

Hello? Hello. Can you see me and hear me? Hello? Sorry.

I don't think I can hear your voice, mister Jenkins. Okay. Let's Oh, yeah. I I can hear your voice. Hello.

Hi. Okay. We're now working. Okay. Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. Because I can hear you all along. I was just not sure. Right.

That that's brilliant. Thank you. It's an honor to meet you, honestly, and thank you for, like, participating in this interview. And I'm Happy to do it. Sorry?

Happy to do it. Remind me of the details. Yeah. So, I'm an MA researcher at UAL and my project is about changing the misconception around fan fiction and fandom communities and Oh, sure. Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. And, before this interview, I'll have to inform you that this interview will be recorded and shown within Of course. The students. Yeah.

Only for, like, verification purpose purposes, and I will have to, like, take a screenshot of this, like, chat room for visual evidence at the end of this interview. Is that okay with you? Okay. No no trouble. I I expect it to be recorded.

And if you wanna take pictures or whatever, that's fine. Thank you so much. Okay. So we have, like, 30:30 minutes, so I'll start with the thing at half past. So Sorry?

Oh, yeah. Yeah. Okay. Cool. Yeah.

Yeah. Brilliant. Okay. So my first question is, like, how has the perception of fan fiction and fandom communities evolved over time? So would you say it's become more positive, negative, or remain the same overall?

Well, I when I started writing about fandom, which is almost 40 years ago, if you can believe it, it was there was almost no acknowledgment or awareness of fan fiction within the larger public. There were negative perceptions of fans as obsessive, as, you know, nerdy, so forth that we needed to confront, but fan fiction itself was invisible. So I you know, when I raised in an a con class at University of Wisconsin Madison, my first actually, in University of Iowa, my 1st year as a graduate student, no one in the room had ever heard of fan fiction. Really? Right?

Wow. There was no one there who knew any that this even existed, and it kinda created shock waves in the room because if they the idea that you could get that directed input from an audience about how they process these shows in their fantasies was something that audience research had long been seeking for. Wow. And so there was enormous interest right away, and I was encouraged to write about it and so forth. Wow.

Now we can jump forward to the point where I started seeing, say, in Entertainment Weekly referencing not only fan fiction, but slash without defining what it was as if everyone in the audience reading the mag a mass market magazine already knew what fan fiction was. Oh. And we knew that we had had a huge impact as in fandom studies because that was one of the central ways the general public would have learned about fan fiction. The other was that just as there's a wave of ACA fans, there's been a wave of journofans. Right?

Right. Fans who are who had grown up and started writing for papers because they were upset with how they were being portrayed or brought knowledge newspapers didn't have. And increasingly, we're seeing specialized journalists, who write only about fan related topics. We're kind of seeing, you know, web based publications and so forth. So the press has shifted pretty profoundly on this, and there's been a growth of fan awareness.

Now as it becomes more awake, people become more aware of fandom, the first

response is to make fun of it. Right? And so you have all these things of stars reading fanfic on on on television, making fun of the writers, you know, and disclaimers and all of that. And so we've gone through that, but I feel like we're starting to come out the other side. And I would have said that Archive of Her Own winning the Hugo award Mhmm.

Is a tipping point. Mhmm. Definitely. The folks who had made fun of fan fiction in the past were the ones who voted to give Archive of Her Own Mhmm. You know, that award.

And there's the moment when Archive of Her Own gets its award, two things happens. 1 is the person accepting it stands up and asks anyone who's ever published on archive of our own to stand up. And massive number of professional writers stood up and, for the first time, acknowledged in public that they had in fact Yeah. Written fic. The second is they asked anyone who'd ever published on archive of our own to say announce publicly what they won their Hugo award for, sort of democratizing the Hugo award so that hundreds of people, thousands of people were posting on social media.

Yeah. I won my Hugo award for that's The Good Omen story or whatever. Yeah. Definitely. And that that's a that's a shift Mhmm.

That's really quite quite significant. I guess before that, though, we have to talk about what happened when 50 Shades of Grey Uh-huh. It was discovered to have been fanfic. And suddenly, the industry, the publishing industry wants works that began as fanfic because they'd love to have the commercial success Mhmm. With as they like to call it, you know, stuff that originated in fandom.

Yeah. Definitely. And can I ask, sorry? Hold on a sec. How how do you, like, suggest navigating the kind of the ethical and legal complexities surrounding fan fiction, especially, like like, considering the oppositions of fan works from original authors such as like George RR Martin and Robin Hobb?

Yeah. Well, I mean, I'll get to Robin Hobb in a minute. Okay. You know, I I think, first of

all, academically, my ethics is always that I try to ask permission and ethics is always that I try to ask permission and get it Yeah. From any fan fiction writer that I'm quoting before I publish anything.

Yeah. Because I think people, you know, people often write under pen names and they're okay with it being published under a suit, but if we don't know if it's their real name or not, and they could be in a more sensitive position. And so you wanna make sure the person is safe. You know, all academic ethics should start with above all, do no harm, just like in Hippocratic Oath. Right.

So that's you know, the general philosophy of online public stuff is if it's in an area that doesn't require a password to access, it is presumed to be public unless notified otherwise. That's true. But if you're going behind friends lock or something or into a membership only area, then, of course, you need to seek permission and you need to go through human subject research subject research subjects Mhmm. Approval. Right?

Right. So that's journalists don't follow those rules necessarily, and we've heard stories of teachers not following those rules and assigning things to students that are behind the closed doors. Oh, I didn't hear that. Wow. And that's been some big scandals around that, which is part of what led Francesca Capa to publish her fan fiction reader, where she got permission from writers and a variety of fandoms and a variety of genres and published an academic book as an intro to fan fic.

So there's stuff we can assign in her classes that is, you know, appropriate in that way. So to me, that's those are some ethical questions we face as academics. Now the Robin Hobbs thing Mhmm. I have zero sympathy with Robin Hobbs. Once you publish once you publish your work and send it out to the world, it is no longer yours to control.

You cannot regulate other people's fantasies, nor should you legally be able to restrict the uses people make in writing of the materials you provided. I don't see fan fiction as copyright infringement. I think it falls squarely under transformative work and use and also under parody. Right? Since parody legally is not funny Mhmm.

But parody means it's a critical commentary in the form of a retelling. Right. And I think you can make a case that a fan fiction is, in one way or another, a critical commentary. Right? Even if you're just having Carrie and Hermione help Anne in a way that didn't do in the book.

Right? It's cuddle stuff. Right? Yeah. Yeah.

It's still a commentary on what is or isn't in Harry Potter from my point of view. And so I would argue that all fan fiction is critical commentary. Mhmm. Definitely. Now whether the courts would agree with that definition or not will remain to be seen.

But some of the top legal with our number of really good lawyers now in fandom who've written about these questions, and they all seem to feel that fan fiction is now pretty widely legally protected. So screw Robin Hobbs. Right? You know, she she she's cranky pants. But, you know, more troubling to me still is Camille Bacon Smith because Camille Bacon Smith wrote Enterprising Women.

She became a science fiction writer. There's a site where writers post how they feel about fanfic Mhmm. And she's totally opposed to fans writing fiction about her universe. Mhmm. And I find that so hypocritical, having written Enterprise in Women and then be closed to, you know, fan fiction Yeah.

That it's pretty stunning. But that I don't know that anyone wants to write fan fiction about Kate Colleen Smith Yeah. Yeah. Science fiction. Yeah.

Definitely. They're also, like, authors like, say, Neil Gaiman and, Rick Rick Riordan who, like, totally respects Please bring it on. Yes. And up to a point, JK Rowling also was inviting it. Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. I I don't know how she feels about trans fan pick today, but it's it's Yeah. Yeah. Definitely.

Yeah. Well, there's there's, like, this legal thing saying that, authors can't read their the fan vision of their own works. Right? So, Yeah. Alright.

So that's a that's a side so this is a trick that I think law probably does need to address at some point. It's the writer's fear that if they read something in fan fiction and they accidentally incorporate something similar in their own work, then they will not they will be sued by the fan for infringement Mhmm. Which is kind of a reversal. And it has happened. You know?

J j Michael Straczynski lit was sued by a fan for plot developments on Babylon 5. And so he spoke at MIT on a panel I a session I hosted. There's a wonderful moment. A woman brought him her novel that she wrote and said he saved her from suicide, and she wrote this book and, you know, and so forth. And he walks out of the room to the green room and says, I want you to see this, and he threw it in the trash.

Said, see, I never opened it. And his point was that he didn't want he wanted a witness that he never opened this piece of fiction, you know, a fiction set in his universe because he didn't want any legal consequences. Right. And I would have thought that was such a strange response. Most fans would want to see some of their ideas incorporated into the source text.

But I ran into this woman who was a True Blood fan. Mhmm. I had a long call with her, and she was so upset because she'd written True Blood fanfic, and she had given these 2 characters a pet armadillo. Mhmm. Right?

And and she saw on the show that they gave this 2 same 2 characters a pet armadillo, and they had to have stolen from her. And she wondered if she was entitled to damages, and she was so upset they stole her ideas. I couldn't get her to think about the fact that Banffek already builds on their ideas and so forth. I could point out that the original Bela Lugosi Dracula has vampires associated with armadillos. Mhmm.

But, you know, armadillos are a logical thing to have in a story setting in Louisiana. So for none of that, she was buying. She was just outraged that someone had stolen her

ID. But you know? And so I think we do see this happen.

Mhmm. But it also means studios can't ask can't really follow fan debates and understand what fans want and get insights from it. There's a lot of consequences of this that affects the communication between fans and producers that I bump into all the time talking to producers. They do things not knowing that they're killing out one character in a relationship that's particularly treasured by fans. Yeah.

What is that 100 that killed off the less one of the parts of a lesbian couple? Uh-huh. I know the writer of that episode, Ursline, he was aghast when he heard fan response and deeply apologetic, but he had no idea how invested fans were because he was being told by the production company not to read fanfic. That's amazing. That's an amazing story.

Yeah. So your work, *Convergence Culture*, was designed as a public intervention trying to help both, consumers yeah? And Yeah. Go ahead. Go ahead.

Users understand the changes which are occurring in their relationship. So what I want to ask is how in your opinion can, like, interventions effectively combat and correct the the social stigma surrounding fan fiction and fandom communities? Well, *Convergence Culture*, I hate to brag, but I'm doing everything. I hate to brag, but I'm doing everything. I hate brag, was is now one of the first either the first or the second most best selling book in the history of New York University Press.

Wow. And it was largely because of the growth of readership in the industry, not, I mean, not just the fan communities or the academic world, but the industry really rallied behind that book. Mhmm. And I got invited to speak all over the place in corporate boardrooms, bring bringing those messages directly to the, you know, the discussions taking place there. I did it not only in US, but in Brazil, in India, and all over the world.

Mhmm. So they opened the door for interventions. Mhmm. And I've seen some direct things come out of it. What happened after when I spoke at corporate boardrooms was younger faculty would kinda chase after me into the restroom after the talk or whatever

and just say, thanks for that.

I've been trying to get my boss to understand this forever, and he's listening to you in a way he would never listen to me. So the sense that we could make a difference Mhmm. If not you know, we certainly were not trying to tell people how to market to fans or to capitalize on fans, but to avoid doing damaging things that disrupt the fan community and why fans are not necessarily a bad thing for you to have. Right? Yeah.

So now I'm working on another round of projects with Robert Kosnatz, who's the father of ethnography and an expert on consumer culture research. Mhmm. And we're creating a series of short books, a 100 page books Mhmm. On different dimensions of fandom and fandom studies, which we're gonna self publish on Amazon starting this fall. Wow.

Okay. So it'll be 14 books altogether, each about a 100 pages each. And the idea was we started to write a textbook, that was about the intersection of our two fields. Uh - huh. And it it grew and grew, and but we also had started the premise that we wanted a textbook where students could buy each chapter individually and only pay for the parts of the books that they needed to read for their classes.

Buying super expensive textbook and their 3 chapters assigned or or whatnot. So that's the idea. They're readable. They overview the state of the field today. The state of 2 fields, really, but 2 fields that actually have a lot to say to each other.

Mhmm. And, you know, we're doing everything from defining fandom as the first one out, then the Guardian studies tradition, and as it relates to fandom as part 2, then there's stuff brand communities and consumer collectives and subcultures down through, you know, think religious analogy, structures of desire and affect, brand publics, brand activism, Mhmm. Globalization, fan locations, technology, industry relations. So we're working through all of the big issues in the field, bringing together his work, my work, but more than that, an overview of the key works in the field. Each of the books seems to have several hundred sources cited.

Mhmm. So they're very thorough in trying to build a bibliography for the field. Wow. And these are designed to be both used for cultural studies classes, but also business school classes so that there will be a whole class of people raised through the business school who will understand fandom better. And we're spelling out the the critical accounts of in fan industry relations.

I just finished the section on queer baiting, for example. Wow. And you know, so that the industry folks can't say, I had no idea the what queer baiting was. Mhmm. You know?

But We can call them on the accountable, assuming they they the business goals adopt these books and use them. And so what I do see it as an intervention for the training of future in this media industry employees to have a deeper knowledge. Now, again, they're not about marketing to fans. That's not the goal. Yeah.

But we know marketing is gonna take place. Mhmm. So what does a good relations between industry and fan look like? So you, you're, like, doing creating change, like, both in the industry and in the audience in in a way? Exactly.

Wow. That's that's perfect. I have now both Robert and I have the eyes of the industry. The question is, what do we want them to know? Mhmm.

And, you know, what what do we wanna know about how the industry sees us at the same same time? Wow. Can I ask, like, how much time did that take? I I I'm, like, guessing that took, like, quite an amount of time to, like, get to, like, both areas. The short books?

Uh-huh. Well, actually, what's amazing is we wrote all of them in under a year. Wow. Oh my god. I've just been on fire.

I'm like because I'm drawing all the stuff I've taught and things people are gearing me to read, and I know where the bodies are in the field. And Robert knows his field, and

we've just been writing, like, at hyper speed. Wow. And we're self publishing them, so we don't have to go through 2 to 3 years of process and the press for each of the books. Wow.

We can when we you know, we're getting a peer reviewed by the experts on each topic. So we're getting feedback and validation, but we don't need to be credentialized by a press. The press is not gonna publicize them as effectively as we are. So we're cutting the production time down to the bare minimum. You know, we think late September, early October for the first book, we're still finishing now.

Wow. So we can go that quickly. So So it's an experiment, but I'm excited about it. And the question is, do libraries buy books that are self published in this way? Will this be as effective at reaching industry people as going through a university press?

My theory is that they'll like it better because they're a little intimidated by university press. But we'll see. Can you remind me of the the the title of the book? I'll definitely get go ahead and tell. It's a series called frames of fandom is the name of the series, and then each book will have its own title under that.

So it'll be frames of fandom 1, defining fandom, frames of fandom 2, fandom as audience, so forth. So simple titles under the frames of fandom, but each is each book is a frame of fandom. And it is intended, as Convergence Culture was, as an intervention, but is the first book solely on fandom that I have published since, I guess, science fiction audiences. Alright. At the beginning of my career, I published tons of fans as articles, as, you know, the Convergence culture is partially about fandom as this credible media or, you know, the the by any media necessary is about fan activism and pop culture and the civic imagination.

But all of those have bigger frames than fandom. And this takes me back to that fandom studies, not at the end of my career, but close to retirement and reflecting back on how the field has changed Mhmm. Since I published Textual Poachers at the very beginning of my career. Definitely. Okay.

So how do you perceive the phenomena of media specificity, where, like, various art forms seek validation by emulating established conventions of other art forms? And, how does this concept intercept with the evolution and legitimacy of fan fiction within the broader media landscape?

Well, it isn't interesting. That's I've I've never really thought about fan fiction in this way, but I think you're onto something. I mean, first of all, fan fiction writers tend to want to legitimate themselves by using details from the source material.

Mhmm. You know? Oops. Barring specific lines, specific scenes, and so forth, which anchors their story in the reality. And this is part of my case for why every piece of fan fiction is in some way a piece of criticism.

Mhmm. It's that it's mobilizing evidence Mhmm. To construct the world in such a way that we recognize and and accept as fans that this person's interpretation has some validity. Right? So so I'm always interested in how fans legitimate their work for other fans through what they quote from the source material.

That's different, though, than I think that analogy that media wants to draw on. Right? So we think it's a compliment to say a television show is novelistic or cinematic. Right. And Peyton Mattel asked the question, why isn't it a compliment to say that it's that The Wire is like a video game?

Mhmm. And and he makes a whole argument. He's got a great argument for thinking about the game like qualities of this particular show. Mhmm. But he says in the hierarchy of media, that's an argument people want to make because games are still seen as lower than television, not higher than television.

Yeah. Yeah. I talk about I talk about media we walk up to and media we walk down to. Right? If you go to the opera, you have to climb stairs.

You go to cinemas often. You have to climb stairs or art museums. Mhmm. If you want to see go buy comics or games, you typically have to walk down because the the comic shop or game shops are underneath the street level. That's true.

That's true. That's absolutely true. Yeah. And that tells us everything about the cultural status of these different media. Yeah.

Definitely. But fan fiction kind of exists in this lateral space Mhmm. Where I would argue it's not trying to legitimate itself as a media to media makers Mhmm. So much as it's trying to legitimate to fans in a particular a particular interpretation of the story. We don't want our stories to look like television Mhmm.

In fan right? Even if we're trying to be a television show, we're trying to pull it out of the realm of television into this more emotionally real world that fan fiction takes place in, which sort of the frame is not there Mhmm. In this way. Right? And I think that's that's important.

Now whereas vids, on the other hand, if you read Francesca Capa's book on bidding Mhmm. And vids, she's sort of arguing that they deserve the status of avant garde remix films. They're in some ways richer than a lot of the stuff that's shown as experimental video that does remix or pop art practices in museums, and she makes a strong case for that. So she's very invested in legitimizing them as a form of video art. And many video vidders I've talked to have a similar goal.

They're trying to get that status as video art. I don't know when you write fanfic. Are you trying to do art? Mostly not. And I think that's what's so good about fanfic is so much of it is bad.

Mhmm. I I say that because, you know, it creates a space where you can be bad and get better. Mhmm. You can be bad, get feedback, get better, and that makes it a more democratized art form. Mhmm.

And it also motivates you because you read a piece of bad fanfic, and you say, well, I can write better than that. Mhmm. Whereas if you read Moby Dick, you don't say that. Or if you watch The Godfather, you don't say, I can make a better movie than that. Oh,

yeah.

Definitely. You know, if you have this if you're in a world where only the very best gets released, which is the world of mass media. Mhmm. It doesn't create incentives for us to create art. Right.

Whereas participatory culture depends on there being bad art that we can push beyond. Yeah. Definitely. To have a space to be bad and improve. And both of those are key parts, I think, of fan fiction.

So I celebrate the fact that a lot of it is bad and that almost none of it tries to be art. Mhmm. Right. So can we technically say that fan fic fan fiction itself is like a new medium different to original writing? I don't think I would argue.

I mean, you know, I'm trying to think how Francesca Coppa puts it in her fan fiction reader, but she has this thing about different definitions of fanfic. And the fact that it is by fans or fans makes it different from, say, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, or *Sea*, or any number of other works that borrow and build on previous novels. And there's a whole thousands of years of history of novelists building on other novels and playwrights imitating other playwrights and so forth. But those contribute to what fan fiction is, but they're not fan fiction, I think, in particular. That they're they are what, Gail Dacosnick calls iconic fiction, that is fiction that builds on an archive.

Mhmm. And fan fiction is a subset of iconic fiction. Mhmm. But fan fiction is its own thing, and it is relatively new, I would say. Certainly no more than a 150 years Mhmm.

Depending on where we count from. Right? We could start from Sherlock Holmes. We could start with, the sum of the Horatio Alger retellings that took place in the amateur press publications in the 18 eighties. So somewhere about the 18 eighties, we start to see people building on existing mass mediated work in order to create something that is for other fans of that work, and it's part of the concept of fan coming into being.

Right. Okay. So, what are the, like, the implications of transmedia storytelling and reshaping narratives about fan cultures, like, in general? Well, I mean, it gives us a lot more to work with. It's a positive way of reading it.

Right? We just have in some ways, what first interest me about transmedia is it seemed to be commercially produced fanfic. It is it was filling in the missing scenes. It was developing backstory. It was exploring other possible relations between characters.

You know? Right? And I think although, Pew says what we want from fan fiction is more of and more from. Mhmm. And it definitely addresses the more of, and you could argue in some cases more from Mhmm.

The source text. So the debate then becomes, does it endanger fan fiction? Mhmm. Does it take on the functions of fan fiction and close it out into some official space? Mhmm.

And I know Suzanne Scott argues that, in some of her writing, and some other people have argued that. I think you can never close down the halls that are available to readers. The the more material you give us, the more halls to open up. You can fill some halls, but other things keep opening up because gaps are inevitable in storytelling and indeed desirable in storytelling. And as long as there's gaps, there's space for fan fiction.

So I don't see it as closing up the space for fan fiction. I see it as expanding it. Right. But, you know, but I think that's an interesting debate that people have been having. Right.

And how does Convergence Media influence our understanding of fan communities and their, like, creative expressions? Well, communities and their, like, creative expressions? Well, this will have to be the last one because I've already been in Of course. Whether we but, yes, I would say quickly that, you know, it depends on what we mean by convergence. But if for me, what I meant in convergence culture, which was this whole landscape of bottom up, top down of, you know, consumer led content

creation versus commercial content creation, You know, fan fiction is very much part of that as are the debates between authors and fans, the ways in which fan fiction is more visible to authors and creators than ever before.

Mhmm. Even if they say they don't look at it, they probably do. Mhmm. You know? And this notion of fan of art actors ridiculing fans for their fan work is created by all of that.

So it's just the changing environment where the lines are blurred between the commercial and the noncommercial. Mhmm. And participatory culture is more visibility than ever before for better and for worse. It makes it more influential and more easy to please. Right.

And we have to decide, you know, both of those are happening simultaneously. Okay. That that's brilliant. Thank you so much for this interview with me. Oh, sure.

Happy to. It's a lot for your project. Yeah. Glad to. And have can I, like, take a screenshot and Oh, yeah?

Sure. Sure. Thank you. Hold on a sec. So are you from China or did you grow up in England?

I'm from China. I'm from China. I I came here to study and, there is a participant consent form that Amanda will send you, so could you like Okay. Sure. So we'll take care of that.

Thank you so much. Ask because we've been forming this global network of researchers on fandom in East Asia. And if you were interested in joining, we meet on Zoom. Times are set up for US and China participants, so England may be a little Okay. For you.

But, but if you're interested Definitely. I'm definitely interested. Feedback, and I'll get you into the pipeline to sign up. We have meetings every other week, and we have

guest speakers, and we're writing stuff together. And because I've gotten fallen deeply in love with Shanghai based fandom, and which I think is most vibrant and creative and engaging fan culture in the world as far as I'm concerned.

Yeah. So to understand that, I've had to learn more about Korea and Japan as well. So That's brilliant. Is there, like, a name for this, organization? Yes.

It's currently just called **transcultural, fandom in East Asia**. Okay. They **USC based**, but Uh-huh. We I've been recruiting as I travel and meet people. You know?

So anytime I see someone who's in fandom studies in Chinese, I tell them about it because I we wanna have all your voices heard, and I wanna use my leadership to ensure amplify those voices here in the West and make sure that, you know, more of that work gets read and discussed and so forth. Oh my god. Thank you so much for inviting me. That's been brilliant. For sure.

Okay. Yeah. Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you for your time.

Thank you. Yeah. So see you. Thank you.