of items for which feedback

was posted. The top ten percent of bidders posting feedback (23) accounted for over 37% of the items.

Of course, it is difficult to know what users will do with their merchandise. At least one multiple-item winner turned out to be an amateur collector in Florida who curates a collection of entertainment memorabilia and items used in television and film production, and who maintains a Web site at MoviePropKing.com. Though this person's (relatively) deep pockets may have rankled some less fortunate bidders, one could hardly impugn his fan credentials. Still, fans' worst nightmares were realized when it became clear that other buyers were essentially destroying the props for a profit. Several eBay merchants began to offer one-inch swatches of wardrobe items framed alongside an image of the cast member wearing the outfit, transforming what was once, according to one fan, "a giant uncut diamond," into so many pieces of worthless glitter.[55]

At this moment in popular entertainment culture, however, the collector class has got to be expected by most fans. Ever since The Hard Rock Cafe and Planet Hollywood codified a consumer habitus and a spatial logic around the exhibition value of entertainment memorabilia, collecting props has become an increasingly popular and expensive undertaking.[56] Combine rising interest in props with what *Variety* identifies as the "confluence of more careful accounting of property by studios, an explosion of do-it-yourself auctioneering, and a growing awareness . . . that production detritus is worth something," and the potential to profit from the sale, resale and display of entertainment memorabilia seems nearly limitless.[57]

In the end, BuffyAuction.com clearly represented a shrewd business decision on Fox's part more than an altruistic gesture "for the fans," many of whom make little secret about their distaste for the network. Indeed, throughout the many discussions about the auction, Fox emerged as the unifying target of fans' discontent. As Sue Tjardes notes in her essay "'If you're not enjoying it, you're doing something wrong': Textual and Viewer Constructions of Faith, the Vampire Slayer," fans' relationship to a show's creators can take the form of "worship or antagonism, as fans attempt to balance their conceptions of characters and plots with the creators' legal and cultural authority."[58] With respect to *Buffy*, such reactions were extremely bifurcated. Fans' adoration of the cultural authority of Whedon and Mutant Enemy was nearly as uniform as their distaste for the legal authority of Fox.

Relations between Fox and fans were tense throughout the show's run, seeming to hit their nadir in the spring of 2000 when Fox issued cease and desist orders to fan-operated Web sites using copyrighted images, sound or characterization from *Buffy*.[59] Fans of the show banded together to organize a one-day blackout on May 13, 2000, asking hosts and webmasters to shut down for the day in protest. One group, "The Buffy Bringers," led an internet campaign against Fox, posting banners across the Buffyverse reading: "The Buffy Bringers. Buffy saves the world . . . We save the World Wide Web. Fox doesn't get it."[60] Whether Fox didn't "get" to control Web content or didn't "get" that fans "spend many unpaid hours building Web sites [that] enhance the value of the franchise" was unclear, but fan resentment of Fox was not.[61]

While fans pouted that items were bid up too high for them ever to buy a meaningful item from the show, what clearly angered them just as much was that the considerable proceeds were not, as the initial online consensus mistakenly held, going to charity, but rather right back to Fox. Many fans howled, pointing out that cast members like Gellar and Nicholas Brendon had sponsored their own charity auctions in the past. One of the members in a *Buffy* forum on the Television Without Pity Web site calculated that the first 400 items auctioned off yielded Fox roughly $563,000, news that made many fans even more resentful of the high prices for which items were selling.[62] One wrote in to alt.tv.buffy-v-slayer, "$13,000.08 for an outfit and $11,000 for a script all going back to Fox. Now, I'm . . . glad I'm too poor to bid."[63] Another adopted a more resigned perspective: "Now, for most fans, we'd given up on Fox a long time ago . . . any online fan of Buffy will hear the name 'Fox' and most likely issue a derisive snort in that direction. (And that's if we're being kind.) So when this broke amongst us, we mostly just threw up our hands and thanked Fox for one final slap in the face."[64] Thus, even as the auction seemed to be a golden opportunity to work toward a rapprochement between the two, the auction instead exacerbated an already tense relationship with *Buffy* fans.

In the final analysis, the *Buffy* auction constituted a unique event insofar as it marked a harmonic convergence of fandom, television production/consumption, entertainment marketing and internet shopping. Just as important, however, the auction also compels us to reconsider the dimensions and boundaries of fan devotion, desire and consumption on the one hand, and of producer-fan relations on the other. Certainly, the props themselves did not make their way into the homes of everyone who wanted one, but what the auction lacked in material gratification it made up for in opportunities for discursive resistance, critique, fantasy production and play. What most fans consumed in the end was not the props from the show but the auction itself. And as one fan who wrote to the *New York Times* noted, "if it's sad to have one's favorite show go off the air, the secret truth is, it's also a relief. At last, we can start living in the past."[65] Thanks to BuffyAuction.com, not only could fans wax nostalgic about the show, they could hearken back to the days when they had 25-inch waists, wore an XS top, and honestly believed they could one day afford the second-hand clothes of a TV star.

Notes

I would like to extend my thanks to *Cinema Journal's* two anonymous readers, and to Lesley Bogad, Claire Buck, Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, whose comments on earlier versions of this article were extremely useful.

1. In *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), Henry Jenkins considers at length the multiple ways that fans engage in 'active' readings and rewritings of television programs. Readers interested in learning more about the contours of television fandom will find the book instructive.
2. The group of core characters are often referred to as "The Scooby Gang" or "The Scoobies." The group originally includes Buffy, Willow, Xander and Giles. Later in the series, other characters such as Riley, Tara and, arguably, Faith and Spike, become part of the group as well.

3. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Episode no. 1, "Welcome to the Hellmouth," first broadcast 10 March 1997 by the WB, directed by Charles Martin Smith and written by Joss Whedon.
4. Boyd Tonkin, "Farewell Buffy, and Fangs for the Memories," *The Independent*, May 21, 2003, 2–3.
5. Amanda Zweernik and Sarah N. Gatson, "www.buffy.com: Cliques, Boundaries and Hierarchies in an Internet Community," in *Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in* Buffy the Vampire Slayer, ed. Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 241.
6. Gail Collins, "Buffy Rides Off Into the Sunset," *New York Times,* May 21, 2003, A-30.
7. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Episode no. 18, "Halloween," first broadcast October 27, 1997 by the WB, directed by Bruce Seth Green and written by Carl Ellsworth.
8. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Episode no. 69, "The I in Team," first broadcast February 8, 2000 by the WB, directed by James A. Contner and written by David Fury.
9. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Episode no. 108, "Once More, With Feeling," first broadcast November 1, 2001 by UPN, directed and written by Joss Whedon.
10. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Episode no. 1, "Welcome to the Hellmouth."
11. Anne Millard Daughtery, "Just a Girl: Buffy as Icon," in *Reading the Vampire Slayer: An Unofficial Critical Companion to* Buffy & Angel, ed. Roz Kaveney (New York: Tauris Park Paperbacks, 2001), 152.
12. For more on the addled sexual politics of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, fan practices and media coverage surrounding the show and its stars, see Sherryl Vint, "'Killing Us Softly'? A Feminist Search for the 'Real' Buffy," *Slayage: The Online International Journal of* Buffy *Studies* no. 5 (May 2002), http://www.slayage.tv/essays/slayage5/vint.htm.
13. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* Episode no. 144, "Chosen," first broadcast May 20, 2003 by the WB, directed and written by Joss Whedon.
14. The hammer first appears in the episode "Triangle," (Episode no. 89, first broadcast January 9, 2001 by the WB, directed by Christopher Hibler and written by Jane Espenson) and figures centrally in the season five finale episodes "The Weight of the World" (Episode no. 99, first broadcast May 15, 2001 by the WB, directed by David Solomon and written by Douglas Petrie) and "The Gift" (Episode no. 100, first broadcast May 22, 2001 by the WB, directed and written by Joss Whedon).
15. Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2002), 28.
16. Hills, *Fan Cultures*, 35.
17. For more on Walter Benjamin's discussion of the 'aura' of an original piece of art, see "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations,* trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 217–252, especially 220–229.
18. Andrew, "Buffy Auction," PeterDavid.net, May 15, 2003 (downloaded February 16, 2004; author has copy of post).
19. Bill, "Re: Anyone checked out the official Buffy auction?" (Message 5 in thread) posted to alt.tv.buffy-v-slayer newsgroup May 20, 2003 (downloaded February 9, 2004).
20. In his chapter, "'Get a Life!': Fans, Poachers, Nomads," Jenkins outlines in very useful ways the dimensions and tensions of the fan-producer relationship, especially with regard to control over imagery, representations, characterization and narratives. For more on this, see pages 24–33.
21. For more, see Sue Tjardes, "'If you're not enjoying it, you're doing something wrong': Textual and Viewer Constructions of Faith, the Vampire Slayer," in *Athena's Daughters: Television's New Women Warriors,* ed. Frances Early and Kathleen Kennedy (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 67.

22. Mary Ann Doane, "The Economy of Desire: The Commodity From in/of the Cinema," in *Movies and Mass Culture*, ed. John Belton (Rutgers University Press, 1996), 124.
23. Stella Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies* (London: Routledge, 1997), 24.
24. Queen Anthai, "Buffy Auction," PeterDavid.net, 15 May 2003 (downloaded February 16, 2004; author has copy of post). Faith and Xander have a one-night stand in an episode called "The Zeppo," Episode no. 46, first broadcast January 26, 1999 by the WB, directed by James Whitemore, Jr., and written by Dan Vebber.
25. Mark Towns, "Re: I'm a fan, but sheesh!" posted to alt.horror newsgroup May 14, 2003 (downloaded February 20, 2004).
26. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Episode no. 78, "Restless," first broadcast May 23, 2000 on the WB, directed and written by Joss Whedon.
27. This occurs during a flashback in a season five episode called "Fool For Love," (Episode no. 85, first broadcast November 14, 2000 by the WB, directed by Nick Marck and written by Douglas Petrie), in which Spike kills a Slayer on a New York subway in 1977 and takes her coat as a trophy.
28. IronMaster, "Re: Willow-Vamp outfit!!!" (message 11 in thread), posted to alt.tv.buffy-v-slayer news group May 21, 2003 (downloaded February 9, 2004).
29. Dr. Bond, "Re: Willow-Vamp outfit!!!" (message 10 in thread), posted to alt.tv.buffy-v-slayer 21 May 2003 (downloaded February 9, 2004).
30. "The Wish," Episode no. 43, first broadcast December 8, 1999 by the WB, directed by David Greenwalt and written by Marti Noxon; "Doppelgangland," Episode no. 50, first broadcast February 23, 2000 by the WB, directed and written by Joss Whedon.
31. Episodes frequently regarded as a response to, or engaging, popular fan discourse and fiction include: "Doppelgangland"; "Something Blue," Episode no. 65, first broadcast November 30, 1999 by the WB, directed by Nick Marck and written by Tracey Forbes; "Superstar," Episode no. 73, first broadcast April 4, 2000 by the WB, directed by David Grossman and written by Jane Espenson; "Restless," Episode no. 78, first broadcast May 23, 2000 by the WB; "Buffy vs. Dracula," Episode no. 79, first broadcast September 26, 2000 by the WB, directed by David Solomon and written by Marti Noxon; and "Normal Again," Episode no. 117, first broadcast March 12, 2002 by the UPN, directed by Rick Rosenthal and written by Diego Gutierrez.
32. Justine Larbalestier, "*Buffy*'s Mary Sue is Jonathan: *Buffy* Acknowledges the Fans," in *Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in* Buffy the Vampire Slayer, ed. Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 229, 228.
33. For more on these episodes, see Larbalestier, "*Buffy*'s Mary Sue is Jonathan," 228–231.
34. Slash fiction is a genre of fan fiction which develops a homosexual and/or homoerotic relationship between two characters within a media text, a relationship that typically is not developed explicitly within the official narrative of the media text itself, as in stories which explore sexual, romantic and/or erotic scenarios involving Kirk and Spock from *Star Trek*, or between Spike and Xander, or Buffy and Willow in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Character pairings are indicated by the use of a slash [/].
35. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, "Doppelgangland."
36. Whedon originally posted this message to The Bronze discussion board on Dec. 3, 1998. The Bronze is no longer maintained by Fox; however, the post can be viewed at several sites, including: http://members.tripod.com/~buffyfaith/joss.htm (downloaded July 20, 2004).
37. Dr. Bond, "Willow-Vamp outfit!!!" (message 1 in thread), posted to alt.tv.buffy-v-slayer May 20, 2003 (downloaded February 9, 2004).

38. EGK, "Re: Willow-Vamp outfit!!!" (message 2 in thread), posted to alt.tv.buffy-v-slayer May 20, 2003. (downloaded February 9, 2004).
39. Rowan Hawthorn, "Re: Willow-Vamp outfit!!!" (message 3 in thread), posted to alt.tv.buffy-v-slayer May 20, 2003 (downloaded February 9, 2004).
40. Don Sample, "Re: Anyone Checked out the official Buffy auction?" (message 19 in thread), posted to alt.tv.buffy-v-slayer May 20, 2003 (downloaded January 23, 2004).
41. Joseph S. Powell, "Re: Willow-Vamp outfit!!!" (message 8 in thread), posted to alt.tv.buffy-v-slayer May 20, 2003 (downloaded February 9, 2004).
42. Shorty, "Re: Willow-Vamp outfit!!!" (message 14 in thread), posted to alt.tv.buffy-v-slayer May 20, 2003 (downloaded February 9, 2004).
43. Andrew, "OKAY, °NOW° WE'RE COOKING WITH GAS," posted to PeterDavid.net May 17, 2003 (downloaded February 16, 2004; author has copy of post).
44. Juleen, "Re: Willow-Vamp outfit!!!" (message 21 in thread), posted to alt.tv.buffy-v-slayer May 20, 2003 (downloaded February 9, 2004).
45. Lee Parpart, "'Action, Chicks, Everything': On-Line Interviews with Male Fans of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*," in Frances Early and Kathleen Kennedy, ed. *Athena's Daughters: Television's New Women Warriors* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 79.
46. Tom Galloway, "OKAY, °NOW° WE'RE COOKING WITH GAS," posted to PeterDavid.net May 17, 2003 (downloaded February 16, 2004; author has copy of post).
47. Panic, "Re: NEED BETTER AUCTION ITEMS," posted to alt.tv.buffy-v-slayer May 21, 2003 (downloaded January 20, 2004).
48. Philip Chien, "Re: NEED BETTER AUCTION ITEMS . . . ," posted to alt.tv.buffy-v-slayer May 22, 2003 (downloaded January 25, 2004).
49. DarkMagic, "Re: Anyone checked out the official Buffy auction?" (message 3 in thread), posted to alt.tv.buffy-v-slayer May 14, 2003 (downloaded January 26, 2004).
50. Dstep, "Re: Willow-Vamp outfit!!!" (message 4 in thread), posted to alt.tv.buffy-v-slayer May 20, 2003 (downloaded February 9, 2004).
51. The auction was not the first time this often latent tension has bubbled to the surface. In their work on "cliques, boundaries and hierarchies" in the Bronze posting board, Amanda Zweernik and Sarah Gatson point out that the Bronze originally attracted so many fans precisely because, as a community, it strove to enact *Buffy*'s overall sense of equality. The Bronze and other fan communities strove to form similar 'classless,' non-hierarchical communities. However, as Zweernik and Gatson learned, "[f]ully 50 percent of respondents to our online survey of The Bronze membership admitted to seeking out a forum as a way to talk about a show their peers could not, or refused to, understand. What hooked them was the community that sprang up around the site. With that community, however, came the very class structure Whedon sought to satirize" (242). Within the first year, the Bronze had established a category of VIP posters —a status that afforded certain fans more 'private' access to *Buffy* producers such as Joss Whedon and Marti Noxon and that manifested in real terms the (im)possibility of an equal playing field even in the idealized space of the web-based fan community.
52. PimpDaddy, "Buffy auction!!!" posted to Tangent 21—Buffy auction!! May 22, 2003 (downloaded February 15, 2004), http://www.tangent21.com/it.php?node_id=104&topic_id=4243
53. Acker, "Buffy auction!!!" posted to Tangent 21—Buffy auction!! May 22, 2003 (downloaded February 15, 2004), http://www.tangent21.com/it.php?node_id=104&topic_id=4243.
54. Dr. Bond, "Re: Anyone checked out the official Buffy auction?" (message 9 in thread), posted to alt.tv.buffy-v-slayer May 20, 2003 (downloaded February 9, 2004).

55. "Re: Anyone checked out the official Buffy auction?" It is worth noting that with little exception, these items tend to be ignored by the broader fan community, which either out of conscientious objection or simple disinterest, typically refuses to bid on them.
56. For more on the relationship between theme restaurants, entertainment culture and consumption, see Josh Stenger, "Consuming the Planet: Planet Hollywood, Stars, and the Global Consumer Culture," *Velvet Light Trap*, no. 40 (Fall 1997): 42–55.
57. Ben Fritz, "Bidding Biz: Auctions thrive on hunger for memorabilia," *Variety*, August 31, 2003 (downloaded September 1, 2003), http://www.variety.com/story.asp?l=story&a=VR1117891746&c=1308.
58. Tjardes, "'If you're not enjoying it, you're doing something wrong,'" 68.
59. For more information on Fox's cease and desist order, see Lynn Burke's "Fox Wants *Buffy* Fan Sites Slain," *Wired*, March 1, 2000 (downloaded July 22, 2004), http://www.wired.com/news/business/0,1367,34563,00.html.
60. For more on the blackout and the Buffy Bringers, see Ellen Ross, "Bringing on the Blackout," May 12, 2001 (downloaded March 1, 2004), http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/buffy_and_angel/39263.
61. Ross, "Bringing on the Blackout."
62. mp405, untitled online posting to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* forum at "Television Without Pity," June 10, 2003 (downloaded February 18, 2004), http://forums.televisionwithoutpity.com/index.php?showtopic=2285021&st=330.
63. Beren, "Bummer about the Buffy Auction" (message 1 in thread), May 28, 2003 (downloaded February 9, 2004), alt.tv.buffy-v-slayer.
64. Claris, "A Letter to Salon.com: Who is your money going to?" June 11, 2003 (downloaded February 21, 2004), http://www.themusesbitch.net/?&article=37.
65. Emily Nussbaum, "Sick of 'Buffy' Cultists? You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet," *New York Times*, June 8, 2003, 2.