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## Labours Of Love: Affect, Fan Labour, And The Monetization Of Fandom

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Media Studies

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Labours Of Love: Affect, Fan Labour, And The Monetization Of Fandom

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Jennifer Spence

Graduate Program in Media Studies

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada

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## Abstract

Fans who launch campaigns to “save our show” or protest storytelling decisions typically see their efforts as standard fannish practices, but these “labours of love” must also be considered, as the name suggests, as labour. Using affect theory, I argue that fan activities and activism are motivated by affect, which in turn drives the affective, immaterial, and digital labour that makes up fandom. While fandom operates on a gift economy, the world of media production is fundamentally capitalist, and as fan labour becomes increasingly visible to producers, it also becomes increasingly susceptible to co-option and monetization. Through analyses of fan campaigns targeting *As The World Turns* (CBS, 1956–2010), *Torchwood* (BBC, 2006–2011), and *Chuck* (NBC, 2007–2012), this thesis explores the ways in which fan labour intersects with the dominant capitalist interests of mainstream media culture and considers how fans understand and position their own fannish practices and labour.

## Keywords

Fan studies, fan activism, fan protest, fan campaigns, fan labour, affect theory, affective labour, authorship, fanon, immaterial labour, digital labour, serial fiction, *As The World Turns*, *Torchwood*, *Chuck*, gift economy

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

Fans are particularly dedicated to a fan object, and when they love something that much, they want more of it. Often, they are the ones who create that “more”. It is fans who participate on websites and message boards, who launch campaigns to “save our show” or protest aspects of the program, and who create derivative works such as fanfiction and fanart. While fans see these as typical fannish practices, these “labours of love” must also be considered, as the name suggests, as labour. And this immaterial, often digital, labour operates in the fannish model of a gift economy, where little or no profit is made from these fan products or efforts.

But while fandom operates on a gift economy, the world of television and media production is fundamentally capitalist. As fan labour becomes increasingly visible to media producers, it also becomes increasingly susceptible to co-option and monetization. This thesis will explore two main ways in which fan labour has intersected with the dominant capitalist interests of mainstream media culture: labour as activism to protest the creative direction of a franchise, using the examples of fan authorship of the characters Luke and Noah from *As The World Turns* (CBS, 1956–2010) in addition to fan outrage over the death of the character Ianto Jones on BBC’s *Torchwood* (2006–2011); and labour as activism to save a television show, as seen with the fan campaign to rescue NBC’s *Chuck* (2007–2012) from cancellation.

There is existing scholarship on the intersection between fan studies and broader works on media political economy. Early works in fan studies, such as Henry Jenkins’ *Textual Poachers* (1992) and Camille Bacon-Smith’s *Enterprising Women* (1992), championed fans’ cultural activity as inherently resistant, progressive, and empowering. This approach has been challenged in recent years, signaling a departure from utopian attitudes towards fan labour in favour of more complicated, nuanced analysis. Scholars such as Matt Hills have argued that “resistant” fannish consumption practices, “far from challenging the interests of TV producers and the power relationships through which



capital circulates, are rapidly recuperated within discourses and practicing of marketing. Fandom has begun to furnish a model of dedicated and loyal consumption which does, in point of fact, *appeal*” to producers (Hills 2002, 36). Hills has also stated that “the supposedly ‘resistive’ figure of the fan has... become increasingly enmeshed within market rationalizations” (Hills 2002, 36). This thesis will seek to explore this intersection, and will contribute to the field of fan studies by suggesting new ways of understanding fan labour.

It is also important to consider what compels fans to do this labour in the first place: what is it that makes them want to spend their time imagining the off-screen lives of the Snyder family from *As The World Turns*, or protesting the death of Ianto Jones, or advocating for *Chuck*’s renewal? I will also explore how fans position their own fannish practices/labour, and how they understand themselves and their work. While fan activities have typically been examined through the lenses of cultural/social capital, I will suggest that they can also be also understood using affect theory, and this approach will complement and augment these existing paradigms. This thesis will argue that fans have an affective relationship with the fan object, and it is affect which drives this affective, immaterial and digital labour.

## 1.2 Historical and Theoretical Contexts of Fan Activism as Labour

### 1.2.1 History of Protest Campaigns

Perhaps no media form has a longer history of fan involvement—both in terms of affect and labour—than that of the soap opera.

There is a clear relationship between affect and seriality, as the open-ended form enables the development of particular kinds of affective relationships between writer/producers and reader/consumers; these are generated in the space between the narrative on the page, on the airwaves, or on the screen, and the space in which it is read, heard, and watched by its readers, listeners, and viewers. Media scholar Jason Mittell (2007) argues that unlike running gags on sitcoms or simmering subplots in the

backgrounds of primetime dramas, soap operas do not require a high level of attention to detail: while soaps similarly “reward longevity and recall”, they are less about picking up on intricate narrative clues and “more about the accumulation of relationships and events that forge complex characterization” over time. This long-term emotional investment in characters’ relationships and events is key to following a serial narrative. According to soap fan and scholar Robyn Warhol (1998), soap operas can be fully understood and appreciated only by loyal fans because “the more recent initiate can put together the basics of the long-term plot, but the experienced viewer who has gone through the ‘feelings’ of all those years of story will have a different relation” to the story. The pleasures of soap opera come from viewers’ affective relationships to the open text, as the “feelings” of the genre play out over a long period of time than in closed forms of media.

Affect is the name we give to the “visceral forces” that “drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension” (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 1), and thus it is affect that drives labour. Gregg and Seigworth believe that the real power of affect lies in “affect as potential”, the capacity to affect and be affected (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 1). In the context of serial fiction, it is this affective involvement—the audience as affected—which encourages fan involvement in the form of labour.

According to Jennifer Hayward (1997), serial fiction is defined by “its ability to (at least pretend to) respond to its audience while the narrative is still in the process of development” (23), and its advent can be traced back to Charles Dickens, whose novels began as serialized monthly installments. Dickens’ first novel, *The Pickwick Papers* (1836–1837) grew out of his commission to provide humorous captions to a “picture novel” published by London printing firm Chapman & Hall. Hayward asserts there are “numerous anecdotal accounts, from Dickens as well as others, attesting to the fact that readers believed him responsive to their suggestions and demands”, in addition to “a few first-hand accounts from readers themselves” that Dickens was one of the first big-name authors to actively incorporate readers’ desires into his work (Hayward 1997, 33). When Dickens introduced the character of Sam Weller in *The Pickwick Papers*, readers wrote to “counsel him to develop the character largely—to the utmost” and he made Sam a central

character throughout the rest of the novel; similarly, when *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843–1844) debuted to poor response, Dickens shipped the title character off to America and elevated the role of fan-favourite Mrs. Sarah Gamp to boost interest and sales (Hayward 1997; 59, 24).

Although Dickens believed that he wrote his fiction in tandem with his readership, he was also a savvy businessman who understood the realities of the “highly mediated” exchange between himself as producer and his readers as consumers (Hayward 1997, 40–41). Dickens was hyper-aware of the divisions—economic, artistic, and intellectual—between himself and his readers, and upon occasions he took steps to affirm his sole authorship and authority. In the postscript to *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens chastises readers who had doubted his storytelling in the months leading up to the novel’s shocking twist ending: he declares he had predicted “that a class of readers and commentators would suppose that I was at great pains to conceal exactly what I was at great pains to suggest”, announces that his decisions were made “in the interests of art”, and admonishes that “an artist (of whatever denomination) may perhaps be trusted to know what he is about in his vocation, if they will concede him a little patience” (Dickens 1989, 821). He then continues his defense by explaining that the twist ending had been planned all along, and he understands that

it would be very unreasonable to expect that many readers, pursuing a story in portions from month to month through nineteen months, will, until they have it before them complete, perceive the relations of its finer threads to the whole pattern which is always before the eyes of the story-weaver at his loom.  
(Dickens 1989, 821)

Because Dickens’ novels were written on strict deadlines and in monthly installments, it is necessary to understand how temporality and seriality were key to his work: his sentimental metaphor about story-weaving aside, the vast majority of his serial fictions were open texts that simultaneously welcomed audience feedback and invited readers’ opinions and ideas, while also allowing Dickens to emphasize his role as sole author whenever “the interests of art” demanded he do so. Perhaps the most famous example of this was when Dickens chose to kill off Little Nell at the end of *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840–1841); her death was grieved by some stunned readers while

celebrated by others (as with Oscar Wilde's famous quip, “one must have a heart of stone to read the death of Little Nell without laughing”) (Walsh 1997, 307). Nell’s fate was conspicuously determined by Dickens in his role as author, but that didn’t deter readers from writing to him; a note from Dickens to his publishers dated November 24, 1840, reads “I am inundated with imploring letters recommending poor little Nell to mercy. Six yesterday, and four today (it’s not 12 o’clock yet) already!” (House et al. 1965, 153). In this case, readers understood that Dickens had sole control over the character, and “all that could be hoped for on the part of the readers was an opportunity to take advantage of the serial nature of the publication (and, it was presumed, the production) of the story to attempt an intervention on behalf of their beloved character” (Gardner 2012, 58). Although these were by no means organized collective actions by “fans” as we understand the term today, Dickens’ readers were still able to influence his novel. This responsiveness to readers was not unique to Dickens; there is evidence that readers frequently sent letters of suggestion and complaint to American newspapers and magazines regarding the events in their serialized fiction (Johanningsmeier 1997, 202), and that many papers had a regular forum dedicated to readers’ opinions (Simon 1998, 13). What is most important about Dickens’ responsiveness is that while he may have been the target of the earliest fan protests, the reasons behind these protests—fans’ stated affective investment, the tensions between author and reader, and the power dynamics of the producer/consumer relationship—are still apparent in contemporary case studies. The struggles over authorship, specifically readers’ investment and ownership over Nell, are echoed in the furor over *As The World Turns* and fans’ desires to see their characters get the happy endings they fans they deserve; Dickens’ declaration that his twist was in “the interests of art” is similar to a *Torchwood* writer’s defence that the death of Ianto Jones was “all in service of the story”. It has been over 150 years since Dickens debuted *The Pickwick Papers*, and protest campaigns have become increasingly sophisticated and technologically advanced, but some things haven’t changed: content producers still bank—literally—on fans’ affective relationship with the characters and narratives.

The evolution of serial fiction and active audiences continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the form of newspaper comics with serialized plotlines. One of the earliest continuity strips was *The Gumps* (1917–1959) by Sidney Smith, launched in the *Chicago Tribune*

and quickly syndicated nationally. Although it was originally conceived and written as a “gag-a-day” strip, it shifted into ongoing stories by February 1918 (Gardner 2012, 49). *The Gumps* became wildly popular, and Smith frequently included readers’ letters and his responses into the final panel of the daily strips; for example, in 1922, the character of Uncle Bim became engaged to the conniving Widow Zander, and Smith asked fans to write in with the answer to “the Burning question—Shall Uncle Bim Marry or Shall He Not?” [*sic*] (Gardner 2012, 51). In 1928, Smith made comics history when he became the first cartoonist to kill off a recurring character: poor Mary Gold, whose fiancé Tom Carr had been wrongfully imprisoned for a crime he did not commit, wasted away in her bed for six months before succumbing to her illness on April 30. During the character’s long ailment, Smith and his publishers had received a steady stream of letters and telegrams “pleading for her recovery and for her reunion” with her fiancé; after her death, the *Chicago Tribune* was so inundated with letters and phone calls that they were forced to hire extra staff to manage the correspondence (Gardner 2012, 54). An outpouring of sympathy over a fictional character in a serialized comic strip may have been unprecedented at the time, but can hardly seem unfamiliar in the context of this chapter. Of particular note here is the role of local newspaper editors, who occupied the uneasy position of both readers of *The Gumps* as well as gate-keepers to the comic; at least one *Gumps* fan wrote to the editor of their hometown paper, hoping—or assuming—the editors had some control over the storyline (“Brownsville Herald” 1929). The editor’s response that he was “sending a wire about it today” showed that the editor had no more direct power or influence over the narrative than the letter-writer, although one might assume that the opinions of newspaper officials could have a greater impact on Smith (unstated but implicit threats to stop running the strip in their paper, perhaps?) than those of daily readers who would continue to purchase their local paper regardless. Irrespective of the readers’ role, whether paper purchaser or paper editor, affect played a role in their impassioned response to this serial.

And yet, for the first time in the strip’s history, Smith did not yield to reader requests, and Mary Gold stayed dead, a move which scholar Jared Gardner notes can be seen as

a gesture of authorial control after a decade of winning readers to the idea that they had a voice in the outcome of the story—that they were, in a sense, collaborators as well as writers. By giving the readers not only precisely what they *did not* want but also what they least expected, Smith can be seen as reasserting his authority, giving the lie to the trappings of collaboration. (Gardner 2012, 55)

Such “trappings of collaboration” are bound up as part of fans’ affective investment with the material; not only do fans have an affective relationship with the initial object, but there is also an affective component which is enhanced through the (false) belief in co-authorship. Smith’s clear declaration of sole authorship over Mary Gold’s fate echoes that of Dickens’ peevish postscript to *The Pickwick Papers*, in that both statements firmly demarcate and reassert the roles of author and reader – categories which the authors had previously, and deliberately, blurred. As Gardner explains, readers of *The Gumps* had been “explicitly encouraged to see themselves as collaborators in a story whose ending had not yet been written”, and fans felt betrayed when the conditions were unexpectedly changed (Gardner 2012, 58). Fans had spent years investing affectively (forming opinions and thoughts on characters’ futures) and financially (purchasing the newspapers in which *The Gumps* was printed) and sometimes both (the cost involved in mailing a letter or sending a telegraph or making a phone call to detail their opinions on the strip), all of which had been rewarded by feelings of collaboration or influence over the lives of Mary Gold, her fiancé, her friends, and her family. With Mary’s death, *The Gumps* underscored Smith’s newfound individual creative control; in a 1929 publicity photo, Smith is seen happily surfing down a pile of protest letters in the *Chicago Tribune*’s mailroom (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Smith enjoying the fan letters  
(source: Gardner 2012)

Another example of a continuity comic strip with particularly interactive production is Milton Caniff’s *Terry and the Pirates* (1934–1973), an action-adventure story about two Americans exploring China. At its peak, the comic ran in over 300 papers

and reached more than thirty million readers (Hayward 1997, 96). Caniff was known for his unusually enthusiastic embrace of fan suggestions, once stating

[r]eader editing of the comic strips is an unprecedented phenomenon of publication history. It is not the fan mail phenomenon, as the movies know it. A movie, or a play or a novel, is a completed product before the fan mail starts coming. But the course of events in a comic strip can be influenced, practically, sometimes even advantageously, by fan letters. (qtd. in Hayward 1997, 95)

In fact, many of the most memorable aspects of the long-running *Terry and the Pirates* were inspired and influenced by fan letters, including the introduction of a Red Cross nurse to the main cast and ensuring that fan-favourite characters had the most prominent storylines (Hayward 1997; 114, 110). Caniff's breakout character was the Chinese villainess known as The Dragon Lady, and her death by assassination in late January 1937 prompted a slew of angry fan letters: one irate missive dated January 23, 1937 signed by someone known only as "Disgusted Reader" warned their local newspaper "If the Dragon Lady in the strip 'Terry and the Pirates' dies I'll never read the [*Daily*] *News* again. I know plenty more who won't read it either" (Hayward 1997, 113). The Dragon Lady was eventually brought back to life in February 1938, and while the character credits her survival to inept cutthroats, it can be argued that the true credit belongs to the loyal *Terry and the Pirates* fans who had lobbied for her resurrection.

Continuity comics such as *The Gumps* and *Terry and the Pirates* are to thank for the invention of the radio serial, the first of which was broadcast in 1926 when the *Chicago Tribune* wanted to capitalize on the popularity of *The Gumps* by creating a radio adaptation for the *Tribune*'s station WGN. However, the two actors who were approached to create the series, Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll, declined the job and instead borrowed elements of the strip to create their own characters for a serial called *Sam 'n Henry* (WGN, 1926–1927), a program often cited as the first sitcom (McLeod 2009). Gosden and Correll left WGN in 1928 and developed a new show, *Amos 'n' Andy*, which eventually became the first broadcasting phenomenon: *Amos 'n' Andy* was not only the first syndicated radio program in the United States, but it also launched a franchise that included a nightly radio serial (1928–1943), a Hollywood movie (1930), two animated short films (1934), a weekly radio sitcom (1943–1955), a nightly disc-

jockey program (1954–1960), and a television sitcom (1951–1953) (Simon 1998, 15). The radio serial format Gosden and Correll created became the model for serials to come – a future that eventually saw successful radio adaptations of *The Gumps* (WGN 1931, CBS 1934–1937) and *Terry and the Pirates* (Red Network 1937–1938, Blue Network 1938–1939, WGN 1941–1942, Blue Network 1943–1948).

Broadcasters eventually realized that radio programs aimed at housewives and aired during the morning and early afternoon could attract sponsors and be profitable for the network, leading WGN to ask aspiring actress Irna Philips to write a dramatic serial about a family that was aimed at women. Her creation, *Painted Dreams* (1930–1943), was the first daytime soap opera, and its unprecedented success marked the genesis of the genre (Schemering 1987, Simon 1998).

The radio soap opera was a natural evolution of the serial narrative, and although it lacked the direct reader outreach of Smith’s “Shall Uncle Bim Marry or Shall He Not?” queries, listeners were eager to voice their opinions. One notable example occurred during World War II<sup>1</sup> when John Perkins, son of the titular character in *Ma Perkins* (NBC 1933–1949, CBS 1942–1960)<sup>2</sup>, was killed in action and buried “somewhere in Germany in an unmarked grave” (qtd. in Cox 2008, 120). The network was quickly deluged with objections – and, interestingly, with sympathy notes and other similar physical manifestations of fan’s affective connections to the characters and storylines. According to Cox, “[t]he avalanche of complaints could hardly have been predicted. Callers and letter writers were rabid in their consternation” (Cox 2008, 120). Cox’s use of such loaded language didn’t stop at referring to fans as “rabid”; I believe it’s worth noting that Cox, who acknowledges in the preface to his encyclopedia that radio serials are a personal “obsession” and then invites readers to join him in “celebrating the heroes and heroines who brought to our lives daily visits with pathos, pain, anxiety,

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<sup>1</sup> Exact transmission date(s) unknown. One source narrows the timeframe to “early 1944” (MacDonald 1979, 269).

<sup>2</sup> The show was broadcast simultaneously on both networks from 1942–1949.



encouragement, mayhem, jealousy, rage, humor, love, dissension and discord” (Cox 2008, 5–6), is not as accepting of those affected tendencies in others. Notably, when discussing the fan reaction to the death of John Perkins, Cox characterizes the responses as “thousands of listeners abandon[ing] all semblance of rationality” (2008, 120) as they hurled “abuse” and “castigat[ed] the shows’ producers through angry communications” (2008; 132, 121). Cox is also clearly amused as he describes how “through tears of anguish, writers and callers vented their hostilities toward the network, some practically unable to write or speak due to extreme emotional states” (2008, 132). Cox’s frequent derision, if not outright ridicule, of fans’ affective engagement with their source material is curious, especially given the author’s vested interests in a genre traditionally associated with heightened emotions.

The show executive tasked with responding to the complaints was Roy Winsor, who told *Variety* magazine:

We did not use the death of John, Ma Perkins’ son, as a story device, and we do not intend to bring him back in later episodes. He’s dead, and the point is that we gave Ma Perkins the same problem as other mothers face. We also believe that, in the face of the type of character Ma Perkins portrays, the episode will give strength to her listeners who have already faced the same kind of tragedy or may in the future. We are willing to face adverse criticism on the terms that we have done something honest in radio. (qtd. in Macdonald 1979, 269–270)

It’s interesting to see how affective responses were drawn out and managed here by Winsor; as affect circulates and recirculates, it gains in power, which aligns with Sara Ahmed’s writing on the “very public nature of emotions” and “the emotive nature of publics” (Ahmed 2004b, 14). Winsor’s confidence that the storyline would “give strength” to listeners marks a clear attempt to control and shape what form the affect will take. Winsor’s response was later characterized by Cox as a Herculean task; in an essay published on the website of SPERDVAC (The Society To Preserve and Encourage Radio Drama, Variety and Comedy), Cox wrote the almost comically melodramatic sentence

“Winsor courageously responded to those out-of-control fans” (Cox 2006, 2).<sup>3</sup> Cox’s interpretation of the response is an example of the tendency identified by Joli Jenson (1992) for fans to be routinely pathologized as hysterical and dangerous. In fact, Cox’s work serves an example as to the way that fannish affect gets taken up as both problematic (“rabid”, “out-of-control”) and productive (requiring a response that would keep fans tuning in week after week because they faced “the same problem” as Ma Perkins).

Despite Winsor’s bold statement that the producers of *Ma Perkins* were willing to stand by their storytelling decisions, it would appear that they quickly capitulated to fan demands. Although never admitted by anyone involved in the show, it is likely that this backlash directly resulted in the addition of a young man named Joseph to the cast, due to the fact that “the similarities between John and Joseph seemed too many to be coincidental” (Cox 2008, 120). Joseph had the same personality, speech, mannerisms, and gait as John, and he became close friends with the Perkins family; eventually, Ma offered him John’s old room, and Joseph took over John’s job as a milkman (Cox 2008, 121). Just as the Perkins clan adopted Joseph as an unspoken substitute for John, so did fans; as Cox notes “it was difficult for longtime listeners to keep John and Joseph separate, given Joseph’s sudden prominence and the parallels between the two” (Cox 2008, 121).

It took until the mid-1940s for a network to transfer the serial narrative concept to television; the first radio serial to make the successful transition was Ina Philips’ *Guiding Light* (radio: NBC 1937–1947, CBS 1947–1956; television: CBS 1952–2009)<sup>4</sup>, which eventually became the longest-running television drama in world history before its

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<sup>3</sup> Also of interest in the context of this female-dominated genre is Cox’s continued dismissal of women: in that same SPERDVAC essay, Cox describes Roy Winsor as “the Father of the Television Serial” [*sic*], while casually referring to Ina Philips—who famously invented the genre and wrote some of the most classic and foundational American soap operas on both radio and television, and whose contributions to the genre considerably outnumber those of Winsor—as a “drama mama” whose career could only aspire to “equal” Winsor’s legacy (Cox 2006, 30).

<sup>4</sup> During the four years in which *Guiding Light* aired on both CBS radio and television stations (1952–1956), actors were required to perform the same scripts twice a day to accommodate each medium.

cancellation in 2009. Audience feedback only continued to increase with the genre's television debut. The flood of new soap operas specifically made for television meant that viewers could follow a soap from its very first episode instead of having to catch up with character backstories and plotlines in a long-running serial (Harrington 2013), thus intensifying viewers' affective engagement with the show. When Sara Karr, a founding character from *The Edge of Night* (CBS 1956–1975, ABC 1975–1984) was killed off in 1961, CBS received 8,000 angry telegrams and letters, 260 of which had been sent while the episode was airing; the next day, CBS had the actress appear as herself to inform fans that it had been her decision to leave the show (LaGuardia 1974, 119; Schemering 1987, 90). The following year, mainstay *As The World Turns* actor Mark Rydell left the show, and his character's death was met with fan backlash so intense that it received mainstream press coverage, with *TV Guide* calling it “the automobile accident that shook the nation” (Schemering 1987, 31).

“Most soap viewers don't realize how much power they have”, writes veteran *As The World Turns* actress Eileen Fulton, who played Lisa Grimaldi almost continuously from 1960 until the show's cancellation in 2010, in her 1995 memoir; “Enough letters, telegrams, and phone calls can kill characters and storylines or turn a temporary part (like Lisa) into a long-term love affair” (67). Perhaps soap opera fans didn't know the power they wielded because they were not organized for collective action; prior to the mid-1980s, fan letters were primarily sent by individuals or by small localized groups of friends. Soap fans did not become more collectively-oriented until the rise of fan clubs. Unfortunately there is very little documentation of soap opera fan clubs prior to the early 2000s, and no institutional history has been passed down (Ford 2007, 3); of the little that is known, according to soap historian William J. Reynolds, the official *The Edge of Night* fan club was not formed until 1971, a full fifteen years after the show's debut (Ford 2008, 5.2). I argue that such ‘official’ designations for fan clubs played a significant role in attracting membership; the endorsement of a club by the network, such as the official CBS website reporting that the *Guiding Light* fan club elected a new President (“Guiding Light© Fan Club - CBS.com” 2002), meant that fans were granted ‘official’ status from the show and could reap the benefits. For example, although the Presidents of the official *As The World Turns* fan club were enthusiasts who managed the organization in their

spare time, the website emphasized that the organization was “fully supported by the actors and the show”, and a result of this network-sanctioned status, club members could attend the annual Fan Luncheon to participate in Q&A sessions and “meet and greets” with cast members (“The Official *As The World Turns* Fan Club” 2009). Duchesne (2010) has pointed out that fan conventions not unlike the *ATWT* luncheon highlight “the reality of corporate ownership” (22), considering the financial investment required to purchase membership and entry to the event in combination with the constant reminders of the numerous regulations that govern fan behavior during fan-celebrity interactions. However, I would add that this direct fan-star engagement—and thus, implicitly, fan-network engagement—increases fan affective involvement in their show while fostering a sense of goodwill between fans and The Powers That Be. In a sense, the ways in which CBS and *ATWT* built and protected their brand could be considered “fanagement”, albeit in ways less explicitly merchandised than in *Hills’* (2012) examples.

However, this cozy fan-officials relationship also meant that a benefit of club membership was the potential for collective action to successfully influence a show. For example, in a March 2006 letter written by actress Ellen Dolan sent through the official *As The World Turns* fan club, Dolan acknowledged the influence fans had over the show and asked them to help her lobby for better plotlines for her character Detective Margo Hughes:

I’m reaching out to you, the fans of *ATWT*. You are the true backbone of our show. You have shown your strong arm many times to the people who run your show. Look what happened to one of your favorites, Henry Coleman [*character played by Trent Dawson*], when you cheered for him at the last fan club gathering. He’s [*Dawson*] now a contract player. You – the fans – did that. Well, I’m asking for your help, now! [...]

Have you noticed that Margo isn’t on any cases anymore? About five years ago Margo, the detective, came to a screeching halt. [...] Do you remember when Margo was a strong, independent woman and not a sniveling, cat fighting, high school girl craving for a football hero? [...]

If you don’t see Margo as a cop soon, you won’t see Margo at all! The character is being dismantled. These characters are your characters and I think valuable to the show. I need your support. I need you to help save Margo Hughes! I need you to write and ask for Margo back. I have attached a list of names and addresses for

you to write to. Tell them how you feel about this character. Please guys, ‘cus I love Margo and I want to keep giving her to you. [...]

All my love and thanks,

Ellen Dolan  
(qtd. in brolden 2006)

Dolan’s language – “your show”, “these characters are your characters” – emphasized and legitimized claims of fan ownership, and reinforced beliefs that fans can mobilize and be called upon for their “help” in setting the direction of a show. The fact that this plea was sent through a fan club via email leads us to a discussion of the most significant aspect of soap opera fan activism over the past three decades: the rise of online soap fandom.

Soap opera fan activity gravitated online beginning in the early 1990s, rendering fan ownership claims more visible than ever before; for the first time, geographically-diverse fans were able to collaborate and mobilize protest efforts instantaneously, as opposed to struggling with the delays involved in communication through offline fan club newsletters or ‘Letters to the Editor’ sections in the thriving medium of soap opera magazines (Bielby, Harrington and Bielby 1999).<sup>5</sup> In the early 1990s, rec.arts.tv.soaps ranked as one of the top 15 most active newsgroups out of the 5,000 listed on Usenet (Baym 2000, 138). One soap fan interviewed during that time said that message boards enabled fans “to express ourselves more effectively now. There’s that instantaneous

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<sup>5</sup> While several soaps-only magazines were launched in the 1970s and 1980s, the industry reached its peak in the 90s, during which there were at least eight major U.S. publications dedicated to soap opera coverage: *Soap Opera Digest* (including *Soap Opera Weekly*), *Soap Opera Magazine*, *Soap Opera Update*, *Soap Opera Now*, *Soap Opera News*, *Soaps In Depth* (a series of individual versions for ABC, NBC, and CBS shows), *Daytime TV*, and *Soap Dish*. Three new magazines were started in 1997 alone. The 1990s were also the peak for sales: in 1994, *Soap Opera Weekly* sold an average over 500,000 copies per issue and *Soap Opera Digest* reported a paid circulation of 1,607,500 (Bielby, Harrington and Bielby 1999, 51). Of that robust list, only *Soap Opera Digest* (launched 1975) and the ABC and NBC editions of *Soaps In Depth* (launched 1997) still publish today, with significantly smaller readerships: in 2011, *Soap Opera Digest*’s circulation was 292,219, and the two editions of *Soaps In Depths* have a combined circulation of about 200,000 (Moses 2012). However, it is worth noting that soap opera publications typically have a higher readership than subscription and newsstand sales indicate, as it is common for fans to flip through an issue at a store and read only the pages relevant to their favourite soap without buying the magazine (Ford 2007, 11). Reasons for the diminishing popularity of soap magazines has been attributed to an overall decline in the soap opera industry itself and the rise of online soap discussion forums and blogs (Bielby 2012).

connection with others who might feel the same way you do. You're not left wondering whether you're the only one unhappy with a story or an actor" (qtd. in Bielby, Harrington and Bielby 1999, 44–45). This remark brings to mind the ideas of affect as "contagious", in that it can spread from one person to another (Ahmed 2010, 39); the "instantaneous connection" between members of organized online communities allowed the spread of ideas, opinions, and affect more widely and rapidly than before. In addition to the increased personal connections and organization abilities, the Internet allowed fans to share and discuss upcoming plots that hadn't yet been reported by the mainstream soap press. In the earlier days of soaps, a shocking death would have come as a surprise to everyone watching the broadcast live, but with the Internet fans were alerted to spoilers weeks in advance without having to rely on network-sanctioned scoops given directly to the soap magazines, and could mobilize before the episodes aired (Scardaville 2005, 884). While this evolution delighted fans, it worried industry insiders: according to a 1997 editorial titled "Crisis of Confidence" published in *Soap Opera NOW!* (which folded later that year), editor Michael Kape expressed concern that "the balance of power [was] shifting" as a result of online fan activity:

In the old days, a soap opera could make a change which might be unpopular with some viewers. At that time, viewers were, for the most part, isolated from each other, and the means of communication among them were snail-like at best. Now in this age of broadcast e-mail, chat rooms, news groups, instant messages... A campaign to counter a move by a show can be mounted now in a matter of hours, with thousands of people joining in. [...] This takes very little time, very little effort, and virtually no money to take place. (qtd. in Bielby, Harrington and Bielby 1999, 46)

Although I would contest Kape's assertion that organized fan activity takes "little" time or effort, this editorial supports my point that the industry was aware of the explosive potential of fan criticism and protest from the early days of online activism. The coalescence of fans and their newfound online organization ability not only increased their affective investment in the show and within the fan community, but also allowed them to make their affect-produced labour visible to the networks and The Powers That Be. These fan protests could take many forms, and could target all aspects of production, broadcast, and storytelling. Referring specifically to online soap opera fandom, Sam Ford

has noted that “online fan communities make more explicit and public the type of activities fans have long engaged in while in small groups” (Ford 2007, 21).

Sometimes the fans protested casting changes, such as when actor Bill Hufsey left *One Life To Live* (ABC, 1968–2013) in 1989 over contract disputes with the network, but was quickly re-hired when the network received 45,000 letters requesting his return (Hayward 1997, 165; Milstead 1989). At other times, fans wanted to affect upcoming narratives or ‘fix’ previous unsatisfying storylines: rec.arts.tv.soap’s 1993 letter-writing campaign to protest *One Life To Live*’s redemption of rapist character Powell Lord was credited with convincing the show to change tactics and turn Powell into a serial rapist who was quickly written off the show after he was sentenced to life in an off-screen prison<sup>6</sup> (Hayward 1997, 165).

Larger, wider-ranging tactical movements have emerged in the past decade, although they have not always been successful. Two notable failed campaigns targeted *General Hospital* (ABC, 1963–present), and were inspired by disgruntled fans who protested not specific storylines or creative decisions, but the overall aesthetic and long-term narrative of the show. In 2003, campaign “Target GH” took issue with what the organizers saw as an offensive increase in plots involving violence against women, and urged fans to contact the show’s advertisers; organizers stressed their campaign wasn’t a boycott, just an attempt to “raise [sponsors’] awareness of how the message of General Hospital reflects upon their products and their good company name” (“Target: General Hospital Index” 2003). However, according to founding organizer QueenEve, the campaign folded after just a few months due to the negative reaction from advertisers who did not take fans seriously (QueenEve 2012, 273). The similarly unsuccessful “SOS: Save Our Soap” campaign in June 2009 was launched by fans who wanted “to work with ABC/Disney to help GH return to the show that we know it can be” and offered a ten-point list of “remedies” including “less sleaze, more romance, a sense of integrity in

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<sup>6</sup> At least until 1999, when the character was brought back for a one-month storyline in which he escaped from prison, murdered three characters, kidnapped three others, and was eventually caught and killed by a police officer.

storytelling, and an overall enjoyable escape” (“SOS/Save Our Soaps! General Hospital Media/Press Release” 2009). The group also disseminated weekly press releases to list the various ways *General Hospital* had disappointed them over the past seven days, enumerating every instance of out-of-character behavior, contradiction of previously established canon facts and relationships and implausible timeline of events, and any storylines that they judged to “contrived, short-sighted, unbelievable, predictable and/or redundant” (“7.16.09 SOS/Save Our Soap! General Hospital Press/Media Release” 2009). The campaign tactics included writing emails and letters to ABC/Disney executives, calling the ABC and *General Hospital* telephone comment lines, filling out ABC comment forms, sending postcards and petitions, voting in online polls on the *ABC Soaps In Depth* and ABC website, and mailing 12,000 postcards to ABC/Disney (“7.16.09 SOS/Save Our Soap! General Hospital Press/Media Release” 2009). Of particular interest to this project is the group’s involvement on the Disney-owned message board “ABC Insider Access” (<http://abcinsideraccess.com>, now defunct); although hosted by Disney, the ‘Insider’ part of the name had very little meaning due to the site being open to anyone who wanted to register and operating like any other independent, fan-owned message board. The site abruptly shut down in December 2009 and was quickly relaunched as an explicit market-research tool that permitted sign-ups only from people who met unspecified demographics requirements. Users who passed the demographics test were greeted with the following welcome message:

Thanks for joining ABC Insider Access. As a member of this exclusive group, you will have behind-the-scenes access to the people calling the shots. Most importantly, your input will give you the opportunity to help shape your favorite shows, so your participation is critical. (qtd. in mangela 2009)

The revamped ABC Insider Access board was visibly monitored and controlled by network representatives who would frequently wade into discussions. In one angry thread concerning the recent storyline of a fan-favourite couple, a moderator posted the following reply, which was typical of ABC moderators’ contributions:

First I want you all to know that we hear you and all of your posts will go to everyone involved in running GH. Be assured, we don’t want our fans to be unhappy and we definitely don’t want you to stop watching. We designed this website so that we can get this kind of immediate feedback from avid viewers like



you. [...] What else do you want to see? Are there any other couples that have potential to reach ‘super-couple’<sup>7</sup> status? GH wants your input! We know that this show is about pleasing a loyal and diverse audience, so we want to hear all your likes and dislikes. Of course I hope you all continue to watch GH and then let me know what you think about it here at Insider Access. The more you write, the more opinions I can pass on [*sic*] ‘powers that be!’ (qtd. in gardeningfool2 2009)

“SOS” participants flooded the Insider Access board, with many campaigners interpreting the board’s birth as a response to their efforts; many fans specifically cited the moderators’ posts, such as the one quoted above, as a sign that TPTB were really listening to their complaints and asserting the value of fans. After “SOS” campaigners reacted positively to storylines in early 2010, the campaign claimed victory and went on hiatus, toning down the polemics on Insider Access. However, the campaign started up again that summer, arguing that the show was falling back into its old bad habits and even after “six months of complaints from GH fans who are loyal ABC/Disney customers, it is clear that management has not listened to the viewers by taking steps to improve its product” (“SOS/Save Our Soap! General Hospital 6.29.09 Media Release” 2009). Much like the fans who campaigned to save *Chuck* from cancellation around this same time, the “SOS” campaigners positioned themselves as savvy consumers of a “product”; their press releases consciously emphasized their value as “customers” through repeated explanations of their buying habits and demographics, as well as their knowledge of the television industry through detailed analyses of Nielsen ratings for *General Hospital* and its competing soaps. However, unlike the *Chuck* campaigns, the “SOS” campaign was not ultimately successful (although it is admittedly difficult to gauge what “success” would have meant to the group, considering its “remedies” for the show were vague and open to interpretation), and the formal campaign gradually faded away in summer 2010.

Just as “SOS” was winding down, another high-profile daytime drama fan campaign was winding up. In March 2010, after news broke that gay couple Kyle Lewis

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<sup>7</sup> The term “supercouple” refers to a pairing which is overwhelmingly popular or noteworthy, and often culturally significant. The term is believed to have originated in the early 1980s during the widespread public interest in the characters Luke and Laura from *General Hospital*.

and Oliver Fish from *One Life To Live* would be written out of the show less than a year into their storyline because they “failed to resonate with the mainstream audience”, fans mobilized a campaign to “Save Kish” with the slogan “Don’t Put Kish in the Closet” (Logan 2010a). Two websites and multiple online forums helped fans with their strategy of sending emails, letters, and postcards; calling into ABC’s comment hotline; donating money to a LGBT Community Center; holding a protest rally in front of ABC Studios; and mailing more than 600 pounds of Swedish Fish to Disney and *One Life To Live* executives in a tactic called “Fish4Kish” (<http://www.dontputkishinthecloset.blogspot.ca>). The characters were written out and the actors’ contracts were terminated, but despite “the most angry and vocal fan reaction to a firing” that industry critics had ever seen, ABC did not reverse its decision (Logan 2010b). In the network’s last public statement on the issue, ABC Daytime PR chief Jori Petersen said “The Kish story did not have the appeal we hoped it would. We are going to spend our time on stories that have a more favorable reaction from our audience” (qtd. in Logan 2010b).

Fan campaigns outside the world of soap operas have also been credited with bringing back favourite characters: “Save Daniel Jackson” (2002) succeeded in getting Michael Shanks returned to *Stargate SG-1* (Showtime 1997–2002, SyFy 2002–2007), “Save Beckett” convinced *Stargate Atlantis* (SyFy 2004–2009) to bring the character back in 2007 (Wilson 2007), and outraged fan reaction in 2010 forced CBS to re-hire actors Adam Rodriguez of *CSI Miami* (2002–2011) and actors A.J. Cook and Paget Brewster of *Criminal Minds* (2005–present) (Ausiello 2010, Eng 2010, Cohn 2012).

Contemporary fan protest campaigns are certainly not limited to television.<sup>8</sup> A recent high-profile example in the gaming world was the poorly-received ending to *Mass*

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<sup>8</sup> An interesting example of how fans can work together for social activism is the international grassroots organization “Racebending: Media Consumers For Entertainment Equality”, which was formed in 2009 when fans of the animated show *Avatar: The Last Airbender* found out that the upcoming movie adaptation would not accurately reflect the show: while *Avatar: TLA* is set in an “ancient, fantastical Asian environment” with primarily Chinese characters, the main cast of the big-budget Hollywood film was predominantly Caucasian, with the exception of Indian actor Dev Patel playing the evil Prince Zuko (“The Last Airbender – A Timeline of the Protest” 2011). (In a telling display of the lack of cultural understanding that went into the production, the casting director instructed background actors to dress in

*Effect 3*, the final entry in BioWare’s award-winning trilogy released on March 6, 2012. Fans complained the games’ conclusion was riddled with plot holes and canon contradictions, forced players to pick one of three “nonsensical” interchangeable endings, and contained little narrative closure; crucially, fans felt like BioWare had not lived up to the promises made during the game’s promotion (Tassi 2012a). The online campaign “Retake *Mass Effect 3*”, with the mission statement “Demand a better ending. We will hold the line!” attracted over 60,000 fans to the official campaign Facebook page. Tactics included raising \$80,000 for the charity Child’s Play and launching a complaint of “false advertising” against BioWare with the Better Business Bureau (BBB)—a complaint which the BBB then upheld (Chalk 2011). A few weeks later, BioWare announced the release of a free “Extended Cut” of the game’s ending, which included additional cinematics and epilogue scenes with the goal “to provide additional clarity and closure” to the trilogy (darklarke 2012a, darklarke 2012b). Fans and reviewers generally agreed that the new ending was a “substantial improvement” that matched “the larger arc of the *Mass Effect* games more than the abrupt finality of the original endings” – or at the very least, that even though “it might just be a band-aid on a bullet hole, it’s an improvement” (Juba 2012, Orland 2012, Tassi 2012b). Much like the efforts undertaken by soap opera fans detailed earlier in this section, unhappy *Mass Effect 3* fans did not just write letters of complaint—though there were many such letters—but also wielded their financial power, threatening boycotts and demanding refunds as “cheated” consumers. The BBB complaint especially made it clear that *Mass Effect 3* players thought their most effective approach was to frame themselves not so much as “fans” but first and foremost

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their “traditional cultural ethnic attire”, so “if you’re Korean, wear a kimono.” [Tarlow 2009]) The fans behind Racebending worked with other Asian-American advocacy groups to launch letter-writing campaigns; create petitions; and stage protests at casting calls, filming locations, fan conventions, and the film’s official premiere, all of which received substantial mainstream press coverage (“The Last Airbender – A Timeline of the Protest” 2011). Although Paramount Pictures hosted special preview screenings for Asian-American advocacy groups two days before the film’s premiere in July 2010, executives later dismissed the groups and ignored Racebending’s attempts to provide feedback on the film’s “appalling” depictions of people of colour. While they have yet to claim any major victories over Hollywood, Racebending has moved beyond *Avatar* and continues to launch awareness and social activism campaigns.

as *BioWare* customers. This tension between fan and consumer runs throughout many of the examples mentioned in my project.

This chapter cannot possibly hope to detail every instance of fan protest; instead, I have attempted to focus on the most representative examples of various fan campaigns across all forms of media. Here I should note I feel it is important to distinguish between fan campaigns targeted at narratives and creative decisions (e.g. killing off Mary Gold in *The Gumps*, the lackluster ending of *Mass Effect 3*, the “Target GH” efforts to “remedy” their show), fan campaigns targeted at cast and crew changes (e.g. the 2010 firings of Rodriguez, Cook, and Brewster from CBS), and fan campaigns targeted at social issues and media representation of marginalized groups (e.g. the unceremonious exits of gay characters on daytime soap operas, the whitewashing of the *Avatar: The Last Airbender* film). The external circumstances and contexts behind these campaigns should not be overlooked, despite the fact that due to space and time constraints this project is concerned with the fan campaigns, tactics, and motivations in themselves.

In summary, this chapter has attempted to trace the evolution of fan protest campaigns and the labour involved. As fans became more invested in characters, going beyond what they were given and inventing their own content, this affective investment and emotional labour manifested in claims of authorship—often encouraged, sometimes not—and fans sought to influence the narrative outcome. The earliest methods were complaints and boycotts, an approach that ranged from upset fans in 1937 who promised “[i]f the Dragon Lady in the strip ‘Terry and the Pirates’ dies I’ll never read the [*Daily News* again]” to the participants of “Target GH” in 2003 who boycotted *General Hospital* sponsors. According to Peter Buckman’s (1985) examination of the soap opera industry in the 1980s, producers could ignore individual letters pertaining to the singular desires of fans, but as Sam Ford points out, it was hard to dismiss “larger and social collective action[s]” that followed (Ford 2007, 9). These larger and social collective actions provided a way for networks to repackage and sell fans’ affective investment back to them, mobilizing the fruits of their emotional labour into profitable marketing opportunities and tie-in materials. Finally, if and when the fans’ affective labour is ever

responded to, fans perform immaterial and digital labour and do the work of producers in order to keep their favourite show on the air.

Ideas about affect, immaterial labour, and fan capital are necessary to properly explore the phenomena of fan protest campaigns, and this project hopes to demonstrate the need for this way of thinking in relation to fan labour.

### 1.2.2 Fan Capital, Fan Labour, Affect Theory, Affective Labour, Immaterial/Digital Labour

This thesis draws on and contributes to literature in the disciplines of fan studies and affective/immaterial labour studies. While these may seem at the outset to be disparate areas of inquiry, I believe that this approach is valuable because it brings the elements together to offer new ways of thinking about fan activity as labour.

#### **Fan Capital**

According to many scholars of fandom, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of "cultural capital" helps explain why fans labour for no monetary profit. Instead of economic capital, Bourdieu-influenced scholars assert that fans collect and "build up different types of fan skill, knowledge, and distinction" (Hills 2002, 46). John Fiske's (1993) work on the economies of fandom coined the term "fan cultural capital" to describe the amount of knowledge a fan has about their object of fandom. In 2002, Matt Hills critiqued earlier applications of Bourdieu's theory to fan studies for what he perceived to be an overemphasis on "functionality" and an under-emphasis on social relations within fandom. He then created the concept of "fan social capital", which includes, in addition to Fiske's fan cultural capital, "the network of fan friends and acquaintances that a fan possesses *as well as* their access to media producers and professional personnel linked with the object of fandom" (Hills 2002, 57, emphasis his). In this non-capitalist fandom economy, fans do not expect financial incentives or compensation for their work, and are content with access and recognition.

In this thesis, I will propose affect theory as an alternative to social, cultural, and economic capital lenses of analysis. I approach this from the same angle as Lawrence

Grossberg (1984). For Grossberg, affect is the overall investment in terms of both quantity and quality; it encapsulates how much a fan is interested in something (the strength of passion) and why a fan is absorbed into something (the reasons for the passion). Theories such as Fan Cultural Capital understand labour in terms of what fans get out of it, but affect theory understands labour in terms of why fans are involved with the fan object and compelled to labour in the first place. In terms of my case studies, affect is at the heart of each fan campaign – fandom is driven by affect, and a focus on affect theory can contribute to the study of fandom and fan labour by emphasizing the importance of pleasure. Other models look at fan labour as a means to an end (access and recognition, if not financial reward), but affect theory is about the inherent pleasure fans find in the fan object and labour. However, if fan labour is monetized or “fanaged”, this inherent pleasure is complicated; although their labour is being shaped, guided, and made profitable by a larger corporation, some fans may still enjoy their activities (such as participating in *Chuck*’s campaign) while others resent their pleasurable activities being commodified (such as Ianto fans’ bitterness that the BBC was profiting from their misery).

## **Fan Labour**

While there is some existing literature on fan campaigns to save television shows from cancellation (Brower 1992, Whiteman 2009, Scardaville 2005, Menon 2007, Cochran 2008, Lundy 2010, Millman 2010, Telotte 2010), it neglects to analyze the *labour* aspects of the campaigns. While the issue of fan-producer power dynamics is necessarily forefront in each of these pieces, the concepts of monetization and profit frustratingly remain unacknowledged and unaddressed, with little consideration given to the very real concerns of fan labour and its potential for commodification.

There have also been a limited number of works published on fan labour in the context of protests and resistance to ongoing serial storylines on TV (Newcomb 2012), in upcoming films (Brooker 2001), and in video games (Milner 2009). Cubbison (2011) documented some of the initial fan outrage over the death of Ianto Jones on *Torchwood*. Other works look at the ways in which fans use online forums to voice their displeasure with a television program, and the complicated fan-producer dynamic that results (Andrejevic 2008, Hadas and Shifman 2012, Hunn 2012).

In his essay “Fan-tagonism: Factions, Institutions, and Constitutive Hegemonies of Fandom”, Derek Johnson (2007) characterizes the average fan-producer relationship as a tenuous balance of power in which “[f]ans attack and criticize media producers whom they feel threaten their meta-textual<sup>9</sup> interests, but producers also respond to these challenges, protecting their privilege by defusing and marginalizing fan activism” and cultivating fandom as a consumer base (298). The most obvious example of an industry which cultivates fans as a consumer base is the professional sports industry, although mainstream Hollywood franchises also partake in this; however, both of these industries are culturally legitimated, which sets them apart from my case studies of soap operas and cult/SF television programs. Similarly, Matt Hills’ 2002 analysis of cult TV fans contends that fans are “directly targeted as a niche market, rather than emerging unexpectedly through ‘grassroots’ movements of TV appreciation” (36).

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<sup>9</sup> “Meta-textual” in this context refers to the fans’ understanding of the narrative.

Hills is critical of Henry Jenkins' early work (1992) work for its overly optimistic and celebratory approach to fan empowerment. In *Textual Poachers* (1992), Jenkins praises fanfiction and fanzines, and champions the radical, subversive, and powerful achievements of fans who re-shape existing media texts for their own purposes. Hills specifically targets Jenkins' "romanticisation of powerless fan 'poaching'", and fairly points out that this supposed 'empowerment' of fans occurs within "the economic and cultural parameters of niche marketing" (Hills 2002, 40). Hills later (2012) coins the term "fanagement" to refer to instances where media tie-ins are used to address fans' criticisms of a TV show's developing narratives: it is "not simply about serving fans; it is also about seeking to manage and protect the brand value of a TV series" and monetize the fan labour (409). He uses the specific example of *Torchwood* and the Ianto-centric supplementary material released after the character's death as a way in which the BBC was able to "non-controversially monetize[e] fandom" (Hills 2012, 414). My approach to this case study differs from Hills through my focus on *affect* – Hills focuses on *Torchwood* as an exercise in storytelling and handling fans' complaints about the narrative, and my *Torchwood* case study complements his work by considering the affective involvement which led to those complaints as well as the forms of labour these fan complaints took.

Other works on fan labour have more specifically focused on the *products* of fan labour. For example, there is a glut of work on fanfiction which focuses primarily on the content of stories. A distant runner-up is research centered on the legal struggles between copyright holders and fans; one of the most common areas of study is the clash between the copyright-holders of Japanese anime and manga and the fans who distribute translations of the content into other languages for free online (Koulikov 2010, Rampant 2010, Lee 2011, Eng 2012). These works rarely emphasize the labour that goes into producing these works, and primarily focus on the products themselves.

### **Affect Theory**

Affect theory is an area of study so abstract that it is impossible to nail down one ultimate and decisive understanding, interpretation, or definition that can be applied to all



disciplines equally; indeed, most works on affect begin with a similar disclaimer. Noted theorist Sara Ahmed (2010) begins a chapter on affect with the declaration that she does not “assume there is something called affect that stands apart or has autonomy, as if it corresponds to an object in the world, or even that there is something called affect that can be shared as an object of study”; instead, she suggests to “begin with the messiness of the experiential... how we are touched by what we are near” (30). Metaphorically, fans are touched by their initial fan object, and they keep it near to them. As such, fans have an affective relationship with both the initial fan object as well as affective engagement with objects encountered as a result of the fandom.

One of the earliest works to consider the role of affect among fans is Lawrence Grossberg’s 1984 essay “Another Boring Day in Paradise: Rock and Roll and the Empowerment of Everyday Life”, where he understands affect as an overall investment that includes both the strength of passion and the reasons for that passion. In a later article, “Is There A Fan In The House: The Affective Sensibility of Fandom”, he identifies the two aspects of affect: the quantitative, which “defines the strength of our investments in particular experiences, practices, identities, meanings, and pleasures”, and the qualitative, which is defined by the “inflection of the particular investment, by the nature of the concern, by the way in which the specific event is made to matter to us” (Grossberg 1992, 57). It is important to Grossberg that an affective sensibility be understood as organized because

it operates within and, at the same time, produces maps which direct our investments in and into the world; these maps tell us where and how we can become absorbed - not into the self but into the world - as potential locations for our self-identifications, and with what intensities. This ‘absorption’ or investment constructs the places and events which are, or can become, significant to us. (Grossberg 1992, 57)

These maps are then constructed on popular culture, becoming affective investments at the level of fandom.

However, Hills (2002) takes issue with what he sees as Grossberg’s boundary-building, culturally constructivist approach to affect, and criticizes later considerations of fan affect which “reduc[ed] affect to an effect of pre-existing structures or conventions”

(80). Instead, Hills argues against such separation of affect from emotion, and in favor of respecting affect as subjective and allowed to be “‘meaningfully’ possessed by a self” (Hills 2002, 62). For Hills, fans’ intensely personal ‘possession’ or ownership of their favourite text requires a consideration of affect as “playful”, “capable of ‘creating culture’ as well as being caught up in it” (Hills 2002, 63). This project specifically is concerned with how fans create this culture about the texts they love, and how these fannish creations and efforts can be understood as labour that can be appropriated.

However, not all labour compelled by this fannish affect is necessarily ‘affective labour’. There is a difference between labour produced by affect, and the “service with a smile” kind of affective labour that is designed to produce an affective response in the customer. These two forms of labour may intersect when fans’ labour as an affective outlet leads to an affective response in other fans; as affect circulates among people, it is intensified (Ahmed 2004a, 120), forming a cumulative affective response. This response and circulation, then, can be monetized.

In this project, I take the approach of considering affect as emotion, feeling, and/or pleasure, and differentiate between labour motivated by affect and labour that produces affect, while keeping in mind the connections and possibility for crossover between the two forms.

### **Affective Labour**

In the context of fan activism, both “save our show” campaigns and protests over creative decisions are forms of labour which are fuelled by fannish affect; this affect-produced labour then leads to affective labour from other fans. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2004) define affective labour as “labour that produces or manipulates affects” (108). The labour may be “corporeal and affective”, but it is immaterial “in the sense that its products are intangible, a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction or passion” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 292). Of relevance to fandom and this project is their argument that affective labour produces “social networks, forms of community, [and] biopower [where] the instrumental action of economic production has been united with the communicative action of human relations” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 293) – this description sounds exactly

like fandom. Here, Hardt and Negri see social and cultural institutions as being embedded within the economy, instead of the other way around; in essence, affective labour and all other aspects of human life are conflated. The communication networks where this affective labour is found aren't selling goods and services, but are the goods and services being sold. If we consider fandom's position within the overall capitalist system, fandom can be seen as one of these goods and services.

Drawing upon this foundational work, Emma Dowling (2012) has highlighted what Hardt and Negri (2004, 108) identified as the "service with a smile" aspect of affective labour. Dowling's work has focused on the role of affective labour in "producing an experience", and she uses the example of waitressing to argue that affective labour involves managing people's expectations. Similarly, Arlie Hochschild's *The Managed Heart* (1983) focused on industries in which people exchange affect for income, and described such labour as that which "requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others" (7). With respect to my case studies, the producers of *As The World Turns*, *Chuck*, and *Torchwood* worked to shape fans' experiences and manage expectations. This is similar to Matt Hills' "fanagement", which requires fans to be both producers and recipients of affective work; this project uses Hills' framework to more closely analyze the ways in which fans both produced (*i.e.* 'authored' Ianto) and received (*i.e.* protested or accepted) this affective work.

Melissa Gregg (2009) provides a history of affective labour studies, with a focus on the emerging "immaterial workplace" and its potential for exploitation. Her article describes "the amount of energy and time that fans dedicate to discussing and consecrating love of a particular book, character, series, game, brand, or application" as an example of a form of affective labour, and she considers "the fan tradition" to be one of two discernible trends in the field of study (Gregg 2009, 209). If we consider fandom as encouraging labour that requires not just knowledge or skill but also personalities, care, and intimacy, then fandom fits the definition of affective labour. Connected to affective labour is the concept of immaterial labour, which Gregg identifies as the second trend in the field of study.

### **Immaterial/Digital Labour**

Immaterial labour is “labour that produces immaterial goods, such as a service, a cultural product, knowledge or communication” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 291). While the product is immaterial, the labour itself is not. Digital theorist Julian Kücklich (2005) introduced the term “playbor” (“play-labour”) to refer to immaterial labour which is done voluntarily, and for pleasure as opposed to profit. Abigail De Kosnik’s piece “Fandom As Free Labour” explicitly frames such pleasurable fannish practices as unpaid work that should be “valued as a new form of publicity and advertising, authored by volunteers” (De Kosnik 2013a, 99). She draws upon Dick Hebdige’s work on subcultures (1979) to argue that fans are “affinity groups” which collectively imbue mass commodities with “a certain sensibility that is reflective of the group’s values and interests” (De Kosnik 2013a, 100). She contends that fans do not think of themselves as labourers because of their distance from the fan objects’ official producers: fans treat their labour as something they do for themselves and their fellow fans (not for general consumers in the mainstream), and some fans may believe that their lack of financial interest makes their motives “purer” as a result (De Kosnik 2013a, 103). De Kosnik concludes that fans will begin to profit from their labour only when companies “regard fan groups as the potential developers of their greatest promotional campaigns” and when fans realize their productions have “not just personal use value, but market exchange value” (2013a, 110). While De Kosnik is optimistic that fans can become one of the first “amateur” groups to be financially compensated for digital work, she also overlooks the fact that many fans would—and currently do—such work for other forms of compensation (*i.e.* behind-the-scenes access, *etc.*)

Of relevance to this project is the way that De Kosnik’s observations of fans as immaterial and digital labourers relate to the ways in which fans recognize their own labour and make it known to media producers as part of their campaigns. The first step is for fans to recognize what they do as labour; for example, they claim authorship of an otherwise-abandoned character, or acknowledge how their exposure to a show’s commercial advertising puts them in a position to actively purchase or boycott the sponsors’ products and encourage others to do the same. Secondly, they then seek to

make that labour matter to the producers, whether through using their knowledge to urge a sandwich restaurant to “save” their show or using their purchasing power to convince a soap opera to change a character’s fate for fear of sponsor snubs.

## 1.3 Methodology

The research questions guiding this project were two-fold: how can fannish practices be considered labour, and how do fans understand their own practices and labour? To answer these questions, I gathered data from a purely observational method of online data collection; I explored digital discussion forums, reviewed hundreds of discussion threads and individual postings, and catalogued those postings which were particularly relevant and revealing.

### 1.3.1 Positionality as aca-fan

Before I go into further detail on my methodology for this project, I feel it is important to acknowledge the complexities of doing work on fandom, as well as my own positionality in regards to this research as both an academic and a self-described fan.

The early days of fan studies were fraught with tension between the fannish communities and the academics who studied them; scholars who conducted research on fans often came from so far outside fandom that their findings were flawed or misrepresentative, and academics with fannish backgrounds did not disclose their personal investment for fear of being seen as “too close” to their objects of study (see foreword in Jenkins 2012 for discussion of these problems within the first wave of fan studies).

Within the past decade, the term “aca-fan” (an academic who also identifies as a fan) has become a popular way to bridge this gap. “Aca-fans” do not deny their fannish interests, but remain reflexive and self-reflective in their research (see Hills 2002; Monaco 2010; and Gray, Hills and Perren 2011). Some scholars have found that emphasizing their own fannish connections and histories have resulted in more meaningful results and honest interactions with participants (Freund and Fielding 2013). Approaching this project as an aca-fan challenged me to ensure my research was rigorous

and valid, but I also trust that my fannish experiences informed and enhanced my work. More specifically, I believe that my own background knowledge and history of fan participation allowed me to approach these topics as an ‘insider’ who was perhaps better equipped to treat these issues more seriously, respectfully, and generously than would a researcher without prior fan interest or involvement. In fact, some work that purports to be in the field of fan studies is actually uninformed, regressive, repetitive, and dismissive of fandom (for example, large swaths of scholarship on fanfiction), which has not only negatively impacted research but also held back advancement of the area as a legitimate and valid field of study; I hold that aca-fan scholarship can combat this phenomenon.

### 1.3.2 Methods

As fan studies is inherently multidisciplinary, with much of the field’s groundwork laid by the 1960s Birmingham cultural studies research, the field routinely draws upon works in areas as diverse as English, psychology, and law, and requires an equally diverse set of methods. As my project sought to both map the ways in which fannish practices can be considered labour as well as research the ways in which fans understand their own labour, it required a qualitative approach: specifically, a mix of both discourse analysis (Fairclough 1995) and online ethnography (based on Jacob 1987). These techniques allowed me to get at what I was trying to find out about fan labour. Discourse analysis is helpful because it encapsulates both “the use of language in social life” and “the relationship between language use and social structure” (Deacon et al. 151). Through consideration of language as social interaction and simultaneously as representative of social reality, I was able to more effectively understand and analyze both online fan discussion in addition to more mainstream media publications, particularly with respect to how “different social categories, practices, and relations are constructed” (Deacon et al 151). The ethnographic research was useful in developing a well-rounded understanding of specific fan communities; a “fly on the wall” observer-only approach allowed me to most effectively absorb the ‘everyday’ of each fandom and added to my interpretation and analysis.

### 1.3.3 Data selection

A significant amount of my research drew upon discourse analysis of popular media, blogs, and opinion pieces and articles from sources as varied as National Public Radio and *Soap Opera Digest*.

For the analysis of specific fandoms, I avoided online spaces that had been ‘tapped out’ by prior researchers or been ‘turned off’ by negative experiences with researchers in the past. In addition, I knew the online communities had to be relevant (relating to my research focus and questions), active (including recent and regular communications), interactive (featuring a flow of communications between participants), substantial (containing a critical mass of communicators and an energetic feel), and data-rich (containing detailed or descriptive rich meanings and data) (criteria according to Kozinets 2010; see ‘Data Collection’ for rationale). To these ends, I focused on key fan communities which best fit these criteria.

Soap opera fandom is wide-ranging and spread across multiple shows and networks, leading to an overwhelmingly expansive online presence. Fan activity surrounding *As The World Turns* was scattered across multiple websites, such as the official CBS daytime forums (now defunct) and catch-all soap sites such as SoapCentral.com (<http://boards.soapcentral.com/forumdisplay.php?4-As-The-World-Turns>). More specifically, the fans examined in my *As The World Turns* case study gathered on the forums attached to the fansites VanHansis.net (<http://s13.zetaboards.com/vanhansis/site>) and VanAndJake.com (<http://z11.invisionfree.com/ZOMGWTF/index.php?>).

The fandom for *Torchwood* was centralized largely on Livejournal communities, specifically “Torch-Wood” and selected affiliated blogs of well-known users (e.g. <http://tencrush.livejournal.com>). “Torch-Wood” on Livejournal (<http://torchwood.livejournal.com>) has over 28,000 individual posts, more than 164,000 comments, and upwards of 8,000 members; remarkably, it has remained fairly active despite the series’ cancellation. “Torch-Wood” is notable for its categorized “episode reaction posts” in which fans discussed episodes as they aired, which could reach well over 1,000

comments in just a few hours. The second primary source for this case study was “Torchwood Forum” (<http://www.torchwoodforum.com>), a standalone message board with over 16,000 threads, 444,000 posts, and more than 10,000 registered members. Unfortunately, “Torchwood Forum” shut down in late 2013; however, a complete archive of the site as of July 13, 2013 remains accessible via the Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine ([http://web.archive.org/web/20130719091347\\*/http://torchwoodforum.com/](http://web.archive.org/web/20130719091347*/http://torchwoodforum.com/)). Although this setback added an extra step in the research process, the Wayback Machine’s copy of the website is comprehensive, and data could be collected normally. As the majority of the discussions relevant to my project were already several years old, it is unlikely that valuable information was lost between the day the Wayback Machine archived the forum and the day the forum went offline.

Fan activity for *Chuck* is centralized largely on the two largest and similarly-named but unrelated websites: the forum on ChuckTV.net (<http://www.chucktv.net>), which boasts over 161,000 individual posts and almost 1,000 members; and the Livejournal community “Chuck TV” (<http://chucktv.livejournal.com>), which contains over 18,000 posts and comments left by over 4,000 members. I chose these two sites as my focus for the *Chuck* case study because they were the largest and most consistently active fansites, as well as the most social and community-focused. Both sites are fully accessible to non-members; there were no barriers to viewing existing discussions, and to participate in discussions required only a free sign-up process.

### 1.3.4 Data collection

Discourse analysis as developed by Fairclough (1995) was a particularly useful method of analysis, as it is best suited to studying power dynamics and social structures at play in media discussion and differing interpretations of media texts; it reveals the “systematic links between texts, discourse practices, and sociocultural practices” (Fairclough 1995, 16–17). Studying online discussions and relationships within fan communities is an attempt to trace a complicated web of texts, interpretation, and social relations.

I also worked within the ethnographic research tradition (Jacob 1987), combining participant observation with text and image analysis. Ethnographic research has been the



backbone of fan studies since the field's emergence (see Evans and Stasi 2014 for a discussion of the history of fan studies methods and the difficulty in establishing best practices within the field) and some scholars (see Booth 2013) have recently called for fan studies to refocus attention back onto fans themselves through ethnography. A potentially useful approach from which I adopted my initial criteria is "netnography", a form of ethnography developed by Robert Kozinets (2010) under the mentorship of Henry Jenkins and specifically designed to study fan cultures and communities online; problematically, however, Kozinets has since applied it to study customer loyalty for major brands such as Campbell's Soup, in an unsettling display of the ease with which fan research can be corporatized and made marketable.

This research used the purely observational or "lurker" method of online ethnography. I did not participate in the interactions of the community; instead, I considered text posts, audio posts, video posts, links, comments, and other content generated by community members in the past and present, and noted and observed how the community interacted.

My data was organized sequentially, with each online post containing information about the time of the posting, the screen name of the poster, a unique numeric identification tag, and a subject line. Unlike depth interviews, which provide rich accounts, the typical messages I studied ranged in length from only a few words to several paragraphs. However, the nature of Livejournal and other similar communities means that there can be many active conversations, with members replying back and forth to one another, which allowed a more detailed dialogue when posts were considered in context.

### 1.3.5 Ethics

The importance of ethical considerations when conducting online fan studies research cannot be overstated. At all times, I kept in mind the ethical considerations of online qualitative study and best practices for accessing otherwise-hidden fan practices, such as the importance of preserving online anonymity and respecting "closed" communities, as discussed in Freund and Fielding (2013).

As such, I studied only communities and sites which were open to the public, listed by search engines, and available via Google. It is fair to assume that, as this data is freely readable online, it can be considered “published” on the Internet and not private. All direct quotes used in this project are attributed to the pseudonym used by each poster in these publicly accessible online forums.

## 2 Case Study: *As The World Turns* and “Nuke”

### 2.1 “Nuke” and the “Liplock Clock”

Arguably the most famous and successful campaign in soap opera fandom concerned daytime’s first high-profile gay supercouple, university freshmen Luke Snyder (Van Hansis) and Noah Mayer (Jake Silbermann)—otherwise known as “Nuke”<sup>10</sup>—who made soap opera history on *As The World Turns* (*ATWT*) between 2007 and 2010. The couple’s first kiss on August 17, 2007 marked the first same-sex male kiss on daytime television, and a clip of the scene uploaded to YouTube by “LukeVanFan” has received over 3 million views to date, a record for any soap opera video (Newcomb 2012, 294). The Nuke storyline attracted new viewers to the show, and in the months following the first kiss, viewership in the coveted demographics of women ages 18–49 and women ages 25–54 jumped an unexpected 9% (Newcomb 2012, 295). The storyline also began receiving mainstream press attention as well as steady coverage from LGBT-centric websites like *AfterElton.com*, and LukeVanFan’s daily uploads of *ATWT*—edited to only include scenes relevant to Luke and Noah—attracted tens of thousands of subscribers.

But strangely enough, just as Luke and Noah were gaining a passionate following off-screen, Luke and Noah were becoming less passionate on-screen: after the couple shared a second kiss in September 2007, their airtime became noticeably reduced, and their few romantic scenes consisted solely of lingering looks, hand-holding, or hugs. Rumors circulated that kisses between Luke and Noah were filmed but cut from final broadcasts for unspecified reasons. (These suspicions weren’t confirmed until early 2011 when an anonymous source uploaded a still shot of a Luke and Noah kiss which had been edited out of the October 2, 2007 episode [evl\_bbw88 2011].) This abrupt and unexplained shift in the couple’s dynamic was most obvious in the “Mistletoe Gate” controversy from the 2007 Christmas episode, when Luke and Noah leaned in to kiss each other but the camera rapidly tilted up to a shot of mistletoe before their lips could

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<sup>10</sup> The portmanteau “Nuke” comes from a combination of the names “Noah” and “Luke”. Combining two characters’ names together to form a single nickname for a couple is a common fannish practice, as is separating the characters’ names with a slash (ie: “Luke/Noah”) when referring to their relationship.

touch. Outraged, fans launched the “Kiss Campaign” to protest the couples’ lack of physical intimacy, collecting over 3,000 signatures on an online petition and mailing Hershey’s Kisses to executives from CBS, *ATWT*’s owner Procter & Gamble, and P&G’s production agency TeleNext Media (Newcomb 2012, 295-296). The final straw for Nuke fans was the 2008 Valentine’s Day special, during which six of *ATWT*’s supercouples imagined what their relationships would have been like under different circumstances: Luke and Noah’s fantasy sequence was one of the shortest in length, the only sequence to culminate in a hug instead of a kiss, and the only sequence to end with the couple unhappily parted instead of blissfully united (by comparison, Lily and Holden’s segment featured the strength of Holden’s love bringing Lily back from the dead). Spurred by these inequities, online fan discussion raised the possibility of the existence of some sort of “kissing ban” that limited Nuke’s on-screen interactions for fear of viewer backlash; fans’ suspicions were fuelled when show officials refused to respond to their queries, and when fans learned that the right-wing American Family Association (AFA) had announced a “take-action alert” against Procter & Gamble, calling the company the “top pro-homosexual sponsor on television” (Newcomb 2012, 296; Bauder 2008).<sup>11</sup> In response, fans organized a “Media Blitz” that ran throughout February and March 2008, contacting prominent members of the press with the news that straight couples and gay couples were being treated differently on *ATWT* (Juergens 2008). This tactic of “taking a cause directly to the mainstream media, much less gaining substantial interest from publications that rarely if ever covered soaps, was a new experience for soap opera fandom”, and it paid off with sympathetic coverage in multiple outlets, including pieces in *The Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Daily News*, *Entertainment Weekly*, and *TIME* magazine; a widely-published Associated Press article; a series of blog posts on popular celebrity gossip site PerezHilton.com; and a primetime CNN television segment (Newcomb 2012, 297). The campaign not only garnered significant mainstream media

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<sup>11</sup> Although it is tempting to assume the AFA held influence over the show’s treatment of Luke and Noah, it is unclear what impact—if any—the organization actually had. While CBS executives denied any involvement with the AFA, in early 2008 an AFA spokesman confirmed that the organization had previously taken part in a phone conference with Procter & Gamble officials specifically to request that the show “do away with the homosexual characters”, or at the very least stop the characters’ “offensive” and “repulsive” kissing (Weiss 2008).

coverage, but also forced “The Powers That Be” (TPTB)—or, as they were more typically known in this fandom, “TIIC” (“The Idiots In Charge”)—to publicly comment on the Nuke situation. A spokeswoman for Procter & Gamble Productions announced there was no “kissing ban”, explained the Christmas mistletoe cutaway as “a creative decision”, and said the recent changes were due to “some of the feedback that [they’d] gotten” while trying to “appeal to [their] entire audience”; however, she also chuckled when she told reporters “you wouldn’t even believe” the intensity of the behind-the-scenes debates about these ‘creative decisions’ (Bauder 2008, Weiss 2008). Meanwhile, CBS’ senior vice president for daytime television Barbara Bloom said there was “minimal” negative reaction to the Nuke storyline and that she would support “a natural progression to the physical relationship” if it went that way (Bauder 2008).

Fans were not placated by these explanations, and they continued with their campaign, including further promotion of the media-friendly AfterElton.com “Liplock Clock” which counted the number of days since Luke and Noah’s last on-screen kiss (Figure 2).



**Figure 2:**  
The “Liplock Clock” as of March 2008  
(source: “AfterElton’s ‘As The World Turns Resource Page’ 2008)

Even the soap opera press subtly commented on the double-standard, such as the April 1, 2008 edition of *Soap Opera Digest* which printed a weekly tally of *ATWT*’s romantic activity and compared Luke and Noah’s “usual, modest ways” of expressing their love

(“several affectionate arm squeezes, three hugs, two dog pounds, one almost-kiss, hand-holding, cuddling, a face stroke and five sleepy forehead/eye pecks”) to those afforded to the show’s other couples (“For everyone else: ... 16 kisses [including vigorous Lily/Holden and Gray/Vienna makeout sessions]. Three couples had sex...”). To fans’ delight, Luke and Noah kissed for a third time on April 23, 2008, stopping the “Liplock Clock” at 211 days, 14 hours, 45 minutes, and 45 seconds (“Gay Teens Finally Kiss Again” 2008). Fans were quick to point out that the third kiss—as well as a tender ten-second moment aired on April 10 which had featured the couple kneeling shirtless on a bed with every intention of kissing before they were (improbably) interrupted—had been filmed within weeks of the “Media Blitz” campaign launch. Most unusually, at the end of April, Proctor & Gamble set up a temporary automated 1-800 telephone poll specifically about Luke and Noah—“press 1 to tell P&G to continue their storyline, press 2 to tell P&G end it”—marking the first time in soap history that a comment line had been specifically dedicated to a particular couple (WillenFan21 2008).

Following the hard-won third kiss, physical displays of affection between Luke and Noah became more common, although fans continued to telephone the CBS feedback lines, send postcards, and write letters to request more screentime and better storylines for the couple (Newcomb 2012, 297). Further fuelling fan efforts was the discovery that the clips chosen for episode recaps streamed on the official CBS website occasionally differed from the versions aired on television; specifically, the online recaps sometimes contained extended Luke/Noah scenes, such as an extra four seconds of their second kiss from September 26, 2007, which hadn’t been shown in the full-length episodes (“Uncut Nuke Scenes” n.d.). Although thrilled with the extra footage, fans wondered why Luke and Noah were the only couple whose romantic scenes continued to be edited down for broadcast.

October 2008 was particularly fraught with fan-producer tension over Nuke’s imperiled screentime. The September edition of *ATWT*’s official e-mail newsletter promoted a can’t-miss moment in the upcoming October 1 episode which would reunite the couple after a month apart (Figure 3), but when the episode aired and the promised scene wasn’t included, fans campaigned for its release, and the deleted scene was quietly



**Figure 3:**

September 2008 *ATWT* email newsletter promoting the October 1 Luke/Noah scene (source: GayTime 2008)

uploaded to the official *AsTheWorldTurns.net* website on October 10. Up until the series' final episode two years later, the infamous "Bench Scene" remained the only deleted moment of any *ATWT* couple or storyline to ever be acknowledged and then made available by CBS. A similar operation launched just two weeks later, when the October 21 issue of *Soap Opera Weekly* accompanied a pro-Nuke letter in their "Public Opinion" section with a still photo of a never-before-seen moment of Luke sitting on Noah's lap in the Snyder farmhouse kitchen. Eagle-eyed fans identified the clothes and setting as matching events of the October 8 episode, and quickly organized to request that CBS release the deleted scene online. However, this time *ATWT* officials did not respond to fan inquiries, and to date the scene has remained lost, with nothing more known about the contents of the scene or the reason for its removal.

As a result, both "The Bench Scene" and "The Lap Scene" became shared fan shorthand for what they perceived to be the show's lack of support for the characters, and served to confirm the belief that fans needed to continually campaign for the couple. Given these unexplained scene deletions and Luke and Noah's general lack of screentime, Nuke fans began to wonder if *ATWT* would ever let the couple's relationship become sexual, especially considering that Noah was not a virgin (he slept with then-girlfriend Maddie in July 2007 while struggling to accept his sexuality) and a major summer 2008 plotline involved young heterosexual highschoolers Parker and Liberty having sex. Fans argued that *ATWT* wasn't shying away from the reality of sexually-active teenagers, so why weren't 19-year-old Luke and Noah eligible? Their concerns only increased when it appeared the show was keeping Luke and Noah too busy dealing

with increasingly elaborate storylines—criminally-disturbed fathers, a fake green card marriage, life-threatening alcoholism—in attempts to keep Luke and Noah from getting too busy themselves. Hoping to increase the pressure on *ATWT*, AfterElton.com changed their highly-publicized “Liplock Clock” to a “Consummation Clock” that counted the “sexless” days, hours, minutes and seconds that had elapsed “since Luke & Noah began their courtship” (“AfterElton’s ‘As The World Turns’ Resource Page” 2008). But then, unexpectedly, with no buildup or fanfare, a scene in the January 12, 2009 episode of *ATWT* featured Luke and Noah literally kissing and making up after an argument, and Noah lifting off Luke’s shirt before the scene faded to black; when the scene resumed later in the episode, the shirtless couple were shown exiting Luke’s bathroom and discussing their first time together. Their dialogue deliberately acknowledged fans’ persistence and (im)patience over the past 514 “sexless” days since their first kiss, as Noah said “I know we did wait for a long time, but it was worth it. Are you happy?” and Luke replied “happy doesn't even begin to cover it”. Although fans rejoiced at the new development, they still identified problems with the execution: Luke’s long-awaited sex scene was particularly tame and abbreviated, especially by soap standards; the network itself had not promoted the scene in the show, excluding it from the customary “next time on *ATWT*” clips appended to each episode; and, most unusually, the act hadn’t been announced in the soap press<sup>12</sup>, which is known for spoiling most plotlines—especially sex-related ones—well in advance (Newcomb 2012, 298). *ATWT* never responded to these criticisms, and Luke and Noah continued to feature in the show until its 2010 cancellation, albeit never as primary characters and with Noah frequently off-screen for weeks at a time with no explanation.

The couple’s biggest hurdle arrived in spring 2010, when Luke and Noah broke up and Luke began dating newcomer Dr. Reid Oliver. While some Luke fans were pleased with the addition of a third gay character to the town of Oakdale, Illinois and actively

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<sup>12</sup> Lynn Leahey, editorial director for *Soap Opera Digest* and *Soap Opera Weekly*, said she would have put Luke and Noah’s milestone event on a cover if she had known about it in advance, but *ATWT* hadn’t informed the soap opera press that it was happening: “Conversely though, we’re constantly being pitched when their straight couples kiss, have sex, marry and/or divorce” (qtd. in Jensen 2009a).



crusaded for more Luke/Reid (“Reke”), Nuke loyalists protested that the breakup was a result of consistently inconsistent characterization and lobbied for the show to reunite the couple before the series finale on September 17, 2010. Neither of these campaigns were successful, and a shocking last-minute death meant the show ended with a deceased Reid, a grieving Luke trapped in Oakdale, and a heartbroken Noah moving to Los Angeles... all while every other *ATWT* character enjoyed happy heterosexual endings.<sup>13</sup> This tragic finish to the Reid/Luke/Noah love triangle was decried by both Nuke and Reke supporters, and it wasn’t settled—sort of—until *ATWT* writer Susan Dansby stepped in with a solution of her own, as examined in the next section on authorship.

## 2.2 Authorship

So far in this project I have attempted to provide enough of a chronology to support my argument that the majority of fan campaigns have been focused on serial narratives, as that is the primary form which simultaneously requires, invites, and constrains claims of fan ownership, collaboration, and authorship. In particular, the nature of the television serial—its immediacy, its position as “mass” culture in all senses of the word, and its continuous, open-ended, and ongoing approach to storytelling—marks it as inherently different from the closed, self-contained, season-based narratives of traditional television programs. I refer now to Hayward’s defense of Dickens—and by extension, a defense of any creator of a serial narrative—for his readiness to acquiesce to his audience’s wishes:

Instead of judging Dickens’ flexibility as a weakness, then, we could see such changes as representing one of his—and serial fiction’s—great strengths. The ability to alter narratives in response to the success or failure of subplots or characters is seen as a negative because we have constructed ideologies of the “true” artist and writer as governed only by individual genius and never by the

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<sup>13</sup> In fact, it was Reid’s death that enabled Chris Hughes to live happily ever after and marry his longtime girlfriend, as Chris had been dying of heart failure but was saved when he received Reid’s donated organ. The death of a gay character to save the life of a straight one raised questions about the treatment of non-heterosexual characters on *ATWT*, and Eric Sheffer-Stevens (Reid) became the first *ATWT* actor to publicly acknowledge the show’s double-standard and specifically implicate Proctor & Gamble’s role in enforcing it: “[I]t is frustrating for everybody and should be. They are not at a point yet where they should be, to tell a gay storyline as they would a straight storyline. And that has to do with who their sponsors are and their audiences are. And, they have to take that in to consideration, and everybody understands that, but that does not make it less frustrating” (Fairman 2010).

demands of the marketplace. This view is, of course, elitist, alienated, and above all unrealistic. ... Instead, both market forces and artistic gifts can work together to produce texts crafted by an individual or creative team but flexible enough to respond to good and relevant ideas from outside, whether in the form of audience response, news events, or other sources. (Hayward 1997, 62)

Hayward's invocation of "market forces" is important here, as this next section will discuss an aspect of media production central to any consideration of fan activism: the economics of television.

The awkward co-existence of economic and aesthetic paradigms is not unique to soap operas; this tension is found in all forms of mass media, as it typifies the similarly-contentious relationship between fans and producers (Scardaville 2011, 61). However, with respect to soap operas, both professionals and fans agree that economic logic currently dominates aesthetic logic, a complaint often identified by frustrated fans (Scardaville 2011, 63). The tension between producers' commercial concerns and fans' aesthetic ones is best explained by the fact that "[i]n the business of television, viewers matter more than fans, but the product itself matters more to fans than to other viewers" (Bielby, Harrington and Bielby 1999, 35). Soap operas are explicitly commercial; the genre was even named after the product it was invented to advertise. But fundamentally, the goal of soap operas is to attract and keep the audience as customers. Whether a fan enjoys the show doesn't matter to networks and producers as much as the fan's money does, as Edmonson and Rounds (1976) explain:

If eight minutes out of every thirty are devoted to commercial messages, the other twenty-two must keep the audience riveted to the set... The audience does have something to say about what it sees on the daytime TV screen. Its letters of praise or protest may be ignored by networks or producers, but it continues to cast the decisive vote at the local supermarket, where it buys—or does not buy—the sponsor's product. Ultimately, it is the audience as consumer, not the audience as critic, that dictates which soap operas will thrive and which will die. (198)

As a result, soap operas tread a precarious line between pleasing the audience and pleasing the sponsors. These power struggles between fans, to whom the product matters most, and producers, for whom the financial realities of viewership take priority, are startlingly apparent when fans attempt to lay claim to 'their' show. Scholar C. Lee Harrington draws a distinction between a corporate entity's legal ownership of a serial

narrative and the “moral ownership” felt by fans (Harrington 2013). She identifies three factors that create fans’ feelings of “moral ownership”: soap operas inhabit “seamless fictional worlds” which privilege fans knowledge of continuity and history; the high turnover rate of shows’ cast, crew, and executives means that longtime viewers have a more extensive investment in the shows than do the people creating these shows; and the rapid production schedules of daytime dramas allow “the industry to respond relatively quickly to fan complaints and concerns, giving fans a sense that their opinions can make a real difference” (Harrington 2013). According to veteran soap opera writer Tom Casiello (2012), the traditional “assumption was that, if the story worked, The Audience would follow. It wasn’t so much about what The Audience wanted but how we could tell The Audience what they would want” (265). However, Casiello identifies a distinct shift over the course of the decade spanning 1999–2009, specifically citing online campaigns and message boards as key to helping him discover the importance of viewers’ desires; he argues that fans currently “partake in the story process [more] than they ever have before”, and in light of the genre’s waning ratings he concludes “if ever there was a time to band together, producers and actors and writers and network executives—and yes, The Audience—it is now” (Casiello 2012, 277–278).

Soap fans consider themselves not as passive viewers, but as “co-owners” and “affect investors” (Bielby, Harrington and Bielby 1999, 42). This is not without reason, as “only in the soap opera community do we see widespread efforts to incorporate viewers into the story-telling process” (Harrington and Bielby 1995, 164). Serial narratives, by their very nature, require audiences’ affective labour; for example, legendary Brazilian telenovela creator Aguinaldo Silva approaches his work from the perspective that “[t]he spectator is co-author and I have to cater to the will of the people” (Joyce 2012, 98). In the context of serial narratives, authorship is framed as a group effort; fans’ “moral ownership” is encouraged, and even necessary to the success of a show. However, this actually obscures the realities of television production and of which group—the fans or the producers—actually has ultimate control over the final product. Fannish affective consumption of texts is simultaneously productive in nature, according to Julie Levin Russo; as fans consume the text, they actively and productively ‘author’ it themselves. It is in the realm of authorship where fans’ “creative and labour practices are

given (or denied) authority and meaning” (Russo qtd. in Johnson 2013, 144), because although fans will produce texts regardless of the copyright holder’s approval or endorsement, the legal owners are the only ones in the position to validate or invalidate fans’ labour with respect to canonicity.

At the heart of all relationships between producers and consumers of media texts is this struggle over authorship. Is it the author/creator or the fan/consumer who determines meaning? Or both? Auteur theory, which was advocated through French film criticism in the 1950s and eventually realized in the United States by Andrew Sarris (1981), contends that the director of a film is the sole author of a film, regardless of the collaborative nature of film production. However, the auteur theory has primarily applied to high-brow texts; television and other similarly depreciated media “largely failed to sustain an authorial myth” until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (Harrington and Bielby 1995, 156). Soap operas are markedly distinct from all other media genres because of the short turnaround time between taping and broadcast and the continuous year-round nature of production; it is difficult for a serial to be considered ‘quality’ within these constraints. As a result, auteurship is “usually only associated with ‘quality’ television” and rarely with serials (Wilson 2011, 149); as Thompson (1998) has found, production of “the American soap opera remains shrouded in anonymity” (67) without the myth of a single author. Soap operas have rotating teams of writers and producers who aim for “authorial seamlessness” (Harrington and Bielby 1995, 158), but genre television shows have “auteurs” like Joss Whedon (*Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, *Firefly*), Gene Roddenberry (*Star Trek*), and Russell T. Davies (*Doctor Who*) whose individual styles are valorized despite the fact that television production is similarly collaborative. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why Harrington and Bielby (1995) proposed that displays of fans’ “moral ownership” over the long-term narrative of a show are met with more hostility by executives in science-fiction fandoms than in soap opera fandoms.

In his work on audiences, Henry Jenkins has argued that “fans are the most active segment of the media audience, one that refuses to simply accept what they are given, but rather insists on the right to become full participants” (2006, 131). However, this is a fairly illusory construction, and I would argue Jenkins does not go far enough when he

acknowledges the limits imposed from the top on this participation, as media companies treat participation as “something they can start and stop, channel and reroute, commodify and market” (Jenkins 2006, 169). As Derek Johnson points out, this new Internet-fueled participatory culture is best understood as “a site of co-creativity marked by new ways of thinking about and making claims to authorship” (Johnson 2013, 136). This echoes Harrington’s distinction between “legal ownership” and “moral ownership” of soap operas. For Johnson, fans’ struggles to dictate the creative direction of shows are proof that contemporary views of authorship “remain intertwined with our ideas about whose creative agency should and should not be validated” (Johnson 2013, 154) – in other words, the legal owner is the author, and moral owners’ creative agency is unworthy.

Authorship is a contentious concept. Roland Barthes’ seminal 1967 essay “The Death of the Author” marks a break from traditional literary theory<sup>14</sup> because he cautions against the tendency to incorporate an author’s identity—political views, psychology, biographical attributes, *etc.*—into the understanding of their work. He argues that it is necessary to separate a work from its creator, and to “restore the place of the reader” to ensure that both Author and Reader work together to give a text its meaning (Barthes 1977, 143). He specifically condemns the myth of the “Author-God”, and seeks a radical solution with his famous closing line “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author” (Barthes 1977, 148). Foucault’s 1969 lecture “What Is An Author?” is seen as a response to Barthes’ essay, in which Foucault complicates Barthes’ death metaphor and raises questions about what remains in the “space left empty by the author’s disappearance” (Foucault 2006, 227). Foucault traces the history of the “author function” in writing, arguing that it was originally useful only when the text needed to be owned by and attributed to someone, and that this ownership and attribution assigned meaning and value to a text which would otherwise be lost if the work were anonymous.

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<sup>14</sup> Although many of the ideas in Barthes’ *Death Of The Author* were already espoused by proponents of The New Criticism, a school of thought which dominated from the 1940s through the 1960s and which similarly discarded any details regarding the author and his/her interests, Barthes’ essay is clear in where his theory radically differs: The New Criticism wanted to arrive at an ultimate meaning for every text, whereas Barthes argued that literature must be “disentangled” from the author rather than authoritatively “deciphered” (Barthes 1977, 147).

He concludes that this author function is formed through our cultural need to “handle” and understand a text (Foucault 2006, 230).

Johnson specifically complements Foucault’s “author function” with his proposal for an “audience function” by which fans—and their labour—serve to give a text its meaning and value (Johnson 2013, 154). However, Johnson acknowledges that any producer-fan collaboration only “firmly reinscribes notions of authorship within cultural hierarchies, claims to greater legitimacy, and markers of social distinction” (Johnson 2013, 136).

## 2.3 The “Nuke” Epilogue

One of the most notable examples of producer-fan collaboration, particularly in light of the previous section’s list of fan campaigns, was the cooperative “Nuke Epilogue” writing experiment headed by *ATWT* writer Susan Dansby after the show’s cancellation in September 2010.

In the series’ final week, Dansby told an interviewer that “she wishe[d] the writers had had more time to resolve a crisis in the lives of Luke and Noah”, because Luke’s boyfriend had been killed “and it seemed wrong to rush him back into a relationship with Noah” (Mathis 2010). On September 18, the day after the finale, she announced on her blog that she planned to write an episode-long epilogue for Nuke as “my gift to you, future writers, soap fans, and, most important, *ATWT* fans who kept the world turning via your passion and devotion to us for over fifty years” (Dansby 2010a). This would be done through an online course in which she would share her expertise and access by teaching fans how to write for soap operas, guiding participants through every stage from scripting the initial unrevised breakdown to filming the final edited version. She also pledged that the experiment would reflect the real-world challenges of having to balance competing interests and input from the many levels of soap production, telling fans “Who’s the network executive, sponsor, executive producer, and head writer in this scenario? That would be you” (Dansby 2010a). Dansby’s language in the announcement—referring to her eventual finished product as a “gift”—is particularly interesting when considered in the context of the capitalist nature of the soap opera

industry versus freely-distributed fanworks... and even more interesting when she revealed she eventually planned to offer the course as teaching tool priced at \$47 although “it’ll be worth easily twice that” (Dansby 2010a). As part of the “gift”, she promised fans “if you sign up for the course, and participate as much or as little as you like, you’ll get the package for free” (Dansby 2010a). From the very beginning of the project, Dansby was clear that she would be using fans’ affective and digital labour and involvement to help her develop a profitable product, but that fans would be compensated in return with a happier ending to the Luke/Noah storyline. Fans seemed to accept this bargain, and the experiment’s intended for-profit outcome was mostly ignored. However, after this initial post, Dansby never again mentioned her plan to sell the course, and as of July 2014 Dansby has yet to do so; in fact, all her webinars are still freely available and linked in her blog posts about the project. While Dansby may have dreamed up the Nuke epilogue project as a profitable way to harness the built-in loyalty of *ATWT* fans, it is unlikely she ever financially benefited from her efforts. Instead of appropriating or exploiting fans’ labour for profit, Dansby ended up toiling, for free, and working to manage the controversies that it caused.

The project started off relatively drama-free. Dansby instructed participants that the basic premise of the epilogue was that Luke and Noah “haven’t seen each other for six months” and that “the scenes will end with a kiss and the promise of the relationship continuing (yes, they’re headed for sex, but you can write the sex scene on your own)” (qtd. in sripley 2010). Over 70 fans filled out a poll answering questions such as “Where does the scene take place? Los Angeles or Oakdale?” and “Who goes to whom? Luke to Noah or Noah to Luke?”; for “extra credit”, fans were asked to submit suggestions for the primary conflict of the epilogue-isode. The poll also asked fans to contribute their favourite Nuke memories: “In each scene, we’ll have a mention of/callback to a pivotal Luke and Noah moment. Which moments do you feel must be included? Give the moment a name, then give the YouTube link where that moment can be found” (qtd. in sripley 2010). The poll was the first indication that fans were being granted authorial legitimacy – not only did requesting YouTube links publicly acknowledge that a legitimate way to follow Nuke’s storyline was through unauthorized fan-edited episode uploads, but asking fans to give names to favourite moments and then later using those

same nicknames in the exercise validated fans' shared referential shorthand (*e.g.* Dansby later referred to a specific scene as “Time Is What I Have” while providing no further details about airdate or context, understanding that fans would instantly identify the October 24, 2007 scene solely by its fan-derived moniker). On October 6, 2010, Dansby published the results of the poll and announced that the basic premise would be Luke going to Noah in Los Angeles, with Luke experiencing a crisis and being resistant to the relationship continuing. In response to a fan named “Stacie” who commented on the results with a list of Luke-specific requests, Dansby responded:

Absolutely have him say do and say those things, Stacie. This is your script. Your story. Setting up the different points other folks (including me) have suggested creates the kind of writing obstacles that soap opera writers encounter. I could “tell” you about the different challenges, but it’ll be a lot more instructive and rewarding as you assert your point of view while giving a nod to the circumstances you’ve been “assigned.” (Dansby 2010b)

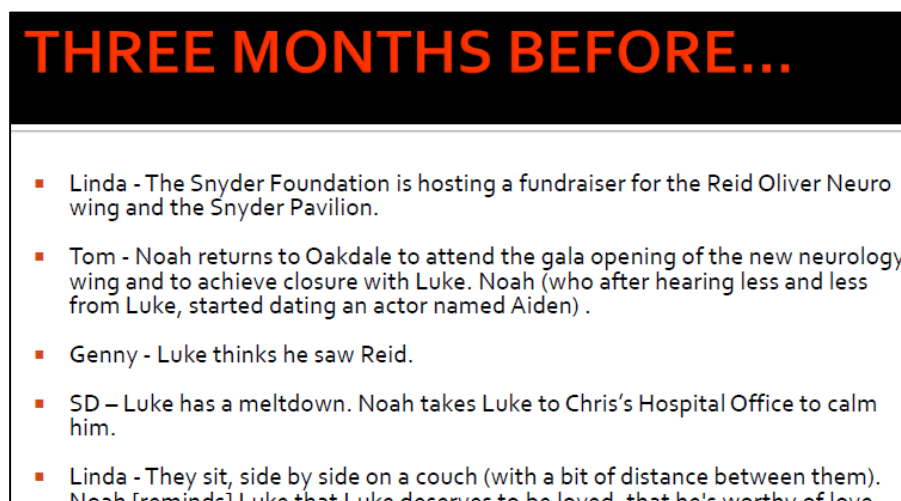
Dansby’s response caused confusion among participants; although in her original announcement she promised “I’d get your input and write accordingly”, the project had now shifted into one in which each participant would write their own script based on a shared premise. Fans understandably began to wonder what made this project any different from fanfiction. Dansby explained this in the preamble to her first webinar on October 5:

I’ve spent the last few days going through the multitude of Nuke moments you all submitted as points of reference for these scenes. [...] Wherever your gifts take you, I thank you for sharing them with me. Your “extra credit” assignments took me back to the breakdown room - ideas coming at you faster than you can comprehend. [...] I kept a little bit of everything that was offered, and it’s starting to look like a story. Tonight, we’ll go through that “breakdown” process, talk about basic actions, and how to construct what is (for me) the most difficult part of the script – the prologue. We’ll also go over the bits I’ve selected from each of your suggestions; and you’ll see how I’ve structured them into a framework. (Dansby 2010c)

By equating fan-submitted suggestions with the ideas tossed around the official *ATWT* writers’ room, Dansby was endorsing fan writers as on par with *ATWT*’s paid staff. However, as the single person with ultimate say over the framework—the one who decided which “bits” from each suggestion would make the final cut—Dansby reaffirmed



her own authority and expertise. She was open to submissions, willing to refine ideas and offer help, but she retained total creative control. This webinar revealed which parts of “extra credit” assignments Dansby had selected to make the final rough outline of the epilogue along with her own ideas; a typical slide featuring the outline of a scene (Figure 4) displays how she organized fans’ ideas into a logical sequence while contributing original content to fill in the gaps. By putting her initials (“SD”) on the same level as those of the fans, Dansby visually constructed the illusion of an equal power dynamic.



**Figure 4:**  
Slide 15 of “Six Scenes – Part 1” presentation  
(source: Susan Dansby 2010e)

However, many participants expressed disappointment and frustration with this assigned outline, and Nuke fans became concerned that anti-Noah, pro-Reid fans had infiltrated the project: suggestions that shy, sensitive Noah should skip Luke’s grandmother’s funeral and transform into a club-hopping West Hollywood party boy, or that Luke should acknowledge his heart was “aching for Reid” instead of Noah, seemed contrary and antagonistic to the Luke/Noah reunion goal of the project. Complained one Nuke fan, “Any prologue I wrote would not involve poisonings or shootings or Reid or galas to honor Reid or newbies or conflict. So if SD wants us to write that, she should tell us” (vertigo 2010a). Another poster urged fellow Nuke supporters to guide Dansby during the experiment, positioning Nuke fans as the “true” experts on the characters:

Let's not assume that she knows that we understand the characters of Luke and Noah and know their relationship inside out, as it were. We can offer her insight, as well. There are things she admits to having forgotten, or not having written certain scripts may not know how things really played out. A little "true" Nuke information could help everyone, SD included. (daffyd12 2010)

On October 7, Dansby released her own first draft of a prologue outline to the "Nuke Epilogue" ("*Open in Noah's Hospital Room. He opens his eyes and quickly sits up, immediately reeling in pain...*"), marking the first time the Luke and Noah narrative was continued in any capacity by an official *ATWT* writer (Dansby 2010d). However, Dansby also confirmed she would not be writing the entire epilogue herself, and emphasized that the fans had as much claim to the characters as she did: "The more immersed I become in this project, the more I realize that this story belongs to each fan - not Nukes collectively. Each of you has a special affinity for these characters, and I think you've earned the right to progress their story your way - not mine" (qtd. in sudsmuffin 2010a).

This announcement did not go over well with fans, who contested the validity of the entire project. "[M]y preference would be for her to write some or all of it, too. I went into this thinking a writer from the show was going to write an epilogue, but that's just me", wrote one fan (sudsmuffin 2010a). Another echoed this concern, drawing on Dansby's authority as a former *ATWT* associate:

If Susan's not planning to write the epilogue after all, then I'm not sure what the point is. The show basically told us to make up our own happy ending for the guys, how would this be any different? SD is giving us pointers on how it would be written for a real soap, I suppose, but I want to know how SD would write it, not how some Reke fan would. (vertigo 2010b)

For project participants, Dansby's role as a longtime *ATWT* writer and position as an industry insider had been crucial to their enthusiasm and enjoyment for the epilogue. Fans wanted to know how a working soap opera writer would craft the script, "not how some... fan" would. Dansby's reputation was key to the legitimacy of the epilogue, but the less important Dansby became to the final outcome, the less enthusiastic the fans were about the project. It is interesting to note that the fans would have preferred for Dansby to fulfill their wishes rather than for her to sanction everyone's individual

epilogues. I would argue this was likely a result of fans' bitterness and disappointment with the way Luke and Noah's story ended on-screen; if Dansby wrote the epilogue-isode herself, it would be an admission that the show had done wrong by the fans, and that *ATWT* was, in some capacity, fixing its mistakes. However, with Dansby permitting and encouraging fans to write their own endings, it seemed less 'official' due to the fact that multiple, probably contradictory, fan-written endings would exist – there would be no single, definitive, Dansby-endorsed conclusion like they had wanted. To make matters worse, the tension between Noah fans and Reid fans was becoming increasingly visible at this stage of the project, and Nuke diehards were vocal in their concerns that Dansby might sanction endings that didn't reunite Luke and Noah.

Dansby's next webinar on October 19 focused on the revised prologue, and—more importantly to participants—featured her second contribution of original writing to the project. Her prologue breakdown was noteworthy for its emphasis on the depth of Luke's feelings for Noah:

He wants to see Noah, and laugh with him and touch him and make love to him. But he's not sure if Noah is still waiting for him. Lily asks what if Noah's just waiting for Luke to make the first move? Luke counters that Noah might think Luke's just lonely. Lily urges Luke to convince Noah he still loves him. Get on a plane. Go! (Dansby 2010f)

The breakdown was well-received by Nuke fans, particularly for its refreshingly casual reference to the couple having sex. While Luke and Noah on *ATWT* only ever had one sex scene—the under-hyped January 12, 2009 “fade to black”, although later episodes did include the occasional coy reference to the more physical aspects of their relationship—at least the show had allowed Nuke to have sex; throughout the five months of Luke and Reid's relationship, they attempted to have sex only twice, and each time were foiled by either Luke's guilt over leaving Noah or by Noah's unexpected entrance. The issue of which couple was 'allowed' to have sex on the show had been a long-standing source of resentment for Reke fans but satisfaction for Nuke fans. When Dansby wrote “Noah” and “want to make love” in the same sentence from Luke's perspective, the Nuke Epilogue participants became even more divided, with Luke/Noah

fans savoring the fact that Luke/Reid fans had started denouncing Dansby and the project:

Wow, those Rekers sure are delusional. Good grief. A lot of them are such hypocrites since at first, they were trying to downplay SD's Nuke project; saying over and over that it wasn't canon and nothing more than glorified fanfic. Then, they start complaining about how it's unfair that Susan is favoring Nuke and that she's supposedly "rewriting history." I'm sure most of them are upset because they realize this is a bit more than just "glorified fanfic."  
(blugirl88 2010)

[I]n her own breakdown, she has Luke wanting to be with Noah, touch him and make love to him. It was kind of nice to hear from a show writer. No wonder the Rekers are in such a tither these days.  
(sudsmuffin 2010b)

To these fans, the extent of the Nuke Epilogue's canonicity depended on the level of Dansby's participation: if Dansby wrote the epilogue herself, it would be canonical, but if it was written by fans under her guidance, then it would be pointless and "glorified fanfic". However, once Dansby's pro-Nuke leanings became clear, any fan writing in this project overseen by her was now deemed valid, worthy of elevated status somewhere in the murky range between not-quite-canon and not-quite-fic. One poster summed up the struggle to classify the project as "Of course what she is going to write isn't 'canon.' The show is over. But she wrote for the show for thirteen years, and this is her take on what would've happened to Luke and Noah had the show flash-forwarded six months, so that's something" (sudsmuffin 2010c). And fans agreed that this "something" had to be better than nothing.

Between the second webinar on October 19 and a teleconference on November 19, Dansby read and made notes on every submission of the first three scenes that participants had written. However, in the meantime, participants had become frustrated with her advice, and had been using their newfound 'insider' knowledge to discuss what they believed was wrong with the soap industry in general, and *ATWT* specifically. In response to Dansby's recommendation that every episode of a soap feature an argument, one fan invoked the language of advertising ("bait and switch") and *ATWT* to observe:

...I think Susan is trying to teach us what she thinks makes up a good, soapy drama. I'm sure she was taught by CG [*Christopher Goutman, ATWT executive producer 1999—2010*] that arguments, angst, drama and little payoff was the way to go. It just goes to show how out of touch these behind-the-scenes vets are when it comes to what their audience wants. Drama and angst is fine, but, as she said, we have to beg for payoff. Then when we beg, we don't get it or the very minimum. This bait and switch method and non-stop angst turned a lot of people off to this show. But as we've all said, that's why it is cancelled.  
(sudsmuffin 2010d)

The final meeting of the experiment was a wrap-up teleconference on December 7, during which Dansby shared her self-written version of Act I, and instructed participants to submit the final half of their own Nuke Epilogues to her for a closing round of comments and notes. However, the teleconference didn't go smoothly, as this forum recap attests:

Your LOL of the Day:

Susan says CG listened to the fans.

The entire thing was hijacked by two Reid fans saying what a breath of fresh air Reid was (BTW, we have Susan to thank for writing a lot of Reke eppys!).

Meanwhile, it took Susan fifty minutes to come up with a Nuke eppy she wrote that she remembered and liked (the one where Noah joins and leaves the Army).

I need a shower now.

(sudsmuffin 2010e)

Even CG himself said he didn't listen to the fans.

HAHAHA, SD wrote that Army one, the one where Luke ran after Noah's car, shouting his name? Oh dear. But it ended with a 3-second hug. That pretty much sums up Nuke: all of the stupidity, none of the payoff.

(vertigo 2010c)

Somebody asked Susan about CG's comment about not listening to the fans. Oh no, CG listened to the fans and had an army of minions checking out the letters, boards, and Twitter feed daily! So all that campaigning we did paid off! Oh wait...  
(sudsmuffin 2010f)

This is disappointing to hear...but it doesn't hurt like it would have a few months ago. God, I'm so glad this show is over and Dansby and her pals can't put Luke and Noah through any more bullshit.

(Richard 2010)

The Nuke Epilogue experiment—the first time a daytime drama writer collaborated with fans and gave a semi-official stamp of approval to a fan-written

extension of the proprietary serial narrative—ended in fandom disharmony and disappointment. Fans felt like they had signed up for a project that would fix the mistakes made by *ATWT*, only to find out that Dansby stood by everything that had happened on the show. Dansby and her colleagues had written the very episodes and plotlines which Nuke fans saw as insults to *their* characters (“HAHAHA, SD wrote that Army one... Oh dear”) and *their* support of *their* show (“we have Susan to thank for writing a lot of Reke eppys”, “all that campaigning we did paid off! Oh wait...”), and this first-of-its-kind author-fan partnership and mentoring program was ultimately, to fans, just “more bullshit” from The Powers That Be.

This unceremonious ending to this experiment again raised issues of authorship. Although soap opera fan fiction exists, two different studies (Harrington and Bielby 1995, 20; Scardaville 2005, 890) have found that soap viewers do not write or consume fan fiction anywhere near as much as other media fans do; one possible explanation for this is that “the ongoing nature of soap operas creates an almost constant possibility that different routes will be explored, hence, there is not as driving a need to create these alternative universes” (Scardaville 2005, 890). This is well worth considering as a rule, but the recent rise of high-profile soap couples that attract a younger, media-fandom-savvy group of viewers is an exception that should be studied: FanFiction.net hosts over 800 stories in the *As The World Turns* category, the overwhelming majority of which involve some combination of Luke, Noah, and Reid; of the approximately 600 works tagged *As The World Turns* on fanfiction archive *AO3* (<https://www.archiveofourown.org>), almost all are entirely Nuke or Reke-centric; and the fan-maintained NukeFic.com contains over 1,000 Luke/Noah stories and remains active to this day. It stands to reason that at least some of these fics are the finished products of the Nuke Epilogue project. One participant posted their final completed script, complete with Dansby’s notes, to an online forum; although the author prefaced the post by saying they approached it “as a challenge for me to do the opposite of what SD would do” (vertigo 2010d), they acknowledged incorporating some of Dansby’s feedback into their final draft, and their Epilogue ended with the same final lines that Dansby had suggested from the initial rough outline and the fan-derived scene name (“It may take some time”/“Well, time is what I have”) (vertigo 2010e).

Ultimately, instead of the Dansby-written epilogue based on fan feedback that was originally promised, the writing project became a way for fans to individually write their own epilogues based on a Dansby-determined structure and crowd-sourced storyline, and a chance for fans to have their scripts read and edited by an experienced soap opera writer who had worked on their favourite show—making fans’ contributions at least tacitly, if not explicitly, approved by *ATWT*. Complicating the fallout was the fact that Dansby had originally intended to package, market, and sell the experiment as a writing course. In the end, Dansby was unable to appropriate or exploit fans’ affective and digital labour because her course was derailed, ridiculed, and dismissed by the very fans whom she had sought to pursue as potential customers. Dansby attracted fans with the promise of creative validation, but the project only succeeded in reifying the producer/fan divides of traditional television production and scriptwriting, leading to its downfall. In the end, it appears as though the Nuke Epilogue began with the goal of becoming pseudo-canon, but ended as pseudo-fanon – “fanon” being a concept explored in the next section.

### 3 Case Study: *Torchwood* and “Save Ianto Jones”

#### 3.1 Fanon, co-option, and fanagement

According to Louisa Ellen Stein (2013), there are some platforms via which media producers actively court audience opinion and “invite them in” to the production process, such as reality competition shows like *American Idol* (FOX, 2002–present) which require viewers to vote for their favourite competitors and thus ‘author’ the show going forward. One legendary example in comics was the 1988 DC Comics poll that resulted in the character Jason Todd (Robin) being killed off at fans’ request, although he was brought back to life in 2005, reflecting the serial nature of comic storytelling (Eason 2007).<sup>15</sup> More contemporary examples can be found with scripted television series which allow fans to vote on upcoming episodes, such as a July 2013 stunt by the creators of *Psych* (USA, 2006–2014) that let fans select which of three scripts they would like to see made into an upcoming episode, and the March 2014 “Fan-Built” episode of *Hawaii Five-0* (CBS, 2010–present) which invited fans to vote on every aspect from the identity of the killer to the clothes the characters wore to what song played during a dramatic moment (Steele 2013, Kenneally 2013). In July 2013, Canadian sci-fi series *Continuum* (Showcase, 2012–present) launched the social media campaign “Continuum Interactive” which allowed fans to decide which of the show’s two opposing factions would triumph in the season two finale; the creator of the campaign explained “obviously, there’s an element of production that [fans] can’t have control over the narrative because the show is pre-shot”, but by limiting the choice that fans could make to two concrete options with pre-planned, pre-filmed endings, *Continuum* was able to give the appearance of fans’ complete control over the long-term narrative (Graham 2013).

However, Stein points out that “such acknowledgments of digitally empowered fan audiences are not simply shows of good will or even recognition of the market importance of a devoted audience, but rather are tools through which producers attempt

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<sup>15</sup> It should also be considered that the comics industry has long been recognized by fans for its multiple authorship, as it involves various different—frequently competing—versions of the same characters, all written by different people, co-existing at any given time. For more see Pearson and Uricchio (1991).



to shape and control fan culture, fan investments, and fan authorship” (Stein 2013, 407). When fans create their own in-jokes or explanations for events, this is known as “fanon”, the canon created by and for fans; however, occasionally a media producer incorporates these fannish ideas into the text, leading to “ascended fanon”. Some of the more high-profile instances of ascended fanon are “Figwit”, a fan-named background character from the first *The Lord of the Rings* film (2001) who became so popular that he was brought back for the final entry in the trilogy (2003) and given a speaking role (iris n.d.), and J.K. Rowling’s 2007 novel *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* referring to Voldemort by a dismissive fan nickname because Rowling “thought it was very amusing when [she] found a chat room full of people calling him ‘Voldy’” (Rowling 2006).<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps the most controversial example of ascended fandom is the character of Derpy in Hasbro’s cartoon *My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic* (Hub Network, 2010–present), as outlined by Derek Johnson (2013) in his book chapter “Participation is Magic: Collaboration, Authorial Legitimacy, and the Audience Function”. “Derpy” was a fan-created name for a background character in one episode who had been accidentally drawn with crossed eyes, but who eventually became so popular in fandom that the season two episode “The Last Roundup” referred to the character by name, gave her a speaking role, and wrote her personality in a way that was consistent with fanon. The controversy arose when concerned advocacy groups complained that Derpy was insulting to people with mental and physical disabilities, and the show’s creative teams quickly disassociated themselves from the character, going so far as to re-animate her appearance in the episode (Figure 5). However, as the producers “shuffl[ed] authorial responsibility” to the fans and “disavow[ed] their own responsibility”, the fans became “imagined not just as participatory remixers and spreaders of produced content, but also as co-creative collaborators within the industrial structures of television production” (Johnson 2013, 144). After the immediate Derpy furor died down, *MLP* quietly re-introduced the character as “Muffins”, the new name coming from a fandom joke about

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<sup>16</sup> An extensive list of examples drawn from all types of media can be found at <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki/Main/AscendedFanon>.



**Figure 5:**  
Original Derpy (left) and re-drawn Derpy (right)  
(source: *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*, “The Last Roundup”)

her obsession with the baked good. With no controversy surrounding their ‘new’ character, Hasbro was free to license Muffins for branded merchandise from backpacks to boxer shorts. Although fans had created “Derpy” and were even recognized as collaborators, they were de-legitimized as co-authors (Johnson 2013, 152). However, by encouraging fans to purchase \$50 collectible Muffins figurines, Hasbro sold the fans’ own character back to them and profited from the guaranteed fan interest and demand. This Derpy debacle is just one high-profile example of commodified fan participation and “fanagement”.

Further to my argument that fan protest campaigns must be understood as labour, I contend that protest campaigns targeting narrative decisions are obvious attempts at audience authorship. However, these attempts are quickly “managed” (“fanaged”), contained, and monetized. This chapter will now explore this intersection between fan labour and mainstream media’s capitalist interests through the case study of fan reaction to the death of the character Ianto Jones on BBC’s *Torchwood* (2006–2011).

### 3.2 “Save Ianto Jones”

*Torchwood* is a spinoff—and anagram—of the revived classic SF television series *Doctor Who* (BBC, 2005–current). The show follows the adventures of immortal time-traveler Captain Jack Harkness (John Barrowman), compassionate cop Gwen Cooper (Eve Myles), misanthropic medic Owen Harper (Burn Gorman), gadget geek Toshiko Sato (Naoko Mori), and administrator-turned-agent Ianto Jones (Gareth David-Lloyd) as they

defend the Earth against aliens who arrive in Cardiff through the Space-Time Rift. While *Torchwood* was originally envisioned and promoted as a grittier, darker “*Who* for grown-ups”, the first season (BBC Three, 2006–2007) was unintentionally camp, and its gratuitous sex and violence were ridiculed by both *Who* fans and the press despite attracting record-breaking viewing figures. The second season (BBC Two, 2008) actively embraced the silliness—its premiere episode featured a cocaine-snorting, half-human half-blowfish alien stealing a sports car—while successfully incorporating several mature and engaging storylines, and the show attracted higher ratings and better reviews. The second season ended with the tragic deaths of Tosh and Owen, killed in the line of duty by Jack’s supervillain brother, and fans wondered what direction the show would take with two of its five core characters dead. As it turned out, season three was a radical rethinking of the entire *Torchwood* concept. Instead of a traditional 13-episode season aired weekly, the third season was a five-episode miniseries titled *Torchwood: Children of Earth* broadcast Monday July 6 through Friday July 10, 2009 on the network’s flagship channel BBC One. *Children of Earth* (CoE) was markedly different from the previous two seasons: instead of a wacky “monster of the week” procedural, the miniseries transplanted Jack, Gwen, and Ianto from Cardiff to London to help the government confront a sinister alien race known only as “The 456” that was controlling all the children on the planet. The series had a higher budget, a sexier setting, and a bleak and nihilistic tone that transformed *Torchwood* from a campy aliens-vs.-cops comedy/drama into a serious government-corruption conspiracy thriller which just happened to feature aliens. But the abrupt tonal shift wasn’t the only surprise awaiting viewers: the fourth episode, titled “Day Four” and broadcast on July 9, 2009, concluded with the unexpected death of a fan-favourite main character. The climax of the episode featured Jack and Ianto sneaking into a government building to negotiate with the 456, but when the negotiations went sour, the 456 released a poison gas into the building; unkillable Captain Jack survived the attack, but mortal Ianto succumbed to the fumes and died in Jack’s arms. The final episode aired the next day, and the miniseries ended with a six-months-later epilogue that showed Gwen happily pregnant and planning a future with her husband Rhys, an emotionally-damaged Jack retreating to outer space after being forced to murder his grandson to save the world’s children, and Ianto still dead.

*CoE* enjoyed critical acclaim, stellar ratings, and would go on to win multiple awards, but the fan reaction was swift and angry – this is not what they had been expecting from *Torchwood*. Many fans accused the miniseries’ promotional photos of being misleading; while the promotional material (Figure 6) featured shots of Ianto posing dramatically and wielding a weapon so comically oversized that fans excitedly and affectionately nicknamed it a “fuck-off huge gun”, season 3 did not feature Ianto in any such action scenes, much less him handling what fans later angrily dubbed a “fake-out huge gun” (tencrush 2009a).



**Figure 6:**  
Ianto wielding a gun not seen on TV  
(source: BBC)

Even more central to fans’ disappointment was the season’s treatment of Ianto’s romantic relationship with the omnisexual Captain Jack. While “Janto” was an extremely popular relationship and had become a defining aspect of *Torchwood*, fans had always been concerned that the show never developed it to its full potential, expressing disappointment that “the romance [on-screen] never played out the way they were playing it in the media” (rowanswhimsy 2009a) and that “the Jack / Ianto relationship was great in theory but due to writing (or lack of it) never came close to fulfilling its promise on screen” (as1mplegirl 2009a). Fans’ expectations had been raised when the official promotional material included “couple-y” pictures of just Ianto and Jack together (Figure 7), an honour previously shared only by the high-profile relationships of Captain Jack and his ex-lover John Hart, Gwen and her husband Rhys, and Tosh and her love-interest Tommy (Figure 8).



**Figure 8:** The Jack/Ianto promotional photos accused of being misleading and misrepresentative of their relationship in *CoE*  
(source: BBC)



**Figure 7:** (left to right) Tosh and Tommy, Captain Jack and John Hart, Gwen and Rhys  
(source: BBC)

Interviews with the creators, cast, and crew leading up to the premiere of *CoE* promised Janto fans that they would be pleased with the couple’s storyline, with showrunner Russell T. Davies praising how the “rich area” of Jack and Ianto “grew naturally out of the scripts and performances from John and Gareth”, and director Euros Lyn pledging that the Janto “love story is really integral to season three” because *CoE* would “explore the nature of their relationship in a way that has never happened before on *Torchwood*” (“Interview with Russell T Davies” 2009, qtd. in thomas 2009). But when *CoE* aired, fans were upset by the love story—or lack thereof. In the series, the pair kissed just once—twice, if fans counted Captain Jack kissing Ianto’s corpse—and the closest the couple got to a sex scene was a flirty proposition from Ianto being interrupted by the more pressing need for Rhys to cook dinner. Even more galling to fans

was the fact that during their little joint screentime, Jack and Ianto were frequently at odds with one another, and shared little of the warmth or humour which had characterized their relationship over the previous two seasons. Some fans even went so far as to compile lists of the exaggerations and misleading statements made in the press during the long *CoE* promotional period (such as kelticbanshee's widely-shared post "Datamining - Interviews before CoE" [kelticbanshee 2009]).

Fans were also upset at the changes made to Ianto's self-identification of his sexuality, which had previously never been explicitly discussed within the show. Ianto spent the first half of season one in a relationship with a woman, and after her death he entered into a relationship with Jack; the only time this was ever treated as unusual by other characters was the occasional reference to the perks of shagging the boss or their curiosity about Jack's skills in bed. However, in *CoE*, Ianto suddenly became insecure about both his own sexuality and Jack's feelings for him, telling his sister "It's weird. It's just different. It's not men. It's... It's just him. It's only him. And I don't even know what it is, really" – an odd contrast to his behavior in season one, when his contribution to a team-wide discussion about Jack's orientation was a wry but emphatic "...and I don't care." The miniseries also featured the first instances in which *Torchwood* included any gay slurs or references to homophobia, as one fan pointed out that Ianto's queerness was "overtly and crudely" flagged by new minor characters using aggressive language ("gayboy", "taking it up the arse"); the fan concluded it came across as "an attempt to paint Ianto being in some kind of denial which needs to be forcibly broken" (rivier 2009). The final indignity for many fans was the dialogue exchanged during Ianto's death scene: Ianto, sobbing, tells Jack "I love you" for the first time, and Jack's response is a shake of his head and "Don't", followed by encouragements to "stay with me, please". An unreciprocated declaration of love from a dying Ianto was unforgivable, and fans took action.

The backlash began first on social media, with fans tweeting their outrage at the series' writers in real-time as "Day Four" unfolded, and making #ianto and #torchwood trending topics on Twitter. Over the next few days, fans formed the campaign to "Save Ianto Jones" (<http://www.saveianto.com>), urging supporters to send the BBC letters,

postcards, and packets of coffee (in reference to Ianto's original job as "the coffee boy") to protest the character's death. Within 24 hours of the episode airing, fans created a sprawling real-world memorial for Ianto at Mermaid Quay in Cardiff Bay, a key filming location for *Torchwood* where the team's secret base of operations was set. The "Hurricane Who" fan convention held a week later in Florida revamped their launch party into "The Wake of Ianto Jones", and David-Lloyd attended the "wake" and thanked fans for their support of his character ("Hurricane Who - Convention Launch Party" 2009). British entertainment website *Digital Spy* conducted a poll in which 27.4% of respondents said they would no longer watch *Torchwood* after Ianto's death (French and Wilkes 2009). Fans also raised money for charity to publicize their efforts, contributing £16,000 to the BBC's "Children In Need" charity in honour of Ianto, and donating £2,500 to adopt a pony through David-Lloyd's treasured Lluest Horse and Pony Trust. The campaign garnered extensive news coverage in the mainstream press, particularly as the upcoming U.S. broadcast of the series was set for Monday July 20–Friday July 24, 2009. However, the longer and harder the fans campaigned, the more annoyed *Torchwood* producers became.

In one of his first interviews after the U.K. broadcast, Davies defended the decision to kill off Ianto, stating "Yes, he's absolutely dead. I'm sorry but [bringing him back] would just cheapen the whole experience... It's a much more real world in *Torchwood*. It wouldn't work to regenerate or go to a parallel universe" (Jensen 2009b). Fans subsequently pointed out that Davies' "real world" science-fiction show involved alien technologies such as the "life knife" and "resurrection gauntlets" which could bring people back from the dead, starred a character made immortal through regeneration energy who travelled across parallel universes, and had showcased the deaths and resulting resurrections of two major *Torchwood* team members in separate season-long story arcs. Fans eventually adopted the rally cry "anything can happen in science fiction" as a direct response to Davies' dismissive hypocrisy.

Davies also praised his own storytelling skills while acknowledging that Ianto was nothing more than a plot device:

DAVIES: I always sort of knew that Jack would kill his grandchild in the last episode ... and in order to do that you got to have a Captain Jack who is badly, badly damaged.

INTERVIEWER: So Ianto died in order for Jack to make that final decision about his grandson. To be so damaged he could do something so awful?

DAVIES: Yeah, that's what it took. I know because it's a great story. What a fantastic story.

(Jensen 2009b)

In this way, he indirectly confirmed what many fans had already suspected, that

the whole Jack/Ianto subplot was almost a red herring. In the end, it was Stephen's death that broke Jack in half, so why did Ianto die? ... So basically Ianto was a metaphor. Which sucks, because I'd been labouring under the belief that he was a character. Oh well, silly me.

(rexluscus 2009)

Davies concluded the interview by displaying a fundamental misunderstanding of why fans were upset over the treatment of Jack/Ianto versus Gwen/Rhys (“[A] lot of those people complain in the same breath that you get to see Gwen and Rhys being happy.... So clearly they don't like the happy characters. So why do they even want the gay people to be the happy characters?”), and lecturing fans “don't get on your high horse about Ianto Jones, for fuck's sake, who is fictional. Go do some good work in the real world where you can actually save some people's lives” (Jensen 2009b). A week later, Davies had become even more dismissive, denying reports of any sort of backlash, and telling protesters “if you can't handle drama you shouldn't watch it”, then suggesting they “go look at poetry” or watch *Supernatural* (WB, 2005–present) because “those boys are *beautiful*” (Ausiello 2009, emphasis in original). On July 26, *Torchwood*'s executive producer Julie Gardner responded to aggrieved audience members at Comic-Con with the reminder that she “make[s] drama to support each author's vision. It's not a democracy. Whether people like it or not, it's storytelling” (Wilkes 2009a). Gardner used language identical to that of James Moran, a *Torchwood* writer who had penned many of the official tie-in novels as well as the *CoE* episode “Day Three”; while his blog over the previous year had been a communication channel for him to tease upcoming *Torchwood* plots and interact with fans, he was inundated with hundreds of comments on July 9 and 10, and he posted this lengthy response on July 12:



I've received over a thousand messages from viewers talking about the show. The vast majority have been extremely positive. Even though many of them are upset, angry and shocked, they have managed to express that without making it personal. [...]

But the rest of the messages? Unacceptable. Some have been spewing insults and passive aggressive nonsense. Accusing me of deliberately trying to mislead, lie, and hurt people. Telling me I hate the fans, that I'm laughing at them, that I used them, that I'm slapping people in the face, that I've "killed" the show, that I'm a homophobe, that I want to turn the fanbase away and court new, "cooler" viewers...

I've been a bit too open, a bit too nice, a bit too willing to explain the thought process behind story decisions. And some people are taking advantage of that, or misinterpreting what it means.

So here's the deal: I'm a professional writer. That's my job. I write what I write, for whatever the project might be. I have the utmost respect for you, and honestly want you to like my work, but I can't let that affect my story decisions. Everybody wants different things from a story, but this is not a democracy, you do not get to vote. You are free to say what you think of my work, even if you hate it, I honestly don't mind. But the ONLY person I need to please is myself, and the ONLY thing I need to serve is the story. Not you. I will do my work to the very best of my ability, in an attempt to give you the best show, the best movie, the best story, the best entertainment I possibly can. Even if that means that sometimes, I'll do things you won't like. I won't debate it. Either you go along with it, or you don't. None of it is done to hurt you, or to force some agenda down your throat, or anything else. It's all in service of the story. [...]

For a while now, I've let things get too cosy here, indulged myself too much, and if I let it carry on, it will affect my work. (Moran 2009a)

Moran's forceful tone—"the ONLY person I need to please is myself"—marked his attempt to retake authorial control. He blamed himself for letting "things get too cosy" and engaging in dialogue with fans, and chastised fans for "misinterpreting" the writer-fan relationship as more "open" than it really was. He concluded his screed by implying the impossibility of an author pleasing both an audience and himself, and confirming that the author's story comes first, no exceptions – to fans, he instructed "either you go along with it or you don't" because it is "all in service of the story". After this post, Moran deactivated his blog until April 2010; on the blog's return, he had disabled the commenting feature on all posts. When *Torchwood* fans liked his work, his blog was open and accessible and he was praised in the comments; when *Torchwood* fans

disagreed with his work, he closed the comments and made it clear that as an author, he did not owe fans anything. Moran's declaration that everything in *CoE* was "in service of the story" is particularly interesting given that he was responding to fans who felt the miniseries had done a disservice to *Torchwood's* narrative – both sides seemed to be proclaiming that they were motivated by the integrity of the story and characters. Here, of course, is when the issue of authorship comes into play. Who knew *Torchwood* and Ianto and *CoE* better, the fans or the writer? Moran invoked his credentials as an authorized *Torchwood* episode writer and tie-in author to rebuke fans who felt they 'owned' the show; as Moran understood it, fans' affective investment in the show—the affective labour that authored Ianto, their affect-motivated labour to promote the show, and their economic labour to purchase *Torchwood* merchandise—all paled in comparison to his position as a professional, paid, and credited television scribe. Fans rejected this defence and cited Ianto's lack of character development over the previous years as proof of Moran's unsuitability to the task of writing *Torchwood*; as they saw it, their displays of fannish affect were more valid because they were from genuine love of the show, whereas he was paid to do a job. Both Moran and the fans acted as though this particular blog post was evidence that the other side was wrong.

Prior to this fateful blog post, Moran was an example of what Jonathan Grey would term an "undead author", a television writer who communicated with audiences to the extent that he metaphorically in Barthesian terms "kill[ed] himself as an author" and thus managed to "fashion himself as 'just one of the fans' when he is decidedly privileged in the relationship" (Gray 2010, 112–113). However, by (re)claiming his privileged position as a professional writer and closing lines of communication between himself and the fans, Moran downplayed his fannish and cult TV interests. This is similar to, yet crucially different from, the identity of showrunner Russell T. Davies. Davies, too, had consciously positioned himself as a life-long fan of *Doctor Who*, telling one interviewer in July 2009:

I speak as a fan myself, and literally I could list off five billion facts about Doctor Who, which I've watched since I was 3 years old. I have all the magazines and books and videos and DVDs. [...] I have been remarkably faithful to the entire mythology and history of Doctor Who, and never contradicted, actually, a single

fact from its original 26-year history. That really takes some doing. But to some extent, most people wouldn't notice; I haven't put that center stage. That's just my own personal love of the show ticking away in the background. (Bahn 2009)

Davies was “careful to present his fannish affect as an asset, rather than a liability”, leading Suzanne Scott (2009) to argue that he is a classic example of the “fanboy auteur”: a media producer with a unique vision who visibly authors their work while publicizing their personal, vested interest in the material (445). Hills (2013) has similarly explored Davies' reputation as the main author of *Torchwood*, despite Davies' limited day-to-day involvement on the first and second seasons of *Torchwood*, which were primarily overseen by producer Chris Chibnall. Davies is even credited with popularizing the American term “showrunner”—the single most important figure of authority on a television series, not just one of many executive producers—in the UK television industry (Martin 2009).

Ironically, however, it was this “fanboy auteur” reputation that made Davies an especially attractive target for fans' anger over the death of Ianto. Davies' indifference and hostility to fans' concerns seemed at odds with his own fanboy persona, and to some *Torchwood* fans he was only using his self-professed fannishness as a cover for a secret dislike of fans:

... I think RTD fucking hates his fans, so this is probably just a final "fuck you" to us all for loving Ianto so much.  
(coffee\_kris 2009)

But he's such a huuuuuuuge fanboy. Who loves fans and would never belittle or insult them. :rolls eyes:  
(as1mplegirl 2009b)

\*laughs madly\*  
No-one can hate the fans like a fanboy. No one.  
(smallship1 2009)

The relationship between *Torchwood* fans and Davies continued to deteriorate rapidly, as Davies subsequently referred to the backlash as just being “nine hysterical women”; in response, fans increased their efforts to show just how many ‘hysterical women’ were involved in the campaigning (Jensen 2009b).

The television series went on hiatus after *CoE*, but the *Torchwood* franchise continued releasing new licensed content over the next two years through its monthly magazine as well as various novels, short stories, and radio plays – all of which prominently featured Ianto. Although such licensed materials are traditionally discussed as merchandise (Pillai 2013), both Pillai and Henry Jenkins (2006) contend that such tie-in materials must be considered part of transmedia storytelling. According to Jenkins (2007), transmedia storytelling is “a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience”; transmedia storytelling is best suited to open, ever-expanding worlds as opposed to “most classically constructed” self-contained narratives. However, Jenkins’ original (2006) definition limited the transmedia narrative to a single story that needed the gaps “filled in” across multiple platforms, and which always directly represented and fulfilled all fans’ desires. Hills (2012) has since pointed out that Jenkins’ original influential definition ignored that some fan cultures have “radically different stances towards the unfolding text” and thus transmedia “can close down modes of fan reading” (412, 414), and he has argued for the importance of understanding media tie-ins as marketed products and “not only as transmedia stories, but also as trans-discourses or trans-practices that cut across industry and fandom” (414). More recently (2014), Jenkins has expanded his understanding of transmedia to include two competing poles, “transmedia as promotion and transmedia as storytelling” (246), although his examples—the “Dawson’s Desktop” diary on the *Dawson’s Creek* (The WB, 1998–2003) website and the alternate reality game “I Love Bees” to promote *Halo 2* (2004)—did not require fans to spend money in order to enjoy them. For Jenkins, transmedia is not “simply a marketing strategy”, despite the fact that “marketing logistics still exert strong pulls, at every stage, in shaping what kinds of transmedia extensions are produced and distributed” (2014, 247–248). However, *Torchwood’s* magazine/comics/novels/radio plays are purchasable items, situating this case study in the realm of commercial, paid-for tie-in materials, scholarship upon which is surprisingly limited.<sup>17</sup> Finally, Jenkins holds that the fundamental aspect of transmedia

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<sup>17</sup> The richest case study of tie-in materials is found in the wide variety of licensed novels, comics,

extensions is that they can only augment the primary television show/movie/game at the heart of the franchise: “The mothership should not depend for its dramatic pay-off on something that consumers have to track down elsewhere. The mothership must be perceived as self-contained, even if other media add new layers” (Jenkins 2014, 247). Jenkins’ description of transmedia extensions as being “tracked down” underscores that these are sought out by only the most devoted fans – or, in the case of *Torchwood*, the most devoted yet disgruntled fans. The BBC’s tie-ins never detracted from the “mothership” of the *Torchwood* television series—none of them reversed the on-screen death of Ianto—but they provided alternative interpretations of scenes and provided more ways for readers and listeners to spend time with their favourite characters. Matt Hills has identified this as the BBC engaging in “fanagement”, using licensed materials to simultaneously placate fans as well as generate additional revenue for the network, as “fan expectations and dissatisfactions are problematically engaged with, and disciplined and contained, at the level of niche paratexts” (Hills 2012, 409).

The official *Torchwood Magazine* featured at least one exclusive new comic story and short story per issue; the first issue released after *CoE* (issue #17, on sale August 20, 2009) had a cover banner that blared “IANTO LIVES! IN BRAND NEW TEXT AND COMIC ADVENTURES EVERY ISSUE!” (Figure 9), and Ianto continued to be featured in every comic and short story until the magazine ended in December 2010 with issue #25. In issue 20, published in summer 2010, the magazine even ran a contest titled “Take Over Torchwood”, in which fans submitted original short stories to be judged by tie-in novel/radio play writer James Goss, novel and TV episode writer James Moran, and

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animations, and audio adventures produced for *Doctor Who*, due to the fact that they continued to be published even while the show was on hiatus for the years 1990–2004, and that they have been often credited with reviving interest in the series. For comprehensive history of the materials see Booy (2012) and Howe (2007); for discussion of the difficulties of establishing continuous *Doctor Who* canon see Parkin (2007 and 2009); for consideration of how the revived television series has incorporated these ‘hiatus’ materials, see Marlow (2009).

Surprisingly, there exists very little scholarship on the expansive universe of *Star Trek* tie-in novels; publications seem limited to literary analysis of plots in a handful of titles written by a specific author (Cranny-Francis 2007) or a mass-market compendium (Ayers 2006).



**Figure 9:** “Ianto Lives!”  
(source: *Torchwood: The Official Magazine* issue 17)

the head of BBC Books. The contest rules stated “The story must feature the characters of Jack, Gwen and Ianto” and “The story must be set between [season two finale] Exit Wounds and *Children of Earth* Day One”, and James Goss’ advice included

“Give Ianto lots to do. You can never have enough Ianto. Just look at Livejournal”. The “Take Over Torchwood” contest is a particularly rich example of “fanagement” – the contest placated fan desire by allowing fans to deny the events of *CoE* and focus on Ianto’s lifetime, yet it also required fan labour in terms of providing content for the magazine. When the winning stories were published, they were accompanied by enthusiastic commentary from the judges’ panel. Thus, fans who helped fill the pages of *Torchwood: The Official Magazine*— a magazine which they paid for— were compensated by having their desire for more Ianto validated by *Torchwood*-adjacent industry professionals with kind words to say about their snappy dialogue and creative plots. In the May/June and July/August 2010 issues, *Torchwood Magazine* published a two-part comic adventure written by David-Lloyd; the story re-wrote the events of *CoE* so that not only does Ianto know all along that he is going to die, but the ending reveals that an alternate version of Ianto survives in a parallel universe. The comic was promoted on the cover of both issues, with the first part endorsed as ““Back To Jack? Gareth David-Lloyd Comic Strip Exclusive!””, and the second part promising “The Funeral of Ianto Jones” – an event never depicted on-screen in *Children of Earth*.<sup>18</sup> In an interview

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<sup>18</sup> Many fans explicitly linked their displeasure with *Children of Earth* to the lack of closure over Ianto’s death compared with what was provided for Tosh and Owen’s deaths. Said one fan, *Torchwood* between seasons two and three “saw the characters dealing with their deaths - mentions of a funeral, Ianto's visions of them in *Lost Souls* [2008 radio play], Gwen's greeting every morning (who else loved that?) - which I

to promote the comic, David-Lloyd revealed that he had been contacted by the *Magazine* team to write the comic, and that he was proud it “incorporates a lot of characters who have been missed by the fans”. Further evidence that the comic was written with fans in mind was its cheeky acknowledgement of Jack’s failure to return dying Ianto’s declaration of love: the story featured parallel-universe-Ianto watching his original-universe death with the comment “Oh, look at that. Can’t even say it back.” A set of three novels, all set pre-*CoE* (“The Undertaker’s Gift” by Trevor Baxendale, “Risk Assessment” by James Gross, and the short story collection “Consequences” with contributions by David Llewellyn, Sarah Pinborough, Andrew Cartmel, James Moran, and Joseph Lidster) was released on October 15, 2009, and two original audiobooks set pre-*CoE* (“Ghost Train” and “Department X” both by James Goss) were announced in December 2010 and released March 7, 2011.

This placation of fans “non-controversially monetizes fandom” (Hills 2012, 414), and the BBC generated revenue by selling the novels, audiobooks, official magazine, “Yearbooks” (collected magazine issues), and comic books (collected magazine strips) through their own online store as well outlets including book stores, comic shops, iTunes, and Audible.com. Fans who had been disappointed with Ianto’s death had to purchase content in order to resolve their issues with the *Torchwood* narrative. But through monetizing “fandom”, the BBC was actually monetizing *the labour inherent in fandom*: specifically, the protest campaigns and complaints that constituted affective, immaterial, and digital fan labour. Although we can never know for sure, it stands to reason that without fans’ immediate and impassioned reactions to the events of *CoE*, there would have been no such “Take Over Torchwood” fanfiction contest or Gareth David Lloyd’s invitation to pen a comic story or the publication of more novels set pre-*CoE* – or, at least, they would not have been so conspicuously publicized. It was fans’ labour—writing letters and mailing postcards as part of the “Save The Coffee Boy” campaign, staging the

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think helped us to deal with it as well. Yet all we got for Ianto was a six-months-later jump.” (pinkalarmclock 2009)

impromptu real-world memorial at Mermaid Quay, their tireless attendance at convention Q&A sessions to ask Davies about his decisions—that proved there was demand for Ianto-centric tie-in materials in the first place.

Additionally, with respect to the focus of this chapter, much of the fan outrage was due to the fact that fans felt that they had been the true authors of Ianto, and that their creative and affective labour had not been properly acknowledged by the showrunner or producers. Ianto Jones began the series as little more than a background character; he had the least amount of screentime of any Torchwood team member in the first season, and he was limited to being quietly efficient at filing documents and making coffee. In the second season, due to positive fan response, his role was greatly increased; he was given a dry, sarcastic wit which resulted in the show's best one-liners and he started venturing out on dangerous missions alongside the rest of the team.

But he was still the most mysterious character on *Torchwood*, as one fan noted, which is why fans felt compelled to make him the favourite:

[T]he thing about Ianto Jones was that we were never really told that much about him. [...] We speculated and discussed what made him tick and what was going on behind those suits and that coffee fetish of his, we guessed at his family life and his romantic past... Ianto Jones, given the amount and size of the holes in his canonical character, became, for those that loved him, a guy we invented in our heads. That's what fandom, hardcore fandom, does. We fill in the gaps. We make the character our own, and the opportunity had never been so readily available as it was in Ianto Jones... We knew next to nothing, so we made him up.  
(tencrush 2009b)

Before the fans got hold of him, Ianto Jones was a flat character – and there is a long tradition of flat characters attracting readers' interests. Gardner is thinking specifically of Dickens' Little Nell when he writes “it is often the flattest of characters in serial literature that produced the greatest emotional response on the part of readers: after all, flat characters *require* an active readership to ‘bring to life’” (Gardner 2012, 57), but the same principle applies to Ianto. To Ianto's most ardent supporters, the character wasn't the product of Russell T. Davies or Julie Gardner or whoever happened to write that week's episode – in fact, quite the opposite. The single most important contribution that allowed fans to make Ianto their own was the freedom allowed by the show's lack of



coherent canon and “the total ABSENCE of any real overriding leadership within the *Torchwood* production team” (tencrush 2009b, emphasis in original). Fans also praised David-Lloyd for his willingness to develop Ianto in conjunction with the fans; on July 17, 2009, while he told fans to trust the writers and producers because “they created Ianto in the first place”, he credited fans with helping Ianto “grow into the character that he became in the end” (Wilkes 2009b).

Despite the confidence that fans ‘owned’ Ianto, they still clung to every canon hint of Ianto’s life that had been provided in seasons one and two—a casual remark about his father being a renowned “master tailor”, an offhand comment about his familiarity with Providence Park psychiatric hospital—and inferred and invented everything else. Some of their “fanon” even made it into the show: during season one, based on nothing more than a few scenes of Ianto preparing beverages, *Torchwood* fandom decided that he brewed the best coffee in the world, and that in-joke was embraced by the cast and crew to the extent that a season two episode established that Captain Jack had hired Ianto on the strength of his “wow”-worthy coffee. Fans had been excited when it was announced that *CoE* would feature the introduction of Ianto’s sister Rhiannon, and they had hoped that her presence would provide some much-needed Ianto backstory. However, Rhiannon’s major purpose with respect to Ianto’s canonical details was to reveal, after his death, that their father had not been a “master tailor”, but instead an average employee in the suit department of a Debenhams. Even after death, and perhaps even moreso than in life, Ianto remained a mystery. And fans felt betrayed; lamented one, “My character is dead; don’t make him an enigma, too” (rowanswhimsy 2009b). Ianto “belonged” to the fans, as they saw it, and they wanted him back; and these fans, just like the readers who wrote to Charles Dickens in the 1840s or to Sidney Smith in the 1920s or the viewers who sent missives to CBS and Irna Philips in the 1970s did so “because they understood *themselves* to have a role to play in the characters’ development” and what should happen to them in the narratives (Gardner 2012, 58). They were the “moral owners” of Ianto. And fans, consciously or not, mobilized the language of labour when they memorialized Ianto:

[A]s we learned more about Owen and Tosh, and saw Jack and Gwen develop a bit more and go through ups and downs, we wanted to know about this mysterious background character. We made up ideas and speculated about him, we thought he was really cool and snarky and mysterious and pretty. But we never got the development with him like we did with any of the other characters. And so we waited. And we kept waiting. And then he died. Tosh's character sort of plateaued, at least with the developments she'd been given, and Owen had also sort of plateaued in a way, and so their deaths were a bit less painful (Sort of. Not really.), but Ianto was completely open, he was unexplored. That's why his death affected everyone so much. [...]

I think fandom has done most of the work on Ianto and that quite a few of the aspects that most people assume are canon (Ianto being the archivist is the biggest one) are actually totally fan-created and not in the show at all. Most of Ianto's character was created by fans... [T]he show didn't do a whole lot. (nothing-rhymes-with-grantaire 2012)

As fans understood it, *they* had been the ones who put in the effort to bring Ianto to life: they did “most of the work”, they “fill[ed] in the gaps” and “invented” him and “made him up”, while “the show didn't do a whole lot”. The fans did *Torchwood's* job themselves. By fleshing out Ianto's character through forum exchanges, fanfiction, in-jokes, and more, fans engaged in what Abigail De Kosnik has identified as the labour of “customization and personalization” that

makes mass-media productions more engaging to them and others in their taste culture or demographic and increases those fans' commitment to the mass-media texts that were initially found at least somewhat lacking, frustrating, or unsatisfactory (and therefore ripe for fans' tailoring or supplementing). (De Kosnik 2013b)

*Torchwood* fans customized and personalized the show for themselves – if the show wouldn't give Ianto a backstory, then fans would create one for him so detailed and appropriate that aspects would eventually be elevated to canon. De Kosnik also points out that by doing so, fans become “more enmeshed in the logic of the marketplace... for in dedicating their own effort and energy to mass media, they increase the likelihood that they will stay invested in and involved” for longer than they would have if the show fulfilled all the desires in the first place and had not required their labour (De Kosnik 2013b). *Torchwood* fandom abounds with anecdotes from viewers who were frustrated by the show and “only watched it for Ianto” or only purchased tie-in novels and radio

plays because they hoped it would have more Ianto-centric content. And fans were aware that their labour to create Ianto constituted an investment—emotionally, affectively, monetarily—as evidenced by this following exchange in the comment section of the *Entertainment Weekly* interview (Ausiello 2009) in which Davies lectured fans “if you can’t handle drama you shouldn’t watch it”:

RTD may sit down and create new characters and new stories, but why should I bother watching and investing in them when I know he’ll just kill them off on a whim when he’s bored one day? Thanks, but no thanks.

(Mary Beth)

what do you mean “investing in them” you did not put in any money to pay any actors. Sitting on your (probably fat) butt watching a TV show is not investing in anything.

(Schick)

Time is an investment. Emotions is [*sic*] an investment. Money paid for DVD, books, audio-books, audio plays, conventions, and such = investments. Energy expended in forums talking about the show and promoting it to people who haven’t watched and helping to grow the fandom also adds up to an investment. [...] [Davies] killed CoE for me when he so carelessly and uselessly got rid of one (and only remaining) of my favorite character. So guess what? My investments will now go elsewhere.

(Tay)

Fans recognized that they had put labour into *Torchwood*, and they were not pleased when their work not only went unacknowledged by the showrunner and network executives, but was also actively ignored, downplayed, and ridiculed by Davies himself.

After the initial shock and outrage over Ianto’s death wore off, some fans’ reactions turned cynical, and they joked that the BBC would remind them to “please be sure to buy the tie-in novels which we will set during a time when he was alive so that fans can fork over some more time and \$\$\$ to get to know him” (rowanswhimsy 2009c). They weren’t wrong. On July 8, 2009, in response to a fan who complained that Jack in *CoE* was acting rudely and out of character to Ianto, James Moran wrote “keep watching. And read my story in *Torchwood: Consequences* when it’s out in October!”; he later clarified, “[I]t may have looked like I was randomly pimping the *Consequences* book for no reason - it was meant as a partial response to the general ‘when can we have stuff where Jack and Ianto care about each other’. There is Stuff [*sic*] in my story, which is

why I mentioned it...” (Moran 2009b, Moran 2009c). But as discussed earlier, the BBC’s provision of such additional content is “[n]ot simply about serving fans; it is also about seeking to manage and protect the brand value of a TV series” (Hills 2012, 409). And Brand *Torchwood* needed to be protected, because a fourth season was on its way: *Torchwood: Miracle Day*, announced on August 7, 2010, was a ten-episode series co-produced by the BBC and U.S. premium cable network Starz and broadcast between July and September 2011, which saw the *Torchwood* team leave Wales and head to America. The show’s previously-loyal audience could no longer be guaranteed, as fans were vocal in their promises to actively avoid any further seasons: read one eulogy/call-to-action circulated within fandom, “*Children of Earth* killed a wonderful show. *Torchwood* died when Ianto did” (chryssalys 2009).

A key aspect of *Torchwood* was its visible queerness (Vermeulen 2013), and one of the main complaints over Ianto’s death in *CoE* was a general fan consensus that the series had not “lived up to its billing as providing positive portrayals of gay men but rather privileg[ed] the heterosexual relationship of Gwen and her husband over the relationship between Jack and Ianto” (Cubbison 2011, 140–141). While many of the tie-ins released after *CoE* had placed greater emphasis on Ianto, the most significant “Janto” action came in the form of a radio play. Three “Lost Files” radio plays were publicized and recorded in May 2011—nine months after the first announcement of *Miracle Day*—and broadcast July 11–July 13, 2011 in the days leading up to the UK premiere of *Miracle Day* on July 14. The first two episodes (“The Devil and Miss Carew” by Rupert Laight and “Submission” by Ryan Scott”) were set pre-*CoE*, and featured Jack, Ianto, and Gwen in fairly standard “alien of the week” adventures. However, the third radio play (“The House of the Dead” by James Goss) appeared to be set pre-*CoE* until the twist ending revealed that it was set six months after Ianto’s death, and that the Ianto in this play was a ghost. Although the play’s emotional finale required Ianto to sacrifice himself and die (again) to save the world by closing Cardiff’s Rift once and for all, the play reunited Jack and Ianto post-*CoE* and finally allowed them to exchange declarations of love:

IANTO: “I gotta go!”

JACK: “Ianto, no! I never said it properly before.”

IANTO: “It doesn't need saying.”

JACK: “Yes, it does! *Ianto Jones, I love you!*”

IANTO: “And I love you too, Jack!” (pause) “Right then, let's get a move on.”  
(pause) “Goodbye, Jack.”

“The House of the Dead” provided closure to the death of Ianto, even giving him the dramatic, action-packed death that fans believed he had been denied in *CoE*; typical fan responses were along the lines of “the previous death was not only fast, it was like WTF? he's dead?! this is much better!” (beesandbrews 2011) and applauded Ianto getting his overdue “honest to god heroes ending” (csmars 2011) which “helps salve some open wounds” (angtosaur 2011). More significantly, however, Ianto encouraging Jack to “move on” can be read as a message from *Torchwood* producers to *Torchwood* fans: the play “paratextually implies that fans should now, once and for all, let go of the past and move forward into a new chapter alongside the brand”—permanently closing the Rift in Cardiff cleared the way for Jack and Gwen to leave Wales and head to America in *Miracle Day*—and discourages further fan speculation while encouraging, and perhaps even enforcing, closure (Hills 2012, 420). Fans realized this as well. Some were pleased, expressing relief that “[a]fter two years of being bitter about how the show ended I can say that this was just what I needed and what the characters deserved” (codename\_sherry 2011), but others had more trouble with the resolution:

OMG so conflicted...love that Jack admits the only person he wanted to see was Ianto, the big ILU exchange, Ianto getting the heroic moment we thought he didn't get in CoE but...seems like they are trying to make closure for J/I and dammit that irks me cause I want him back or at least Jack being upset for a loooooong time, oh go to hell BBC!!!! (wounded\_melody 2011)

While attempting to downplay *Torchwood* fans' claims of authorship and re-establish Davies' position as the all-powerful auteur, the BBC also “fanaged” protest campaigns by mollifying fans with additional material they could purchase to ‘fix’ their show – and of course, the demand for these tie-ins was proven by the fans' campaigns in the first place. In the case of Ianto Jones and *Torchwood*, the BBC harnessed the market potential of fan labour to produce tie-in materials and generate revenue from upset viewers, and thus

attempted to protect their brand by constraining any further fan disgruntlement while encouraging interest in the upcoming Ianto-less *Miracle Day*. When faced with unhappy fans, the BBC profited by making them *happy*. In her work on affect, Sara Ahmed (2010) theorizes about the human desire for happiness and states

[w]e can be happily affected in the present of an encounter; you are affected positively by something, even if that something does not present itself as an object of consciousness. To be affected in a good way can survive the coming and going of objects. (23)

Ahmed uses the example of pleasurable memories of a fruit when it's out of season, but I would like to argue that Ianto Jones is a similar example (fruit puns aside). Fans had been "happily affected" by *Torchwood* and Ianto, and their labour—both affective (authoring through fanon) and economic (purchasing *Torchwood* products)—was a response to that positive encounter. But for many fans, *CoE* was a drastic departure from their original encounter. License-holders of the *Torchwood* franchise don't make money from angry viewers boycotting their products; they make money from happy fans purchasing DVDs, novels, comics, magazines, and all other tie-ins and merchandise. If *Torchwood* was no longer a happy object for fans, and thus no longer a source of pleasure for their valuable customer base, that would negatively affect their bottom line: hence the "fanagement". By releasing more Ianto-centric material and placating fans, the BBC clearly attempted to turn unhappy fans into happy—or at least pacified—ones; Ianto was restored as a source of happiness, even if he was no longer available in future canon. Fans were affected in a "good" way that could survive Ianto being gone. As Ahmed warns, "this does not mean that the objects one recalls as being happy always stay in place" (2013, 23) – for some fans, as evidenced above, *Torchwood* died with Ianto, and thus their pleasurable associations of the show pre-*CoE* were forever tainted by the narrative of the miniseries. However, "if we think of instrumental goods as objects of happiness then important consequences follow. Things become good, or acquire their value as goods, insofar as they point toward happiness" (Ahmed 2010, 26). It was in the BBC's best financial interests to ensure that the *Torchwood* brand pointed towards happiness, and it is for those reasons that the *Torchwood* franchise appropriated and monetized fans' affective labour.

## 4 Fan Activism as Labour – “Save Our Show”

In contrast to the previous chapter, which explored fan activism in the context of protests when fans and producers hold markedly different views on the ideal creative direction of the show, this chapter is concerned with occasions upon which fans and media producers work together towards the same goal of saving a TV show from cancellation. As opposed to fans aiming campaigns at a program’s showrunners and/or creative team to express their displeasure with ongoing or upcoming storylines, character development (or lack thereof), or casting decisions, “Save Our Show” campaigns typically target and demonize the networks that have cancelled the show, and the show’s producers typically align themselves with fan efforts.

This chapter will begin with a history of “Save Our Show” campaigns, tracing the evolution from early organized letter-writing campaigns to more recent trends for fans to “sell their labour to advertisers as a more effective way to negotiate for desired content” (Savage 2014, 2.3). Using the example of *Firefly* and “The Browncoat Invoice”, this section will then move towards a discussion of affective involvement and immaterial/digital labour and an exploration of the ways in which fan labour is positioned and repurposed by television creators. Finally, through a case study of the successful fan campaign to prolong the life of *Chuck*, this chapter will argue that television producers both directly and indirectly utilize and monetize fans’ affective involvements and sense of ownership over the initial fan object.

### 4.1 A history of “save our show” campaigns

*Star Trek* (CBS, 1966–1968) was the first television program to inspire fans to boldly go where no fan had gone before: into a large-scale organized campaign to save a favourite show from cancellation.<sup>19</sup> In late 1967, rumours circulated that the series would be

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<sup>19</sup> There is some evidence to indicate the very first anti-cancellation campaign occurred even earlier; the radio soap opera *Guiding Light* was “dropped briefly” in 1941, but 75,000 individual letters “forced the sponsor to reinstate it” (see Cantor and Pingree 1983, 97). However, this was not an organized campaign, for reasons detailed in the previous section on the history of soap opera fan involvement.

cancelled after its second season, and fans mobilized to create the “Save *Star Trek*” letter-writing campaign. *Star Trek* creator Gene Roddenberry later described the campaign as “a highly articulate and passionate loyal viewing audience participat[ing] in what is probably the most massive anti-network programming campaign in television history” (Tulloch and Jenkins 1995, 9). An early network press release claims that NBC received more than 114,667 letters, and later estimates by the network put the total just under 500,000 letters (Tulloch and Jenkins 1995, 9). As a result, NBC renewed *Star Trek* for a third season, delivering the news live on-air after the episode broadcast on March 1, 1968: “And now an announcement of interest to all viewers of *Star Trek*. We are pleased to tell you that *Star Trek* will continue to be seen on NBC Television. We know you will be looking forward to seeing the weekly adventure in space on *Star Trek*” (Poe 1998, 116). Ironically, although this was intended to end the influx of letters being sent to the network, it then prompted a surge of “thank-you” letters from fans (Poe 1998, 117). The 1968 book *The Making of Star Trek*, co-authored by Roddenberry, explained that the campaign “serves as a graphic reminder to the networks that people like to believe that they have a voice in affairs that concern them, and will express that voice, sometimes in staggering proportions” (Tulloch and Jenkins, 1995 9). Or as Betty Jo Trimble, a key organizer of the campaign, proclaimed: “And so a major triumph of the consumer public over the network and over the stupid Nielsen ratings was accomplished through advocacy letter-writing” (qtd. in Tulloch and Jenkins 1995, 9). The *Star Trek* letter-writing campaign provided a model for subsequent attempts at letter campaigns as viewer activism (Tulloch and Jenkins 1995, 28).

*Cagney & Lacey* (CBS, 1981–1988), the groundbreaking police procedural centered on two female friends, premiered in March 1981 to low ratings, and was cancelled before the end of its first season. Dorothy Swanson, a school teacher from Virginia, spearheaded a letter-writing campaign; she encouraged fans to “write to the network executives, but if they don’t read their mail, write to your newspapers, too. Write to the *New York Times*, the *L.A. Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*. Write to your television critic” (Brower 1992, 169). Swanson estimates she directly inspired 500 letters, and the campaign as a whole is estimated to have resulted in the mailing of 10,000 letters (Brower 1992, 170). *Cagney & Lacey* was renewed for a second season, and it went on to



run for seven seasons in total. The show's ratings never improved drastically, and it was purely fan support that kept the show alive despite the yearly "ritualized cancellations" (Brower 1992, 170). It was *Cagney & Lacey*'s fourth attempted cancellation, in 1985, that inspired Swanson to found the non-profit fan activist organization Viewers For Quality Television (VQT) (Brower 1992, 170). VQT successfully fought to rescue other beloved shows, generating thousands of letters for shows such as *St. Elsewhere* (NBC, 1982–1988), *Designing Women* (CBS, 1986–1993), *Quantum Leap* (NBC, 1989–1993), and *Party of Five* (FOX, 1994–2000). The VQT actively campaigned until 2000, when Swanson shut down the group, citing concerns that the Internet was replacing their traditional methods: "There was a time when campaigning for a show had meaning, but because it can now be done with a click of a mouse it really has lost its specialness" (Pearson 2010a, 15). Swanson's quote is particularly telling in the context of this project, as her nostalgia for the "specialness" of early fan activism ties into aspects of affective and digital labour; to Swanson, and perhaps to other disillusioned VQT members, the inherent value and cultural capital in offline work was lost when campaigning moved onto the Internet.

The most famous example of early online fan activism was the fan support for ABC's drama *Twin Peaks* (1990–1991). The discussion group alt.tv.twinpeaks formed a committee titled C.O.O.P ("Citizens Opposed to the Offing of *Peaks*"), and fans used the message board as a "rallying point" for national efforts to save the show (Jenkins 1992, 79). Posters circulated the addresses, phone numbers and fax numbers of network executives, and encouraged fans to write letters of support. Their campaign met with mixed success: while it succeeded in convincing ABC to air the second half of season two, the show was not renewed for a third season, and *Twin Peaks* famously ended on an unresolved cliff-hanger (Bianculli 2010, 302-303). Unsuccessful online fan campaigns included letter-writing movements in support of *My So-Called Life* (1994) (Shaw 1995); the "Barcode" campaign, which encouraged removing the barcodes from consumer products and mailing them to the network, to save FOX's *Dark Angel* (2000–2002) (<http://dabarcodes.tripod.com>); letter- and email-writing efforts to secure a second season of *Wonderfalls* (FOX 2004) (<http://www.savewonderfalls.com>); and even a pre-emptive campaign to save Joss Whedon's *Dollhouse* (2009–2010) from cancellation *launched*

*before the show even aired* did not convince FOX to extend the show's lifespan (Wortham 2008). A particularly exhaustive yet unsuccessful campaign was the mobilization around Whedon's supernatural drama *Angel* (The WB, 1999–2004), a spin-off of his successful *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* (The WB, 1997–2003). Whedon had ended *Buffy* specifically in order to concentrate on *Angel*, only for the show to be cancelled despite its position as the second-highest rated show on The WB Network. Fans organized numerous campaigns online, wrote letters to media outlets and the network, ran advertisements in trade publications such as *Variety*, rented a mobile billboard to drive around Los Angeles with the message “We Will Follow Angel to Hell... or Another Network”, and organized a rally at the WB studio in California, all to no avail (Millman 2010, 29–30).

Fan campaigns to un-cancel shows have sometimes had success in securing additional episodes to resolve cliffhanger endings, such as the campaigns for *The Sentinel* (UPN, 1996–1999), *La Femme Nikita* (CTV, 1997–2001), and *The Magnificent Seven* (CBS, 1998–1999). The 2008 campaign to “Save Spashley”, named after the groundbreaking lesbian couple Spencer and Ashley from the cancelled teen drama *South of Nowhere* (The N, 2005–2008), resulted in the network creating two exclusive webisodes that not only negated the series finale by reuniting the couple, but also flash-forwarded five years into the future to show the women happily married and expecting their first child together (“Save Spashley” 2008). Fans of *The Borgias* (Showtime, 2011–2013) sent sardines to the network and rented a plane with a “Save The Borgias” banner when the series was cancelled after only three of its planned four seasons had been produced; these efforts succeeded in getting the two-hour series finale script released as an e-book (Cornet 2013, Goldberg 2013). And notably, *Jericho* (2006–2008) was saved after its first season through its “Nuts For Jericho” campaign that mobilized viewers to write letters, send postcards, and mail 40,000 pounds of nuts to CBS headquarters. When the show was cancelled again after a truncated second season, fans organized through SaveJericho.info and spent \$7,500 to rent a giant billboard in L.A and \$11,180 to buy full-page ads in *Variety* and *The Hollywood Reporter*; while the series was not renewed, *Jericho* was eventually continued in a graphic novel (Whitesell 2008).

Some campaigns have helped shows avoid cancellation by getting picked up by a different network: sending Tabasco bottles helped *Roswell* (1999–2002) transfer from WB to UPN for a third and final season; fan support ensured the continuation of NBC's drama *The Pretender* (1996–2000) through two TV movies made by TNT in 2001 (Kiesewetter 2000); and while early attempts by fans of *Arrested Development* (2003–2006) were unable to convince FOX to continue the series, continued fan enthusiasm led to Netflix reviving the show in 2013. In May 2014, cult comedy *Community* (2009–present) was cancelled by NBC, but Yahoo! Screen picked up the show for a sixth season to be streamed online in fall 2014 (Hibberd 2014).

Perhaps the two best-known un-cancellation campaigns are those of *Firefly* (FOX, 2002) and *Veronica Mars* (UPN 2004–2006, The CW 2006–2007), which to date are the only two television programs to have made the transition from cancelled series to Hollywood feature film based on fan intervention.

*Firefly* was a genre-bending space-western television series created by writer and director Joss Whedon, which followed the exploits of Captain Mal Reynolds (Nathan Fillion) and his ragtag crew of outlaws onboard the Firefly-class spaceship “Serenity” as they struggled to make a living against the backdrop of the star system’s oppressive Alliance government. FOX ordered fourteen episodes for the first season, consisting of a two-hour pilot and thirteen one-hour episodes. *Firefly* premiered on September 20, 2002, to critical acclaim but disappointing ratings; the show was cancelled in December 2002 after only eleven episodes had aired.

In reaction to what they viewed as an unjust cancellation, die-hard *Firefly* fans, calling themselves “Browncoats” after the nickname given to Mal and his freedom-fighting cohorts during the galactic Unification war, mounted an online campaign to bring back the show. Browncoats wrote letters and postcards of protest, hosted local viewing parties, and raised money to run an ad in *Variety* magazine (Telotte 2010, 116–117). When *Firefly* was released on DVD, pre-orders pushed it to #2 on Amazon.com’s best-selling chart (gambit3 2003). Over the next two years, *Firefly: The Complete Series* remained consistently in the top 100 most popular DVD purchases. Fans organized mass

“boycott” days, where Browncoats would purchase multiple copies of the DVD sets in order to help the show surge up the rankings; one such mass buy was in March 2004, when FireflyFans.net raised \$14,000 to purchase 250 sets that they donated to the Navy (Mueller 2004). Throughout these various fan campaigns, Whedon and the cast and crew regularly appeared at comic and genre conventions throughout the United States to talk about Firefly and thank the fans whose DVD purchases helped them stay “faithful” and “positive” that the show would return (*Done the Impossible: The Fans’ Tale of Firefly & Serenity* 2006). The strength of these DVD sales in early 2004 convinced Universal Studios to green-light a *Firefly* movie, titled *Serenity*.

At a fan convention held after the movie was announced but before it was filmed, Whedon enthused:

On a lot of levels, the fans’ involvement has helped because, first of all, Universal has a bottom line, and the fact that the *Firefly* DVD sales are huge, that they would come and see these booths [at fan conventions] and be like ‘they’re advertising a movie we haven’t made yet!’ excited them very much, gave them confidence in something that isn’t a normal major release. (*Done the Impossible: The Fans’ Tale of Firefly & Serenity* 2006)

Throughout all stages of the filming process, Universal organized a series of advance screenings across North America. Titled “Can’t Stop The Signal” screenings—named after a triumphant line in the film that also served as the film’s tagline—these special events began with a recorded video message from Whedon during which he asked fans to spread positive word of mouth about the movie in order to keep it in theatres. In the video, later included as a bonus feature on the DVD release of *Serenity*, he also thanked fans for their support because:

This movie should not exist. Failed TV shows don’t get made into major motion pictures, unless the creator, the cast, and the fans believe beyond reason. It’s what I’ve seen, it’s what I’ve felt, in the DVD sales, at the [conventions] and booths run by fans, the websites, the fundraisers. All the work the fans have done has helped make this movie. It is, in an unprecedented sense, your movie... Because remember, they tried to kill us. They did kill us. And here we are. We have done the impossible.

Fans embraced “their” movie, as evidenced by the fact that the screenings—where fans paid to watch an incomplete rough cut of the film—sold out in every location. When

*Serenity* hit theatres on September 30, 2005, it opened at #2, making \$10.1 million over the weekend (“*Serenity*” n.d.). While the movie did not recoup its \$40 million budget at the box-office, it broke even, and then became profitable, on DVD. Two years after its initial DVD launch, a two-disc “Special Edition” version of *Serenity* was released, owing to the consistently high sales figures for the original edition. Whedon made the announcement on his own website, and told fans “maybe a little self-back-patting is in order for you guys. Way to keep her in the air” (Whedon 2007).

The only other show-turned-movie as a result of fan campaigning is *Veronica Mars*, a critically-acclaimed highschool-noir detective series cancelled in 2007 after three seasons. Fans congregated on SaveVeronicaMars.tv to sign petitions, send emails to network executives, and organize the sending of 10,000 Mars chocolate bars to the network accompanied by the message “*Veronica Mars*: More Addictive Than Chocolate! Satisfy our craving for Season 4!” The show was not renewed for a fourth season, but creator Rob Thomas wrote a script for a potential feature film, and in March 2013, six years after the series’ cancellation, he launched an online fundraising campaign through Kickstarter.com to produce a *Veronica Mars* movie. The goal was \$2 million, which the campaign reached in less than 10 hours; by the end of the month-long campaign, it had cleared \$5.7 million in funding. The campaign broke Kickstarter records for the shortest amount of time to raise \$1 million, highest goal ever achieved, greatest number of individual contributors, and largest film project in Kickstarter history (Thomas 2013). Production on the film began in summer 2013, and the feature film was released on March 14, 2014, one year and one day after the Kickstarter launch. In this case, fans themselves directly financed the production of a film based on a cancelled TV series; rewards were also offered for different levels of contributions, ranging from \$10 for an emailed copy of the script up to \$10,000 for a cameo with a single speaking line. Joss Whedon, no stranger to the struggles of cancelled cult shows, expressed “unfettered joy” at the *Veronica Mars* Kickstarter success, telling BuzzFeed

I understand that it feels not as pure, and that the presence of a studio makes it disingenuous somehow... But people clearly understood what was happening and just wanted to see more of the thing they love. To give them that opportunity doesn’t feel wrong. (Vary 2013)

The *Veronica Mars* film was released in March 2014 to overwhelmingly enthusiastic reaction from fans and generally positive reviews from mainstream critics (Gilman 2014). Fan studies scholars have raised concerns about such “fan-ancing” and its potential for financial exploitation of fans, but the precedent set by *The Veronica Mars Movie Project* is new enough that its effects and impact remain to be seen.<sup>20</sup> Several prominent fan studies scholars involved in a roundtable discussion conducted after the Kickstarter announcement (Chin et al. 2014) were divided on whether or not the experiment was exploitive of fans; some contended that the project was no different from fans paying in advance for merchandise, while others argued that this set a dangerous precedent for industry heavyweights to double their profits. However, all participants agreed that fan-ancing comes with the caveat that fans’ expectations must be met—no small feat considering that “giving the fans what they want” may include trying to please different fans with different opinions— and that power dynamics are complicated when direct financial accountability comes into play.

In any narration of the history of fan campaigns to un-cancel television shows, it is important to consider how fan activism is a form of labour. And when the issue of fan labour comes up, it is necessary to see how that labour is recognized by producers and corporations. In almost all of these above instances – and most visibly with *Firefly* and *Veronica Mars* – the shows’ cast and crew positioned themselves as fans of the show and then, through overt invitations to fans to participate in the “production” aspects of the fan object (which are themselves invested with an affective charge or payoff), proceeded to draw on and repurpose their loyal audiences’ affective involvement and labour.

## 4.2 Affective/immaterial labour

Fan campaigns are born of and driven by passion for the fan object, and I argue that the efforts fans go to in these campaigns are a form of labour; Abigail De Kosnik, among

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<sup>20</sup> “Fan-ancing” and its impact is related to, though at this stage beyond, the scope of my project. For additional commentary on the *Veronica Mars* project by noted media scholars, see criticism by Stanfill (2013), McNutt (2013) and Scott and Pebler (2013), and defence by Chin (2013), Jones (2013), and Mittel (2013).

others, contends that fan activity is a form of work because it involves active creation, not just passive reception (De Kosnik 2013, 99). In the context of fan activism, this work does not produce physical or material goods, and thus represents immaterial labour. Fannish passion, in the forms of “energy and time” dedicated to “discussing and consecrating love” of a fan object, is a form of immaterial labour known as affective labour (Gregg 2009, 209). A study of college-aged social activists conducted by Wilson and Curnow used the framework of affective labour, as the authors found that “[t]he dialectical concept of affective labour... more accurately represents the nuanced activities and sentiments of activists” (Wilson and Curnow 2013, 580).

Scholars such as Mario Lazzarato, Michael Hardt, and Hardt & Antonio Negri developed the concept of “immaterial labour” to explain new forms of post-Fordist capitalist production that have emerged since the late twentieth century; instead of focusing on material forms of production, these works have shifted the focus to less visible forms of work in service, creative, and communication industries (McCosker and Darcy 2003, 1267), otherwise defined as “the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion” (Lazzarato 1996, 132).

Melissa Gregg (2009) has identified two distinct directions in affective labour studies: the long history of affective labour studies in feminist research, and the more recent focus of affective labour as work performed by fans.

Drawing upon the former use of affective labour, Emma Dowling (2012) has highlighted what Hardt and Negri (2004, 108) identified as the “service with a smile” aspect of affective labour. Dowling’s work has focused on the role of affective labour in “producing an experience”, and she uses the example of waitressing to argue that affective labour involves managing people’s expectations. In the context of fan campaigns, shaping experiences and managing expectations is done by content creators. Michael Hardt acknowledges affective labour’s place within the feminist canon even though his work with Negri developed affective labour studies in the second direction:

I do not mean to argue that affective labour itself is new or that the fact that affective labour produces value in some sense is new. Feminist analyses in particular have long recognized the social value of caring labour, kin work, nurturing, and maternal activities. What are new, on the other hand, are the extent to which this affective immaterial labour is now directly productive of capital and the extent to which it has become generalized through wide sectors of the economy. In effect, as a component of immaterial labour, affective labour has achieved a dominant position of the highest value in the contemporary informational economy. (Hardt 1992, 97)

Negri and Hardt define affective labour as “immaterial labour [that] involves the production and manipulation of affect and requires (virtual or actual) human contact” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 292). The labour may be “corporeal and affective”, but it is immaterial “in the sense that its products are intangible, a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction or passion” – emotions not unfamiliar in a fanish context, despite the anger and frustration also felt when a favourite show is cancelled (Hardt and Negri 2000, 292). Similarly, in an examination of immaterial labour in the online environment, Terranova describes affective labour as a combination of free/unpaid, self-taught skills and “forms of labour we do not immediately recognise as such: chat, real-life stories, mailing lists, amateur newsletters, and so on” (Terranova 2012, 38). Every action Terranova lists here is typical of any fanish space.

Key to the applicability of this concept to this project is Hardt and Negri’s argument that affective labour produces “social networks, forms of community, [and] biopower [where] the instrumental action of economic production has been united with the communicative action of human relations” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 293). Fan activism requires the formation and maintenance of relationships between fans, network executives, and content creators; as stated earlier in this project, Hardt and Negri’s definition can be applied to fandom, particularly as it is set within the overarching structure of capitalism. This intersection between for-free fandom and for-profit corporations is discussed in the work of Terranova, who argues that affective labour is marked by the “creation of monetary value out of knowledge/culture/affect” (Terranova 2012, 38).



Hardt specifically singles out the entertainment industry as being particularly “focused on the creation and manipulation of affect” (Hardt 1999, 95). It is this affect, encouraged by the industry, which is the driving force behind fan campaigns. Because fan labour is motivated by passion, not profit, it is immaterial and affective; fans simply want to unleash “the best and highest promise of their favored objects” (De Kosnik 2013, 103). In fact, as Abigail De Kosnik explains,

fans often think that it is official producers’ profit-seeking motives that lead them to make incorrect or less-than-optimal decisions about their products, leaving fans to salvage or modify the products to which they have become attached, spurred by love and frustration, not by money. (De Kosnik 2013, 109)

The fact that fans can come to believe that the people in charge of their favourite programs are wrong, and that it is up to fans to “save” the show from the mistakes made by the producers, shows that fans feel a sense of ownership of their beloved television object. Sharon Marie Ross concludes that online fandom fosters a sense of “shared ownership” over a program, leading fans to feel more invested in “laying claim” to their show (Ross 2008, 231), similar to the previously explored concepts of “moral ownership” over serial narratives. Any sense of ownership necessarily derives from an existing affective investment in the fan object; putting the time and effort into inventing a backstory for Ianto Jones or posting on forums about the illogicality of the current Luke/Noah storyline on *ATWT* strengthens fans’ case for ‘owning’ the initial fan object.

Another way in which fans “lay claim” is through becoming more educated about how the television industry works. For example, ratings reform has long been the subject of fan discussion. The audience measurements standards developed by Nielsen Media Research—often simply called “Nielsen ratings”—have a de facto monopoly in the television ratings industry; if Nielsen’s data reveals that a particular program is not reaching its ratings goals, then that show’s future is immediately called into question. However, Nielsen ratings have several key flaws—examined as far back as 1992 in Henry Jenkins’ *Textual Poachers*, but acknowledged as long ago as the original *Star Trek* campaign when Betty Jo Trimble grumbled about “stupid Nielsen ratings”—which fans of at-risk television shows are eager to discuss. Fans’ affective labour takes the form of becoming knowledgeable about the television industry. More recently, online tools

have enabled people not otherwise involved in the television industry to research Nielsen's methodologies, and have helped foster discussion around the legitimacy of a measurement system that was sluggish to take into account newer technologies such as DVRs and online streaming (Ross 2008, 220). As evidenced by the upcoming *Chuck* case study in this chapter, fans position themselves as armchair 'experts' on the television industry, and freely offer their advice—and labour—to networks and industry professionals.

Labour adds value to a product, and affective/immaterial labour is no exception; Hardt argues that affective labour is “one of the highest value-producing forms of labour from the point of view of capital” (Hardt 1999, 90), and “can be subsumed into capitalist circuits through the creation of brand value” (Wilson and Curnow 2013, 571). According to De Kosnik, fan labour “merge[s] with the stream of official advertising and promotion that surrounds any given product”, and can in fact “ramp up the buzz and reputation of the product, and it can reinforce the pull or allure that the product exerts on would-be consumers” (De Kosnik 2013, 109).

Along with this added value comes the potential for fan labour to be exploited: the fans give their labour for free while corporations reap the financial benefits. However, Mark Andrejevic (2013) points out that there are challenges in associating fan labour with exploitation: doing so, he argues, “takes a critical concept traditionally associated with industrial labour's sweatshop conditions and transposes it into a realm of relative affluence and prosperity—that is, a realm inhabited by those with the time and access to participate” (153). (Of course, with this generalization he is making several assumptions about an imagined commonality of 'fans' and their socio-economic conditions.) He also points out the “lack of coercion and the pleasure of participation” inherent in fandom (Andrejevic 2013, 153), conditions exemplified by Nancy Baym and Robert Burnett's (2009) findings in a study of indie music fans who promote their favourite bands:

We are loathe to dismiss [fans'] claims of affective pleasure and the desire they feel to spread what brings them joy as evidence of exploitation. Their social response to the pleasures of music is situated in deeply meaningful social phenomena that hearken back to much earlier phases of musical history, phases before there was an industry, when music was always performed in communities

by locals for locals rather than by distant celebrities for adoring fans... To claim that these people are exploited is to ignore how much these other forms of capital matter in the well-being of well-rounded humans and to deny the capacity of these individuals to stop doing what they do... (Baym and Burnett 2009, 446)

There is however one notable exception to fans' willingness to let their affective labour go uncompensated: when their sense of ownership over a show clashes with the legal ownership. Although it was volunteer efforts by *Firefly*'s fans that enabled the creation of *Serenity*, the producers were also not afraid to reinforce their control over the media text. This complicated power structure ignited when a prominent fan artist, Susan Renée Tomb aka "11<sup>th</sup> Hour", created and sold *Serenity*-inspired clothing to other fans online before the movie was released. After the film was released, Universal Pictures sued her for copyright infringement and demanded \$9000 in retroactive licensing fees, even though her work had never directly used licensed images (Cochran 2008, 246–247). Although Tomb complied with the studio's cease-and-desist order<sup>21</sup>, the fan community was outraged. This post on Whedonesque.com is typical of responses to the news:

I feel so much anger over this, how much time, effort and love have Browncoats put into the cause over the past three years?? Without us, what would have gotten accomplished for Fox or Universal. [...] I can't believe that after all that we've done they would come back at us. I know someone is going to say "it's corporate, it's not personal, it's business." Well, great. We have been there for Joss and Chris B [*Christopher Buchanan, Serenity executive producer*] and the rest - how about them stepping up for ppl like 11th hour? How much energy did she put into her art in just promotional things for the dvd's and movie???

(whedonite37 2006)

This poster's invocation of Browncoats' affective investment—their "time, effort, and love"—combined with their belief that FOX/Universal would have accomplished nothing without the efforts of fans is reflective of the prevailing attitude in *Firefly* fandom prior to the 11<sup>th</sup> Hour lawsuit. Before Fox/Universal wielded their corporate power, *Firefly* fans considered themselves to be working in tandem with the media companies – as this poster puts it, fans had "been there" for the film's director and

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<sup>21</sup> An interesting aside: in 2009, Tomb was contracted by online pop culture retailer Quantum Mechanix Inc. (store.qmixonline.com) to produce designs for their line of officially licensed *Firefly*-themed merchandise (beth 2009).

producer, and it stood to reason that the license-holders would “step up” for the fans in return. But this cease-and-desist threat shattered the illusion of a harmonious partnership, and fans felt cheated and used. This controversy led a group of fans to launch [BrowncoatInvoice.com](http://BrowncoatInvoice.com), an itemized statement that included a log of over 28,000 billable “fan-hours” spent by fans to promote the film. According to their calculations, the monetary value of fans’ labour totaled over \$2.1 million. The site’s FAQ reads as follows:

Many Browncoats got to thinking about just how many hours they spent on helping to market and promote *Serenity*, in essence with the tacit agreement of Universal Pictures, if not their outright official encouragement.

Rather than responding in a manner which might antagonize Universal, we thought that asking fans to tally those hours and publishing the totals for all to see would be a gentler way to make both the specific point about Browncoat marketing for *Serenity* and the more general point about the relationship between producers of entertainment and their increasing (and knowing) reliance in the 21st century on fanbases to help promote that entertainment.

This site is not a screed against copyright or trademark law. [...] We simply believe that issues are raised in this area when a company knowingly has accepted the promotional work of fans.

In other words, this site should not be taken as an attempt to actually bill Universal Pictures for all of our time, energy, and effort, nor encouragement for any fan do try to do so. We just believe that there is a point to be made.  
(“The Browncoat Invoice” 2006)

Reaction across *Firefly* fandom to the Invoice was mixed. Some fans were eager to begin tallying their contributions to “charge” the studio:

I’ve done fan websites, modded/run official [*sic*] websites, podcasts, street teams, meetings with marketing execs, got on national tv promoting it, and more...erm...I’m just having trouble adding it all up, to be honest.  
(nixygirl 2006)

Does putting links and reviews and raves on your website count as billable hours?  
[...]

LOTS of people did/do this, driving people to the Uni site and also now to Amazon so they can buy the DVDs.

The studio is still benefitting from OUR work.

Hell, maybe the Done The Impossible guys should bill Fox and Universal for all of THEIR hard work promoting *Firefly* and *Serenity* with their documentary.

I don't know what's more shameful: Fox going after fans who are doing nothing but helping Fox/News Corporation make money off of a show that they didn't "get", hated, mishandled and killed? Or Universal, who BEGGED fans to help promote Serenity, and now are going after those same fans who aren't exactly making a mint off of the things like t-shirts.

Yeah, as a corporation, they have the right. But that doesn't make it right.  
(AmazonGirl 2006)

Other fans pointed out that it may have been a fair trade:

The fandom did benefit from Universal, let's not forget that. The studio praised the fans, built up their profile and helped to feed the myth that the fans led to Serenity being greenlit. It wasn't an [*sic*] one-sided relationship by any means.  
(Simon 2006)

[A]s incensed as I've been over this issue for the last few days, I think I'm getting some perspective. I don't fault Universal for the C&Ds, and I am coming to understand that Universal the Creative is probably in a different building than [*sic*] Universal the Legal Enforcers, so I can't completely fault the studio. In much the same way I got an education about box office numbers last fall, I feel I'm now getting an education about how the movie system works. They really don't care if we've thanked them. They don't care if many of us worked our butts off to do free promotion or that most vendors' motivations were to share the love, not make a buck. [...] It's a movie studio. Money talks. Nothing else ever will. That's why people say Hollywood has no soul, Hollywood is heartless, and Hollywood doesn't care about art, only the bottom-line. We should feel lucky that we got Serenity, and that they gave Joss free rein to make the movie he wanted. We don't have to thank them, because they don't really care if we're thankful. But we can be grateful that something in the universe lined up and we got the [movie].  
(Dizzy 2006)

And other fans said they felt fairly compensated because their labour gave them access to once-in-a-lifetime opportunities and experiences that wouldn't have otherwise been available:

I'm still trying to work out if I should submit my invoice. I moderated the US site for free which took hours every week due to troll problems, set up and ran the UK site for the movie on release for free, helped organise and sell out the UK screenings (twice - running the screening website for Universal) (for free), and lined the streets with fans at the London and Edinburgh premieres (for free), put people on MTV, and to be frank helped them win BBC Film of the Year etc. I shall bill them one million dollars, ah-ah-ah! Or a few thousand, anyway.

Of course, I'm not actually after payment at all. Universal gave allowed me [*sic*] to drink tequila with Nathan [*Fillion*], my friends and Joss [*Whedon*] for - like - 3 hours. Plus, free bar. Plus - and here's the thing - major motion picture.

I gave them my time. As a group, I think the Browncoats helped bring the studio an audience. I mean, 48% of the opening US weekend audience said they had seen *Firefly* before. That isn't an accident.

And I think that's a happy medium.  
(gossi 2006)

Whether or not Universal “knowingly... accepted the promotional work of fans” as the Browncoat Invoice and numerous fans charged, the existence of the controversy raises important questions about collaborative fan/producer partnerships – specifically, can they exist? In the context of *Serenity*, fans performed tasks typically fulfilled by professional marketers (creating advertisements, reviewing the series on Amazon, managing websites); crucially, they did so with no expectation of monetary compensation, and none was offered. In Bertha Chin’s analysis of the labour involved in managing fansites, she observes that site owners often “serve as grassroots campaigners, promoters, and sometimes even public relations officers, acting as liaisons between media producers, celebrities, or industry insiders and fandom in general” (Chin 2013, 0.1). Chin specifically looks at two prominent fansites—*Sherlockology* (<http://www.sherlockology.com>), dedicated to BBC’s *Sherlock* (2010–present); and *Galactica.tv* (<http://www.galactica.tv>), dedicated to the original (ABC, 1978–1979) and rebooted (Sci-Fi, 2004–2009) series of *Battlestar Galactica*—which are notable for being endorsed by the series’ production companies. Chin argues that it is important to consider fan agency in the decision to run a fansite; she maintains that “rather than merely performing labour for the industry, these fans are also acting as intermediaries for other fans”, and thus even though the labour is “continual and intensive”, the labour is not necessarily exploitive (Chin 2013, 4.14). Chin concludes that because her interviews with the teams behind *Sherlockology* and *Galactica.tv* did not reveal that they felt taken advantage of, this form of labour is “free” rather than “exploited”; she also notes that intangible rewards such as status, recognition, and friendships are highly valued by fans (Chin 2013, 6.2). However, I take issue with Chin’s framing of fan labour exclusively through the context of the gift economy – while I believe that is a valid way to approach

derivative fanworks, I am not convinced it is the most comprehensive framework in the context of fansites. Fansites such as Sherlockology have become the de-facto ‘official’ websites of the series, and thus perform the sort of promotional work that would ordinarily be performed by industry professionals hired by the show’s license-holders. FOX/Universal courted fans to promote *Serenity*; similarly, Sherlockology routinely works with the show’s production office and the BBC to disseminate news and information on their behalf. Chin seems to trust this sort of labour can’t be “exploited” because it’s from one group of fans to another and not from fans to fans on behalf of the industry; however, I believe it is important to consider the very real involvement of the industry in this form of exchange, especially considering their distinct lack of involvement in the time-honoured tradition of fanfiction, fanvids, *etc.*, which are traditionally distributed in the gift economy. While it is unlikely the copyright holders of *Battlestar Galactica* and *Sherlock* will mimic FOX/Universal and threaten legal action against the fans whose promotional activities they encouraged, the situations are comparable, and both involve fans performing labour that would be paid for under other conditions – whether fans feel exploited or not.

With these issues and examples in mind, I now move to a close examination of the extensive and innovative anti-cancellation campaign launched by fans of the TV series *Chuck* (NBC, 2007–2012). This case study will demonstrate the validity of considering fan activism as labour and will explore how TV producers both directly and indirectly utilize and monetize fans’ affective involvements and sense of ownership over the initial fan object for benefit of the industry.

### 4.3 Case Study: *Chuck* and “Finale and a Footlong”

*Chuck* is an hour-long action-comedy-drama series about computer nerd and slacker Chuck Bartowski (Zachary Levi) who becomes a CIA secret agent when he unwittingly receives an email that downloads the only remaining copy of the United States’ most classified spy secrets into his brain. The show chronicles Chuck’s evolution from hapless James Bond-wannabe to confident professional spy, all while he struggles to hold down his day job at big-box electronics retailer Buy More. The main cast also includes Chuck’s immature but faithful best friend Morgan Grimes (Joshua Gomez); Chuck’s government

handlers, gruff NSA Colonel John Casey (Adam Baldwin) and mysterious CSI Agent Sarah Walker (Yvonne Strahovski); affable Buy More manager Big Mike (Mark Christopher Lawrence) and eccentric employees Lester Patel (Vik Sahey) and Jeff Barnes (Scott Krinsky); and Chuck's overachieving sister Ellie (Sarah Lancaster) and her boyfriend Devon "Captain Awesome" Woodcomb (Ryan McPartlin).

Despite *Chuck*'s critical acclaim and substantial promotion from NBC, the quirky spy spoof never garnered the ratings the network hoped for. In April 2009, when NBC did not immediately announce a renewal for season three, fans swung into action to prevent the season two finale from becoming the series finale. Fansites promoted the usual tactics: sending letters and postcards to the network, voting in online polls, signing online petitions, starting "Save *Chuck*" Facebook groups and making the hashtag #savechuck the fifth-highest-trending topic on Twitter by the end of April (Lowery 2009; Rose 2012, 195). The show's co-creator, Josh Schwartz, also asked fans to send packages of Nerds candy to the network, in reference to Chuck's job as a member of Buy More's "Nerd Herd" technical support team (Itzkoff 2009).

But the campaign tactic with the most impact was the one that did something almost unprecedented in the history of fan efforts: through a strategy dubbed "Finale and a Footlong", *Chuck* supporters commanded the network's attention by courting one of its biggest advertisers, Subway restaurants.<sup>22</sup> According to TNS Media Intelligence, Subway was already in the process of increasing its ad spending on NBC; the company invested nearly \$22 million in 2007, upped to \$34.4 million the following year (Steinberg 2009). Subway's production integration deal with NBC had been glaringly apparent during *Chuck*'s second season: a subplot in "Chuck Versus The Third Dimension" featured the

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<sup>22</sup> The tactic of targeting advertisers directly was previously attempted by fans of *Farscape* after the show's cancellation on the Sci-Fi channel in 2003. According to Nina Lumpp, one of the co-founders of SaveFarscape.com, they had several advertisers, including UPS, Kia, and KFC, speak with Sci-Fi executives on fans' behalf (Wright 2004). KFC proved to be their most valuable ally after fans mailed thousands of dollars' worth of receipts back to the company; when a *Farscape* miniseries aired on Sci-Fi the following year, KFC created a *Farscape* screensaver available for download on their website accompanied by the text "KFC is a proud sponsor of the return of *Farscape* to Sci-Fi... We appreciate your patronage to KFC restaurants everywhere. Please enjoy the screensaver!" ("Farscape Screensaver" 2004)



main characters entering the “Subway Sprint” sandwich eating contest, and “Chuck Versus The First Kill” (Figure 10) contained a 45-second scene in which Morgan bribed his boss with a Sweet Onion Chicken Teriyaki footlong and then cheerily recited the “five-dollar foot long” marketing slogan.



**Figure 10:** Morgan bribes Big Mike with a Subway sandwich (source: *Chuck*, “Chuck Versus The First Kill”)

The “Finale and a Footlong” campaign, created by fan Wendy Farrington, involved buying sandwiches from Subway on the day of the upcoming season two finale on April 27, 2009 and writing “*Chuck* brought me here” on comment cards. The cast and crew quickly embraced what they deemed a “creative” and “grass-roots” effort and participated in the campaign; star Zachary Levi, who was a guest at the Starfury Convention in Birmingham, England on April 26, 2009, led hundreds of *Chuck* fans to a local Subway at lunchtime, and even stepped behind the counter to help assemble the sandwiches, not leaving until the last fan had been served. Wendy Farrington attended the convention, and introduced herself to Levi:

Levi was fascinated: “You started that? We never get to meet the people who start that.”

“Well”, she replied, “we never get to meet you either.” (Rose 2012, 195)

When Farrington journeyed to the Subway location with Levi, his introduction of her was met with wild applause from the audience, and he gave her a hug before donning the plastic gloves of the sandwich artists (Owens 2009). Said Levi after the stunt:

That people even take the time to start grassroots campaigns means I feel like it would be irresponsible not to do my part alongside them if that's how much they care about what we do. There are reasons beyond that – it's nice to be employed! - but more than that I think it's a responsibility to fight the good fight and fight for your fans because your fans are the only thing that keep you employed anyway. (qtd. in Bahar 2009)

Farrington was equally fearless in making connections with corporate spokespeople; the day after the April 27 finale, she was in touch with Mack Bridenbaker, the Associate PR Manager for Subway, who informed her of the campaign's impact (Farrington 2009). More difficult was talking to NBC executives: as she told one interviewer, "there was no communication path to the network", so she ended up cold-calling the network, and after introducing herself as the fan behind "Finale and a Footlong", she soon found herself being invited to participate in official NBC executive conference calls and consulted about upcoming *Chuck* promotions (qtd. in Rose 2012, 197).

It is apparent that key to the success of Farrington's campaign was cultivating relationships with corporate sponsors, NBC executives, and the cast and crew of *Chuck*. Zachary Levi leading fans in a public show of support for *Chuck* and Subway was a physical manifestation of the relationship between fans and those who produce fan objects. In her work on fashion modelling as affective labour, Elizabeth Wissinger argues that the complicated system of producing relations—modelling is a business in which networking is integral to booking jobs—speaks to Hardt and Negri's definition of affective labour as that which "always directly constructs a relationship" (Hardt and Negri 2004, 147; qtd. in Wissinger 2007, 254). In the context of fan activism, relationships between fans themselves—in the creation and co-ordination of disparate but related fan efforts—as well as relationships with industry professionals must be built and continuously maintained; thus, as the theory suggests, social networks are a key component of the productive process: "immaterial labour constitutes itself in forms that are immediately collective, and we might say that it exists only in the form of networks and flows" (Lazzarato 1996, 136).

Subway was so pleased with the sales generated from the campaign that NBC and Subway struck a "special sponsorship deal" which allowed the show to be renewed for a

third season (Elliott 2009). The official press release from May 19, 2009 noted that Subway would be even more integrated into the show: Ben Silverman, co-chairman of NBC, stated that “by involving Subway early in the process, we were able to bring a quality show like 'Chuck' back to NBC for next season. Everybody wins – NBC, Subway, and the loyal fans who so enthusiastically lobbied for ‘Chuck’s renewal”, and Subway’s chief marketing officer Tony Pace was equally enthusiastic, declaring “Our customers love ‘Chuck’ so we are happy to help bring the show back through our partnership with NBC” (Fienberg 2009).

The unique and innovative sponsorship deal was due to fans’ using their affective investment in *Chuck* to take control/ownership of the show and then save it themselves. Fans were specifically credited with bringing the deal to fruition – Silverman praised “loyal fans” and emphasized that “[b]oth the fans of the shows that matter and the advertisers of the shows raised their hands to say, ‘We need ‘Chuck’ on the schedule.’ We will send you Nerds. We will buy Subway \$5 footlongs. We will do whatever it takes” (Adralian 2009). By giving fans credit for influencing the fate of *Chuck*, Silverman and NBC positioned fans as being on the same level as network advertisers and executives. However, similar to Susan Dansby’s attempt to portray “Nuke Epilogue” participants as equal shareholders in *As The World Turns* alongside her own writing, NBC’s network’s attempt to portray *Chuck* fans and industry insiders as equal shareholders of the show concealed the very real power dynamics at play in the fan-producer relationship. Fans were not really elevated to the level of industry insiders despite the shallow soundbites that implied or outright declared their industry validation.

It was such validation that participating fans, like Mel Lowery of ChuckTV.net, were aiming for: Mel wanted to run an “intelligent” campaign “that would not just gain NBC’s attention, but also their respect” by “show[ing] the network and the media that we understand that this is a numbers game not a popularity contest” (Boris 2009, Howard 2009). This quasi-authorized power was echoed by co-creator Schwarz, who enthused that “Chuck fans are the most loyal, dedicated, imaginative, and passionate fans any show could ever hope for. Every season they offer more proof they should be licensed and professional fans teaching other fans how it’s done” (Hibberd 2010). Schwarz’s invocation of credentials, suggesting that fans could be “licensed” and go “professional”

due to their effectiveness in campaigning, is of particular relevance to the issue of fans' affective involvement and pseudo-professionalism.

Because *Chuck* was on the chopping block due to low ratings, devoted fan campaigners had to learn and understand how this could have happened. As a result, fans taught themselves to use industry logic, and ChuckTV.net hosted numerous threads devoted to analyzing each season's ratings on a per-episode basis. In these threads, users often tossed around industry-specific lingo like "prelim household numbers", "demos", and "overnights":

It's that time again, Chucksters. Time to sweat it out every Tuesday morning while we wait for the numbers to come in. Time to obsess over every ratings point. Time to explain (and lament) the significance of the 18-49 demographic in the ratings. Time to gripe about how outdated the Nielson ratings system is. Have fun!  
(Agent Mel 2010)

Many posters made a game out of guessing future ratings and how they could be positively spun in *Chuck*'s favour:

Remember that these ratings will, at first, be household ratings. They are notoriously hard to predict demos and total viewership numbers. For reference sake, 3.06 and 3.07 got 3.9/6 HH ratings, but 3.07 got 0.2 lower demos. The number to look for is anything above a 3.9 HH rating. Anything above that, it **could** be good ratings. [*bold in original*]  
(buymoriaking 2010)

Some fans volunteered to monitor the other shows and networks that they viewed as *Chuck*'s competition:

Is it just me or has this week been awful for NBC? Monday was bad with Trauma and L&O cratering. Tuesday saw The Biggest Loser down, with Parenthood dropping to a 2.6 in its second week. Wednesday is a write off with American Idol on so Mercy was down to a 1.4, SVU did ok at 10 but the opposition is weak in that slot. Thursday saw the Marriage Ref drop to a 2.6 already, and the rest of their shows were down except for 30 Rock. Amongst that landscape Chuck doesn't look that bad.  
(Strangeworld 2010)

And other supporters engaged in high-level discussions of the details of television advertising and profit structures:

I don't think what they sold in upfronts matters anymore. Chuck was renewed for a 13 episode run, so the upfront sales would have been for the first 13 episodes. Since we're now past that stage, anything they're running now is probably sold on a new figure based on the more recent ratings. Part of the ad rate determination is not just the SD+DVR, but the SD+3. Is it enough to cover the licensing cost and make money?  
(Norbrook 2011)

These posts read as though they could have been written by industry experts; it is remarkable to consider that fans, none of whom identified themselves as television or marketing professionals, would congregate in forums and engage in this form of technical dialogue. Pop culture observer Linda Holmes wrote that what set *Chuck* fans apart from previous campaigners was their “businesslike” manner: “rather than just expressing the depth of their love, they tried to think pragmatically as well as passionately about keeping their show on the air” (Holmes 2012). Holmes identified *Chuck* fan campaigns as the start of “the rise of the fan”, and the beginning of an era in which fans can see themselves “not as people who [have] to beg for kindness from the network, but as people whose most important job [is] to prove their value to the sponsor” (Holmes 2012). Although *Chuck* was not the first fan campaign to use such clear marketing language—soap opera fans routinely saw themselves as “customers” of the show’s sponsors, and fans often wielded their power as consumers by threatening or enacting boycotts of networks or franchises that had done them wrong—it was the first campaign to treat their show as a business transaction and seriously approach corporate backers on behalf of the television network. The fans cut out the middleman—the NBC professionals whose jobs involved dealing with advertisers—to engage directly with an outside sponsor.

Many of the activities in which *Chuck* fans engaged (wooing sponsors, contacting journalists, tracking ratings and demographics) would be considered professional labour worthy of financial compensation when done by anyone in the television industry, but they performed this labour for free. The fruits of the labour benefitted both fans and producers: Subway and NBC financially benefitted from fans’ efforts, and fans benefitted by receiving more episodes of their favourite show. Key to this case study is the fact that Subway appreciated the campaign but did not take control of it: the company “wanted to emphasize their support for the show without seeming to be running the campaign” and “wanted to avoid being seen as manipulating fans into buying their product” (Savage

2013, 5.10). Subway was happy to reap the benefits, but let fans do all the actual labour. *Chuck* fans also saved the network additional promotional labour; because fan efforts led to the show becoming known for its loyal and stable audience base, “NBC had an understanding of how well it would perform and could focus its marketing efforts elsewhere”, and the network could bank on the knowledge that attentive viewers—such as fans—are more likely to pay attention to advertisements (Savage 2013, 6.5). This aligns with Terranova’s argument that “[f]ree labour is the moment where this knowledgeable consumption of culture is translated into productive activities that are pleurably embraced and at the same time often shamelessly exploited” (Terranova 2000, 37). Fans translated their affective investment and knowledge of the industry into a campaign that was enjoyed by all, but could still be seen as exploitative—at least financially. Terranova’s study of volunteer forum moderators found that users “did not work only because capital wanted them to, but [because] they were acting out a desire for affective and cultural production, which was nonetheless real just because it was socially shaped” (Terranova 2000, 36–37). Fans performed these tasks due to their affective connection to the source text, and their desire to ensure its survival.

The revamped NBC-Subway partnership increased the amount of overt product placement on the show; while the show’s first two seasons had been infamous for the network’s less-than-subtle Subway promotion, the blatant product placement only intensified in the following seasons. Season 4 episode “Chuck Versus the Fear of Death” opened with a lengthy close-up of Agent Greta eating a sandwich, a scene which one review later called “quasi-pornographic” and “the sexiest Subway product placement you’re ever likely to see” (Anders 2010). The scene ends with Jeff and Lester lovingly describing the sandwich she’s eating—“black forest ham on honey oat, with chipotle sauce, banana peppers, and jalapenos!”— and then using it later in the episode to lure her into a trap. In his review of the episode, noted television critic Alan Sepinwall wrote “the Save ‘Chuck’ campaign was so successful at making me associate the sandwiches with the show that I’m at the point where I start to feel sad if we go too many episodes without hearing someone describe the ingredients” (Sepinwall 2011). One scene from season four episode “Chuck Versus The Muurder” [*sic*], in which Big Mike is held hostage by rival

retailer LargeMart, was named by Nielsen as the fifth most memorable “branded integration” of 2011:

Big Mike: “This isn’t anything that can’t be handled in the confines of the shopping center. And anyway, I’m having a nice time. [The kidnappers] brought in Subway Flat Bread Breakfast Sandwiches!”

Morgan: “Steak, egg and cheese ones?”

Big Mike: “With Chipotle Southwest sauce!”  
(Nielsen Newswire 2011)

Even today, *Chuck* remains cultural shorthand for overt “branded integration”: a review of Netflix’s original series *House of Cards* (2013–present) acknowledged a moment of particularly brash in-show Playstation promotion with the humorous comment “Over at The Buy More, the cast of *Chuck* is eating Subway sandwiches and shaking its head at the egregious product placement on display in this episode” (McGee 2013).

While casual viewers may have been bothered by the explicit product placement, fans were almost overwhelmingly supportive – the general consensus was that if Subway could bring back *Chuck*, then it was worth suffering through the sandwich sales pitches.

As a fan of “Chuck”, I couldn't care less if Sarah starts working at Subway on the show. The rest of the show is what matters. All this is simply the result of a successful fan campaign. If it means 13 more hours of “Chuck” and less “Deal or No Deal”, I'm all for it.  
(Dianora 2009)

Chuck’s never been a big hit in the ratings, and the only reason it’s still on the air is because it sold out to Subway big time. You get rid of the product placement, you get rid of Subway, you get rid of Chuck. It’s that simple. Accept it or not, that’s the reality of the situation.  
(skhplbliss 2010)

Look, we bought (not brought) Chuck back by bribing Subway. Them getting their pound of flesh for following through should be celebrated, not insulted.  
(Anonymous 2010)

The ratings for *Chuck*’s hard-won third season did not improve substantially, and fans turned their attention away from Subway and towards a “Watch Chuck” campaign to bring in new viewers and attract Nielsen families; regardless, NBC was still buoyed by

Subway's support and handily renewed the show for a fourth season. And even though the fourth season actually suffered a slump in ratings, *Chuck* was eventually renewed for a fifth season that NBC announced would be its last (Hibberd 2011).

Another key characteristic of immaterial, especially affective, labour is what Wissinger identified as the "boundary-less working day" (2007, 254): immaterial/affective labourers are "working all the time", with no clear or official beginning or end, and "once the job has been done, the cycle dissolves back into the networks and flows that make possible the reproduction and enrichment of its productive capacities" (Lazzarato 1996, 136; qtd. in Wissinger 2007, 254). This feeling of never-ending work is demonstrated in the 2011 fan campaign "We Give A Chuck" launched before the fifth season renewal decision. Instead of courting Subway with "Finale and a Footlong" like they did in 2009 or trying to attract new audiences as with 2010's "Watch Chuck" campaign, the goal of "We Give A Chuck" was to use Twitter to thank the companies who aired commercials during *Chuck*'s fourth season and raise awareness of the limitations of Nielsen ratings. Nielsen ratings are based on the viewing habits of "Nielsen families", which are randomly-selected households of people who own televisions; participants are instructed to keep a log of what shows they watch and at what particular times, although sometimes Nielsen installs monitoring equipment on the household's electronic devices directly.<sup>23</sup> Fans have long decried the all-important status given to this system, arguing that the "families" are far from representative of the general television audience and that the practice unfairly punishes genre shows. The #NotANielsenFamily Twitter campaign tried to raise awareness of the number of viewers not counted under the existing methodology: a sample tweet read "@Stouffers saw your ad on @NBC's #Chuck. Can't wait to try the lasagna! Thanks for advertising on my favorite show #NotANielsenFamily" ("#NotANielsenFamily – Tweeting Responsibly" n.d.).

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<sup>23</sup> Interestingly in the context of this chapter, Nielsen families are not financially compensated for their time and efforts. Perhaps this is due to the assumption that the prestige of being (randomly) chosen to inform the all-powerful ratings measurement firm of one's viewing habits is reward enough; one Nielsen participant characterized his experience as feeling "drunk with power" (O'Dell 2013).



Even after *Chuck* was renewed for a fifth and a final season, “We Give A Chuck” encouraged fans to continue campaigning and contacting advertisers; as the campaign’s creators explained,

We’ve all spent years trying to help this show and it is a credit to all of you that Chuck has made it this far. But all great shows must come to an end. And though it’s hard to say goodbye, at some point, we have to. Let’s do it the right way, let’s appreciate what we’ve been given here. Most shows and most fans never have an opportunity like this. But wait, we said that #NotANielsenFamily would be continuing, didn’t we? Yes, it certainly will! This campaign was designed to help Chuck secure a fifth season, but it was also created to confront an aging ratings system and prove that the Niensens are not the only way to measure an audience. We think that’s a mission worth carrying on. We’d also like to continue our support for the advertisers who stuck with us last spring. We reached out to them and they responded. [...] It seems wrong to walk away from them now. We’re still here, we’re still watching their ads, and we’d like them to know that. (“NANF Fridays: Because we want to say “Thanks!””)

The assumption that *Chuck* fans needed to work non-stop to support their show—to not only campaign for its renewal for three years in a row but then to also be responsible for continuing those tactics in a ‘thank you’ campaign throughout the fifth season and beyond—thus seems comparable to Wissinger’s concept of the indefinite, infinite, never-ending “boundary-less” workday.

In the series finale, “Chuck Versus The Goodbye”, every character gets their happy ending: Jeff and Lester become famous musicians, Morgan moves in with his girlfriend, Ellie and Devon head off to exciting careers in Chicago, Casey reunites with love-interest Gertrude, and the final shot is of newlyweds Sarah and Chuck sharing a kiss at sunset. But the happiest ending of all belonged to Big Mike, who was thrilled to announce that the Buy More chain had been bought out by Subway and now he and the other employees would be spending their future “eatin’ fresh”. In an interview with IGN, co-creator Schwarz said that this particular story point was intended as meta-commentary on *Chuck* itself: “Well, we were basically sold to Subway, so why not the Buy More?” (Goldman 2012). One review of the series finale mentioned that it “deliver[ed] laughs, tears, action, callbacks and some of the best product placement you will ever see”, and called it “a bittersweet love letter to its most devoted supporters (and yes, this includes Subway)” (Brown 2012).

The story of *Chuck* and the innovative fan campaign to ensure its renewal is notable for several reasons. NBC and Subway both directly and indirectly utilized fans' affective involvements and sense of ownership and control over the show through their encouragement and praise of fan efforts and by actively positioning *Chuck* crusaders as on par with industry professionals. Finally, these fan efforts were then monetized, as both NBC and Subway reaped the financial rewards of the groundbreaking fan-motivated sponsorship deal struck between network and advertiser. In the end, it wasn't so much "*Chuck* Versus The Network" or "*Chuck* Versus The Fans", as many catchy headlines read during the campaign, but more accurately "*Chuck* Fans' Labour Versus NBC's Profits" – even if both sides believed they were the victor.

## 5 Conclusion

This thesis is concerned with the ways in which typical fannish practices, often heralded as “labours of love”, can be understood as labour. Using affect theory, I have suggested that fan activities and activism are motivated by affect, which in turn drives the affective, immaterial, and digital labour that makes up fandom, and I have analyzed key ways in which fan labour has intersected with mainstream media and been appropriated and exploited. Finally, this project has attempted to explore how fans understand and position their own fannish practices and labour.

As Gregg (2009) has noted, fandom is an ideal area of study through which to consider affective, and then immaterial, labour. Fans form affective attachments to the initial fan object, and this affect circulates as labour; in fannish activities, affective labour is the investment of time, energy, and emotion into a fan object, and can be evidenced through attempts at, or claims of, authoring or co-authoring narratives. Affect can also motivate immaterial labour, often performed digitally, as fans post on message boards, run fansites, and attempt to become industry experts in order to more effectively lobby for their opinions and viewpoints to be recognized and heard. Karen Hellekson (2009) links affective labour to the gift economy model; she argues that fan labour creates and maintains social cohesion, and describes fan cultural products as “gifts” which “have no value outside their fannish context” (Hellekson 2009, 115). Although Hellekson’s article never uses the term “affective labour”, she describes fandom in a manner that aligns with the term’s definition: fandom is “a shared dialogue that results in a feedback loop of gift exchange, whereby the artwork or text is repetitively exchanged for the gift of reaction, which is itself exchanged, with the goal of creating and maintaining social solidarity” (Hellekson 2009, 115–116).

Although fandom traditionally operates in a profit-free gift economy, mainstream media production is inherently capitalist, and there always exists the potential for co-option and monetization of this fannish work. Through harnessing fan affective involvement to set them up as loyal consumers (soap operas and Dansby’s Nuke epilogue project), or “fanaging” disappointment to turn a profit (*Torchwood*), or appropriating

fannish discourse to take advantage of fans' marketing savvy to perform the work of professional advertising executives (*Serenity, Chuck*), media producers are regularly engaging with fans and encountering, often co-opting, their labour.

While the case studies explored in this project relate to the intersection of corporate interests and fan affect and labour, there is another way in which fannish practices are becoming increasingly at risk of corporatization: through commercial efforts which try to monetize the fanworks, such as fanfiction and fanart, which result from the initial affective investment.

Fanworks have traditionally existed in a legal grey area, and the unspoken fannish rule to keep fanworks free and non-commercial has largely protected them. However, that may be forced to change. Abigail De Kosnik (2013b) argues that fans are the “primary producers of value in the cultural sector of the digital economy”, and Suzanne Scott (2009) warns that fandom “continue[s] to construct gift and commercial economic models as discrete economic spheres” which may blind fans to future developments as “commodity culture begins selectively appropriating the gift economy's ethos for its own economic gain” (1.2). Alternatively, Roberta Pearson suggests that the new digital economy has indicated that “fan practices may provide the model for the reconfigured industry-consumer relationship of the digital era as a negotiated sharing of productive power” (Pearson 2010b, 84); she advocates for Lawrence Lessig's (2008) “hybrid economy”, a model that “builds upon both the sharing and commercial economies” as “either a commercial entity that aims to leverage value from a sharing economy, or [a] sharing economy that builds a commercial entity to better support its sharing aims” (Lessig 2008, 86). Nele Noppe, another proponent of Lessig's model, posits that this “inevitable” fan/producer hybrid economy “will also have broadened to include forms of commodification that we probably can't even imagine right now. Commodification will suddenly seem a lot less unimaginable once fan works get legal recognition, and enterprising fans and businesses will start exploring their options” (Noppe 2011, 2.6).

Currently within fandom, those who try to profit from their fanworks are often denounced and accused of ‘selling out’ (Jones 2014). However, while the fans who “go

pro” choose to monetize their own labour, there have also been incidents where corporate interests from outside of fandom deliberately seek out fanworks and attempt to commercialize them.

One of the most interesting examples of this is also the most recent: Kindle Worlds, an Amazon.com-based e-book publishing program announced in May 2013, bills itself as “New stories inspired by books, shows, movies, comics, music, and games people love” – or, to be exact, only the “books, shows, movies, comics, music, and games people love” *and* with which Amazon has partnered. While some fans were initially excited at the prospect of receiving royalties for every copy of their officially-sanctioned fanfiction sold, others were wary of the legal details and guidelines. The Kindle Worlds terms of service stated that the author maintained all copyright to their characters and events, but Amazon also acquired all rights, and the license-holder was given an indefinite license to use these copyrighted elements in the future without offering further compensation. In addition, the guidelines for acceptable fanfiction were vague: the site stated it would not accept “pornography or offensive depictions of graphic sexual acts”, but what counted as ‘offensive’ was not defined (“Kindle Worlds: For Authors” 2013). Fans also feared that “slash” (same-sex) fiction would have been classified as more offensive or objectionable than non-slash stories, or that they would have had to adhere to stricter guidelines, and were concerned that there would be no way to prevent dishonest users from uploading stories they had not written themselves. Kindle Worlds and Amazon were not particularly transparent or responsive to fan anxieties, and after the initial hand-wringing and distress, Kindle Worlds launched to remarkably little media fandom interest or participation. Tellingly, as of July 2014, the site’s latest ventures have all been new fandoms—or in their parlance, Worlds—based in contemporary romance novels from “superstar” bestselling romance authors (“Announcing Four New...” 2014); of the top seven Kindle Worlds bestsellers in late July 2014, six were from the romance novel Worlds. Even in the media fandom fanfiction category, not all the site’s stories are written by fans – its inaugural *Gossip Girl* (The CW, 2007—2012), *Pretty Little Liars* (ABC Family, 2010—present), and *The Vampire Diaries* (The CW, 2009—present) stories were contracted out to professional independent romance novelists. And contrary to the site’s stated intention, established authors such as Neal Pollack, who uploaded the

satirical novella *The World of Kurt Vonnegut: 50 Shades of Kilgore Trout* in July 2014, seem to be using Kindle Worlds as more of a publicity stunt than a legitimate platform to publish original fanworks.

Aside from hacking into Amazon's accounting office, it's difficult to know whether Kindle Worlds is a financial success for the company. What can be known is that the site has not lived up to its original intention as a game-changing, commercially-successful fanfiction platform. According to Kristina Busse (2013), fans' "rejection of potential commercialization of fan production has a strong history... based on media property rights as much as on a sense of subcultural semi-private community" (61). With Kindle Worlds, fans were given the opportunity for the first time ever to write licensed fanfiction – and yet they still didn't take Amazon up on the offer. There may be many reasons for Kindle Worlds' failure to attract the media fandom audience it so obviously attempted to court before its launch, but I argue the most obvious one is that fans are resistant to any outside attempts to explicitly commodify their labour. Perhaps Karen Hellekson summed it up best when she observed that because of the cycle of fanworks—giving, receiving, and reciprocating—"[f]ans insist on a gift economy, not a commercial one" (2009, 114).

Fans' labour is given and shared freely, and expected to be reciprocated. Extreme attempts at monetization, such as Kindle Worlds, are rejected by fans; yet fans are not unaware or unsophisticated about their participation in a series of exchanges—they exchange their labour for insider access, for acknowledgement by The Powers That Be, for the funding of a movie, for narrative closure. While all those exchanges may end up making money for the companies behind them, fans are motivated by affect, not profit.

Fans' emphasis on affect over profit is not new – affective labour predates digital labour, as this project shows. Through my selection of case studies and examples, I have tried to contextualize the evolution of fan affect and labour over time. As such, this project has argued that fan activism to protest narratives or to "save our show" is a form of labour; that fans are affectively involved with their fan objects, and they affectively labour to (co)author characters and narratives; that they devote time, money, and energy

to the objects of their fandom as a result of this affect; that fans are aware that what they're doing is labour; and that fans understand their labour—whether it's to ensure a happy 'canon' epilogue for Luke and Noah regardless of how *As The World Turns* ended, or to remind FOX/Universal that *Serenity* was only flying because of their efforts, or to lobby for the resurrection of *Torchwood*'s fan "owned" character, or to do the job of a network and line up a sponsor for *Chuck* on NBC's behalf—as labour. Fan labour begins with affective investments beyond what fans are given, and thus engenders co-authorship; this affect motivates boycotts and displays of consumer power; fan-authored "fanon" gets folded back into canon, even as the labour gets "fanaged" and repackaged and sold back to fans as a marketing opportunity; and now affective labour can be harnessed and repurposed so that fans perform the professional labor of industry experts and executives.

I'd like to conclude this project with a quote from the introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*, in which Gregg and Seigworth (2010) write, "affect arises in the midst of in-between-ness: in the capacities to act and be acted upon" (1). Fandom and affect are inexorably connected. Fandom is about the in-between (the dichotomy between fans and The Powers That Be), and fans act and are acted upon. It is difficult to consider fans and their passion projects without also considering how and why they derive pleasure from their labour.

The ultimate goal of this thesis was to contribute to a more complete understanding of fan labour. While several of my examples have been previously explored by other scholars, I believe my project's emphasis on affect and the historical contextualization helps to enhance existing scholarship on these case studies, as well as augment work on affect and fan labour more generally. Through my research into the archives of fannish history, I hope that this project has added to the overall consideration of these specific cases as well as the wider issues of both fan-related affective labour and the nature of immaterial labour itself.

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