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Untaming Fandom: Funny Animal Figures and the Page-Based World of Furries

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

by

Brandy Juniper Lewis

June 2024

Dissertation Committee:
Dr. andré m. carrington, Chairperson
Dr. Keith Harris
Dr. Richard T. Rodriguez
Dr. Sherryl Vint
Dr. John Jennings
Dr. Margaret Galvan

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2024

The Dissertation of Brandy Juniper Lewis is approved:

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Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

Acknowledgements

To say that I have reached a doctoral degree would have shattered whatever prior notions a younger, more skeptical me would have had some ten years ago. Said "me" of secondary education would have wondered, why? What path or events would lead me to such a point, if not my then recent experiences of abuse, trauma, disability, and loss, factors that no doubt were enough to shake me into recognizing my identity as a trans-woman? In community college, I would even listen as a supervising professor told me to think otherwise of getting a doctorate: "It's too expensive," he would say, "and frankly might not be worth much, now." Alas, looking back, I now recognize that it was numerous friends, family, and colleagues who got me here (not him) and who pressed me to see the world in different ways.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Untaming Fandom: Funny Animal Figures and the Page-Based World of Furries

by

Brandy Juniper Lewis

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in English
University of California, Riverside, June 2024
Dr. andré m. carrington, Chairperson

Attendant to the comics, erotic, speculative fiction, and anthology works produced by the contemporary fan community known as furries, this dissertation presses toward the *queerness of fandom* with criticism both within and outside of fan studies. While scholarship to this day has worked to de-pathologize fans from being read as simply fanatics or worse, as furry shows, fandom continues to be freighted by hegemonic and heteronormative values. Accordingly, and reliant on the work of scholars including Carolyn Dinshaw, Kadji Amin, Hayden White, and Ramzi Fawaz, this dissertation looks at how fans' numerous print publications evoke the plurality of fan attachments overlooked by dominant apparatuses.

Beginning with comics, Chapter One examines how fandom offered the space for newly-minted furry fans to imagine new futures and coalitions of care, haunted as they were by past and proceeding violence. To this end, I argue for fandom's queerness, a frame of thought recognizing the numerous directions that fans take as part of their cultural work. In Chapter Two, I close-read writers Justine "Orrery" Tracer and Ko's

“The Witch of Whatcom County.” Published as a play on the Gothic horror in erotica anthology *Heat, Volume 16*, “The Witch” follows sensationalist journalist and magic fanatic Justine Lejeune on a documented interview with one Helen Cressida, or the narrative’s suggested monster and magic practitioner. In Justine coming to realize magic and fantasy’s existence, however, rather than sustain a perspective treating Helen and assistant Ren as monsters, the story evokes for readers how seemingly fanatic interests exceed determination due to their careful offerings. Chapter Three follows with another close-read of Mary E. Lowd’s *Nexus Nine*, a speculative fiction rewrite of *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* that considers attachment’s limiting power. My final chapter closes the dissertation with a look at furries’ print anthologies and fan-produced magazines, which I argue mediate fandom as heterogeneous via its material production outlets. My conclusion thus offers fan studies with the opportunity for new potential, extending conversations on what it is fans do that can only be read by the close, affective engagement fields still hesitate from.

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Introduction:

Getting in the Thick of Fandom

Figure 1. Tommy Bruce's Atmus and fursuit performer Cassius in Fuzzy Feelings.

Artist and photographer Tommy Bruce's *Fuzzy Feelings* begins in a hotel corridor. Standing at the entrance to a single room, costume characters Atmus and Cassius beckon to readers, their soft, plastic eyes and felt eyelids catching us in their (literally) fixed gaze. Without even needing to turn a page, we follow, and as if in a comic book, we witness as the two animals begin a simulated foreplay ending with Cassius's canine muzzle pulling back from Atmus's erect deer penis (Figure 1). From panel to panel, image to image, Bruce's photography continues, following the two characters as we are, transforming the typical accoutrement of a hotel's bedroom into a stage for pornographic and elicit excess. The challenge that the work ultimately brings

forth destabilizes one from a fixed position. Is the sex real? Does it matter? Are they animals, or, do the performances of the humans inside the costumes blur the terms we so easily rely upon to make sense of something typically viewed as deviant, even obscene? By the work's end, with Bruce's Atmus penetrating Cassius as he ejaculates across a bed's cover, the soft illuminance streaming through the window's sheer curtains suggest a blissful orgasm that can only be encapsulated by a simulated money shot. Cassius's sphincter and backside are left dripping with what is presumed to be human semen. We do not get closure in the scene, nor do we get a description of either the artist or the two animal characters and their performers. Rather, *Fuzzy Feelings* leaves us thinking and feeling backwards, reexperiencing the imagery that has just taken place, and experiencing what scholar José Esteban Muñoz in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* describes as an opportunity to be overwhelmed by impressions that harken to a queer, utopian time that cannot be simply "capture[d] and render[ed] visible" ("Ghosts of Public Sex" 40).

Using the anthropomorphic animal as he is, Bruce has been recognized for his work emerging from today's contemporary furry fandom. A community of creatives, writers, costumers, and general fans (genfans) who since the mid-twentieth century have expanded the cartoon funny animal character into a form of representation, furries according to Jessica Ruth Austin in *Fan Identities in the Furry Fandom* lay low in Kristina Busse's theorized "geek hierarchy," being seen as fans who specifically sexualize their objects of adoration or fandom beyond what is often accepted ("Pornography" 108, 111). While fans use the networks they have created to celebrate the

numerous titles and artworks they produce on their own, many other fans do take interest in rendering the anthropomorphic figure in sexual, even highly explicit terms. Nevertheless, as independent researcher and scholar yerf argues in their online treatise entitled *On Furry*, furry's stigma hails from years of representations in which normative or mundane media have depicted them. From appearances on *The Tyra Banks Show* to their conflation with the sexual pervert on an episode of *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, majoritarian culture has transformed the anthropomorphic animal fan into "what Judith Butler (1995) calls a 'threatening specter,'" yerf writes, "something that must be 'continually repudiated through interactional processes,'" or, abjected to uphold what is acceptable in normative media culture and its peripheries ("Technology" 7-8). Yet Bruce, a queer content producer and scholar interested in playing within the "ugliness" that scholar Yetta Howard describes in *Ugly Differences: Queer Female Sexuality in the Underground*, gestures to the way in which the funny animal or otherwise anthropomorphic character has become a form and technology for thinking about the possibilities offered through utopian celebrations of the self ("Introduction" 11).[1] Seemingly enclosed from the danger and judgement of an outside heteronormative culture, Atmus and Cassius's sexual encounter offers readings of care, connection,

[1] Throughout this dissertation, I use various terms to describe the tools and strategies fans use within the furry community, building as I am from the work done by fans and independent scholars and critics such as yerf and their *On Furry* text. As yerf expresses in the introduction of their document, "Technologies are worlding devices: building worlds, relations, understandings of 'subjects' and 'objects' as such" ("Technology" 4). Yet to allow for a fluidity that makes room for all types of scholars, fans or otherwise, the terms I use can be understood to include forms, technologies, media, imagery, documents, figures, and more. Similarly, I choose not to capitalize furry as a proper noun, for like yerf, I recognize that furry can be many things, many spaces, bleeding in and out from normative understandings of fan communities as it might be.

exclamation, and community, all of which come mediated by *Fuzzy Feelings*'s affective sensibility (Grossberg 55). Theorizing what brings fans to the works they enjoy, Lawrence Grossberg argues that "The fan's relation to cultural texts operates in the domain of affect or mood," and unlike majoritarian culture, where interests or purchases are typically aligned with a culture's circulating or expected sense of taste, what the fan likes can only be understood or gestured to by the "feeling" fans get from their "subjective experience," something that like queerness is anachronistic ("Is There A Fan" 56). Affect like fandom is left floating in the memory of its object's happening or its traces, an elusive quality that touches the document and escapes what readers may try to determine. Erotic as Bruce's work might be, and though it does feature walking, human-like animals with matching, some would argue accurate anatomy, to try and describe what the work actually does would fail in some regard, dependent as we are on our relations to the object under normative discursive formations. I argue that it would only be through a close, active, and affective engagement with the fan text that we would possibly be able to feel what for some may be an allowance of the pleasure they dream and long for.

Working within the field of English as supported by Queer Theory, Fan Studies, and the study of Archives and the production of History, this dissertation takes up the difficult challenge of exploring the printed and ephemeral forms of the community known globally today as the furry fandom. Out of interests in the subculture's numerous literary forms including comics, pornography, speculative fiction, and edited fiction anthologies produced across generations of fans, rather than try to put a fix or anchor on what continues to be seen a "bad" object within the study of fan groups in ways, I join

scholars including andré m. carrington, Margaret Galvan, Matt Richardson, Alexis Lothian, and numerous fan critics like Hazel Ali Zaman to remind scholars and critics of the queerness of fandom and mass culture (Doty xiii).[2] Though it is resonant with the fan communities seen at comic and speculative fiction conventions including San Diego Comic Con and Los Angeles's Anime Expo, as a community birthed at a time of cultural upheaval and independent production, the furry fandom operates out of sync with fandom as it is typically understood. While much of what fans celebrate exists within dominant media forms, including the funny animal and anthropomorphic character existing in Western media since the nineteenth century, fans have continuously troubled what we know as consumption and expressed desires in continuously unfurling directions. As historian Joe Strike describes in *Furry Nation: The True History of America's Most Misunderstood Subculture*, the early fan events and conventions supporting what would eventually become furry catered to numerous types of fans, whether they loved funny animal characters or not ("I'm Not the Only One!" loc. 204-229). Specifically, in "Furry Fandom, Aesthetics, and the Potential in New Objects of Fannish Interests," fan and American Studies scholar Kameron Dunn explains how the fandom took shape as media products and cultures became part of "larger transnational economic and cultural flows" (*Transformative Works* par. 2.3). Beyond fans' personal spaces, America was growing

[2] In Alexander Doty's *Making Things Perfectly Queer*, Doty exemplifies the propensity as to which popular culture can be read in queer ways. Whether because of the amount of queer characters and performers that would come forth at the turn of the twenty-first century or the directions audiences take up from their own interests, Doty writes, "it seems to me the queerness of most mass culture texts is less an essential, waiting-to-be-discovered property that the result of acts of production or reception" ("Introduction" xi). Beginning from the idea that mass and popular culture is queer, then, this dissertation is more of an engagement with how it is we might perhaps learn to approach texts already complex and divisive.

unstable. During the 1970s and 1980s, the Civil Rights movement, Second Wave feminism, Gay Liberation, and the push for decolonization were rethinking many of the structures that held normative culture in formation (par. 2.7-2.8). Fans would only become embroiled in the West's many changes as subjects within it. As I explore in Chapter 1, funny animal fans would accordingly produce texts that resonated with their numerous publics while also bringing something new into the conversation. As fan and graduate student Benjamin Silverman explains in "Fursonas: Furries, Community, Identity Online," furry took shape as something that queered fandom, but to my end, shows the *queerness of fandom* through its numerous and complex documents (15).

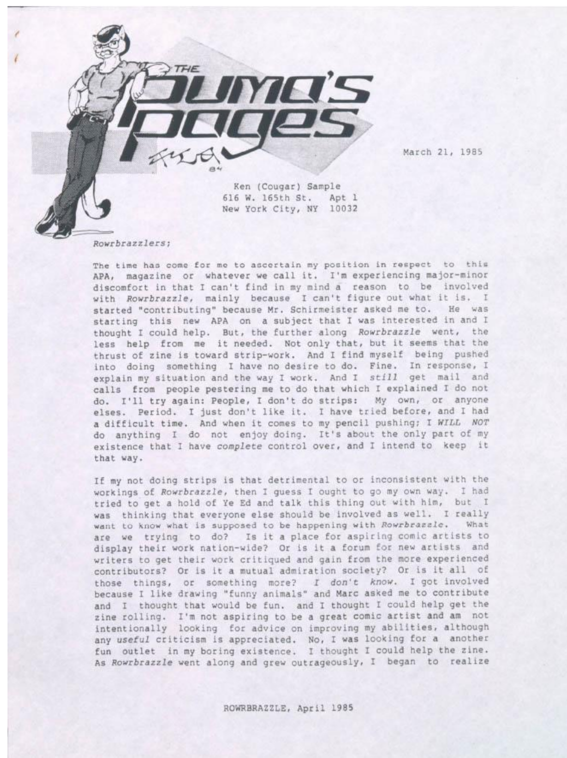
While the fiction and literature of fans communities have been recognized for the ways they work through cultural struggles, by turning to the page as a form of Muñoz's queer "horizon," I agree furry fans transformed their simplistic, easy to produce and modify cartoon aliases into a strategy of political action and cultural caregiving (*Cruising Utopia* 11). The page offered escape from what Lauren Berlant sees as reality's continuous cruelty (*Cruel Optimism* 8). Yet it is here where I argue that fandom is a problem of history. In attempts to look back and ascribe documentation to what we have seen, performances we have witnessed, and more, we limit the numerous realities taking place and uphold certain acts for ideological reasons. For many, yes, these works generated the ability to represent and create funny animal texts that gave room for independent artists to "do their thing" and celebrate a long beloved genre of entertainment. However, from artist and writer duo Reed Waller and Kate Worley's *Omaha the Cat Dancer* in the 1980s to the often humorous, deeply affective post-AIDS

work of Steve Domanski et al. in the comic series *Circles*, early furry titles and projects saw their page-based worlds and narratives as opportunities to imagine better futures, better relations, developing as they were from Reagan's late twentieth century America. Though comparable to other communities or subcultures including Trekkies or the more recent Brony fandom of Hasbro's *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*, furry's support of independent artistry and performance seemingly leaves it formless in a world driven by studio-led intellectual properties and media cycles. Similarly, the community's history with adult and highly sexual material has continued to leave fans under continuous judgement, whether from other fan groups or even alt-right conspiracy theorists and the interests of wider organized media. Nearly two years following the January sixth insurrection at the United States Capitol building, conservative news outlets circulated reports from a Durham District School Board meeting in which a parent alleged that schools were allowing litter boxes in campus bathrooms. As *NBC News* journalists Tyler Kingkade cites from Joan Donovan of the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard, much of conservatives' portrayal of the myth "turns on two key wedge issues…educational accommodations and gender nonconformity" ("How an Urban Myth"). Furry was distinctly named in such rumors: a name that for many is a strange and ephemeral concept. Who are these fans, and why do they see themselves as animals, or imagine themselves to be animals sometimes in pornographic imagery and costumed aliases?

To try and explain what furry *is* would be a fraught project, then, similar to trying to capture every nuance of popular culture. Such a description would leave out the fact

that some fans do identify with/as nonhuman animals and some do like pornography, while other fans simply like films including Walt Disney Animation's *Zootopia* or Disney's classic *Robin Hood*. Focused on furry's—and thereby fandom's—queerness, then, this project turns to the literary works that give voice to the desires that have developed within and around the furry community. Rather than simply reiterate furry as queer, I aim to rethink how the study of fandom has been done and press for the recognition of fandom as numerous and in some ways undocumentable, making space for a study of fan-produced works accepting of fans as creators of cultural knowledge and theory with orientations of their own.

Documenting Fandom without Fixing It: A Process



THE Puma's Pages

March 21, 1985

Ken (Cougar) Sample
616 W. 165th St. Apt 1
New York City, NY 10032

Rowrbrazzlers;

The time has come for me to ascertain my position in respect to this APA, magazine or whatever we call it. I'm experiencing major-minor discomfort in that I can't find in my mind a reason to be involved with *Rowrbrazzle,* mainly because I can't figure out what it is. I started "contributing" because Mr. Schirmeister asked me to. He was starting this new APA on a subject that I was interested in and I thought I could help. But, the further along *Rowrbrazzle* went, the less help from me it needed. Not only that, but it seems that the thrust of zine is toward strip-work. And I find myself being pushed into doing something I have no desire to do. Fine. In response, I explain my situation and the way I work. And I *still* get mail and calls from people pestering me to do that which I explained I do not do. I'll try again: People, I don't do strips: My own, or anyone elses. Period. I just don't like it. I have tried before, and I had a difficult time. And when it comes to my pencil pushing; I *WILL NOT* do anything I do not enjoy doing. It's about the only part of my existence that I have *complete* control over, and I intend to keep it that way.

If my not doing strips is that detrimental to or inconsistent with the workings of *Rowrbrazzle,* then I guess I ought to go my own way. I had tried to get a hold of Ye Ed and talk this thing out with him, but I was thinking that everyone else should be involved as well. I really want to know what is supposed to be happening with *Rowrbrazzle.* What are we trying to do? Is it a place for aspiring comic artists to display their work nation-wide? Or is it a forum for new artists and writers to get their work critiqued and gain from the more experienced contributors? Or is it a mutual admiration society? Or is it all of those things, or something more? *I don't know.* I got involved because I like drawing "funny animals" and Marc asked me to contribute and I thought that would be fun. and I thought I could help get the zine rolling. I'm not aspiring to be a great comic artist and am not intentionally looking for advice on improving my abilities, although any *useful* criticism is appreciated. No, I was looking for a another fun outlet in my boring existence. I thought I could help the zine. As *Rowrbrazzle* went along and grew outrageously, I began to realize

ROWRBRAZZLE, April 1985

Figure 2. Ken Sample's contribution to Rowrbrazzle*, featuring his anthropomorphic alias.*

In the 1985 issue four of editor Marc Schirmeister's Amateur Press Association (APA) *Rowrbrazzle*, adult material deemed by some fans to go too far would draw out conversation on what the community should be or accept. Not found in the Fanzine Collection at the University of California, Riverside's Special Collections department, the moment of uproar came as a result of fans fulfilling both their obligations to the APA's member rules and fans' chance to speak out for themselves. Nonetheless, the submission of said artwork would be followed in issues five and six, where fans including Schirmeister, Al Sirois, Deal Whitley, Mark D. Ashworth, and more speak to their respective perspectives on the controversy. Although Ashworth would argue the concern to be "rather trivial" in his contribution to the following issue five, Sirois would call out fans who supposedly went behind his back to "Schirm" and others, adult material again something accepted in the APA's respected predecessor (*Rowrbrazzle*). Just the same, Schirmeister in issue six would explain how sexual content had been allowed in the preceding APA *Vootie* edited by artists Ken Fletcher and Reed Waller. The crisis would be one for many to engage the question of whether or not furry could or should be sexual, something I take on in Chapter Two and that continues to plague the fandom today. Inevitably, while the APA's question of sex can be aligned with then in-motion panic of some feminists against pornographic materials, the moment can similarly be read as a plurality of responses and views happening both on the page in numerous unfurling directions.

For Black fan and artist Ken Sample in particular, the conversation would be a chance to speak out on several things occurring for him, specifically what it was the

community wanted to be and where he fit within the space. Writing a letter that addresses both the controversy and the problem of other fans asking why he did not contribute comic strips like others, Sample, who begins the piece with a letterhead showing his anthropomorphic cougar alias leaning against his zine's title in a friendly demeanor, argues that to draw up questions of censorship as members had would go against the very idea of shaping a public for themselves; as well, and detailing the questions that he would get over his celebrated artwork, Sample presses that he simply did not do comics, that he joined the APA to help Schirmeister get the APA into motion, and that fans' emphasizing him doing "strips" only made him feel "that I don't belong here" ("The Puma's Pages" 1-2) (Figure 2). Although many may turn to his position on censorship because of the moment's controversy and relation to the fandom's history, which since the 1990s has only been plagued by reports that fans are sexual deviants in disguise, again, Sample's address to the question of the then growing fandom implicates an understanding of fandom as plural and critical, driven as it might be by someone limiting what gets published or documented out of agency.

Yet Sample's text similarly destabilizes how we view similar objects within our own perspective. In researching the furry fandom as both a fan and scholar indebted to the survival practices and opportunities the community offers, I found Sample's letter standing out to me as something of eventful focus, or, what Peter Hühn in "The Eventfulness of Non-Events" argues captures us in the story of history formation, a "decisive, unexpected, and surprising turn within the sequence of historical elements" (*Narrative Sequence* 37). Within the archive, however, a space that over the last twenty

years has only grown as an object and well of study, we are compelled into such a perspective, driven by the hunt for knowledge that French philosopher Jacques Derrida famously captured in his "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression." Describing the archive as a historical institution, Derrida presses how try as we might, the archive comes plagued as something that "always holds a problem for translation" (*diacritics* 57). Because of how archives have come pre-determined as sites of knowledge production, we enter the archive carrying a curiosity as to where "origin" lies, where "memory" can be seen in material form, and where it can "[speak] by itself" as we understand it to in our various horizons of expectation (58). But memory does not work like that. Already curious on furry, having been a member of the community since 2004 when many of the conventions and websites now existent were only in the imagination of fans coming into the internet for their own, I ultimately saw Sample's use of what is now seen as the fursona and his ascription to community as a site of care deeply crucial to contemporary questions on fandoms' importance. Much of the affect Sample gestures at resonated in my mind with what other fans have spoken toward; as well, his words in relation to the anthropomorphic alias on the page continues to resonate with fans today, knowingly or otherwise. Nevertheless, ignoring his hailing of communities *as* multiplicitous spaces of contradiction would mean to limit the porous boundaries of fandom as an object, term, and symbol. My understanding of furry and Sample in this moment came wedded to my attachments as a disabled trans scholar, thereby closing space from the reality of fan communities as densely layered, multi-temporal fields of knowledge production and, yes, even some inconsistency.

Informed by my experiences working with fans and questions of the archive, my dissertation joins scholars who complicate fandom such as Cornell Sandvoss, Lori Morimoto, and Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, yet in doing so, I bridge the gap between temporality studies, archive theory, history and fan practices as they are conceived yet mold to prior expectations still directing us. Arguably, fan scholars have always been invested in the archive of fandom and its knowledges: from figures like Bacon-Smith (*Enterprising Young Women*) and Henry Jenkins (*Textual Poachers*) again revealing the numerous practices fans take on in their quotidian cultures, to critics like Abigail De Kosnik (*Rogue Archives*) and Matt Hills (*Fan Cultures*) investing the fan with agency beyond discursive knowledge, fandom appears rife with opportunity for questions of plurality, or, what Arturo Escobar in *Designs for the Pluriverse* understands providing context for understanding the world and its forms' many complexities as they are "formed and seen in difference" ("An Outline" 183). Alas, as a community, furry continues to be truncated in what yerf sees as that disabling, even pathologizing rhetoric once held of fans prior to the late twentieth century, for thinking with academia and culture's attempts to describe what furries do beyond or with sexual content as has been recognized, yerf nonetheless realizes how much of what furry becomes to scholars is indebted to diagnostic modes of reading, which I argue in my second chapter depends on hegemonic attendance to queerness in all its performances (*On Furry* 44-45, 50).

My work accordingly draws from the field of archive studies and queer temporality to think on how culture produces its own limits through anachronistic determination. The archival turn as it has been known in academic discourse came amidst

the rising postmodern question of societies' numerous structures. Whether in conversation with Derrida or taking direction from Michel Foucault's disturbance of the archive in *The Order of Things*, scholars seeking to rethink the archive such as Diana Taylor, Saidiya Hartman, Carolyn Steedman, Ann Cvetkovich, and more took to analyses driven by the question of knowledge and power. Amidst the turn into the twenty-first century, queer theorists would similarly move to question temporality and heterogeneous timelines, medievalist Carolyn Dinshaw in *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* particularly looking at the plurality of terms used to reference "deviant sex in late medieval England" and subjects' cross-temporal identifications ("Introduction" 2). As Elizabeth Yale suggests in her 2015 "The History of Archives: The State of the Discipline," the questions being drawn forth were an "impulse" to address what knowledge we had yet to engage, as subjects' sought "grounding in a material reality that, ultimately, [the archive] could only provide partially, if at all" (*Book History* 336).

Expansive as the field of archive studies has become, however, only within the last decade have academics grown more attendant to fandoms' archival depths and forms. Within Camille Bacon-Smith's well known 1992 *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth*, for instance, readers only gained a gesture to the numerous slash-fiction works that fans produced, whereas in comparison, Abigail De Kosnik's recent *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* invokes the political and creative opportunities fans take through the production of archives for themselves. De Kosnik, a media and culture scholar distinctly interested in fans'

deployment of archivists' judicial repertoires, undoubtedly leaves space to consider how fans' numerous projects operate in a public sphere disinterested in what more institutional structures provide ("Repertoire Fills" 243). Within a similar vein, scholar and fan information specialist Shannon Fay Johnson in "Fan Fiction Metadata Creation and Utilization Within Fan Fiction Archives" examines how metadata inevitably affects how fans come to organize their titles towards diverse ends (*Transformative Works* par. 5.1). Generative, works such as these evoke how little has actually been done to sit with or otherwise accept time's queerness as the archive draws out: just as there seem to be numerous, even contradictory pasts and presents, so too are there repertoires and performances seemingly unable to be documented.

While my project thus attempts to show how fandom–and more particularly furry–is in fact this plural, heterogeneous space of numerous worlds and lives all trying to come together at a moment of culture and society seeking change, understanding that the present is in fact saturated with what Carolyn Dinshaw in *How Soon is Now?* sees as asynchronous moments turns us to the question of how fans practice a version of fandom for themselves amidst many numerous others ("Out of Sync" 133; *On Furry* 50). Fandom is not clean nor tidy. Though much of what the media tries to show us is generative towards getting a sample of fandoms' numerous scales and interests, to try and capture everything that fans do or find themselves interested in would inevitably leave out the more deviant interests or practices that fans would better leave silenced to protect their dignity. As well, and as figures such as Michel-Rolph Trouillot (*Silencing the Past: The Power and Production of History*), Stefan Tanaka (*History Without Chronology*), and

Hayden White (*Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*) have shown respectively, to oversimplify a cacophony of passions, negations, contradictions, and pleasures would err towards what White in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* sees as an assimilationist rendering of the "familiar," and what Samuel R. Delany in "The Politics of Paraliterary Criticism" links to "The idea of 'definition'...with the idea of 'mastery'" itself ("Introduction" 5; *Shorter Views* 238). To these ends, what would it mean to not only say that furry and fandom are too thorny to singularize within easy terms and within fan studies itself, perhaps, but that they exceed us, driven as they are by the desires of subjects wanting peace and community in their own lives? Furry may or may not be about the anthropomorphic animal and its speculative, sexual form at this point, but may in fact be a nebula of things that demand more care to understand.

Methodologically, rather than try and focus on a broader, more overarching understanding of the works fans produce, I again zoom in and focus on the various forms that fans take on amidst literary production. Such an approach aims to center fans as producers of knowledge and their ways of understanding the world(s) around them, again, while also recognizing how furry fans sit with difference as a productive part of their growing ecosystems. In ways reminiscent of Dana Seitler's *Reading Sideways: The Queer Politics of Art in Modern American Fiction*, in which Seitler as a literary scholar examines "the coming into legibility of a set of diffuse counter-aesthetic practices that provide an access point for engaging the political methods of minoritized subjects at the turn of the [twentieth] century," I see here "the unfinished, the uncertain, the small, the low, and allusive among other aesthetic categories" a chance to give voice to fans

speaking from wherever they are and, when necessary, to elucidate fandom as more than the homogenizing and disfiguring form we have come to understand over time ("Introduction" 8-9).[3] Furry like fandom is not something fixed nor beholden to societal values, and as I will show, to truly experience what it is we misunderstand means sitting with and through the messy, tricky, and fantastic worlds that contemporary fan scholars seem to forget about. Attached as fans may be to the funny, anthropomorphic animal, said fans' works make felt "the event[s] of live intimacy" and the realities that often get obscured by cultures' reactions to that which they do not understand (Berlant 33).

Imagining Queerer Communities Through Speculative Fiction

As editors Jonathan Gray et al. explain in *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, "first-wave fan studies derived its legitimization from fans' assumed disempowered social position and their problematic representation in both public and academic discourses" ("Introduction" 3). With scholars such as Stuart Hall, Laura Mulvey, Marshall McLuhan, and Pierre Bourdieu having reconceived media and culture as sites of struggle, figures including John Fiske and Camille Bacon-Smith would come to realize the "more complex relationship between fans as agents and the structural confines of popular culture in which they operate," as Cornel Sandvoss writes in *Fans* ("Introduction" 3). Though generative, Sandvoss suggests the study of fandom and its

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[3] In "The PushmiPullu of Fandom," scholar and theorist Paul Booth describes how because of its interest in active, ever consuming audiences, media industries have consumer the idea of fandom and blurred it with "viewers" for their own ends (*Consumer Identities* 49). Booth as well cites Robert Pearson, who argues that "the internet has greatly facilitated the capacity for commercial exploitation," since fans "will always be beholden to the owners of [what] platform" they use (51). Agreeing with these statements as well as Booth's conclusion that "fandom can be other than commodity and fans can be more than consumers," my project hopes to make space for numerous, perhaps unseeable departures that can only be traced via allusion and playful renditions on the page (69).

attempts toward illustrating how subjects create meaning or value within the systems they operate has nevertheless limited the field, for "The recognition of the fan in the object of fandom is…inevitably self-reflective, rather than a meaningful engagement with anything new or other" ("Conclusion" 158). Resonant with this reading has been the work of recent fan scholar and media theorist Lori Morimoto, who in a 2013 published article with *Transformative Works and Culture* entitled "Trans-cult-ural Fandom" argues scholars in the West have failed to successfully attend to Eastern or international fan groups' dialogical relations because of a predominant focus on subjects from Western perspectives (par. 1.3). It is as though while moving in new directions, as scholars, we find ourselves still attached to the work of our early predecessors who through sociological means worked tirelessly to "reveal" any object of fandom through a particular, even national lens.

Furry as a question of definition again breaches this problem. Although scholars within the wider field have moved towards analyzing fans' objects for various reasons, furry's believed deviance shows how fan scholarship remains undecided on whether it is the fan we study or their texts. Just as well, said focus on deviance and difference ignores the reality that fandom *is* queer. Try as we might to contain them, there are some fan aspects that cannot be put into discourse due to our reliance on hegemonic terms. Queer theorists have similarly recognized a problematic such as this within their own field. In his 2018 work titled *Disturbing Attachments: Genet, Modern Pederasty, and Queer History*, scholar and queer theorist Kadji Amin turns to the field of queer studies as it has been developed and, while understanding the value of its many forebearers, questions the

extent that queer studies itself has remained attached to the hopes of staving off the cultural stigma queer subjects still face in their daily lives. Focused on known French pederast and political figure Jean Genet, Amin explains how when entering the work, hoping to realize Genet as someone who, perhaps like other queer figures, invokes a radical "pre-gay liberation past," he found himself troubled to the extent that Genet could not be rescued, or, could not be fully understood because of how queer studies has already always been about idealizing "denigrated groups" in order to contest the very violence that "sexual and racial" structures have caused ("Introduction" 5). In queerly failing to try and idealize Genet as a "politically 'good' figure," as Jack Halberstam describes in *The Queer Art of Failure*, Amin instead came to see new directions, specifically how because "Queer Studies…has seized the resources of scholarship for the project of stressing the viability, the political potency, and the world-building potential of queer life-worlds," has the field been inattentive the ways in which "Queer intimacies…are as likely to produce abuse, exploitation, and the renunciation of care as more loving, sexually liberated, and just alternatives to heteronormative social forms" themselves (6-7).[4] What if instead we worked against the grain in ways, Amin asks, while

[4] In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam, a theorist who begins her text with the reality that life as it has been promised has not existed for many, instead turns to how "Through the use of manifestoes, a range of political tactics, and new technologies of representation, radical utopians continue to search for different ways of being in the world and being in relation to one another," a direction that I see furries themselves distinctly taking up as they utilize "cartoon characters" and alien, seemingly nonhuman forms "to articulate [that] alternate vision of life, love, and labor" they desire ("Introduction" 2). What is particularly of importance in Halberstam's reading to me is her reading of "low theory," or, a "mode of accessibility" and "a kind of theoretical model that flies below the radar…assembled from eccentric texts and examples and that refuse to confirm the hierarchies of knowing" seen and recognized by hegemonic spheres of thought (15-16).

still moving "to offer more textured accounts of the distinct cultural and historical modalities of deviance" as allowed by our respective fields (8)?

Though this dissertation challenges scholars to sit with the difficulty of cultural texts celebrative of explicit content, rather than press for us to deidealize fandoms as objects of study or center adult practices, I argue that because we have been so guided to realize the forms and structures of fan practices in particular, more relatable understandings and values, we have overlooked the generative opportunities that fans' own literary analyses and texts—even the smutty ones—can offer our scholarship if not their own. In her recent work entitled *Before Fanfiction: Recovering the Literary History of American Media Fandom*, professor of writing at Texas Christian University Alexandra Edwards argues not only that literary analysis allow fan scholars to see the ways in which fans "have a sophisticated theoretical understanding of and language for their work" "themselves," but it also suggests how their works as queer performances *do* something, producing certain values or readings that escape fan studies as it has been institutionalized ("Introduction" 9; "Conclusion" 137-138). Resonant with this understanding is Black queer scholar Matt Richardson's *The Queer Limit of Black Memory: Black Lesbian Literature and Irresolution*, where in attempting to make felt "the unrecoverable" of Black lesbian realities within the archive, Richardson turns to historiographic literary works as a means to understanding what it is that occurred "in the familiar heterosexual and normatively gendered story of the past," being that any attempt to read Black queerness as it is understood today would ignore the "vernacular culture" within numerously varied "diasporic practices" ("Introduction" 12, 14). Each author here

tangles with the literary to their respective ends, yes, but to take on Edwards' and numerous other fans' charge that fandom *is* literary would mean to return to Grossberg's focus on affective sensibilities, and how fan produced texts bring certain knowledges and practices out in perhaps unexpected ways.

My work thereby draws from the field of speculative fiction studies to show how for furry, fandom is both this queer and temporally messy space *dense* with lingering pasts and imagined futures, but also that attempt at building better worlds, better selves, with the cartoon, anthropomorphic animal (perhaps) a placeholder for the subject identities we had been, could be, and wish for. I focus not only on the ways in which fans use speculative, even surreal aesthetics to document their desires and needs, but also on the way that print can be seen as a vehicle for queerness unto its own. Particularly, I mesh what is becoming of print and manuscript studies with the field of queer, speculative fiction studies, again locating the page as "a horizon imbued with possibility" as laid out by Muñoz in *Cruising Utopia* ("Introduction" 1). Considering the ways in which readers can see queerness "[as] that thing that lets us feel that the world is not enough, that indeed something is missing," Muñoz opens a path to the "not-yet conscious" that I see occurring in the blank spaces and gutters creatives find in the page's margins (2). In *How the Page Matters*, scholar of Print and Book History Bonnie Mak specifically argues how as a document, "the page hosts a changing interplay of form and content, of message and medium, of the conceptual and the physical, and this shifting tension is vital to the ability of the page to remain persuasive through time" ("Introduction" 5). Pressing forward, she emphasizes that "The page is more than a simple vehicle or container for the transmission

of ideas; it is a part of those ideas, entangled in the story itself" ("Architectures" 9). Like queerness, what seems so empty and meaningless within normative discourse is actually the "schemata of a forward-dawning futurity," "the anticipatory illumination of art" as Muñoz understands from philosopher Ernst Bloch offering "a surplus of both affect and meaning within the aesthetic" discourses available (2).

Furry as we think we know it took shape amidst cultural and social emancipation. While fans during the 1980s took to comics, conventions, cartoons, essays, and story as part of who they were, surrounding them, numerous collective movements pressed against the reality that the United States and Western imperial nations had become. For those who were reading funny animal comics produced by Dell and others across the mid-twentieth century and into the 1980s, the Civil Rights movement and early foundations of the Gay Liberation Front would contest the very idea of citizenship, together, as Roderick A. Ferguson describes in *One-Dimensional Queer* ("The Multidimensional" 19-20). Looking at the 1970s and how countercultural movements consumed print as part of their political networking, historian and scholar Sam Binkley asserts how the "intimacy" that publications brought on fused with "the tensions between formal and experiential expertise," giving materiality to the lives that subjects held and the worlds they wished to create (*Getting Loose* 107). For Ramzi Fawaz, who in *Queer Forms* describes how 1960s and 1970s feminists and gay activists took on a "range of aesthetic figures or structures that [could] give concrete shape to abstract identities, desires, and experiences," creation would be synonymous to manifesting the truths that subjects were a part of ("Introduction" 6-7). Try as one might to separate fandom from

political desires, fans came to use their cartoon figures to do what they wanted as they needed to. Contributing as a real, lived member of the APA known as *Rowrbrazzle*, for instance, anthropomorphic wolf and stand-in alias Vawlkee would introduce himself as a particular figure for cultural discourse, ostracized as he was by culture across literature in racializing ways. Created by artist and costume designer Robert Hill, in the APA's 1984 issue two, Vawlkee would specifically hail fans and readers in remarking how his "culture" was no different from that of "slick-skins"—humans—engaging in "Discussions [that] cover everything from lustful sexual encounters to the availability of cattle in a given area" ("Vawlkee"). Alas, and appearing reminiscent of popular culture's Big Bad Wolf archetype, the character would describe how because of the ideology "perpetuated by the church and its disciples," "The few of us that make our homes on the North-American Continent [have] it especially rough," unable to be seen as living, feeling subjects no different from those who ostracize them. Done in a style evoking the art of Walt Disney Animation and the pathos of a hand-written letter, Vawlkee's contribution shows how fans made use of cultural forms and documents to creatively speak out on the worlds they lived in, language subjunctively affective enough to turn reader's minds towards better communities.[5]

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[5] Subjunctivity for this project pulls from speculative fiction author and critic Samuel Delany's understanding of the term in "About 5,750 Words." Published within the collection *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw*, Delany defines subjunctivity as "the tension on the thread of meaning that runs between (to borrow Saussure's term for 'word':) sound-image and sound-image" (10). Focused as the essay is on speculative fiction, however, he asserts how SF places readers in situations that "*have not happened*" yet (10-11). Subjunctivity, then, allows one to not only see alternative futures and worlds but also "specifies how we got there" (12). In this direction, I argue that furry's literature, as fantastic as it might be, allows for us to consider the steps needed to take to build better worlds and queerer communes.

Rather than simply viewing fans' creative works as part of what fandom generates, through engagements with texts such as these, I showcase how fans' projects "illuminate something about the public character of the subjects," as Hall in "The World of the Gossip Column" argues with regards to print, just as said literature gestures to their worlds and alternative modes of relationality (*Writing on Media* 122). In this latter case, as I will show in my first and second chapters, fans' use of fantasy in works like Shawntae Howard's comic series *Extinctioners* and authors Orrery and Ko's "The Witch of Whatcom County" produces something, as comics scholar Darieck Scott describes in *Keeping It Unreal*, fantasy "a mode of living and…the transformation of living and being" in unending ways ("Introduction" 38). Yet fans do *more* than fantasize and imagine. Again complicating the ways that fan studies overlooks fans' numerous forms in attempts at ethics, care, and celebration, what furry is in actuality is always on the move, always going. To try and document furry, as I press in my final chapter, would be to recognize the numerous desires and worlds that subjects demand for their present and future, and to always be out of time with what it is we think we know of fans' lived experiences.

I have organized my dissertation into four chapters, with the middle two chapters performing focused close readings that draw from fans' literature as sites of knowledge production. In Chapter One, I begin by focusing on the growth of furry alongside comics and the production of original titles, where because of the opportunities that fandom allowed with regards to independent publication and experimentation, Gay and Black artists such as Shawntae Howard with *Extinctioners* and Steve Domanski et al. with

Circles became able to produce works that engaged with the past and its place in the present and future communities. In Chapter Two, I sit with the concern of determining what it is fans do and how though media and academics may try to cement a discursive understanding to fans' practices, do fans' speculative, even real desires go beyond the boundaries of what it is that our institutions and cultural understandings might allow. The chapter accordingly close reads Justine "Orrery" Tracer and Ko's speculative pornographic text "The Witch of Whatcom County," wherein a journalist with obscured and closeted desires learns that the fanatic magic practitioners she is paid to objectify may actually have the power to allow her own sense of self and fantasy to flourish. This chapter is followed by my second close reading, where looking at author Mary E. Lowd's 2019 novel *Nexus Nine*, Chapter Three works to imagine a formal practice of relationality best suited to making sense of communal, utopian projects and their dimensions, for in attaching to things we need in order to survive, as Berlant describes, we miss out on other, perhaps simultaneous moments, situations, that "[have] impact *despite*" what we see (*Cruel Optimism* 32). Finally, Chapter Four makes space to sit with the continued practice of anthology and collections production within the furry community, wherein editors like K.C. "Kiri" Alpinus, Alex Vance, Fred Patten, and more have mobilized and mediated fandom as a cohesive whole of numerous differences and desires. Throughout these chapters, I try my best to leave room for further scholarship and discussion by those within the fandom and not. The work included here comes from years of working and sitting with fans, advisors, and a dose of self-discovery along the way, yes, but I close the project in ways unfinished, gesturing to how fans and scholars must again be treated

synonymous with each other. Ultimately, this dissertation is a call that with or without us in the institution, fans do in fact produce knowledge on their own, accessible to us or otherwise. Furry can never truly be held in entirety, for it is not for us, unless we allow ourselves to be taken beyond normative culture's limiting though porous boundaries.

Chapter One

The Independent Comics of Furry and Imagining Queerer Futures

Figure 3. Artist Albert Temple's Gene Catlow, February 9th, 2001.

In a 1986 issue of editor Kim Thompson's *Critters*, Thompson, a self-proclaimed avid fan of the funny animal genre, argues that it is time for the funny animal's return. "Funny animals have taken a terrific beating in the last few years," he describes ("The Golden Thread"). Surrounded by comics full of superhero-costumed humans and action heroes proclaiming humanity's ability for change, what had begun as a popular interwar form of entertainment seemingly vanished, for "[when] Western Publishing heaved its final sigh and expired in a shower of bagged reprints, it sounded the death knell for the most enduring of the funny-animal series." Yet funny animal works would return. As Thompson's several-year series would showcase, numerous fans remembered the titles

they and their parents knew celebrated, and many would go to works like *Critters* and Steve Gallacci's *Albedo Anthropomorphics* to relive their childhood years while also seeing what new artists were bringing out. Just the same, fans themselves were creating new titles, for as comic scholar and historian Charles Hatfield explores in *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature*, fandom would become the stepping stool many needed to get their own works onto independent comic store shelves (26). With direct distribution offering a new method for comics to be published without artists being required to be part of a working studio, the funny animal was seemingly returning to a place in popular culture.

Fans found difficulty with their growing public, however. While many certainly enjoyed the funny animal of yesteryear, producing titles that put them in conversation with earlier artists that perhaps inspired them, several found themselves desiring more from their favorite archetypes. Reed Waller and Kate Worley would introduce their adults-only series *Omaha the Cat Dancer* in 1984, just years after Waller considered the question on whether funny animal characters could have sex and, if so, what kind. Known for his fusion of Japanese samurai Bushido with the aesthetic of traditional style caricatures and animation, Stan Sakai's *Usagi Yojimbo* would similarly transform the funny animal's early concern with difference into a narrative of differing factions and cultures colliding across feudal Japan. Just as the twentieth century was ending, fan artists operating under the moniker of furries including Shawntae Howard, Albert Temple, and Steve Domanski would theorize how communities could operate with more attention to America's failures in their daily lives, contesting any idea that the nation had

grown into a place to heal (see Figure 3).[6] In effect, the fandom that had once simply been for funny animal comic appreciators had grown too dense for simple categorization. Furries, affected as they were by their personal histories and desires, took on fandom as a means of building deeper and queerer opportunities.

Beginning my foray into the furry community and its problematizing of fandom as we know it, this chapter looks at the funny animal works and fans that inspired many artists heading into the new century. I argue that fans carrying with them the experiences and desires of subjects wishing to build something more inevitably realized fandom's queerness: its "elusive quality" that is "both interactive and yet resistant, both participatory yet distinct" (Doty xv). Like the idea of sex, which Doty uses to account for the ways that what we hail might in fact slip past us due to the limits of the terms we have available, furries were finding that how they understood fandom grew out of touch with the numerous decisions being made by artists on the move (5). They could in fact point to the texts they were interested in, with independent comics and direct distribution coming to the forefront during the later 1980s, and the attachments fans held ultimately burgeoned into numerous *other* directions their favorite form could go. Fans would inevitably come to place their hopes for their favorite archetypes in representations that were out of sync with what others expected of them. Taking what opportunities and

[6] A fan favorite, Temple's *Gene Catlow* series began at the turn of the twenty-first century, just as question of better, more egalitarian America was consistently shown to be otherwise. The series follows anthropomorphic cartoon animals including Buster Rabbit and the comic's titular hero Gene as their world grew ever more affected and under attack by the bureaucratic, capitalist humans who severed the funny animal metropolis of Furriston from humanity. Though in deep conversation with the aesthetics of early funny animal titles, Temple's fusion of real-world questions of red-lining and racial othering with fans' favorite form illustrates one way in which fans decided to rethink their favorite genres within fandom.

repertoires were available, then, late-twentieth-century creatives like Howard and Domanski, French, and Fabianek would use the funny animal comic as a structure for imagining new coalitional futures, blurring how many conceive of fandom as a structure writ large.

I begin this chapter by looking at the funny animal genre's history in American culture before I turn to how that aesthetic's play with difference allotted opportunity for the subjects feeling estranged and forgotten to experience identification as fans. I close this chapter with an approach to Howard's *Extinctioners* and Domanski et al's late twentieth-century *Circles*, two works that I argue evoke fandom's creative opportunities and the out-of-sync relation that many furry fans bear to definitions. Concluding, I leave room to sit with fandom as it has been understood, with furry as only one out of numerous publics containing traces of our attachments that fan scholarship is prone to overlook.

Funny Animal Figures and the Question of Fandom, with a Twist

The funny animal has only unfurled before academics' eyes within recent years, its layered, dense, affective histories complicating what it is culture easily skims of such a form. While many accord anthropomorphic animals to the more contemporary works produced by artists and names including Walt Disney and Bill Waterson, as education scholars Carolyn L. Burke and Joby G. Copenhaver describe in "Animals as People in Children's Literature," during the late eighteenth century, works of fiction catering to children used the animal's playful image to provide "guidance and instruction to maintain [children's] safety and to allow them to grow into full membership in society" (*Language*

Arts 208). Animals in this sense acted as models for expressing human qualities and expectations in humorous, affective gestures, being that documents left open space for readers to think about the morals and values texts like Heinrick Hoffman's *Struwwelpeter* (Slovenly Peter) and Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* could offer. The publication of such works no less came to fruition as industrial printing accelerated, but the funny animal readers know today would not faithfully come to be until the turn of the twentieth century, when comic strips and newspapers rose into commodities for working class citizens.

News print transformed into a highly economic enterprise just as prior entertainment forms were ending, and for the funny animal, this meant transitioning from simple illustrations to models of civility and difference. In *Producing Mass Entertainment*, comics scholar and historian Christina Meyer writes how "In the 1890s, city papers in the US began to print extras for their Sunday editions—in color," and this "Colored Supplement…[would] become the weekly sensation of the paper," "filled with diverse illustrations, short human-interest stories, and prose miscellanea, and a number of comics" ("Introduction" 3-4). Pulitzer's Sunday World's "Comic Weekly" would grow to include works such as Richard Felton Outcault's *Hogan's Alley*, while competing newspapers like the *New York Herald* and the *New York Evening Journal* would release works including Winsor Mc-Cay's *Little Nemo in Slumberland* and George Herriman's *Krazy Kat*. In these last two works, the funny animal continued its place as a simple representation for children, but as scholars such as Rebecca Wanzo and Nicholas Sammond have explained respectively, with *Krazy Kat* and Walt Kelly's *Pogo* in

particular, the funny animal took on the role that was priorly kept to the stages of vaudeville-minstrelsy. In *Birth of An Industry: Blackface Minstrelsy and the Rise of American Animation*, Sammond lays out how "the visual and performative tropes of vaudeville and blackface minstrelsy—well known to audiences of the day—gave rise to the basic template for trademark continuing characters such as Felix the Cat, Krazy Kat, Oswald the Lucky Rabbit, Mickey Mouse, and Bugs Bunny" ("Performance" loc. 821).[7] As Wanzo explores in *The Content of Our Caricature: African American Comic Art and Political Belonging*, the United States similarly found its textual materials generative in understanding or apprehending the numerous urban changes surrounding them; as subjects came into contact with numerous subjects, comics' ability to render difference in fixed tropes helped build an audience already needing to recognize a world that had become more than they had known ("Introduction" 6). Vaudeville-minstrelsy thus bled into the slapstick antics and language plays occurring both within the newsprint pages and in the animation performances on early matinee screens. With comic books coming out amidst the Great Depression, the funny animal would only pull its histories into the pamphlets fans know today.

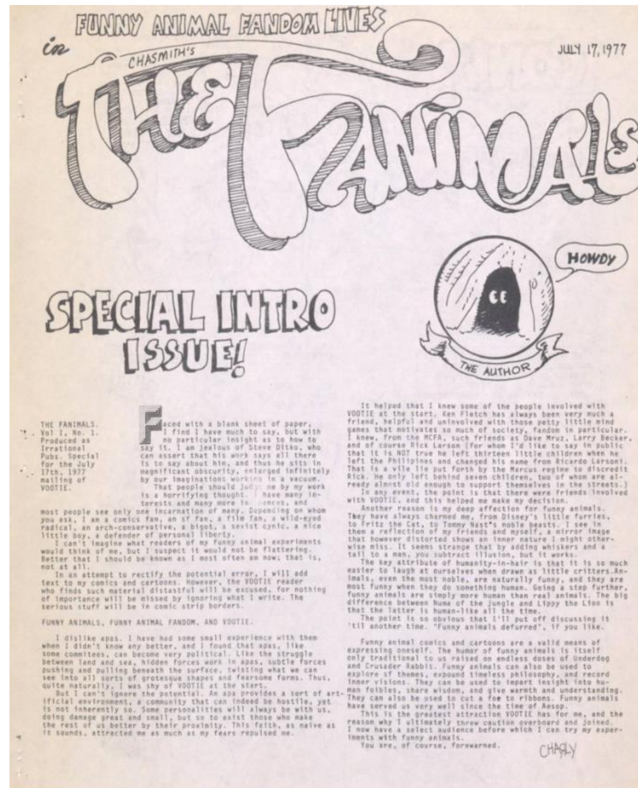
Enmeshed with Americans' anxieties as they were, said characters' openly malleable and predictable natures remained popular for children. In "Lions and Tigers

[7] Though engaging the areas of music and sound production, historian Matthew D. Morrison in his *Blacksound: Marking Race and Popular Music in the United States* explains that vaudeville-minstrelsy was one of the first largest moves into what we consider popular culture, and many of the numerous, racializing forms and interests have accordingly continued into the texts we know today ("Introduction" loc. 228). Vaudeville-minstrel comedy and slapstick no less held sway in American culture and easily blended into the newsprint comics and animations that already captured audiences as notions of difference and social types circulated.

and Bears: A Natural History of the Sequential Animal," historian and comics scholar Daniel F. Yezbick explains it would be funny animals' "multidimensional" properties that allowed the genre to eventually become what they are known today, for though animals, the figures used by Herriman, Kelly, and eventual Charles M. Schultz operated opportunities for explore "human anxieties," "harsh warnings," "fantasies, cultures, and communities," and desires leading on into the mid-century (*Animal Comics* 29-30). Inevitably, comic producers like publishing magnate Dell would come to rely on the funny animal titles they released for continued readers: "After World War II," Yezbick exclaims, "Dell and other publishers…enjoyed an unprecedented 'Animal Comics Boom,' where middlebrow anthropomorphic slapstick humor reached new heights of diversity and popularity" ("From Anodyne Animals" 258). Just the same, within the underground, artists and comic fans would exceedingly test the boundaries of the forms they knew, Art Spiegelman and Sheri Flenniken in *Aminal Comics* placing their funny animal figures in more adult interests or conversations such as sex and retellings of the Holocaust. What stayed true to the animals much like their predecessors was their ability to contend with questions about society and culture through their numerous storylines, then. Yezbick writes, as "charming 'little graphic machines,'" funny animals mediate the numerous human "codes" and "signs" whether adult in nature or not, and more importantly with regard to the underground, such meant artists could take on the "unyielding form of biomorphic repression that makes consumers of all ages less comfortable, familiar, or interested in the sensual, erotic, or erogenous potential of their own and other living bodies" (*The Routledge Guide* 259).

Amidst the numerous rises and shifts of the genre, fans no less ascribed various merits to what it was they found so interesting. In issues of comic fan and Amateur Press Association (APA) editor Dr. Jerry Bails's *Capa-ALPHA*, fan Mike Barrier would look back to the numerous titles released by Dell and the Walt Disney studio; in the 1965 issue thirteen, Barrier particularly numbers and lays out what to him is "a record of when regular publication [of the Walt Disney comic books] began, the course it [publishing] took, and when it ended (if it has)" ("The Publishing History"). In a 1973 issue of APA *Starling*, editor Lesleigh Luttrell's "Great American Comics, Part V: Funny Animals of North America" would attempt to place popular animal characters into their respective biomes, successful or not (39). Contributing members would celebrate these seeming returns to the form; in a contribution to funny animal APA *Vootie* in 1977, fan and funny animal artist Charles Chasmith would proclaim that funny animal fandom was alive despite the mid-century's seeming focus on superhero and action titles, and that part of the action, "Funny animal comics and cartoons are a valid means of expressing oneself. The humor of funny animals is itself only traditional to us raised on endless doses of *Underdog* and *Crusader Rabbit*" ("The Fanimals") (see Figure 4). It made sense to these

fans that as underground comics were rising, so too would new artists and titles come out in an excess of unexpected proportions.



FUNNY ANIMAL FANDOM LIVES in CHASMITH'S THE FANIMALS

JULY 17, 1977

SPECIAL INTRO ISSUE!

THE FANIMALS. Vol I, No. 1. Produced as Irrational Pubs. Special for the July 17th, 1977 mailing of VOOTIE.

Faced with a blank sheet of paper, I find I have much to say, but with no particular insight as to how to say it. I am jealous of Steve Ditko, who can assert that his work says all there is to say about him, and thus he sits in magnificant obscurity, enlarged infinitely by our imaginations working in a vacuum.

That people should judge me by my work is a horrifying thought. I have many interests and many more in [illegible], and most people see only one incarnation of many. Depending on whom you ask, I am a comics fan, an sf fan, a film fan, a wild-eyed radical, an arch-conservative, a bigot, a sexist cynic, a nice little boy, a defender of personal liberty.

I can't imagine what readers of my funny animal experiments would think of me, but I suspect it would not be flattering. Better that I should be known as I most often am now; that is, not at all.

In an attempt to rectify the potential error, I will add text to my comics and cartoons. However, the VOOTIE reader who finds such material distastful will be excused, for nothing of importance will be missed by ignoring what I write. The serious stuff will be in comic strip borders.

FUNNY ANIMALS, FUNNY ANIMAL FANDOM, AND VOOTIE.

I dislike apas. I have had some small experience with them when I didn't know any better, and I found that apas, like some commitees, can become very political. Like the struggle between land and sea, hidden forces work in apas, subtle forces pushing and pulling beneath the surface, twisting what we can see into all sorts of grotesque shapes and fearsome forms. Thus, quite naturally, I was shy of VOOTIE at the start.

But I can't ignore the potential. An apa provides a sort of artificial environment, a community that can indeed be hostile, yet is not inherently so. Some personalities will always be with us, doing damage great and small, but so to exist those who make the rest of us better by their proximity. This faith, as naive as it sounds, attracted me as much as my fears repulsed me.

It helped that I knew some of the people involved with VOOTIE at the start. Ken Fletch has always been very much a friend, helpful and uninvolved with those petty little mind games that motivates so much of society, fandom in particular. I knew, from the MCFA, such friends as Dave Mruz, Larry Becker, and of course Rick Larson (for whom I'd like to say in public that it is NOT true he left thirteen little children when he left the Philipines and changed his name from Ricardo Larsoni. That is a vile lie put forth by the Marcus regime to discredit Rick. He only left behind seven children, two of whom are already almost old enough to support themselves in the streets.)

In any event, the point is that there were friends involved with VOOTIE, and this helped me make my decision.

Another reason is my deep affection for funny animals. They have always charmed me, from Disney's little furries, to Fritz the Cat, to Tommy Nast's noble beasts. I see in them a reflection of my friends and myself, a mirror image that however distorted shows an inner nature I might otherwise miss. It seems strange that by adding whiskers and a tail to a man, you subtract illusion, but it works.

The key attribute of humanity-in-hair is that it is so much easier to laugh at ourselves when drawn as little critters. Animals, even the most noble, are naturally funny, and they are most funny when they do something human. Going a step further, funny animals are simply more human than real animals. The big difference between Numa of the Jungle and Lippy the Lion is that the latter is human-like all the time.

The point is so obvious that I'll put off discussing it 'til another time. "Funny animals defurred", if you like.

Funny animal comics and cartoons are a valid means of expressing oneself. The humor of funny animals is itself only traditional to us raised on endless doses of Underdog and Crusader Rabbit. Funny animals can also be used to explore sf themes, expound timeless philosophy, and record inner visions. They can be used to impart insight into human foibles, share wisdom, and give warmth and understanding. They can also be used to cut a foe to ribbons. Funny animals have served us very well since the time of Aesop.

This is the greatest attraction VOOTIE has for me, and the reason why I ultimately threw caution overboard and joined. I now have a select audience before which I can try my experiments with funny animals.

You are, of course, forewarned.

CHARLY

Figure 4. Charles Chasmith's "The Fanimals"

Fandom specifically made room for fans and collectors to try their hand at comic production in any form. While much of what readers had grown up knowing came at the result of a studio model bent towards quick production runs and even exploitation, within fandom, comic connoisseurs could spend their time creating and being celebrated for works they made on their own, even experimental titles that again brought sex and new themes into the forefront. Ascribing the 1970s and 1980s as when independent comic producers found themselves with new agency thanks to print and reproduction modes at the time, Hatfield explains that just as newspaper stands gave way to comic shops that ran

on their own mix of customers, so too would "the major publishers…[begin] to concentrate on this all-important fan market. The growing emphasis on fandom, among not only mainstream publishers but also upstart publishers adapted specifically to the new conditions, led to the growth of specialty shops" ("Comix, Comic Shops" loc. 521-530). Publishers looking to take advantage of said shops then took on newer artists by soliciting "orders from retailers in advance of publication so that the size of print runs [could] be adjusted according to anticipated demand," and using artists wanting to become big names for themselves, independent shops would circulate titles priorly unseen or even imagined (loc. 539). Like with fans' numerous fan fiction titles and works that played with known contemporary forms and narratives, the new comic market gave allowance to artists to do what they wanted and get paid for it.

Inevitably, funny animal titles would explode across the 1980s, whether thanks to the independent, fan driven magazines and fanzines fans had come to use or the swell of shops now catering to fans attendant to the indies as connoisseurs. Pulled from the pages of his fanzine newsletter of the same name, Dave Sim's *Cerebus* playfully meshed the worlds of Robert E. Howard's *Conan the Barbarian Comics* with funny animal aesthetics, while comic creator and US Air Veteran Steve Gallacci again fused science fiction military with animals in *Albedo Anthropomorphics* in 1983. An anthology series, *Albedo* would host Sakai's *Usagi Yojimbo* and its playful rendition of Japanese samurai Bushido amidst cartoon heroes, a fan favorite eventually colliding with Peter Laird and Kevin Eastman's similarly produced 1984 *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. While some fans did in fact continue the form as it was known since the early twentieth century,

others similarly lingered within the fervor of underground comics' depictions of sexual content and pornography in comical and illustrative ways, as seen in Sin Factory's 1990s series *Genus* and Antarctic Press's *Genus: Male*. Within the fanzines and APAs fans circulated, artists Donna Barr, Jim Groat, Steve Martin, and Roz Gibson would continue to make the works they did in good company; for Gibson and Barr specifically, *Rowrbrazzle* and other APAs remained the springboard for new, fan-based ideas and curiosities, fans across issues even contending with the question of what made anthropomorphic animals distinct. Inevitably, the growing wealth of fans that would become the furry fandom in the 1990s would see a "furry comics boom" of their own, argues Gibson, particularly with the rise of the internet and fandom-invested distributors like Vision Comics and Shanda Fantasy Arts ("*Shanda the Panda* #50"). Beginning as a form meant to help children and audiences understand the developing worlds they were a part of, the funny animal had transformed into a public means of representation and counterculture thanks to fandom.

Considering Tomorrow's Ghosts with the Anthropomorphic Animal and Its Worlds

Whereas fans making use of the new independent comics market certainly found themselves returned to their favorite memories of yesteryear through the funny animal's classic slapstick conventions living on in titles like those featured in Thompson's *Critters*, the late twentieth century was finding itself embroiled in what many have come to know as the culture wars over America's and the western world's futures. The world had become a much more global place, as Dunn contends, and with World War II having drawn out considerations of a national community, many still struggled with the limits

their own spaces dealt with as a new coming century came into question ("Furry Fandom" par. 2.1, 2.4). With regards to America's "long emancipation," or what scholar Rinaldo Walcott describes as the continued efforts for Black freedom across America's numerous unfurling timelines, subjects found themselves recognizing that it would take "a global reorienting and radical reordering phenomenon" to confront and dismantle what W.E.B. Du Bois understood as "the problem of the color line" (*The Long Emancipation* 5; Chandler 145).[8] For gay and lesbian subjects still haunted by the nineteenth century's question of difference and marked for death at the becoming of the global AIDS crisis, the state as a figure for support could not offer what it had seemed to proclaim since the nation's very inception. Cries for America to take note of its plurality failed, for as James Kyung-Jin Lee charges, the nation indeed seemed more interested in marking those who should live and die via biopolitics ("Introduction" xvi). Inevitably, subjects would find themselves having to go through their own communities for the care and support they needed, already always out of sync with culture and its fantasies of civility for the people.

Fandom nonetheless remained a public sphere of its own, with fans making use of the forms available to mobilize and mediate their own thoughts on the world. Though funny animal fans like Patten would remain interested in the classic works and what they

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[8] Thinking about Du Bois's theoretical contributions and how they pertained to building new worlds at the turn of the twentieth century, African American Studies scholar and theorist Nahum Dimitri Chandler ascribes Du Bois question of the color line as this wider question "of 'man' or humankind as a whole" (*Beyond This Narrow* 145). Though many understand Du Bois as someone principally concerned with matters of race and the West's numerous violences into the twentieth centuries, "'the problem of the color line'…was rendered as a distinct epistemological proposition in Du Bois's thought in the course of an effort to name the situation of the African American," Chandler writes, and thus, one can consider Du Bois as taking on "the worldwide and variegated system of modern colonialism" that affected humankind at the level of an epistemological failure (146).

continued to offer fans as continued readers, others like Taral Wayne argued that what brought them into APA's like Schirmeister's *Rowrbrazzle* was fandom's specific allowance for new, perhaps even radical departures unexpected to be taken "from the comics [he] read as a kid" ("Taral Wayne"). Likewise, the APAs in themselves had become affective sites for community, artist Jim Groat in *Rowrbrazzle*'s 1989 issue twenty-two reimagining his family as anthropomorphic goats to retell the night he and his family took part in witnessing America's first moon landing twenty years prior ("July 20th, 1969"). Fans would come to share aspects of themselves in personal, perhaps even indirect forms of discourse; again contributing as character Vawlkee, artist and costumer Robert Hill would explore queer sexuality and America's monstrosity in ways that would perturb other, more conservative contributors. Though many might expect fans to simply contribute texts that played with their chosen aesthetic, fandoms' celebration of fans and their respective lives laid the groundwork for many to contend with the world in the means they had available to them.

Comic works would again be a part of this process, seemingly pulling away from what was expected of fandom as they might have been. Discussing Waller and Worley's *Omaha the Cat Dancer* in "A Christmas Card from a Cat Dancer," Aaron Kashton explains how real-world Minneapolis, Minnesota, was experiencing a crisis with regards to the closure of nightclubs and sex publics supporting minoritarian communities financially or otherwise. As a work produced by fans interested in the funny animal figure, *Omaha* would use its anthropomorphic characters to contend with such, the comic's titular heroine herself a performer pushed out by in-world Mipple City's corrupt

politicians (“A Christmas Card” 55). Here, the funny animal, anthropomorphic figure’s humanizing light allowed “a sense of warmth and community” to the figures within real-world situations; as Kashtan describes, “Waller and Worley make the reader feel affection for *Omaha*’s Mipple City by depicting that city with loving specificity, and by presenting it as a nice place to live, despite its undistinguished reputation” (*Inks* 60). In this sense, the comic as a work of fandom *and* professional artistry arguably blurred what subjects knew of fandom as it had been recognized, or at the time a site of wild fanaticism driven by consumers inherently abnormal for their believed gluttony with texts. No doubt, fan studies as a field of scholarship would work against the expectations in the following decade through works like Bacon-Smith’s *Enterprising Women* and Lisa A. Lewis’s *The Adoring Audience*.

Titles like *Omaha* and Antarctic Press’s *Shanda the Panda* thus “queered” fandom, as Silverman argues, fusing the sexual with the seemingly childlike to render new publics for audiences’ minds. Unlike preceding funny animal fans, the newest wave of fans known as “furries” at the time of the 1990s identified with the characters they had come to know much more personally and “sever[ered] fandom from textual objects” as priorly understood by the general public (*Fursonas* 5). With the internet only coming to homes and the numerous servers held at university campuses, fans would also roleplay as their favorite, self-made anthropomorphic figures. In this stead, the production of publics only continued its rise, driven by the queer and Black fans transforming technology for themselves. While furries would ultimately enter the dominant sphere thanks to articles released by magazine’s including *Wired* and *Vanity Fair* (which I sit with more in depth

in this next, following chapter), comics and their surrounding worlds catered to fans still feeling America's failures in a moment of argued progression.

Titles coming at the turn of the twenty-first century no less messed with time in their attempts at mediating deeper questions on survival. Began as a spin from Waller and Worley's *Omaha* and the Marvel published series *Excalibur*, Black artist and Afrofuturist Shawntae Howard released *Extinctioners* in 1998. Released by independent publishing company Vision Comics, the series followed super-powered animal "hybrids" Katherine "Alleycat" Fela, Phenix, Scarlet Starfox, Maxwell "Copycat" Manx, and more as they worked to tirelessly survive and defeat colonizer-from-the-past Dr. Adam Mahn, a scientist who as Earth found itself dying from Climate Change shuttled experimented-upon animals into an alternate dimension, hoping to reclaim the planets they colonized for humanity's own. While the series emphasized on time as a seeming antagonist with regards to its main antagonist, Howard's earliest issues as well contended with the liberal idea that supposed progress brought with it a unanimous reality of social acceptance. Beginning the comic as the series' in-world Space Station Alopex finds itself under attack by an unknown force of cybernetic "hunters," Katherine and her boyfriend Maxwell flee as their community is also invaded. Alas, Katherine finds herself separated from Maxwell and left at the dead-end of an alleyway, now forced to deal with a hunter drone on her own. While the droid fires upon her, Katherine seemingly phasing through the enemy's blasts and surviving, heroes known as Red and Scarlet of the Solarfoxes arrive to save her, and the two foxes take on their new enemy, as Katherine's pulled into a hovering vehicle by the rest of Red and Scarlet's team, who welcome Katherine as they

simultaneously grieve the loss of their home aboard the Alopex space station. The moment ends with everyone onboard surviving, but as Red and Scarlet return to their ship, Scarlet finds the Katherine is an anthropomorphic feline, and in anger, she hails Katherine an "Alleycat" who deserved to die rather than be saved and brought aboard just as she was. Red, captain of the Solarfoxes, separates Scarlet from the space and apologizes to his new guest, someone who herself is just as much as victim as Scarlet and the team are themselves.

Howard, however, uses this tension to address the twentieth century's question of community and problem of the color line. With Katherine on board and safe, Red turns to Scarlet, and following her to her private quarters, Red demands that his second in command explain herself. Tense and emotional, Scarlet takes Red back to a moment of her childhood, where on her fourth birthday, her older brother and Canine Astro Officer was murdered by several felines right before her eyes. Graphically rendering the image for readers to see and acknowledge, Howard no less leaves the page open for readers to move through, the past only inches from the present and future, and thus in direct relation. With icons of space stations, shuttles, androids, and anthropomorphic animals used across a title emphasizing in working across differences, *Extinctioners* nevertheless reveals the present as queerer than timelines allow.

Echoing the works inspiring him, Howard uses *Extinctioners*'s complicating narrative to render the humanitarian potentialities that come from building coalitional publics with difference in mind. Following the characters' escape from Katherine's first hunter encounter, the animals find themselves captured when attempting to free many of

the friends and colleagues from Mahn's subservient droids and animal subjects ("Countdown to Extinction, Part 3"). Overpowered, alas, Katherine, Scarlet, and an unknown heroine known only as Phenix flew with Solarfox member Foxy to a distant planet, where safe, the three take commune with kangaroo characters Tisha and Thomas. The group are taken to their hosts' home, where they can repair and take best approach at saving their friends now held captive by a still unknown force of nonhuman beings, but Scarlet, upset that Katherine could allow for her team and Red to be captured, strikes the feline, only for the two to be separated by Phenix and told to calm down. Phenix, a figure representative of Marvel's own Jean Grey, exclaims to the two women that fighting over their differences would only fail them. Instead, she transforms the two's outfits into superhero attire brandishing the icon of a phoenix and explains that if they are going to want to save their friends and loved ones, then they must ultimately "work together," "The symbol…of the phoenix [being] the embodiment of hope and life" (see Figure 5). As Fawaz explains in *The New Mutants*, Howard's series takes on the radical energy of the mid-twentieth century New Left and its drive for coalitional futures. In bringing an energy informed by anticolonial politics and the desire of dismantling oppression still left unseen in America's system, however, Howard takes the "monstrous progeny of the age of atomic and genetic science" to realize "national civic life" into the 1990s as still imperfect. The "cosmopolitics" of the mid-century heroes is shown to be still unfinished, leaving subjects to produce new publics for them and their collaborators into the next century ("Introduction" 26, 36).

The funny animal figure in this way held an opportunity to render reality with a twist, with fans able to confront issues important to them as fans while also theorize with

Figure 5. Phenix coming between Scarlet and Katherine in Shawntae Howard's Extinctioners.

what queer forms were available to them. Yet resonant with Howard and many within the Black independent comics movement, gay and queer artists still affected and haunted by the preceding decade's AIDS Crisis worked to capture queer history often left behind as mere traces within the archive's collections. Inspired by the preceding success of independent comic series *Associated Student Bodies* (ASB) by artist and writer team Lance Rund and Chris McKinley, Steve Domanski would release *Circles* in 2001, just as

the new century brought about the idea of America with newer, fresher restart. Whereas ASB made space for queer funny animal fans to feel community within the "bad feelings" that scholar Ann Cvetkovich argues often tail queer, gay, and lesbian subjects, *Circles* follows skunk protagonist Martin "Marty" Miller as he joins the numerous gay men and animals at the upper-class suburban home of 6 Kinsey Circle in a fictional Boston, Massachusetts (*An Archive of Feelings* loc. 215). Readers shadow as Marty not only uses the home as a resting place following his leaving of home, but how after coming out, he and house members Paul "Paulie" Mayhew, Douglas Pope, Kenneth "Ken" Brassai, Arthur Korsky, and Taylor "Taye" Dooley become a family of their own, transforming the suburban household into a multistory, multi-generational site of care. In a personal interview, series writer Andrew French expresses how furry fans who had been using the internet to connect and roleplay revealed their support for queer titles through ASB's success, but rather retell another tale going through a youth's coming-out experience, *Circles* was to be a project that showed the density and multiplicity within the queer and post-AIDS gay community. Although deeply in conversation with other fan titles, Domanski et al. would join said works to recognize the importance of community while also blurring what fandom could offer in the minds for fans making way into the next century.

The home at 6 Kinsey Circle itself draws out the difficulty queer subjects would suffer to be included in a supposedly more accepting America. Following the energy and activism of the 1960s Gay Liberation Movement and its blending with the numerous activist groups including ACT UP, as Historian Stephen Vider writes in *The Queerness of*

Home: Gender, Sexuality, & the Politics of Domesticity after World War II, "In the 1980s and 1990s, people living with HIV/AIDS faced open hostility," and "Disclosing that you were living with the virus could come with consequences ranging from loss of job to loss of home or family" ("Introduction" 2). "Yet," Vider continues, "by the 1990s, LGBTQ activists increasingly came to see the state as an ally in protecting" them, and "LGBTQ activists no longer viewed the home as a haven *from* the state, but rather a haven protected *by* the state" (3). *Circles* follows this trajectory, for once entering the home as a prospective housemate in issue one, Marty finds that the three story suburban home has queered into a productive site for community and continued care. Arthur, the home's resident artist, takes up the basement as his own personal art studio and living quarters (34), while Douglas uses the kitchen to provide well-tended to meals for the numerous animal characters as though they were family (47). Despite this feeling of home, however, canine patriarch and neighbor Carter Allen wields his homophobia against the household across much of the series, local neighbor and elderly Squirrel Mrs. Esther Nussbaum a frequent contest against Carter's barbed commentary (*Circles* 3 50-51). Likewise, in the series's issue eight, readers learn that house member ken's relationship with an anthropomorphic bull is abusive, and thus transform the home into a sight of violence from the inside (*Circles* 2 129). While not depicting actual, true events that may or may not have transpired, Domanski et al.'s use of the comic as this speculative question of progress at the century's turn evoked a deeper resonance with fans who were transforming fandom's porous boundaries into a home for themselves.

Figure 6. Paulie learning of his HIV-AIDS status in Circles*, issue five.*

Inevitably, and with so many of the characters coming from different generations, *Circles*'s eventual discussion of the AIDS Crisis's longer histories helped fans make sense of time—and fandom's—inherent queerness. Throughout the work, readers follow as Marty makes sense and builds relationships with the numerous men and neighbors now a part of his life. While it would have been easy for Domanski et al. to rely on stereotypes and common tropes that had since been explored with works such as Alison Bechdel's *Dykes to Watch Out For*, Howard Cruse's *Gay Comix*, and Rund and McKinley's ASB, using the funny animal's informing question of difference, the creators add depth to each respective home member, particularly the home's leading patriarch, Paulie. In the comic's issue five, Marty finds himself home alone with the older canid, and curious, he presses Paulie into explaining his move from Britain and eventual coming

out (10). The narrative unfolds as a representation of oral history, with the older housemate and father figure retelling his first gay relationship and move into the home at Kinsey Circle (16, 24). As Paulie gets closer to readers' contemporary present, alas, Paulie describes the devastation that he and others suffered as a result of AIDS and the country's failure to act, friend and drag queen rabbit Greg committing suicide after "he was diagnosed as having full-blown AIDS" (33). The issue ends with Paulie's own diagnosis and his decision to become an activist "speaking at colleges about safe sex and the importance of it," and he and Marty end their conversation to return to their respective beds (38) (see Figure 6).

With the image of Paulie climbing the stairs to his upper portion of the house, however, Domanski et al. deflect any conception of a linear timeline, the history of AIDS itself literally haunting the numerous gay men resting below. From dinner routines to their respective schedules, the characters and their numerous encounters with each other built out the idea of queerness as multifaceted and dimensional, just as it put into material form the idea of numerous timeliness coexisting in spaces at once. As somber as *Circles* issue five is, it nevertheless reiterates the power of community and found family across its pages and through its respective form brings forth a "horizon" for queer and gay subjects to imagine themselves experiencing in some coming and desired for future (Muñoz 24). It is a reminder to fans, perhaps many themselves who had yet to come out as gay or queer, that community offered a means of survival at a time of continued loss. No less a work of fan community, readers have continued to look back at it and its

numerous chapters and other sibling works as one of the many reasons they joined furry at the turn of the century.

Conclusion

As subjects surrounded by media, we tend to think of fandom in homogenous, even fixed ways. No community is ever entirely whole or unanimous, yet the power of discourse and the desire for knowledge holds us in patterns typically relying on an ideal whether or not we recognize it. For furry fans, this tends to mean seeing the late 1980s and 1990s as the foundation of when furry began, but as this chapter shows, furry is in actuality a cacophony of histories and subjects acting out under a signifier affectively guided. Though furry has become known as a space where funny animal fans of all ages produce new titles or projects of their own, the many histories of the funny animal and its respective comics fandom still circulate, as readers and artists rethink early concerns of difference into a conversation on relationality. Just the same, the titles I have described show how fandom is in fact numerous things, allowing subjects to create for themselves, yes, but also allowing them a means for imagining survival strategies into the coming years. And as suggested, fans' entanglements with sex and sexual material does exist within fandom, but this is not restricted to furries. Rather, fandom is a queerness full of attachments and interests both positive, deviant, or otherwise. Furries have just been taken by an image in culture that fits with what normativity demands.

Yet the fandom's numerous comic titles and surrounding publics illustrate how fandom is queer. It is beautiful, painful, inspiring, desire filled, tricky, nebulous, and heavy. For the subjects who use it to imagine newer, better futures, perhaps even building

new families and communities within the space we think is already always one, singular thing, to ascribe what they see of fan communities as *their* fandom is to only gesture towards a something out of sync with the terms we have available. Of course, we might be shaken by such a reality. As Amin explores with regard to a queerer queer theory, however, perhaps recognizing that fandom cannot "be predicted in advance" can open to a newer practice of scholarship built in "possibility rather than as a burden or drag." "[D]riven" as fandom is "to do new things and grapple with new problems…through the force and the course of its ongoing affective history," this shift can help scholars in confronting how fandom has been seen and imagined into our contemporary moments, where histories of difference, race, power, and ableism enact continued violence on victim subjects (*Disturbing Attachments* 189).

Moving into my next chapter, here, I transition toward my first close-reading with Justine "Orrery" Tracer and Ko's "The Witch of Whatcom County." Sitting with fandom's queerness as well as the tools that dominant culture uses to estrange us, in turning to the Gothic histories within the present, I press that it is up to us critics to be affected by the titles or projects seemingly too deviant for our structures as they stand. To do otherwise would mean disallowing the power that fantasy and fandom inherently offer.

Chapter Two

"The Witch of Whatcom County" and the Failure in Rendering Fandom

While funny animal comics into the new century proved accessible and enjoyable to numerous audiences, fans continuing under the moniker of furry would find themselves stricken with the identity of fanatics believed to be sexually aroused by cartoon and animal-like figures. As said fans made way into the early nineties, for instance, room party fliers at science fiction and comic conventions would be replaced by pamphlets advertising them as "Skunk Fuckers."[9] Similarly, users of online Multi User Custom Kingdoms–MUCKs–would be hailed by other communities just the same. While funny animal comics had grown to represent numerous genres and conventions audiences would be well aware of, the fact was, some comic artists did use comics to engage sexual content and pleasure, again, and for those unfamiliar with the strategies that independent comic artists and storytellers were taking, doing such enmeshed with concerns of pornography and deviancy at the century's turn. Strike explains within *Furry Nation* how

[9] While much of this history is passed through oral description, issues of APA *Rowrbrazzle* gesture to the disruption and discourse fans took on as they found themselves seemingly under concern. In *Rowrbrazzle*'s 1989 issue twenty-three, Asian-American artist and fan Lex Nakashima identifies the perpetrators as one Doug Herring and Bridgett McKenna, who, after being "reminded…about Fannish Taboos" ("in this case, one NEVER, EVER vandalizes another's flyers"), were "contrite and said they wouldn't do it again." Nakashima adds that though confronted, "The next year (this last Baycon) they proved once again that not all humans are capable of learning," and mocked furries for tearing down their own fliers after fans tore down "a mock-flyer that they created and printed with the same vulgar (and now tired) slogans." This description proves interesting because while Nakashima supposedly identifies those who were seemingly turning fans into abject fanatics, within the same issue, artists such as one Taral Wayne confront co-contributors on the concern of adult materials just as Nakashima exclaims how large furry had become: "Furry fandom has grown so much, and is made of so many convention voters and travelers that the politically savvy don't really dare offend them (did you see Baycon's panicked denial of Furry prejudice?). If the Furries would just ignore these pranks, they would make much less interesting targets." Just as concerns on furry were rising, furry itself seemed to be growing queerer with regards to what it was fans offered.

journalist organizations such as *WIRED* and *Vanity Fair* ignored the concept of closely reading what it was fans were doing, and instead pressed towards representing the early community in "patronizing description[s]" ("I Read the News" loc. 2621). Furry would become victim to numerous dehumanizing representations into the twenty-first century, then, and while many would find security and potential within the net forums and published comics that queer and minoritarian artists continued to create, the boundaries between normative, acceptable fandom and furry's state of abjection would be held as truth. To this day, many continue to see fans as sexual deviants or perverts, ignoring any chance at truly understanding why fans may fantasize as they do.

The difficulty in changing critics' perspectives is nothing new, however. As Joli Jenson expresses in "Fandom as Pathology," "The literature on fandom is haunted by images of deviance," informed as the study of communities is by the modernist interest in social types (*The Adoring Audience* 9). Began as western fandom did amidst citizens' situatedness in dense urban centers of plurality, audience criticism drew the fanatic as someone seemingly incensed by the media or cultural objects they were witness to. In "Fandom Before 'Fan': Shaping the History of Enthusiastic Audiences," reception historian Daniel Cavicchi describes how the term of fan would be taken up by baseball magazines and "mainstream discourse in the late nineteenth and into the early twentieth century," yet prior to this moment, fans were more recognized by a diversity of terms including "'amateurs,' 'beggars,' 'boomers,' 'buffs,' [and] 'bugs,'" all terms hoping to bring clarity to subjects who seemingly carried the "symptoms" of a believed "type" diseased by the "discrete circumstance" of obsession (*Reception* 54-55). While Cavicchi

uses a reading of disease more as a theoretical tool to describe how fandom would come to be recognized at the century's turn, Jenson remarks how baseball fans during the early twentieth-century were in fact understood through pathological typing, which into the 1950s would grow as music fans and their believed "frenzy" came bounded across media and discourse (11-12). Inevitably, one finds that like with furries, journalists' attempts to ascribe meaning to fans' numerous passions and performances would mean to produce what scholars and editors Maggie Hennefeld and Nicholas Sammond describe as the abject of mass and popular culture ("Introduction" 6).[10]

Considering fandom's representation, what would it take to see furry as a more nuanced public, something that while affected by the histories of abjection and racialization comes driven by those desiring more in the painful realities of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries? In what ways are we as critics required to recognize the lenses we use to approach our subjects, historically weighted and haunted as they can be, and move from what Amin sees as the "repressive hypothesis" within culture ("Against Queer Objects" 103)? Turning to the work of writers Justine "Orrery" Tracer and Ko with "The Witch of Whatcom County," this chapter models a careful, literary-analysis informed reading of fans' erotic works to expand upon prior studies of fans and their documents.

[10] Thinking about abjection across culture and politics, Hennefeld and Sammond respectively emphasize with Julia Kristeva's and Thomas Lamarre's works to press how "the abject, in eliciting the nameless affect through which the sovereign subject emerges…is not so much a stable heuristic as [it is] something illuminated in its situational specificity—legible only through its objects and practices" (6): "In fact, this 'wretched population' must remain present as an object of disgust and fascination, and as an abject lesson that drives the individual oppressor's maintenance of sovereignty and self-rule" (4). It is the specific construction of a subject who represents the outside of a particular semiosphere that gives solidity and refinement—power—to majoritarian forces. In regards to fandom, we may argue that furries and their generally surface-level understood practices produce a potent Other for majoritarian capitalism and culture to identify against with, whether to sustain the idea that adults *should* progress from child-like media and fantasy, or to continue the promises of racial violence and queer- and transphobia in Western societies.

While interests in pornographic media, queer and minoritarian sexual cultures, and supposedly more deviant performances of identity have grown since the 1970s, here, I press that scholars and fans' moves to understand furry's sexual repertoires in more human and complicated ways remain freighted by attachments to objective analyses leaving intact the violent histories and forms informing us, try as scholars might to follow the traces that scholar Petra L. Doan argues may not even be possible in the diagnostic methods we carry ("To Count or Not to Count" 124).[11] Told in the epistolary vein of Mary Shelley's 1818 *Frankenstein* and Bram Stoker's late nineteenth century *Dracula*, "The Witch of Whatcom County" follows protagonist and narrator Justine Lejeune, a journalist for in-world skeptic magazine *Inquiry*, which relies on the discursive language and biopower used to render supposed magic practitioners as crazed and monstrous fanatics. Arriving to the home of BDSM-attired practitioners Helen Cressida and assistant Ren, however, Justine finds herself breaking from the constructed reality that she has come to know as real, for inevitably taking part in the ritual and finding herself transformed from an anthropomorphic fennec fox into a bat capable of flight, she recognizes how violent and objectifying her prior actions have been, located as they were

[11] Engaging the question of method as it relates to queer subjectivities and one's subjectivity aligning with those in measurement forms, Doan's "To Count or Not to Count" adds an interesting spin to the question of fandom and fan identity. Doan stages measuring transgender identity as a fraught project, being that "transgender people are not a fixed group but reflect multiple subjectivities, complicating the collection and analysis of these data" needed by researchers (Women's Studies 91). Testing "traditional" methods against a queerer method which "expand[s] the count beyond [transgender subjects] who have had surgery," Doan shows how "There is no clear-cut means of gauging the size of [any] gender-flux population," a statement that ultimately opens paths to new practices and possibilities yet untested (99, 102). Focused as this study might be on more sociological and scientific methodology, its alignment of transgender identity with knowledge production interestingly collides with Orrery and Ko's story and how it is we as fan scholars attend to our subjects from particular histories. Within this project, I see how any moves to carefully represent and understand the documents and practices fans take on would require new methods of approach, perhaps done by those who identify with fans as opposed to otherwise.

in attending to queerness from dominant and hegemonic understandings. Critically invested in the traditions of Gothic horror and the monstrous change, as a pornographic text which estranges the scene of discursive objectivity, Orrery and Ko's tale inevitably "demonstrate[s] the way pornography exploits the repression of sexual desires seen to be particularly Victorian, and utilizes the process of transformation to verbalize unspoken desires and anxieties of [subjects within] the particular cultural moment," as Laura Helen Mark describes in discussion of pornographic takes on Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* ("Radically Both" 115). Ultimately a representation of furries' being consumed by mass media's abjecting gaze, the characters illustrate how we still understand sexual cultures and practices under the guidance of Victorian positivism, and by "porning" discursive journalism and media within the frame of Mark's "neo-Victorianism," do Orrery and Ko suggest that a more personal, more affectively involved engagement with fan materials is needed to see what outside scholars and conservatives still miss with regards to fandoms' numerous potentials.

Informing my analysis, I follow intellectuals in the field of Porn and Performance Studies who see embodied and sexual practices escaping the institutions' limiting vernacular. Scholars have acknowledged pornography's usefulness when it comes to cultural commentary; however, little again has been done with furries' erotic literature, which fan and academic Katav in "Furry Erotica and Pornography" understands as a vehicle for self-expression and construction outside the realm of normative, mundane society (*From Paw to Print* 44). In her seminal work entitled *Hard-Core*, porn scholar Linda Williams describes how though pornography may be seen by feminist audiences

and wider critics as violent and objectifying of women ("Speaking Sex" 19), as a medium interested in revealing the truths of the sexual and pleasuring, porn "swerv[es] away from more direct [and normative] forms of pleasure," challenging "more 'natural' heterosexual or even lesbian couplings" and experiences as one knows them ("Fetishism" 102). Resultantly, porn offers the ability to recast knowledge and cultural norms expected of persons or in persons' lives. For media theorist and historian Mireille Miller-Young in *A Taste for Brown Sugar*, for example, Black female artists and pornographers such as Jeannie Pepper have taken culturally known and relied upon stereotypes to rethink beauty, identity, and agency through the use of "illicit eroticism" on screen ("Introduction" 11). Though one could argue that said stereotypes and histories of "racial fetishism" continued through the work of Pepper, Miller-Young explains that Pepper and artists "stag[ed] [their] sexuality so as to acknowledge and evoke the taboo desire for it…racial fetishism taken up by its objects and used differently." Critiquing the discursive line between erotic fiction and pornography within furry, Katav nonetheless addresses how fans may use their erotic texts to engage discourse and the limitations of their surrounding spaces, writing and illustrating that generative part of "self-construction" via one's own selected attachments. Although scholars like Jessica Ruth Austin have attended to furries' work, nevertheless, a predominant amount of such research ends at the reality that fans' porn is "something that provides sexual pleasure," Austin citing Jenkins in this moment to fix what fans are interested in as simply "taking sensibilities about the human form out of the equation," "creat[ing] 'an alternative sphere of cultural experience that

restores the excitement and freedom that must be repressed to function in ordinary life'" ("Pornography" 115-116).

Yet even here, furries do more than just find sexual freedom. Theorizing with the tools available to them and playing within the realm of the sexual, their works gesture to a something somewhere outside and inaccessible to the frameworks we still carry forward. Thinking with the Gothic and neo-Victorian, Orrery and Ko accordingly add layers to furry by setting representations' failures clearly up front, contending as they are with the many reasons one might seek fantastic illustrations and identities.

Documenting the Others of Media within Discourse, Haunted

Beginning Orrery and Ko's tale, chief *Inquiry* editor M. Josephson sets the narrative's imagined magazine as a lens of discursive hegemony, for utilizing the language of the state, they describe how "[n]ever before has *Inquiry* magazine run an exposé of this nature. Our subjects have tried our patience, tested our resolve, and strained our credulity" (*HEAT* 16 19). Alas, and in acting as a framing device, Josephson's expression of this work being published out of legal obligation ultimately draw up the question of power and its failure. Hearkening to works like Mary Shelley's 1818 *Frankenstein* in ways, Orrery and Ko implicate the haunting rationale and history of the Gothic upon queerness. Developed as the novel took on a more respected, more socially concerned form amidst its then contemporary readers, the Gothic enacted a critical project deeply curious on the unknowns of society and the human condition. In scholar Matthew M. Reeves' definition of the genre in *Studies in Iconography*, Reeves explains how the Gothic drew on more medieval, Romantic aesthetics for modern

audiences, where "From ca. 1600 to 1800 'Gothic' enjoyed a popular currency in European culture, when it was employed rhetorically as an other to hegemonic authority, whether political, sexual, or architectural" ("Gothic" 236). Through the genre and its place within Romantic literature, readers and artists became critically interested in notions of the sublime–this affective, productive experience of that which exceeds any held or recognized order of control, "strangeness" one of many experiences to offer such (Morris 302-303). Alas, the Gothic relied upon social and cultural Others as a tradition for its works. In "*Frankenstein*'s Monster," for instance, H. L. Malchow explains how the era's monster, or this assemblage of anxieties and norms made material, grew from "contemporary attitudes [such as those] towards non-whites, in particular on fears and hopes of the abolition of slavery in the West Indies, as well as on middle-class apprehension of a Luddite proletariat" like seen within Shelley's *Frankenstein* (*Past & Present* 90, 92). These unstable figures, spaces, and Others that Victorians imagined seemed to "defy all attempts at rational decoding and assimilation, totalization and control" (Townshend 281), yet as Patrick Brantlinger writes, questions of the "irrational over the rational" would continue into the twentieth-century via new shapes thanks to aliens, mad scientists, and fantasies as opposed to the traditionally monstrous ("The Gothic Origins" 31).

Justine's look at magic users and ritualists accordingly enters as someone looking to concretize the magazine's believed Others. Following the inciting paratext that lends to the question of truth and knowledge, Justine describes how for her, part of the work is to discover and engage those "contempt[ed]" by the magazine's "contemporaries" ("The

Witch" 19). "Every interview with every True Believer starts the same way," she writes: "While one of our contact team is trying to set a date and time for an interview, the candidate will make some demand," playing into this opportunity to show real magic, real belief, that other magazines might miss out on. Alas, Justine states, "These [other] sites specialize in mocking kooks for entertainment, and any 'proof' their victims might offer in defense of their beliefs is subject to such rigorous control that failure is guaranteed." *Inquiry*, "on the other paw, give[s] people whatever rope they request…At that point, *Inquiry* lets you, Inquiring Minds, draw your own conclusions." Though she suggests, then, that the magazine is inevitably curious from an objective position or fashion, like the Gothic horror novel or story, readers are carefully drawn towards considering that which stands apart from normative society. The "kook" or magical performer here becomes what Julia Kristeva in "Approaching Abjection" defines as "a non-object," or this representational void that can be filled and exchanged to represent that which is "repugn[ant]" (*Oxford Literary Review* 133). Rather than make the decision for readers, Justine and *Inquiry* leave open a space for discursive subjects to make their choices accordingly.

This space of the unknown signifier however grows as Justine explains Helen and Ren's change in repertoire. Though other subjects of the magazine ask for blindfolds, as Justine describes, the non-use of cameras and ultraviolet lights preventing the magazine "from actually validating whatever claims [they have] gone to review," the fennec fox states that "Helen Cressida's team asked for basically nothing. We'd found her website through an online search for folks calling themselves witches…[and] When *Inquiry*'s

team got in touch, the person was happy to hear from us" (Orrery and Ko 19). Rather than become another subject of the magazine's discursive gaze, then, instead, Helen and Ren take hold of *Inquiry*'s seemingly opportune gesture of goodwill. They "fail" what Justine and her own team have come to expect, and as Halberstam explains, open space for a challenge to any argued "disciplinarity" the magazine promises (*The Queer Art* loc. 210). Accordingly, and as Justine writes on her arrival to the pair's home, readers find a playful refashioning of the Gothic genre's use of supposedly monstrous homes:

> Cressida's house was two stories tall with a fieldstone façade, sitting at the end of a long dirt driveway a few turns off of SR539, up by Wiser Lake. I ran the pre-interview checklist, but I swear on my mother's grave we found nothing. Whatcom County records showed the property had been bought by "H. Cressida"; I took screen shots and stored them in my notes. ("The Witch" 20)

Though Justine plays out her role as the detective of curious investigator—as expected—her attempts to fit Helen and Ren into readers' expectations flounders, and she settles the two magic users as that unknown Other for curious minds. Rather than fully settle the two as abject monsters, however, Justine's seemingly "normal" description of the home offers a new potential, a new direction for Gothic literature fans. As distant or hidden as the home may be, its "fieldstone façade" and purchase title bequeath a critical estrangement that realizes the abject as subjects.

As Justine meets Helen's rabbit assistant, then, readers find her destabilized from any performance of capture, for the characters and text in fact take agency for their own hands though prior histories remain in view. Preparing for her introduction, Justine lays out how she "set[s] up one video camera in the back seat and pointed it at the front door, then got out a second and a tripod to take inside with me, along with a paper grocery bag" (20). Asked to bring a drink and snack for the interview's planned ritual, the paper bag

indeed follows with her as she is greeted by Ren, Helen's assistant, an unexpected introduction if any at all:

> A rabbit with tan fur greeted me at the door, wearing a costume halfway between a stage magician's assistant and fetishwear. The black leotard and stockings were a glossy latex; along his neck was a thin black collar that ended in a white bowtie dotted with silver sparkles and a d-ring.

Grinning, Ren welcomes Justine inside following the request of her drink and consumable, and though asking her to return the meal to her car for later, he agrees to "recorded audio," waiting for Justine to come back as needed. The moment itself can be read as a "disidentification" with the monstrous magic user's assistant; for Muñoz, such means that Ren's agential playing-with Justine's (and readers' expectations) involves a messy, historically-informed understanding of *Inquiry* and outsider's perspectives (*Disidentifications* 34). "Subjects who are outside the purview of dominant public spheres encounter obstacles in enacting identification," he writes, and accordingly, Ren fills the narrative's unknown signifier with a genre-bending inhabitance, critically aware of the magazine's (and Gothic traditions') depictions of non-normative subjectivities.

Readers follow Orrery and Ko's protagonist as she attempts to explain this new direction, realizing what Vider suggests as the domestic's malleability. Though the home and the Gothic manor have potent discourses within hegemonic society, as Vider writes when looking to the house and its use by queer citizens, like fandom, such subjects "reformed the terms of domestic citizenship" out of the "complex and varied" histories that they have lived (*The Queerness* 17): "they experimented with household forms; denaturalized the gender, sexual, and social norms of postwar domesticity; and asserted a right to create home spaces that affirmed their identities, relationships, and desires." The

home in this sense became "used in ways other than for which they were intended or by those other than for whom they were intended," as Sara Ahmed explains in *What's the Use?*, queered into a site of survival and care otherwise left out of wider histories ("Conclusion: Queer Use" 198). Turning to the home's living space, for instance, Justine moves through with a critical gaze, taking note of the stairway that "went up into near-darkness," but also the "small dining nook, its wooden table and mismatched folding chairs painfully ordinary against the backdrop of 'witches capable of changing the fabric of reality.' I remember joking at the time," she adds, "that even modern wizards apparently held dinner parties" (Orrery and Ko 20). Though the Gothic narrator and investigator remains in clear sight, its generically fulfilling monster and haunted domestic home have been reimagined for queer use considerably.

When Justine meets Helen, however, readers are in fact reminded what power the fennec and *Inquiry* have. "In an old wooden rocking chair, the kind seen in Norma Rockston paintings from around the Final War," she writes, "sat Helen Cressida. Like Ren, the lioness wore a black leotard and boots, but her bowtie was gold, and her gloves were fingerless to expose carefully filed claws. Her tufted tailtip flicked back and forth on the hardwood floor" ("The Witch" 20-21). While a character introduction, Justine's description nonetheless reiterates the discursive gaze that Amy Villarejo in *Ethereal Queer* argues comes part of media apparatuses in form; though focused on television and the ways in which media organizations struggle to represent knowledge outside of "hegemonic diagnoses," Villarejo's turn to considerations of queer and normative time within "temporal structure[s]" allows readers to see that Justine—as a media producer of

sorts—is creating a figure seemingly out of time yet simultaneously adjacent or alternate ("Introduction" 4, 8). Helen's self-aware and campy attire places her in time just as it does outside of it, and with the "old wooden rocking chair" and allusion to an in-world World War II, is there both oddity and a sense of refashioning resonant with the queer departures taken thus far. Justine is trying to put Helen in relation to a normative, institutional "social time," or, a sense of traditional and nontraditional domesticity arguably understandable by readers. Before she can do so, however, when Justine asks Helen if all "witches" dress as they do, the lioness remarks, "It was Ren's idea; you were coming to try and expose us as frauds. We figured the least we could do was play along" (21). With just a single response, Helen draws for readers the histories of difference that media has created out of capital.

Helen and Ren's awareness and dressage nevertheless return one to the Gothic's question of the unknown signifier playing in the space. As suggested, the monster is an ideological construction meant to sustain readers' anxieties and the sublime, or, what Morris again defines as the seemingly indescribable and open for critical determination (*New Literary History* 302-303). In *Skin Shows*, Halberstam argues that what is monstrous about the monster is not actually what it or a creature is; instead, he writes, it is that it "constructs a monster out of the traits which ideologies of race, class, gender, sexuality, and capital want to disavow" ("Technologies" 101). This reality then leaves open the sublime as what Muñoz sees to be a queer "stage": a site for "potentiality" and "utopian performativity" that gives over to those otherwise left out from hegemonic "modes of belonging" (*Cruising Utopia* 98). As Helen and Ren come to see it, for Justine,

an interest in the supernatural and possible is all it takes to hold care for the self inside of one.

The story moves forward as Justine begins her interview, but rather than simply focusing on Helen, Justine is directed to see how her history is enmeshed with the lioness more than let on. Having introduced herself and listened as Helen reimagines she and Ren as "multi-traditional ecstatic ritualists," Justine "lean[s] back on the couch," and rather than get a moment to ask Helen on her supposed prowess and magic, the lioness states, "If you don't mind, then, let's start with a history lesson…Mine, and yours. The Phoenix Club has a long memory, Ms. Lejeune" (Orrery and Ko 21). Justine seems startled, "grateful" that Ren enters the room with "a mug in each paw" for the two, and she explains to readers how as a college student, she was "bored and, frankly, lonely," and joined an on-campus group that could add to the "fantasy life" she saw as supporting her. Though curious, she states, her "tr[ying] to play along with them" and their promised "real magic" failed, and she found them to be "a cliquey bunch that didn't want [her] around." Justine moved to a new university, she adds, and responding to Helen, she asks how Helen knows "of the Phoenix Club" (22). Helen then expresses how she "helped start the club," and though once the male brown bear founder Louis Bixby—or, someone who would become "offered" as the club's eventual "magical mascot," an egregore—Helen transformed herself into the lioness that Justine is then interviewing and sitting with. Justine tries to ask what her subject wants of her, but with magic, Helen stops her, and offers an apology: though the group at one point was unable to help the fennec, having followed her and her life as *Inquiry*'s journalist, Helen offers Justine "another

chance," but unless Justine agree to any magic via consent, the fennec's past dream of flight ("It didn't matter what form you took, only that you could soar") would be impossible (23-24).

Helen's ability to peer into Justine and see her past—her dreams—fully ruptures Orrery and Ko's protagonist from expected reality, and sobbing, expressing to readers the "vulnerability" that she felt in Helen describing her dream so readily, the fennec accepts that she saw the Phoenix Club from limited perspectives ("The Witch" 24-25). In effect, and given the choice to practice actual magic, Justine agrees, though Helen inevitably argues that she "must be an active participant" in the labor, "not just an observer" (25). This relocation of Justine from observer to participant, however, is partially wedded to what I argue is the ultimate form of "The Witch of Whatcom County." As one piece out of a genealogy of texts known as transformation fiction, the narrative works to involve its readers in the experience of becoming something new. With traces back to fans' first toying with figures such as the Ancient Greek goddess Circe by one Joe Strike in *Rowrbrazzle*, transformation fiction "has always been about exploring who we are," writes archivist and fursuiter Chipper Wolf in "Together We Howl" (*Fang, Feather, and Fin*). Specifically, erotic transformation (TF) stories allow the play with "the idea of an altered mental state—not just losing one's inhibitions and submitting to instincts [or otherwise], but in some cases losing thought altogether." In this case, the idea of Justine being pulled from normative reality not only allows for the expected critique of normative culture and straight or hegemonic ideology, but it also shows how queerness in fact changes one in material ways.

Unable to produce any magic or ritual without Justine, Helen asks the fennec for her consent and is granted such. Helen then tells Ren to "[p]repare [their] guest," and Justine describes to her readers how "[her] gut, Inquiring Minds, spent the whole two minutes [preparing] twisting. I stood on the porch, waiting with bag [of food] in paw for the moment to knock" (Orrery and Ko 25). When she does knock, "the door open[s] to pitch black. An arm reached out from the darkness; circles of golden light glowed on the insides of the elbow, wrist, and fingertips." Justine is then pulled inside to a house and hallway "that seemed to stretch out far beyond the length of the house in the dark." Such descriptions read resonant with the Gothic horror that Orrery and Ko set out with, but as the characters move deeper into the house, Justine explains that Ren—her guide—simply tells her of the next few moments: "On the ground you will see a triangle, circumscribed by a circle…When you are ready, eat the food and enter the circle. When you wish to stop, drink the beverage, and the ritual will end" (26). He finishes, stating that "Any effects which linger beyond that point will be entirely [Justine's] choice," being that the ritual is her own. Justine agrees to the instructions. At this moment, "A light snapped on overhead, a single bulb, illuminating a spot on the floor." Unable to speak for fear of "shatter[ing] the illusion," the fennec can only watch as "candles began to light themselves," the ritual beginning as promised.

Describing it with regards to the erotic form, Justine watches the ritual take off, and Helen becomes a red gryphon like that of a phoenix, magic burning her fur and prior self away, while Ren tells the fox to eat two prepared snacks before entering the ritual's spell circle (26-27). "I shed my pants and shirt at the edge of the circle, but I kept my

underwear and bra on," the authors write, and told to make out with Ren, or Helen's then "empty vessel," Justine does (27). Her body shivers, and Justine explains that "The warmth welled up inside [her]; my shoulders went slack and knees trembled" (28). Then, she falls, and finding Ren's "cock dangl[ing] freely in front of" her face, "without a moment's hesitation [she] opened [her] muzzle and took him." The story crescendos, Orrery and Ko walking readers through the narrative's expected sex scene, and enunciating as they do, they supplant said readers into the story's event, blurring the outsider, non-furry world with that which exists on the page:

> I closed my eyes, gave Ren's cock a lick inside my muzzle, and nodded. [Helen] tugged down my panties, letting the arousal slick fabric pool around my knees. Her talons then continued their work, the heat from them [and their magic] rippling down my arms and sides, tingling at the joints and at my smallest fingers.

With orgasm growing close, Helen—still a gryphon— asks if the fox is ready, and nodding, Justine takes Ren's semen into her throat simultaneous to her own orgasm. Justine's body seems to rip and change as she is filled with a "hot spasm deep inside"; "I let out a cry of surprise," she states, "only to hear a high-pitched screech." Opening her eyes, she finds the ritual has been completed, and now, instead of arms, she held "two new leathery wings sprouting between [her] arms and sides." Though having agreed to everything, all Justine can do is whisper, then, that her wings were "*real*."

Alas, Justine learns that not everything she hoped for will come as easily expected. Asked to finish the ritual by drinking her brought soda, the fox follows along, hoping to "keep" the wings given to her, only to see said wings vanish, paws now replacing what she had dreamed and desired for so long (28-29). The fox becomes emotional, and looking to Helen, states, "But—but you promised!" (29). Helen, who can

only speak for herself now that the ritual is over, expresses that they only promised to "cast the spell," but that the magic "requires sacrifice. It requires something that you do the right thing for the right reasons" (29). Helen tells the fox, then, that "some part of [her], long closed off, is now open," but Justine must "discover the rest" before she try again. Discouraged, Justine is swiftly returned to the real world, and writing two weeks after the fact, she tells readers that Helen and Ren have seemingly disappeared, and that the home she visited in actuality had been "foreclosed fifteen years ago, [standing] vacant since." Experienced what she has, Justine nevertheless explains that she still "wanted it." She still desires the magic she took on, or that which she took "from so many people since [she] started working" for *Inquiry* as an investigator. Resigning, closing that she needs to "give that hope" of actual magic "back if [she is] ever going to feel worthy of experiencing that dream again," Justine finishes her story, and returns readers to the story's Gothic framing. In closing, the magazine's senior editor expresses that their journalist has, too, gone missing, a single "painted crow's feather [put] on [his] desk before she left."

Conclusion

As metaphorical and fantastic as it may have been, Justine's ultimate encounter with Helen and Ren illustrates the density and dimensionality existent within seemingly believed deviant practices. Entering with actual skin in the game, Justine learns that queerness, this miasma of questions and living subjects, literally and figuratively escapes the structures of normative representational strategies, and how only when unfixed from the magazine's demands, are Helen and Ren able to be subjects with access to a freer, much more relational potentiality that Muñoz argues begins "at precisely the point where the discourses of essentialism and constructivism short circuit" (*Disidentifications* 31). Effectively, and as witnesses to Justine's introduction to new terrain, we are incited to view furries' subcultural performances and "scripts" as "a self-making practice," Zaman writes, unfettered by the institutional boundaries driving us to search for those "objects" already always freighted by institutional logics ("Furry Acts" 100-101). Through Justine's decision to exit her career with only a feather left behind marking her departure, Orrery and Ko inevitably leave behind the idea of truth—of the supposed reality of the event and its nuances—as a trace exceeding the object in representation, and Justine as someone who now cannot be contained by the institution and the tools it uses to apprehend us. The editor may never truly understand what happened to Justine though it is seemingly right there before them, nor may they ever be able to affix said story to what material proof or evidence they might find.

The authors leave us with the question of whose story it is for the magazine to tell, then. Try as she might to make sense of the fantastic, Justine nevertheless finds that

her work affects real lives, real dreams, moments which were never hers to give away within the violence of normative reality. In effect, this chapter implores scholars to trouble how they study fans, pressing one to move away from the act of hailing or identifying subjects such as furry within the expected terms we know, and give into an analysis that is in the thick of it, more considerate of the subjects we study, and willing to closely read that which seems to be too queer, deviant, and affective.

Chapter 3

Mary E. Lowd's *Nexus Nine* and the Queerness of Time in Community

In a 1997 panel held at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania's science fiction convention known as Philcon, artists and genfans Joe Strike, Jim Groat, "Major" Matthew Mason, Peter Stoller, Eric Blumrich, and Ray Rooney came together to engage the question of what their fandom had seemingly become. Documented on a VHS tape that now exists digitally on *YouTube* and within the documentary by independent media producer Ash Coyote, *The Fandom*, the panel moves from fans describing the early days of their funny animal interests, how they entered the community at that point growing ever more to be seen as furries, and their thoughts on the adult, deviant side of their community. Groat, an artist who into the nineties created funny animal titles such as *Red Shetland* and *Equine the Uncivilized*, jokingly threatens fans were they to hail him as a furry; before historian Strike presses Groat to exclaim, I'm furry, and I am proud" ("Philcon" 00:05:19-00:05:30). Rooney describes furry's growth in ways similar to the rise of science fiction fandom, wherein which fans took each other's names from letter columns to produce new publics for themselves. The panel soon becomes fragmented over what, in their eyes, holds value in their community (00:14:50-00:15:04). Blumrich in particular exclaims that the internet's place in fans' growing public was becoming exaggerated (00:22:20-00:22:46). While he identifies himself as someone critical of the internet and what it offers, he nevertheless argues that furry and funny animal fandom did "very well without the internet" (00:22:50-00:23:00). As one of several moments when the panelists gesture

to their view of fandom, Blumrich's move away from the internet at the time of the late nineties complicates how we understand furry today.

Each respective panelist's perspective nuances the idea of community; nonetheless, while a majority at the table seemed attached to furry's funny-animal heritage or inception point, others at the table and within the room contest what made the community what it was becoming. As suggested by my last chapter, the reasons behind why subjects come to their communities as they do are too numerous to describe, even going against what is expected or believed by outside critics and hegemonic discourse. Fandom is but a form or structure giving way to many different practices, different dreams, fantastic or nostalgic as they might be. Accordingly, to try and make sense of how something became fandom and what value it offers would be to fix a scheme limiting what Alain Badiou sees as "genuine creation" (*Badiou by Badiou* 12). Engaging the question of truth and how a something becomes a thing, Badiou, writing on philosophy and its use as a means of evaluation, expresses how "at the origin of a truth there must be something that is not reducible to the strict determinations and laws of the world in which it has been produced," for while truth "occurs in a determinate world," our understanding of the world can limit it ("The 'Truth Procedure'" 12-13). In this vein, while we could argue that fandom is in fact an outgrowth of the capitalist practices of the early to mid-twentieth century, furry and where it comes from is ultimately too messy and vibrant to be explained in a simplistic telling.

For instance, a concern throughout this project has of course been furry's question of sex and whether or not the fandom itself *is* this sexual thing or if sex is just part of a

wider field. As Zaman expresses in a published talk, "it's complicated…[for] furry seems to be something that you can do and utilize but you can [also] run with. The moment you think you have a grip on what the fandom or community is, it may be running off in a different direction without you" ("Talking Adult Furry" 00:29:45-00:30:09). Taking this idea further, how do we perhaps define furry or its inception point, if what furry is comes down to a "situation" that Berlant again finds "unfolding amid the usual activity of life" (*Cruel Optimism* 4)?

Rather than move towards an understanding of fandom as something whole and carrying a distinctive point of inception or interest, focusing on the idea of attachment, this chapter argues how taking a definite stance what furry is via a controlling schema would in fact mean to silence the practices and non-events archived across fans' repertoires and oral, publicly produced histories. I focus on Mary E. Lowd's *Nexus Nine*, released in 2019 by FurPlanet Productions, a work that gestures to world-building projects as saturated with history and attachments. Following human-animal protagonist Mazel Rheun within a world mirroring that of Rick Berman and Michael Piller's *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (DSN), the novel traces how Mazel, a feline science officer of the novel's Tri-Galactic Navy, who technologically carries the memories of numerous animals before her, attempts to find the origin point of numerous selves locked away within her Rhuen Chip.[12] Rather than a device meant to ease her place in the future, the

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[12] Developed over seven seasons, *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (DS9) expands the world of Gene Roddenberry's original series by taking place on an operating space station surrounded by intergalactic political conflict and a queerer understanding of community. Though centering on actor Avery Brooks's Benjamin Sisko, the commanding office of the station, the series uses characters such as Nana Visitor's Kira Nerys and Terry Farrell's Jadzia Dax to engage how the past lives on in the present and future. Jadzia, a figure a part of alien species known as the Trill, specifically shares Mazel's complication with memories

Rhuen Chip's ability to hold multiple selves at once complicates how Mazel reads a single experience. Alas, in boarding the namesake space station in hopes of bringing clarity to whatever past she may gather belonging to her, Lowd gestures at the queerness of time. Mazel exposes how utopian projects come entered by subjects from numerous inception points and histories too dense to singularize into a unique telling. As scholars within the field of queer temporality studies have argued, what we know of the past and present is limited due to history's inception from empiricist models of scholarship, in which the official archive is this single site meant to uphold certain histories as materially true. Philosophers and scholars have ignored the extent that history is constructed, as Hayden White expresses in *The Practical Past* ("The Historical Event" loc. 874). Not only do we attach to that which we see as more profitable to us, but we also fail to seek out material proof of what it was that came before us because to do so would mean to think from "specific times and places" (loc. 941), and thus to erase the very real possibility that who we are in actuality is a combination of moments too queer to be put into a single telling.

This chapter adds to my approach of fans' media and literature as utopian gestures, utopian schemata, affected by histories of violence and enclosure at times, but rather than try to cement a practice of how to diagnose who or where a community or practice as messy as furry comes from and engages, this chapter works to remind us of

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and time, for like Mazel, Jadzia's symbiotic relationship with organism Dax means that they too carry the lives and memories of prior symbiote hosts such as Curzon Dax, the once colleague to Sisko at a prior station. As well, Jadzia finds herself having to adapt to new opportunities seen from multiple perspectives much like Mazel. Lowd's ability to play off of DS9's history evokes how fans continue to use fan fiction as a way of theorizing their communities' many concerns, but the novel's emphasis on time specifically draws from DS9 in critical ways.

the harm such singular directions could inflict. Within a close reading of speculative fiction's consumable and readily available form, do authors allow us the ability to access what Alexis Lothian sees as the queerness of time for queer subjects and their unfurling horizons (*Old Futures* 27). Yet this chapters as well adds to what Dinshaw and other scholars see as the failure of historiographic method, how, at any moment, what we consider present or with us is actually a density of concurrent histories and timelines shaping the utopian projects we seek. Though Lowd's protagonist seems willing to give her all in understanding her communal becoming, she must recognize that to do so is fraught, and instead, a recognition of the many could bring a communal sense of utopian possibilities.

Historical Depths, Communal Nows, and the Impoverishment within the Origin

Mazel first enters the novel distraught: as a science officer given the task of helping a recovered space station move from its imperial past, looking to her commander, Shep Bataille, she sees not just one, but numerous histories before her. "Mazel Rheun watched her old friend, Shep Bataille, from across the command deck of Nexus Nine Base. The calico cat was steeling herself to approach the German Shepherd," Lowd writes. "Mazel need[s] to introduce herself," both Mazel and the canine Darius Rheun that now lives on in her (1). Holding the alien device known as the Rheun chip, Mazel experiences the uncertainty of a new position—a new life—simultaneous to the experiences of being a figure who unlike her had "been tall, strong, short-furred, and floppy eared." "She'd been a captain of her own vessel—his own vessel…and she'd come up through the ranks, side by side with Shep," even as she, Mazel, also had not.

Similarly, there are memories that stretch beyond Mazel's latest superior: she is ultimately connected with every Rheun user since the device's inception. Mazel inevitably brings forth the idea of time's fullness, as Dinshaw views it; critically interested on the many now's within the present/prescient moment, Dinshaw theorizes time in relation to a creek, "heterogeneous and always already full," sifting around one just as they stand in a seemingly fixed moment or location (*How Soon* 130). Yet for Mazel, a character who now finds herself joining a new future, a new present ever more dense than before, the question of who and where she comes from sets forth a project of tinkering with reality as she knows it.

Mazel's specific predicament with time draws readers toward what scholars understand of history's trouble with linearity, or the curbing of surrounding histories for the sake of something constructed from limited vantages. As history scholars describe, much of what is known of the past comes from the cultural and social productions that subjects attach to and not. In "Professional Historians and the Challenge of Redefinition," scholar and historian Patricia Mooney-Melvin traces the historian back to the nineteenth century, where the historian stood as a fixed identity within the academy and its interests in "exert[ing] control over particular branches of knowledge. By the beginning of the twentieth century," she argues, "professional historians—for whom history became a corporate task and a specialized career—were on the ascendency" (*Public History* 8). While the field itself would continue as a result of its "fluidity and openness," Mooney-Melvin cites, throughout its Western formation the field was implicated in producing history as a retelling of fixed events from the position of a single interpretation (8-9). In

Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History, Trouillot, writing on the ways in which silences are made through historical projects, describes how "As history solidified as a profession in the nineteenth century, scholars significantly influenced by positivist viewers tried to theorize the distinction between historical process and historical knowledge" ("The Power in the Story" 4). "Thus, historians and more importantly, philosophers of history were proud to discover and reiterate instances where the distinction was supposedly indisputable because it was marked not only by semantic context," he adds, "but by" the lens that scholars used to operate. As much as historians worked "to reveal the past" from positions of believed experience, their "power [being seen as] unproblematic," the production of time's events became affected by what Giordano Nanni, in *The Colonisation of Time*, describes as the West's place as an imagined "time-conscious civilization," "stak[ing] its claim to universal definitions of time, regularity, order" through the "conquest of space and time" ("Introduction" 31). Consequently, the production of history remains haunted and informed by its recursive expectations of control.

Particularly, Mazel's attempts to look back and see or construct for herself a linear, supposedly organic history effaces the murkiness of efforts that come together to produce a utopian project. As a *Star Trek*-esque move from imperial and violent pasts, Lowd's in-world Tri-Galactic Union is a "federation of planets" and cultures imbedded in sci-fi's "directive function," whereby theme, narrative, meaning, and representation "[challenge] the audience, questioning their worldviews," as Philip Schwadel asserts in "Grokking Modernity" (*Contexts* 15). Rather than a naturalization of subjects'

worldviews, characters working aboard the Nexus Nine base like within DS9 help "foreground a utopian vision of interracial cooperation and scientific advancement," continuing *Star Trek*'s "histories of racial, sexual, and national politics," as carrington describes in *Speculative Blackness* ("The Golden Ghetto" loc. 2896, 2923). Yet Mazel comes front-loaded with the affect felt in what Berlant sees as a "pedagogy of desire, where "[living] with a sense of slight excitement," Mazel moves to find solidity within the felt heterogeneity informing her, something that Berlant cites as "a belief that does not hurt anyone and never requires us to commit ourselves" (*Cruel Optimism* 29-30). Although this desire seems simple enough, Mazel's ultimate interest in a fixed singularity denies the polyphonic "hum" in being, a felt "temporizing" that Dinshaw again writes is "full and attached" with many subjects and desires all taking place in the "now" (Berlant 30; *How Soon* 5). As Trouillot asserts, "History is always produced in a specific historical context," with numerous "Historical actors [that] are also narrators, [agents] and vice versa" (*Silencing* 22). Inevitably, and although a worthy cause for her, Mazel's drive inevitably proposes a resistance against "heterogeneous and asynchronous temporalities on the macro scale" (Dinshaw 5).

Though Mazel herself is interested in heterogeneous futures, readers can see her struggle for temporal purity as reliant on questions of stable meaning and the event-centered nature of things.[13] Finishing her conversation with her new/old commander,

[13] In scholar Megha Anwer's "Resisting the Event: Aesthetics of the Event in the Contemporary South Asian Novel," Anwer, again building off the understanding of the event as "an economy of excess in which the individual specific moment comes to exceed its local possibilities" (1), locates the event as something that has come to seemingly overtake plural approaches to history, and thus "dominates" and controls what one knows of something that might in fact be without any "absolute finality" (*ariel* 6, 9).

Mazel is guided and introduced to the bird-like Neera Jerysha of Avia, another commander operating on the base and someone who holds a direct connection to the station's prior occupiers, the Reptassans, or reptiles who colonized and enslaved the Avorian people. Alerting Mazel to the station's prior history, Neera nevertheless leads her new science officer to her station before taking Mazel to the science labs (Lowd 10, 13). As Neera tells Mazel more and more about the base's prior history, the latter describes how she has been to eight other nexus wormholes, "looking for evidence that they're where [she] came from," as "One of the earliest memories [she holds] involves travelling through a nexus passageway," although "dim, and only a fragment" (Lowd 19). Neera acknowledges that such a fact would mean Mazel's newest position would be her nineth nexus visit, an accomplishment all on its own, but the feline seemingly loses herself, readers finding that Mazel "wished she could figure out how to access those memories" that seemed to escape her, such as why Darius "had come to think highly enough of her to select her as the next carrier of the Rheun chip" (19-20). "Memory could be so frustratingly slippery and elusive," Lowd writes, "And memory had become such a big part of [Mazel's] life" (20). As Mazel finds herself surrounded by questions and concerns about time's fullness, her drive for clarity inevitably centers on the base's growing projects.

Inevitably, Mazel seems to pass over her colleagues' own desires and positions, ignorant to how her attachments and desires prevent her from developing better relationships. Learning that Neera's people believe the wormhole to be a "Sky Nest," something that "has blessed [their] world with its protection for as long as [they have]

recorded history," Mazel asks, "But have you studied it?" (15). Neera, who in the feline's eyes "looked smug," responds that they have of course studied the wormhole: "It is the home and voice of our gods, all in one." Rather than appreciate and acknowledge Neera and her people's beliefs, bringing out her own desires for stability and linear order, Mazel, who "[is] irritated," states, "That's a beautiful belief. But I mean, have you studied it scientifically?" Again as someone finding themselves distraught by the numerous, surrounding pasts and presents a part of her lives, Mazel in her own way seeks to impose order for Neera and her peoples' histories, rationalizing a belief that goes beyond Neera's time while also removing her from Mazel's worldview. Despite this small moment of testing the Avorian officer, when asked "why [her prior selves] [brought] her *here*," Mazel gives into a "dim" memory: "she could feel her tentacles coiling around her as she watched through a spaceship window—the space outside blossom[ing] like a midnight orchid with velvety black petals, then explode[ing] like fireworks" (18). The memory ends without much more clarity for the cat, functioning as a symbol: "The whole memory [as] tentacles, space bending outside her spaceship." Yet in this memory is there also a gesture to thinking about history in other ways, something always ever unfolding, again, and taking formation across numerous points rather than a singular whole.

As the novel picks up and Mazel grows closer to her trip into the neighboring wormhole, she and a select team of animals depart to the neighboring planet of Avia, Neera having offered Mazel and the crew "a session with the Twig of Foresight at the Temple of Yunib," a sanctuary that supposedly houses the Avorian's sacred artifacts (53). Having done research to "be respectful with [her] studies," Mazel accepts the offer,

knowing that it would be a privilege to see and witness something new that her prior numerous selves had yet to explore in their own time. The chapter, however, turns attention away from Mazel's own difficulties as she witnesses and meets Lieutenant Unari, another feline who, much like Mazel, joins as a science officer wishing to understand. Alas, the addition brings contempt for Neera, for while Mazel serves as a point of identification for the reader as witness to everything happening around her, Unari's continued probes at Neera and the Avorian people draws concern. At a moment when the crew are told to be respectful and treat a "handmade" "shawl" as their own in order to gain access, Unari states, "Excuse me…but I came along to study the strain of bonsai trees kept inside the temple, and I wasn't told anything about accepting a new religion. I don't even believe in the First Race!" (57). Challenged, Neera explains that "The shawl is a symbol. You cannot enter the temple without it," and defeated, Unari agrees to wear it respectfully. With the characters moving ever closer to seeing the Twig of Foresight, Mazel, who the entire time has witnessed Unari's seeming dismissal of another culture's beliefs, thinks back to her research and how, when held by the Reptassan occupiers such as Commandant Sukast, the twig's "vision[s] ate away at him, the freedom fighters [aboard Nexus Nine taking] advantage of the growing opportunities to thwart him" (63-64). Though to this point Mazel has yet to see the Twig and seemingly falls back as protagonist within the narrative, in relation with Unari's own failure to understand the desnity of their visit, readers (and Mazel) come to realize how Mazel's technology and science cannot explain what she sees as the team finally looks upon the Broken Twig's form (66). She recognizes that it might be something as well "from a

nexus that her own neural chip had passed through," as she finds on her scanner a "distortion that danced before her eyes like a trickle of the light, like an optical illusion, like someone had scratched a gash in the face of the universe and space-time was leaking out through the crack" (65-66). Meaning and time's seeming order ultimately give way to other possible realities inaccessible beyond simple witnessing, then, influencing Mazel to start thinking on what meaning is and for whom.

The crew return to the base following Commander Bataille's own witnessing of a vision that suggests he might be a messiah for the Avorian people, something so shocking that the Avorian temple guardian, Vee Way, asks them all to leave (71). Once on the ship and back to Nexus Nine, he wonders with Mazel whether the experience could simply "go away," he not ready nor interested in taking on such a position as part of his work (73). Mazel, who is now finding herself rethinking what it is that exists beyond her, presses him to realize that what others think of them cannot be part of his journey; instead, he needs to "be the best Tri-Galactic Union delegate that [he] know[s] to be" (74). The answer soothes her superior as expected, but this moment becomes informative for Mazel herself to the extent that it helps her realize the plurality of histories and timelines surrounding her. Preparing herself for her own lab work once landed, Mazel asks Lt. Unari where the more conservative feline will be working. Introduced to the medical bay, Mazel learns from Neera how the "Viper's Perch," as it was called during the Reptassan occupation, is "huge," and "was where Reptassans shipped any of their officers from the planet we [the Avorians] managed to seriously injure but not quite kill" (76-77). "They'd patch 'em up and send them back to stand on our wings. If we were

injured though," Neera closes, "They'd just let us bleed" (77). Mazel accepts the explanation from her secondary superior, "not knowing how else to respond," and rather than question the idea, she closes in, realizing how because of the historic density of the site, the "whole space station felt haunted by its violent, horrible past," one supposedly linear history confronting and affecting the present: "Mazel felt sick being there." Difficult as it has been for her to accept who or what she has become, Mazel realizes then that although "she wanted to find her own history…somehow, it was tangled up—by way of Nexus Nine—with the Avorians," the technology agan a part of their past just as much as they now were a part of her present and future. As clean and simple as she would like to make it, her understanding of the Tri-Galactic Navy's value is but only one of numerous readings, and, like fandom, her place is just as much a part of others' histories, those who, like her, have sought communal projects in the hopes of better worlds.

Conclusion: Considering Fandom's Shape(s)

Though she enters the novel focused on the discovery of her form's many selves-in-one, Mazel's opening up to other characters and histories can again be seen as a recognition of time's fullness, and thereby a prescient understanding of form as communal and heterogeneous despite any argued wholeness. Like the textual history that would become furry for many across the late twentieth-century, community is this ever-unstable fabric sutured by certain cultural values, personal interests, and the desires of publics' collective yet fractious experiences. Just as one may try to acknowledge everything that goes on in a weekend or online exchange, to work with a community or utopian project in a way that "foster[s] temporalities other than the narrowly sequential"

and recognizes how "impossible [it is] to delimit [it] as a single discrete unit," Dinshaw offers, may in fact mean recognizing our attachments and the extent to which they drive our movement through community (*How Soon* 3). Scholars such as carrington (*Speculative Blackness*), Cavicchi ("Foundational Discourses") and Ebony Elizabeth Thomas (*The Dark Fantastic*) have engaged the extent to which fandom comes shaped and understood via discursive interests, but extending from these scholars' respective questions, what would it mean to sit with the numerous "nows" that fandom offers in its support of pluralistic happenings? For Mazel, to do so would mean accommodating the reality that community (ergo fandom) is like time, or, only understood in the sequence of events producing an assembled and imaginary whole.

Years ago, as I first began my critical work with fandom, I started to host in-person panels at fan conventions such as San Jose, California's Further Confusion. Rather than enter as an expert in any way, however, I began these sessions asking participants to think with me, I myself having yet to imagine what project or thesis I would inevitably explore following my qualification exams. In one panel focused on how to describe the fandom while taking account of the ways fans' practices enmesh with those in queer cultures and those seeking digital, even posthuman lives, I began with how historian Fred Patten in his 2017 *Furry Fandom Conventions* laid out the fanzine, APA circuit and its surrounding cultures as furry's origin space. This idea was greeted by several responses including but not limited to confusion. One trans fan in particular explained how fandom and any sense of furry began for her via the internet forums of the mid to late 1990s. For another fan, furry began within the convention spaces, specifically Mark Merlino and

Rod O'Riley's 1989 convention Confurence in Costa Mesa, California, and its traces from prior room parties. Alas, another fan midway through the conversation suggested that the conversation, which had moved onto what opportunities the community brings, was not for him. Though the discussion would inevitably end with gratitude as fans realized that furry was numerous in shape(s) and size(s), thinking back now reiterates that what one conceives of as crucial to fandom—whether or not based in questions of origin—stems from the desires and needs of fans just as much as the historians and critics attentive to them.

Mazel's predicament thus joins a genealogy of fans wondering what their community may offer them. Hosting numerous selves who have all moved their way closer to finding that origin or inception point seemingly too distant for them to understand, she closes the novel knowing "the present is porous," "Hail[ing] the possibility of specters, spirits, ghosts, revenants," and futurities at her question of how she got there (Dinshaw 135). Her world may not have been brought to clarity, nor does she fully produce a pedagogy for herself to move with the "potentiality" of queerness, as Muñoz understands (*Cruising Utopia* 1). Instead, she leaves space for herself to recognize the polyphony of voices, bodies, agents, and histories that draw one into a collective project, something fans still sit with and consider as they build their fandom into the coming decades.

Moving as I have been towards a complication of what furry is, I close this chapter instead with the question of what fandom—and by extension furry—does. Moving into my dissertation's conclusion, my final chapter looks to how fans' collective

works and anthologies in fact help mobilize fandom into this collection of desires and possibilities, all the while standing as textual object part of fandoms' interests in communal projects.

Chapter Four

Furry Fan Anthologies and Fandom's Collective Presents

Writer Al Song's "Rekindling" begins with queer, Laotian-American protagonist Charlie driving to his parents' home during a spring break that the anthropomorphic small-clawed otter would much rather spend in his apartment (*Difursity* 39-40). Finding his vehicle inevitably low on gas, Charlie pulls into a station close to home, where he learns that rat and once classmate Ford now works at the station behind the counter (41). The introduction is warm, with Ford asking the otter if he is in fact dating anyone at the moment, him knowing the otter is busy with school. Keeping busy, Charlie's queerness is only a quick mention for the two before the conversation moves on (42), but readers quickly find that the otter's queerness aligns with what is suggested as a felt unhomeliness, for as Charlie arrives home, his identity as someone who wants to be part of his parents' traditions and culture clashes with the reality that he, too, finds himself not as at home with the queer community as he would like: "I know I should be going to the LGBTQ center more, and actually helping out in the queer community too," he states, "since it's another huge identity of mine" (51). Charlie leaves, taking a car ride with Ford and telling him of how a recent breakup epitomized the reality of his having "wasted seven years of [his] life." Ford no less takes Charlie around their hometown and nostalgic past, and in a soft moment, the narrative turns, the two characters coming to make out in a dark, cold park as they realize how their queer identities offer room for what Muñoz again sees as a potential of hope (*Cruising Utopia* 3-4). In Charlie's seeming "backward glance" at the past, he and Ford ultimately come to lay out a new direction for

themselves, the two returning back to Seattle as Ford begins community college himself (*Difursity* 68).

One of the numerous stories to be published over the last twenty years, “Rekindling” again destabilizes furry from its generic shaping as a fandom. The story brings readers to feel what Susan Koshy in “Minority Cosmopolitanism” describes as a subject’s displacement in the diaspora, queer or otherwise, specifically through its use of the queer, anthropomorphic animal as a departure for engaging the lived experiences of first-generation American youth seemingly existing in two worlds at once (*PMLA* 597). As well, the work shows furry fans and curious first-time readers how just as there are numerous worlds to what some may know as fandom in the west, so too is there an entire global understanding of furry existent and providing alternative dimensions to what one supposedly knows. Jordan A. Y. Smith in “Translationscapes” asserts that “[c]ritiques of world literature tend to be *structural* and *political*,” scholars or critics distraught to “[work] with data sets so large” fearing that any work outside the involved community would “[diminish] local authority” (*Comparative Literature Studies* 750). With regards to my project, for fans, the anthropomorphic animal is again a starting point for numerous departures, a recognition of the shared humanity one holds with those around the world, and a seeing of fandom as much more than what Western horizons suggests.

This dissertation began driven by the question of how we compose an understanding of communities so vast and troublesome as fandoms, whether because of my position on multiplicity, the realization of multiple presents, or my press to include fan literatures in all of their nuances and difficulties. Furry in itself is not simply a

fandom, as I have suggested, but what Delany describes with regards to science fiction as "a balance of complexities," being that rather than fit neat and tightly into the understanding of a fan community in our current minds, furries resist, riff, turn, and mess with media in interesting yet opaque departures ("The Semiology" 32). Though Song's piece could be argued a piece of fiction written by a fan, for instance, it is not simply fan fiction, its original take on transcultural identity written from an author's own experience and knowledge of minoritarian lives. How, then, could mainstream or outside critics understand what happens within the community, determining what they think is fanfiction yet is knowledge production of its own? With regards to this chapter, I conclude my dissertation focusing on the fandom magazines (fanmags), anthologies, and fiction collections fans and writers have held since the early fanzine years, arguing that while much of the fandom does indeed move as a communal enterprise in ways, for writers, the anthology or collection text is one way of communicating and giving allowance to the numerous offerings that "furry" brings as a queer culture. As well, it continues the tradition of celebrating furry in all of its differences and directions, for to encapsulate a certain amount of fiction here is not to necessarily categorize or canonize works homogenously but is to instead take account and celebrate the numerous, creative worlds writers dream for their audiences. Inevitably, this chapter produces an opportunity for us to recognize how fan objects can in fact give deeper understanding to the communities we strive to know from the knowledge production of their own.

The anthology is something singular yet fractal, created through the arrangement of artifacts into dimensional text. Sharing relations with the early collections that

Victorian booksellers used to capitalize on the ephemera and materials lying around in their hodge-podge collections, writes scholar Barbara M. Benedict in "Choice Reading: Anthologies, Reading Practices, and the Canon," anthologies would eventually become understood for their ability to render seemingly whole or unified forms thanks to "[t]he developments in the book trade, copyright reform and literary criticism" (*The Yearbook* 35, 54). While such would allow the literary canon to take formation out of editors' interests in shedding light on particular moments and authors, as Christopher M. Kuipers explains, so too would the form's origination out of the Greek designation for "literary bouquet" carry forward, bringing about the collection history for new generations to take on ("The Anthology" 122-123). Amidst America's late twentieth century did artists and activists of color particularly take up the anthology's ability to render the numerous voices that activism carried, as seen within literary works including editor Cherrie Moraga & Gloria Anzaldúa's *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* and editor Barbara Smith's *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*. Gay and lesbian subjects still affected by the 1980s AIDS Crisis and preceding Lavender Scare and racism would produce collective titles including editors Bruce Morrow and Charles H. Rowell's *Shade: An Anthology of Fiction by Gay Men of African Descent* and editor Ethan Mordden's *Waves: An Anthology of New Gay Literature* to engage jointly what it meant to be queer against culture's representational strategies. Collecting as the anthology might be, its archiving form nevertheless centers "difference," as Delany expresses in the introduction to Morrow and Rowell's *Shade* (xx).

The anthology can thus be read best in line with Marshall McLuhan and his reading of mediums, with the anthology's form in itself a mediation of collective difference and queerness. McLuhan, who in his 1967 work entitled "The Medium is the Message" implores that readers and critics have failed to take note of the way a medium's shape informs its ultimate message, lays out a path that offers us room to consider what the anthology brings. "[It] is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action," he writes of television: "Indeed, it is only too typical that the 'content' of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium" (*Understanding Media* 9). Though McLuhan is thinking of television's ability to circulate imagery and sound, if we look at the anthology form and acknowledge that it makes or otherwise brings something fractal into the world whole, we can understand that furry anthologies and collection gesture to the fandom's continued interest in diverse and complicated departures within in a believed singular moment. Ostensibly pulling at their own seams, anthologies as mediums suggest a contact with a cultural inherently difficult to define as one single form, and thus experimental, being that they do not rely on a canon to the same extent that works of literature and mundane fiction might require, they operate more as a chance to show and "capitalize on the multifarious authors and new readers," resonant with what Benedict sees in "post-Interregnum society" ("Choice Reading" 36). With furry unable to be shown as one thing or another, anthologies instead take advantage of the plurality possible, particularly with regards to collections themed or based on certain interests.

In this vein, this final chapter leaves room to consider the collective projects, readings, and positions that a literary text like fan anthologies can make clear for us as scholars simultaneous to fandom as community writ large. Extending what Howard Rambsy sees as the "shelf life" of early collections and documents ("Platforms" 49), furry fan anthologies and collections bring forth what editor and writer Ianus J. Wolf argues to be a "wild (pun half intended)" variety of worlds, presents, and futures, many of which contributed by writers who may be submitting fiction for the first time, even (Personal Interview).[14] Though the anthology may "help crystallize agreed ideas of what is 'furry,'" Wolf adds, said works remain crystallized in a multidimensional form, ever fractured and redirecting one to find a palimpsest, though readers may be handling a single work as a whole. One might best understand fan anthologies, here, in resonance with the more traditional understanding of the anthology, then, which scholar Barbara Mujica attributes to "solicited contributions" and "miscellany" compilations "not [meant] to canonize certain texts or authors" ("Teaching Literature" 203). Consequently, however, this chapter exemplifies how these texts do produce something: the collective understanding of a fandom as always multiple and critically dimensional.

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[14] Rambsy's "Platforms for Black Verse: The Role of Anthologies" lays out the history that anthologies have provided for Black poets, beginning with nuance that while journals and literary magazines do provide entry into a poet's work, "publishers" used anthologies "[to ensure] that poems initially published in literary journals and volumes of poetry would have new and extended lives," particularly in conversation with editors' "political commitments and literary-cultural values" (*The Black Arts* 49-50). As Rambsy describes, "Anthologists who regularly present African American poetry designed their collections to coincide with developing political and cultural movements of the time period" (51-52). In relation to fandom, furry editors have echoed with the desires of these early texts, particularly within Alpinus's *CLAW* and Weasel's *Difursity*, where questions on difference and silencing are taken on as a critical starting point.

Thinking Politically About the Economy: Fandom Markets, Fan Publications

Historically, that which fans have tried to recognize as their early fandom came out as independent markets vitalized a drive for publication and personal dialogue. From the early comics fans and artists entering fandom to the fanzines that held said persons' works and their discourse cultures, editors like Fletcher and Waller, Schirmeister, Patten, and their contributing authors mutually enforced a nexus of diversity and multiplicity critically aware of one another and not. As a press for inclusion would inevitably draw in the issues and cultural mores surrounding fans, critics again taking up the conservative actions they did to try and contain a certain fandom amidst change, such actions would fail, I argue, for the reason that is the community's emphasis in fandom's specific sensibilities. Again, as Grossberg asserts, fandom stands as a site in which independent artists, writers, and genfans can produce that which they see missing in their usual, more discursively shaped surrounding culture's. Imbibed by the desire to produce something of their own and a "cultural environment from the cultural resources available to them," "all of [which is] inseparably connected through the audience's constant struggle to make sense of itself and its world, even more, to make a slightly better place for itself in the world" (*The Adoring Audience* 52-53). In this stead, fans comprise an "active audience" rethinking how forms and cultural mediums operate, and which necessitate us "to consider the relationship [between subjects and object] without falling back into theories which privilege either the text or the audience by giving one the power to determine [any] relationship" (53).

Particularly, as scholar John Fiske explains in "The Cultural Economy of Fandom," fans have seen their communities as a chance to produce an affective site or space of relation amidst cultural forms and personal identity. Yet productive as the fan might be, creating works that like outer culture and capitalism will circulate amidst questions of value, any such forms exchanged hold an "enunciative productivity" that brings something different into the world, meanings made, "spoke and…shared" as they carry into the textual forms ultimately constructed (*The Adoring Audience* 38-39). An example of such could be argued Bruce's *Fuzzy Feelings* or Howard's *Extinctioners* series, respectively: while Howard again pulls on the threads and affective registers that Fawaz in *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination of American Comics* locates within the "material and psychic becoming[s]" of post-war superheroes such as *The Fantastic Four* and *Excalibur*, Howard's emphasis on Walcott's reading of "the long emancipation" again reminds readers that there is more work to do, more attention to be had, specifically as haunting remainders of the past seemingly step into the present/future at the question of forming new communities ("Introduction" 29; *The Long Emancipation* 2).[15] As documents, fan objects carry with them a mediating component beyond their representational desires.

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[15] Explaining his concept of the long emancipation, Walcott describes how "Black nonbeing" continues to take force within the West's "juridical and legislative" structures, allowing "liberalism's linear progressive narrative" to take shape specifically "because of the ways that modernist logics of freedom are deployed against Black people and how Black people themselves have largely come to imagine what freedom might be" ("Moving" 3). Freedom is specifically imagined "as imminent condition," he states, "both belated and always just ahead of us" (4). For this reason, "Black life," affected as it has been by slavery and the 19th century's racial sciences, America's liberal democracy, and the judicial system as it stands; "seems to dwell in that Derridean 'to come' that is always anticipatory and future-oriented," ultimately demanding "an entirely new human experience for everyone" (4-5). With connection to Howard's work in *Extinctioners*, we can see Phoenix and her cosmic position in the narrative standing in as that opportunity for Howard, as

Based in print, fans' original magazines and fanzines were some of the first moves to produce a sense of community outside convention spaces. As described in my introduction, Fletcher and Waller started APA *Vootie* as a chance to give the funny animal its dues with regards to fandom; for them, Waller describes, funny animals still remained overlooked in a field of action heroes and human-centered titles, though many animal fans were seeing comics fandom as a space to connect and create ("*Vootie*: A Proposal"). However, with *Vootie* playing towards the development of underground works like *Omaha*, the APA's production and eventual folding would nevertheless lead to the birth of *Rowrbrazzle* as Schirmeister describes in the latter's editorial:

> *Rowrbrazzle* is this unofficial successor to *Vootie*. *Vootie* was created by Ken Fletcher, noted Minnesotan and ink slinger, as a forum for those of us who feel that there's more to comics than Super Heroes and (that blight of the 20th Century) "Adult" graphic novels…Now *Rowrbrazzle* won't make you rich or famous. But it will give you the chance to make friends, experiment, or improve your drawing or writing style. ("Introduction to *Rowrbrazzle*")

Tongue-in-cheek in a way that fans of other, prior fanzines and APAs could recognize, Schirmeister's introduction no less ushers the involved creatives into a community forum in the making. Through his direct gestures, his mention of one "improv[ing their] drawing or writing style," do readers get what Lisa Gitelman recognizes as "an imaginary domain for what observes of later zines have called 'cooperative individuality' and healthy 'intersubjectivity'" (*Paper Knowledge* 141).

While the use of Bulletin Board Systems (BBS) and online networking would come about towards the end of the 1980s, editors and publishers alongside comics would

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carrington writes, to say something more "relatively autonomous from the social structure" of both fandom *and* the dominant superhero comics at the time of publication (*Speculative Blackness* 22).

still recognize the opportunity that printed material had, so much work having been produced and circulated within fan magazines already. As editor Jeff Eddy explains, the fanzines and magazines were spaces where writers and historians could develop their skills and techniques long before a market for fans' fiction arrived (Personal Interview). When magazines like Watts Martin, Bill Biersdorf, and Franklin Veaux's 1990 *Mythagoras* came out, editors would turn to their friends and colleague writers for submissions, later works like Sofawolf Press's *Anthrolations* doing similar. Here, within the fiction magazine or collection, was there a way to organize stories seemingly missed or uncelebrated. Fans as well were given the chance to show their skills in magazines more representative of a publishing trade than a fandom. Looking at the early *Mythagoras*, issue one, readers handle what first appears to be a fanzine or fanmag, before opening to reveal a more professional layout and contents page. Distinctly, editors Biersdorf and Martin organize the volume by "Features," "Departments," and "Graphics," with the bottom copyright description giving detail to the fanmag's printing, cost, and named publisher, Concept Alliance. In the included editorial, the editors describe their "new amateur small press magazine" as both a "Furry Fanzine" and "a resource for the furry fan, providing convention data, a list of other periodicals, a remote access systems (BBS) list, and a fan directory" ("Introducing" 2). While aiming to publish fiction, the fanmag nevertheless conveyed itself as indeed a site of community.

Mythagoras would nevertheless fold due to the realities of small press publishing, but its existence shows how fans surrounding any documents wanted a press and publishing industry of their own. Fanzines would continue to be produced though the

eighties had in ways been passed, and with conventions continuing to grow popular for furries, the implication of a market would accordingly grow as well. *YARF! The Journal of Applied Anthropomorphics* was publishing at the time of *Mythagoras*'s run, its first issue released by fan and editor Jeff Ferris in 1990. Unlike *Mythagoras*, however, *Yarf!* would press into the twenty-first century with its collections of comics, essays, and short fiction. Similarly, as Alex Vance explains with regards to anthology publication, *Mythagoras*'s and *Yarf!*'s introduction of a market-centered collection meant that fans were willing to buy stories of various interests and dimensions (Personal Interview). *Anthrolations*, began by Eddy in 1996, would be one text to take hold of this interest, but rather than simply make profit, Eddy and contributing writers would indeed help mold a market invested in giving readers access to a professional aesthetic. As Eddy describes, the jump to a more professional market similarly meant a heavy introduction to concerns such as copyright and formatting (Personal Interview). Though a project of fandom and economic investment, the early magazines did show that it could be done, and asking writers such as Tim "Kyell Gold" Susman to aid in the magazine's production, Eddy would inevitably issue the magazine at Anthrocon in 1996, releasing every new issue on a yearly basis thereafter. Following thereafter, the magazine would continue until 2006, when Sofawolf Press would unveil *HEAT*, another fiction anthology geared specifically to adult audiences and writers.

Difficult as this work is, for editors such as Eddy, Vance, and more recent editors like Kirisis and Lowd, part of shaping a collection of community fiction has again meant seeking out friends and authors willing to submit their fiction for the result of publication.

At the seeming height of furry anthologies in the late 2000s, writers and fans were able to locate calls for stories on publishers' websites; these calls would include themes, word count requirements, lists of unacceptable themes and materials, and further submission information. Across social circles and websites such as the *Furry Writers' Guild* forums, writers as well continue to prepare manuscripts and drafts, advice, seeing beta-reading and skill development a highly communal process. What is more, following submission and depending on quality, editors may even work with their selected authors to finalize publication quality work, share illustration drafts, or more. As Eddy explains, thus, the nature of fandom publishing may prove difficult due to accrued costs and concerns of profit, yet part of the work is relying on one's community in efforts to form the communal anthology (Personal Interview). In the end, collection's focused on themes such as dystopia or queer histories evoke that sense of plural participants resonant with the furry fandom writ large.

As a medium, the fan anthology or collection produces that recognition of fandom and its multiplicities as productive, while also keeping in mind the prior histories of fans who labored to collect works as part of shared publication. Inevitably, the fiction that gets included holds opportunities for communicating what messages they hold accordingly, while also challenging the fandom itself to keep in my collective futures.

Rekindling the Undercommons, and Anthologized Calls for Recognition Through the Consciousness-Raising Collection

Driven by the interest of what fans' textual collections produce, this chapter has nonetheless come with the question of where furry may go, what it might continue to bring for those who see its porous boundaries ever more welcoming to them. The internet has certainly played a part in what the fandom is; as Strike argues, the BBS systems of the early 1980s offered a dynamic opportunity for more connectivity, and the social media fans use now still relies on some of what made virtual reality game *Second Life* so popular, it bringing a sense of "safety [via] anonymity and the chance to experience life in the way one truly feels" (*Furry Nation* loc. 1934, 2056). Similarly, websites and services like *Fur Affinity*, *Mastodon*, Elon Musk's *Twitter*, and *Discord* gesture to the self-made webs that fans could gather in the early, fanzine pages, though the global offerings that social media generate means "accounting" for one's relations at a much larger, quicker scale, writes Lee Humphreys in *The Qualified Self: Social Media and the Accounting of Everyday Life* ("Introduction" 33). Yet print and literature still continue to live on, whether because of the editors who want others to see their work in publication, or because of the pure economics and the ability to practice fandom through it all. While digital media may be argued to extend circulation, thinking back to McLuhan's notion of the medium, as Gitelman suggests, media is again "more properly the [result] of social and economic forces, so that any technological logic they possess is only apparently intrinsic" (*Always Already New* 10). Just as I have described, the published, printed anthology comes sustained by the underlying histories of furries' press and economic

models. Like the Black feminist anthologies and titles that editors of Kitchen Sink Press and Persophone Press released out of the 1980s, these works are not just products, but a bringing forth of furry's social matrix and its eclectic heterogeneous inhabitants. Unlike the screens of users' personal computers, said works carry those gaps and spaces constructed directly into the page, interacting with readers in the ways informed by fans' early comics and fiction networks. In accordance, many continue to see more printed anthologies than not, as is the case with *HEAT*, *FANG*, and other texts.

The printed anthology is no less a continuation of furry's varieties and interested publics, again, but within recent years, editors have moved with their feminist predecessors to center and celebrate the differences authors bring to their worlds and hopes for the future. In FurPlanet's 2019 anthology *ROAR*, volume ten, Lowd as editor stresses on the importance of community, sixteen authors from around the world no less bringing ideas on what makes a community possible and supportive of utopic potentials. Speaking to readers within the foreword, Lowd writes, "this book that you're holding; this is community. All of the writers, all of the readers, and all of the characters in the stories meet at a point in time and space…[and] When you read these stories, you are part of that community" (11). Nonetheless, stories like Kyell Gold's "Outsiders" and Singaporean author Mikasiwolf's "No Choice About It" sit with what their characters' various communities offer. In Lloyd Yaeger's "Year Forty-Four," readers imagine a Martian colony where once-human colonizers have transformed into anthropomorphic animals without clear reason, and entering into "uncharted territory," duck protagonist Joyce rationalizes how no matter what future may come, "things were difficult [before],

and they'll be difficult now. There are always adjustments," community then a felt stability giving room for collective change (*Roar* 10 138-138). Similarly, in *Difursity*, editor Weasel of Thurston Howl Publications brings out three authors who help realize the national and cultural differences that exist in the fandom, Mikasiwolf's "In Better Times" drawing from the author's military experience to align physical senses of unhomeliness with the haunting and bleed of time (8). Within the anthology, then, an effort to move towards collectivity comes mobilized into material artifacts able to be held and exchanged as needed.

With collections like *Difursity*, however, editors have made more of an attempt at acknowledging the limits that furry has come up against, whether that be its celebrating and cementing the fandom's western histories or focus on cisgendered and gay male authors. Acting as what historian Brian Norman describes of the "consciousness-raising document," in editor K.C. "Kirisus" Alpinus's *CLAW*, volume one—a sister text to Bad Dog Books's *FANG*—readers are introduced to thirteen different works by queer and (trans)female writers such as Erin Quinn, Greyraven, and Madison Keller ("The Consciousness-Raising" 38). In a personal interview discussing the collection, Alpinus tells of how she gathered works that took up the challenge to entertain readers who perhaps agreed that "for years, the literature aspect of the fandom has been heavily overrepresented by cis, gay men, despite there being a lot of women and non-binary folks in the fandom who liked to read." Nonetheless a collection of fiction, with each story as well focusing on various female and queer protagonists finding love and romance, Kirisis and her included writers return to "those transformative political potentialities" that have

allowed their community to be what it is today, and that like queer archives—as Muñoz exclaims—are “more expansive and including of various structures of feeling and habits of being that the relatively restrictive categories of gay and lesbian identities [and fandom] are incapable of catching” (*Cruising Utopia* 115). In this stead has Kirisis similarly published *Selections of Anthropomorphic Regalements*, volume one, in 2020. Bringing eleven different works by authors from across the world, the anthology works against what Kirisis sees as a “depressed” market, showing that there are numerous furry fandoms, furry worlds, waiting to be told whether in anthology form or otherwise (Personal Interview). “A lot of people are looking for full novels these days,” she explains, “[and] There's also seems to have been a quality shift downwards since most of the talented writers stopped submitting since the pay rate has not increased in over a decade.” Nevertheless, the anthology continues to realize fandom as a shifting expanse welcome to heterogeneity.

Though anthologies are commodities, then, crafted by editors, writers, and artists to help promote the continued lives of fiction within the furry fandom, so too do they bring out the means of continuing furry’s early histories and interests, where writers could be a part of the fun just the same as artists, and where fans could dialectically shape their community into new coming eras and potentials. While furry may not have the publication scale that wider, hegemonic publications and syndicates offer, fans continue to come together and make something for themselves, raising consciousness as they need to, aligning the plural, messy interests and histories they carry along with others. Also, though the anthologizing process in itself stands as a difficult, even challenging project.

artists, writers, and creatives have taken to funding their own collections as well as using the zine format as a chance to celebrate numerous themes and authors, eclectically or otherwise. In 2021, British author and editor Huskyteer released *The Furry MEGAPACK* with Black Cat Press, home to collections of horror, science fiction, fantasy, and other pulp narratives tracing back to the numerous Golden Ages of the twentieth-centuries. On *Zooscape*, or an online web magazine produced by Lowd, writers can as well submit their animal or alien focused short stories for an average rate of eight cents per word. While these efforts do not continue the exact model of the early fanzines, some that like *Rowrbrazzle* continue to grow, they inevitably center diverse, fan-interested mediums as a collective build towards fandom's potentials.

Conclusion

Like the fanzine, the anthology mediates community. Its interests toward a collective understanding of fandom and literature means though many may try, to define furry or particular community as one thing or another is to ignore the opportunities that the community instead produces, whether that be safe spaces for queer and minoritarian audiences, or a vehicle for contending with prescient realities. With a single call for submissions, editors offer publication, collective production, financial support, and the mediation of an anthology's constructed miscellany nature. As Eddy describes, whatever difficulty that a collection project may require falls second in ways to the circulation of authors doing their fandom together (Personal Interview).

A final question to consider is whether or not fandom as a repertoire in and of itself mediates the heterogeneity that media and entertainment studios fail to recognize.

As Morimoto and Bertha Chin explain, how we engage and access fandom is fraught with attachments, from economics, institutional boundaries, and hegemonic, majoritarian interests; accordingly, as "imagined communities," transcultural fan groups such as furry disrupt traditional, Western depictions and formations, particularly as non-Western and queer, minoritarian fans contest homogenizing and generalized knowledge, exceeding any "centripetal norm" applied ("Reimagining" 186-187). "Fandoms *are* imagined communities, and as such," Morimoto and Chin state, these communities "are reimaginable to reflect more closely their inherent transcultural diversity and complexity" (186). With regards to the printed works I have examined thus far—including the anthology—we must recognize how fans enter with their own histories and attachments, and resultantly, do they again illustrate fandom's queerness.

Further studies may need to continue realizing the possibilities that fan-based economic and publication interests gesture toward, then. For furries, many more comic, fan magazine texts remain unseen by wider audiences, and like queerness, this horizon gives motion to the dreams, fantasies, desires, and wishes that normative, mundane society cannot otherwise offer. Similarly, as I have suggested with my introduction to this chapter, global understandings of the fandom can further dimensionalize what still today continues to be seen as a predominantly Western project.

Conclusion: A Gesture to Fan Studies' Futures

In 2018, I began my graduate school journey as someone deeply attached to furry and fandom sensibilities. Having entered the fan community in 2004, when conventions began to rise as one of the major social outlets for fans recognizing they were not alone in their interests, I applied for the doctorate by implicating a queerness to furry's totality and turned my attention to areas such as Speculative Fiction Studies, Asian-American literature, Media Studies, Performance Studies, and more, all while speaking at conventions with the fans who lived lives that to me were so enchanting. It would be in that panel at San Jose, California's, Further Confusion in 2019 that reminded me of the histories and work that fans were producing all on their own with or without institutional analyses, again. Just the same, projects like Strike's *Furry Nation* and Ash Coyote's 2019 *The Fandom* displayed the nuances and simultaneous histories that academics and the study of what Hayden White describes as "the historical past" fail to capture (*The Practical Past* loc. 404). Though I entered graduate school wanting to verbalize the world(s) that I had felt I knew for some time, then, the work I found myself engaging with and returning to continued to implicate the limitations fields and language had for understanding furry's queerness.

While not a product of the study of history, explaining fandom is in ways a problem of historiographic work. Making sense of what it is fans do, what it is fans look like, and how we verbalize practices seemingly deviant requires the same tools that producing historiographical texts require, I learned, such as holding a willingness to concede to contradiction and multiplicity, accepting that what is it we look to describe

goes against our very moves to "[govern] practice," as Pierre Bourdieu argues in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* ("The Dialectic" 95). What is more, engaging with fans generating their own takes on the community they love reminded me that there is a plethora of stories and experiences surpassing the horizon of expectations fan scholarship has made for itself over the last thirty years since the early nineties. Yet as White describes when thinking of how to "summarize a long and detailed 'history' of anything," to turn to literary texts and documents carrying "the truth of feeling" within their margins can "halt the process of narrativization and…[jolt us] out of our readerly concentration" that may limit a totality's intricacies ("Historical Discourse" loc. 1586, 1697).[16]

The texts that I have brought forth are thus only a sample of the worlds and pathways furries have imagined as part of fandom, then, but as said works stand, they give materiality to what it is that fans *feel* within their communities and living histories, and what it is they desire when normative, mundane culture cannot provide the realities it seemingly promises. Driven as they were/are by independent comic production and fandoms' textual circuits, creatives within the furry community have used the strategies available to make sense of the worlds and politics surrounding them into the twenty-first century, just as they have found techniques to evoke new publics, new practices of

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[16] Another strong reading on narrative and the archive's limitations would be Doro Wiese's *The Power of the False: Reading, Writing, Thinking Beyond the Truth and Fiction*, where in focusing on Gilles Deleuze's understanding of literature, Wiese takes up "the power of the false" to remind historians of literature's "potential to incite readers to beyond their frames of references" ("Introduction" loc. 140). Whether affected by the pain and loss that documents can make apparent or the gaps that scholars such as Marisa J. Fuentes in *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* see as the archive's structural "bias grain" ("Introduction" 1), literature's "powers of the false," Wiese expands, "...[point] as they do toward a form of knowledge that is not yet here, can only be described only by listening attentively to the singular propositions of literary works" (loc. 159).

responsibility, fleshing out what normative and majoritarian culture can't seem to get right. Just the same, though the works I have examined have leaned towards the fantastic and speculative, perhaps removing any sense of believability with regards to the more "factual" knowledge that empiricist methods have tried to produce, as documents, or, texts that cultural and print theorist Lisa Gitelman describes to be gesturing to the "patterns of expression and reception discernible amid a jumble of discourse," they again explicate fandom as always already changing, always on the move, subjects working to imagine a sociality seemingly only possible through the imagination (*Paper Knowledge* 3).

This final point reminds us that fandom is always numerous, always out-of-sync with itself, as I have tried to explain. Just as I have shown that anthologies and collection documents give shape to a communal sense being-with-difference, conventions offer fans the opportunity to be alongside one another at events and panels happening simultaneously, sometimes within the space of the convention or otherwise. Also, the oral history and archival projects that fans have only begun to recognize epitomize how fandom works against the very formations that institutions and discourse provide for us. While it would be safe to say that fan studies deserves new questions as to how to move, particularly as fans continue to practice interests involving sex, queer becomings, and more, we must remind ourselves, I challenge, that fandoms hold critics of their own. Rather than try to continue and rescue fans' practices into terms that institutions can recognize, then, why not redirect and look to said practices for what they suggest about time's messiness?

In *Fan Cultures*, Hills comes to suggest that we must remind ourselves of the ways in which fan communities "cannot be subjected to any controlling or synthesizing gaze," and while published in 2002, just years after the twenty-first century had its turn, furry is a case that exemplifies how much of what Hills describes remains intact ("Conclusion" 174). As he explains, ethnography and its believed "position of non-interventionist data-gathering" still limit "those very processes which researchers have been interested in studying," for try as academics might to engage fan identities in new ways, citing critic and fan Susan Clerc, said academics' "desire[s]" affect how we bring forth what are numerous, even supposedly deviant potentials into something "familiar and comfortable within a generationally specific set of practices" (174-175). While such may lend dignity to the works and practices fans take up, thereby placing particular values on what for so long has been deemed wild and seemingly abnormal, as furry shows, to achieve dignity is to silence certain departures and shape fandom against "neoliberal and heteronormative logics," as Stephen M. Engel and Timothy S. Lyle find within queer communities (*Disrupting Dignity* 305). Just the same, to uphold furry fans' interests as what separates them from other, perhaps just as queer communities would mean to extend the limits holding us back from more curious analyses. For carrington, who in his conclusion of *Speculative Blackness* gestures to the opportunities that can come from "reconsider[ing] speculative fiction" and Blackness as modes of thought, "Taking a critical eye to the way in which we categorize works on the basis of telling differences helps us to apprehend the internal logic[s] of cultural production. Yet it also enables us to articulate what it means in relation to other facets of our everyday lives and

social experiences" ("Coda" 240). In attending to communities' own "internal logic[s]," can we as academics thus recognize the labor fans produce "to transform cultural politics" and their communities for the better, with or without the institutions we rely on (241).

Across this dissertation, I have tried to give precedence to fans' perspectives, driven as they are by the affective and intellectual sensibilities informing them. In terms of recognizing fans as producers and holders of knowledge, we might consider taking attendance to how fans use certain forms upon the page to make sense of their contemporary, prior, or future socio-cultures, as yerf and Fawaz allow respectively. We might also think about the ways that fandom is a humanities of its own, where from literature and criticism to visual media and performative excesses, fandom is but a microcosm of our larger publics and their queries. While we can continue to study fan communities as spaces of discourse, we could also follow the directions of journals such as *Transformative Works and Cultures* and smaller events like furries' own Further Confusion and Anthrocon in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Open access and supportive of the work critics bring forward, these sites recognize that knowledge is not simply produced within the institution, nor is it always as neat and clean as objective-leaning scholarship would like to suggest. Rather, said outlets offer the suggestion that what makes fandom is an abundance of cultural practices and forms, glimpses, too untimely to be categorized in a singular mode. I conclude this document not with a clear direction, then, but with a horizon of possibilities for fan scholars, whether they want to move in more interdisciplinary and queerer directions or not. Fandom–as with any public sphere–

is too difficult to qualify in a single framework. Perhaps this may lead to troubling fandom's archive(s) and recognizing fans as they are.

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