

CHAPTER 6

STILL FLYING: WRITING AS PARTICIPATORY ACTIVISM CIRCULATING ACROSS THE FIREFLY ‘VERSE

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INTRODUCTION

The production and circulation of fan culture is entering a moment when fans, entertainers, and copyright holders are renegotiating the terms of participation. No longer bound by traditional means of making and delivering content, content producers and content consumers are blurring the lines between their roles by co-producing material to share, spread, and celebrate the object of their enjoyment. Much of this activity takes places across digital spaces such as Tumblr, Twitter, Facebook, Etsy, meet-ups, and conventions (or cons). Sometimes, such blurring has resulted in the production of music videos (amandapalmer, 2009) and funding movies (Thomas, 2013). At other times, the results have met with resistance in the form of cease-and-desist letters and the threats of lawsuits (Gibson, 2007). In many of these cases, it is the self-organizing activity of the fans—sometimes in cooperation with artists and producers—that create networks for knowledge sharing and collaboration.

Negotiating participation, fans work within and across various digital spaces to contribute to their fandoms. Many scholars have examined this kind of labor, including Henry Jenkins’ (1992) groundbreaking work on fan fiction, Matt Hills’ (2002) examination of fandom’s anti-commercial ideology, Jonathan Gray’s (2010) work on paratexts, and Abigail De Kosnik’s (2013) work on the free labor of fandom. The activities fans partake in and the objects they invoke across physical and digital spaces alter the context in which they can participate. And while these activities are in abundance online and many are protected by Fair Use, the copyright holders do not always appreciate such

participation from fans. As Tabettha Adkins mentioned in this collection, it is through social media that these participants are able to communicate and change social activism dramatically.

For fans of the short-lived science-fiction television show *Firefly* and the movie *Serenity*, this fandom has far outlived the show and produced more original content than the show ever will. From podcasts (*The Signal*) to edited collections whose authors include a mix of fans and academics who are fans (Espenson, 2004, 2007; Wilcox & Cochran, 2010), these participants are as prolific as they are passionate about the source material.

A hat worn by a main character in *Firefly* has become a symbol of their fandom. The “Jayne hat” is worn by fans to identify each other, celebrate the show, and demonstrate their allegiance to *Firefly*. In 2013, that hat was claimed by the copyright holders, licensed to a third party to produce “official” hats, and sold by a “nerd company” (Chaney, 2013) that may have regretted it. Before the official version was produced, the crafters of these hats were primarily fans selling their knitted caps to and sharing patterns online with other fans. The making of the official hat led *Firefly*’s copyright holder, 21st Century Fox, to send cease-and-desist letters to crafters selling their homemade hats on Etsy (Hall, 2013). It also inspired fans and allies to take to social media to vent their frustrations and come up with solutions together.

In analyzing these activities, I explain how individual members of this event participated, illustrating how groups mobilized by shifting their movements across and between strategies and tactics. To discuss these issues, I predominately apply the concept of enunciation from Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) as well as my own work studying fandom, social media (Potts, 2012, 2015), and disaster (Potts, 2014). Through their *social* writings across *social* media, their acts are exhibited through their enunciation of the conflict and the translation of activity across the network of the fan community.

As Ann M. Blakeslee and Rachel Spilka (2010) have noted, “digital audiences are complex, requiring processes of analysis and accommodation that embrace and take full account of this complexity” (p. 223). By making these moves more visible through this type of analysis, I explain why this kind of social web participation is a significant site of study for digital rhetoric, one that can help expand how we teach social media writing practices to our students. Examining how social media can be a space for activism and shared experience can provide examples of how writing works in these digital spaces. Understanding how writing works in social media can bring practical examples to our classes, whether we are teaching courses on content strategy, digital writing, experience architecture, new media, or technical communication.

PARTICIPATORY CULTURE'S STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Concepts from Michel de Certeau's (1984) *The Practice of Everyday Life* have received much attention from scholars studying participatory culture. In particular, Henry Jenkins (1992, 2010a) and others (Jenkins et al., 2009) have used it to discuss expectations for engagement for students, fans, and everyday people. Participatory culture examines how communication is networked, how everyday people can connect and engage with others, and how collaborative activities work across these networks. In the case of this research, I am examining the collaborative, participatory writing space of social media and social networks. This section will look specifically at de Certeau's concept of enunciation as it relates to writing and communicating in digital spaces. Here I suggest that we consider a hybridized model that would help us negotiate the space between a strategy and a tactic. That is, I question whether the emergence of social media, participatory culture, and activism gave rise to other models of activity outside of the binary presented by many scholars when they think of de Certeau's work. The writers in this case study see themselves as participating in a fandom where their key text focuses on rebellion, survival, and chosen family. Through their participation, they rebel with the help of actors, magazine writers, and other fans against a corporate giant that had betrayed them.

DEFINING STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau (1984) created a framework by which he could discuss power relations and communication. His work on the concepts of strategies and tactics is often seen as a binary. He defined a strategy as "the calculation or manipulation of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated" (pp. 35-36). In defining a strategy, de Certeau linked these acts to a space, an environment, the "place of its own power and will" (p. 36). The place of major organizations and corporations is the space of power in which strategies can be executed. In contrast, de Certeau defined a tactic as "a calculated action determined by the absence of a power locus" (pp. 36-37). The tactic is an "art of the weak" in this power relationship (p. 37), the "space of the other" in which everyday people reside (p. 36). This binary establishes corporations as producers of power and knowledge, and everyday people as operating under these conditions and constraints.

It is useful that de Certeau situated his analysis as a way of examining "contexts of use" (p. 33), something familiar to scholars of Internet studies, where the interfaces, platforms, and devices are often studied as part of an ecosystem

of activity. De Certeau pointed to context as a way of describing traits, and he framed a model of *enunciation* as a way of understanding these traits. In that model, he discussed issues of language and linguistics, and we would say, as scholars of participatory action, rhetoric. He lays out four elements (Table 6.1) that collectively comprise enunciation and thus use and context: realizing, appropriating, inscribing relations, and situating in time (p. 33). The concept of realizing refers to how a speech act can actualize its potential. A speaker’s appropriate language and an interlocutor create a contract between speakers. Finally, establishing a moment in time, a *kairos*, roots the enunciation in a fixed present—a “now” in which the speakers can contextualize activity.

Table 6.1. Four Elements of Enunciation

Element	Definition
Realizing	How a speech act can actualize its potential
Appropriating	How speakers take and fit language
Inscribing	Creating a relationship between speakers
Situating	Contextualizing speech within an activity

Each presupposition to enunciation—which all four of these elements describe—works to create meaning through language and context through use. We can see this kind of activity in online communities, as inside jokes, shared values, and memes are used repeatedly to layer community knowledge and create context for conversations. Other studies of Internet communication have discussed such communication issues across spaces such as YouTube (Gal, Shifman, & Kampf, 2015), Reddit (Potts & Harrison, 2013), and other social networking spaces (De Ridder, 2013), as well as fandoms and digital spaces, such as the work of Richard McCulloch, Virginia Crisp, Jon Hickman, and Stephanie Janes (2013).

PARTICIPATION AS A HYBRID MODEL OF STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

In considering participatory cultures, Jenkins (2013) described how “the ‘digital revolution’ has resulted in real, demonstrable, shifts in media power, expanding the capacity of various subcultures and communities to access the means of media production and circulation” (p. xxiii). It is through this revolution that we see a collapse in de Certeau’s model of strategy and tactics. Participation and activism can be resituated as neither a strategy nor a tactic, but an ability to flex and adapt to conditions. Jenkins et al. (2009) defined participatory culture as having

1. relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement
2. strong support for creating and sharing creations with others

3. some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed on to the novices
4. members who believe that their contributions matter, and
5. members who feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least, they care what other people think about what they have created). (p. 50)

Axel Bruns (2008) referred to participatory culture activities as “produsage”—combining the terms “production” and “use” (p. 2), which is relevant when considering the crafting community and participation across social media in this case study. (See Estee Beck’s chapter in this volume for a discussion of produsage vis-à-vis labor issues in social media spaces.) Here, we have participants who are both producing material objects as well as using objects created earlier by content producers. In some instances, fans take these objects and work them into remixes; in other examples, the materials created by fan crafters are based on props from the object of their adoration—television shows, movies, books, etc. In his recent work, Jenkins looked at participatory culture and how spreadable media can empower consumers (Jenkins et al., 2013). Spreadable media refers to the circulation of content within commercial and participatory culture, examining issues of economics and meaning making (p. 1). Such issues are key to communicating across digital spaces as a form of social activism.

Combining these key definitions of participatory culture, a framework can begin to emerge when discussing activities that take place across social media. For example, we can examine using Twitter to chat directly with content producers or creating websites to share fan community knowledge, such as design patterns for creating costumes. This activity is not bound to specific strategies or tactics by participants so much as it is a shifting of power relationships across spaces where traditional claims are not so easily enforced. So by their production, use, and ability to spread information, the fans in these communities can participate in ways that can often circumvent these traditional power relationships.

IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDYING DIGITAL RHETORIC

For fans to build their identities and align themselves with their communities, there are specific practices that they take up in various digital spaces. In particular, different social media tools can support this kind of work. For example, fan scholars and scholar fans have traced the use of technologies and sites such as LiveJournal (Busker, 2008), blogs (Chin & Hills, 2008), and, more recently, Twitter (Deller, 2011). Throughout the history of social web technologies and fandoms, conflicts have arisen between fans and copyright holders—from the early example of Fox’s takedown of the *X-Files* fan-produced multimedia archive

the Treehouse to the lawsuit brought against the fan-organized Harry Potter Lexicon (a website that the fans wanted to turn into a physical encyclopedia). And while these conflicts are certainly troublesome, the ways in which fans are able to circumvent these issues and continue to keep their communities active is noteworthy, both as spaces where digital rhetoric can be studied and where pedagogy can be developed. There are also many instances where the collective actions of fans and content producers have led to the creation of new content, as in the case of Whedon's *Serenity* and more recent examples on Kickstarter such as the fan-supported movie for *Veronica Mars*.

Given the case study in this chapter, it becomes clear that the strategies and tactics of crafters and their supporters are deploying a mixed model, a hybrid of sorts of the two terms. They are writing their participation in social media as a form of activism, where both strategies and tactics are required to circumvent traditional channels of content distribution, sales, and support. This form of activism is made more visible by their use of social media and through these writings. This is participatory action.

PARTICIPATORY ACTION: THE CASE OF *FIREFLY*

Fans of *Firefly* have created their own community around the television show and movie. *Firefly* is a show focused on a group of heroes who are often fearless in the face of opposition, although all of them have faced some major loss in their lives. In describing *Firefly* creator Joss Whedon's take on heroes, actor and star of *Firefly* Nathan Fillion stated, "Joss Whedon's version of a hero doesn't always win. He loses more than he wins, and when he wins, the victories are tiny, but he takes 'em" (as cited in Pascale, 2014, location 78). This understanding is useful in examining strategies, tactics, and participation—the activities undertaken by the fandom to support, protect, and defend members of the community in this case study. These fans adopt personas similar to the characters in *Firefly*, and thus share an ethos regarding heroics, family, and independence. The object that is central to this particular case study is a symbol of both fandom and family for *Firefly* fans: a hat worn by one of the main characters, Jayne Cobb, a gift given to him by his mother. It is a key example of how posthuman objects can impact communities and writing and how they can become the interlocutor necessary to enunciate meaning in a community. As *Firefly* scholar Elizabeth L. Rambo (2014) noted, the "*Firefly* fandom has come to associate Jayne's hat with devoted family ties and with fearlessness in the face of opposition, such as the corporate interest that doomed *Firefly*" (p. 191). The care for and wearing of this hat is one way in which these fans enact and embody their fandom.

In April 2013, the fan community of *Firefly* faced off against Fox through

various spaces across the social web. Wanting to sell an authorized, official version of Jayne's hat, online retailer ThinkGeek contacted the copyright holder, Fox. Fox worked with third-party supplier Ripple Junction to create the hat, which ThinkGeek could then sell in their online store. The need for the official hat triggered Fox to then go after the "unofficial" versions sold by fan crafters on Etsy, sending cease-and-desist letters in an effort to stop the sale of the unofficial hats. By tweeting on Twitter, renaming items in Etsy, writing articles in geek news sources such as *Buzzfeed* (Hall, 2013) and the *Mary Sue* (Pantozzi, 2013; Polo, 2013), and responding on websites, fans and their allies deployed various strategies and tactics in response to Fox's moves. By participating, they were at once enunciating their fandoms, finding a route around a corporation, and deploying long-term strategies for the crafters' sustainability.

Looking specifically at the incident discussed in this case study, we can see how fans, fandoms, and copyright holders collide. Such understandings can help us be better researchers of these kinds of social media writing genres as well as explore issues of intellectual property and the crafting community. Analyzing the activity that occurred during the summer of 2013, we can better understand how fans construct their social networks, share crafter knowledge, and distribute information across these networks to support one another using a hybrid model of strategy and tactic: participation.

BACKGROUND ON *FIREFLY*

Firefly was a television show created by Joss Whedon that was aired for three months by Fox, premiering in the fall of 2002. The show did not receive much support from the network; episodes were broadcast out of order, confusing viewers and failing to gain an audience large enough to satisfy Fox. Even so, *Firefly* garnered fan support. These fans persuaded the rights holders to produce and release the film *Serenity* and a reunion special in 2012 on the Science Channel. In between those years and since, the *Firefly* universe has produced various merchandise and media. These objects include official and unofficial objects such as compendia, comic books, and various fan-made products such as fan fiction, fan videos, books, and merchandise.

These details about *Firefly* are important, as the values and mores of the characters in the show help construct the ways in which the fans have constructed their fan community. Set in the year 2516, *Firefly* presents a futuristic world where Earth was destroyed and people spread out across the universe (referred to as the 'Verse in the show). Fighting in the Unification War, the Browncoats lost to the Alliance at the Battle of Serenity. The Alliance continued to assert their control to varying degrees across the 'Verse, while the losers of this civil war

were pushed to the boundaries, taking up a pioneer lifestyle reminiscent of the American Western society. The time and space in which this show took place, a reconstructed Old West, and the inscription of rebellion against a monolithic superpower are key elements in understanding the ethos of the fans and allies in this case study.

The main characters of the story are self-proclaimed “Big Damn Heroes” who survived the war in their own ways: soldiers, a mercenary, a mechanic, a religious leader, and fugitives. They are “by and large irrelevant in the grander scheme of the universe” (Rowley, 2007, p. 319), while being representative of survivors strewn across the ‘Verse. Whedon’s characters are purposefully ambiguous about good and evil; they defy the Alliance, steal when necessary, and come to the aid of the weak when needed. In a similar way, the fans of the series share these values themselves, especially in the case study. By referring to themselves as Browncoats, the fans are appropriating the language of the show and using this term to realize their community. They are pointing to the image of central character Captain Malcolm “Mal” Reynolds, still wearing his brown coat long past his group’s loss at the Battle of Serenity, as a way to show unity with the greater cause of freedom and independence in opposition to the overwhelming control and loss of agency that the Alliance represents. A similar tactic is taken by the crafters and their allies in opposition to Fox in this case study.

These actions leading to enunciation are critical moments for the fandom to shape itself and become coherent. In describing their community, one of the fans states, “When you meet a Browncoat for the first time they don’t shake hands, they hug you right away. It’s like a family, and you feel that from the actors, too” (Hadlock et al., 2006). These fans gather at conventions, chat in various digital spaces such as FireflyFans.net, and talk to the stars, producers, writers, and costume makers over Twitter. The fandom’s culture often replicates the *Firefly* ‘Verse, with many noting that “the fans of *Firefly* are in fact sort of these characters on the show” (Hadlock et al., 2006). This further enunciates the sense of family and belonging within this fandom and *Firefly*.

As characters, they are also constructing a different kind of fan community. This concept of “family” and community is one that is central for the fans, fan scholars, scholar fans, and the cast and crew of *Firefly*. Other scholars in Whedon Studies have explored these ideas (Koontz, 2008; Rambo, 2014; Wilcox & Cochran, 2008), and the idea of strong community ties is central to the fan-produced video celebrating the *Firefly* fandom (Hadlock, Heppler, Neish, & Wiser, 2006). The phrase “Done the Impossible” is a line of dialogue spoken by Mal in reference to a temporary victory during the Battle of Serenity during the *Firefly* pilot episode. In that way, it is also the shared ethos of the fandom that they had done the impossible by uniting themselves as Browncoats and produced the vid-

eo to showcase their community. This concept of family is pervasive throughout many of Whedon's works, and it has an effect on the fans and scholars who study his work. A central leader of the Whedon Studies Association, scholar Rhonda V. Cochran (2014) noted that she was "especially drawn in by the abiding theme of chosen family" (p. 392). This theme is central to the ways in which these fans enunciate their community's ethos through communication moves they make across social media and the symbols they choose to rally behind.

FANDOMS AND SYMBOLS

The main characters use the ship to smuggle goods and protect their stowaways. In the words of the ship's captain, Mal: "You got a job, we can do it, don't much care what it is" (Minear, 2002). This continued ambiguity about right and wrong permeates the show. It also shows up in Nathan Fillion's response to a fan crafter regarding the Jayne hat issue (Fillion, 2013b). As the actor who played Mal, he is a central figure for the fandom, and his involvement in this case lent weight to the fan crafters' cause. As for the owner of the hat itself, Jayne Cobb is a character described as a "doltish mercenary" and a "lovable sonuvabitch," (Chant, 2012, p. 224). In the twelfth episode of the series, he receives a gift from his mother: A winter hat she has knitted for him in various shades of orange. As a material symbol, this hat became the focus of the event in this case study. In an authorized book about *Firefly*, costume designer Shawna Trpcic described the hat as a "labor of love," noting that "you can tell that he loves it because it's from his mom, and he doesn't even think about the fact that here he is, this hired killer, wearing a pom-pom on his head" (Twentieth Century Fox, 2007, p. 140). When Jayne puts it on, his crewmates are amused, while Jayne is proud to wear something handmade by his mom, softening his tough-guy persona. Here is the rugged mercenary with a family and backstory.

The hat is an important object to the Browncoat fandom, one which they have poached, as a form of fan crafting, from the show while also crafting their own versions of the hat. This kind of poaching was first discussed by de Certeau (1984) and later elaborated on by Jenkins in discussing fan fiction (1992, 2012). The fans inscribe their fandom through the hat across various kinds of media, both physical and digital. People can download patterns to make the hat (Fung, 2012), listen to a podcast dedicated to the hat (dillo, 2013), cosplay about the hat (blaster, 2013), and listen to fan-produced music (known as filk) dedicated to the hat (Peal, 2008). In these ways they have reached enunciation—realizing the need for an object to unite the fandom, appropriating from Jayne as a central object within the fandom, inscribing the hat as a relationship-making object among fans, and situating the hat as a way of cementing their connections to each other.

The hat was taken up by the fandom, with one fan crafter noting that “every fan who sees them knows I’m a fellow traveller in the ‘Verse” (‘dillo, 2013), signaling to the term used to describe the *Firefly* Universe. Describing the hat and how to craft one in a podcast, one fan states: “Is there anything more symbolic of firefly than a cunning yellow-orange hat with red earflaps? When a brown-coat walks down the street wearing a Jayne’s hat, you can tell they’re proud of their fandom” (‘dillo, 2013). These statements by fans both align them with their fellow fans and point to the symbol as central to the fandom, thus walking through the four elements of de Certeau’s enunciation. During the episode where Jayne’s character received the hat, he asked, “How does it sit? Pretty cunning, don’t you think?”

Fans have poached the artifact from *Firefly* and made it part of their “lexicon of use” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 31)—a way to ascribe meaning to their fandom while prescribing the ways in which they can participate and show their loyalty to their fan community. Responding to the actions of Fox, fans appropriate the language of *Firefly* by using the phrases used in the show, situating and inscribing meaning between the show and the events happening in real life as a way of the larger fan community and their allies. On Twitter, the #jaynehat hashtag was used as an interlocutor during the time and space of the case study, and it is still in use today for fans to talk about the hat, the controversy, and the fandom. Someone is even running a Twitter account under the name of the hat, spelled backwards (EnyajTah), in reference to Nathan Fillion’s suggestion that crafters rename their hats EnyajTah to avoid Fox’s interference (Fillion, 2013a). But it is the physical manifestations of the hat—the official one sold on ThinkGeek (2013a) and the crafter fan-made versions on Etsy—that cause the controversy in this case study.

EYNAJ STAHS FOR SALE

This kind of “entrepreneurial feminism” (Jenkins, 2013, p. xxx) is supported by *Firefly*’s creator, Joss Whedon. This term refers to “feminists’ conflicted ability and desire to engage with and intervene in capitalism” (Sheridan-Rabideau, 2009, p. 128). As the creator of *Firefly* and several other cult television shows, including *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Joss Whedon has notably generated strong female characters and shown support for the DIY community. On a crafter blog called Crochet Me, he stated that seeing the hats “fills me with tiny knitted joy” (Werker, 2008). In that same article, Whedon (2008) acknowledged the crafter culture within *Firefly*, noting the “pioneer spirit” of the show and explaining that “we were really trying to evoke the idea of things you make for yourself, of a life that you create with your own two hands” (as cited in Werker, 2008). It

is unsurprising that the fandom would also show signs of this kind of participation, making their own hats, selling hats to fellow Browncoats, and sharing information with each other about how to make these hats. In that way, the hat itself becomes both a symbol and a genre form for the fans to show their allegiance to the show and each other.

Etsy is a space for crafters to sell handmade objects and connect with fans. Through this case study, we can see how the *Firefly* fandom is similar to a folk culture, which, “as they historically operated . . . [was] highly participatory, with skills and norms passed down informally across generations and with no sharp division between expert and novice” (Jenkins, 2013, p. xxvii). It is through this kind of activity that we can also see how sellers might alter the genre of Etsy by posting new listings that take up the language of their fandom—appropriating this language to fit the situation—rather than using the specific name of the copyrighted material. So here we see listings for “cunning hats” rather than “Jayne hats,” pointing to the catch phrases of their fandoms—the interlocutors of their fandom—rather than pointing to Fox’s “official name” for the hats. In this way, they are inscribing the relationship between object and fandom, situating it within this context to enunciate the connection. Whether or not this can continue will be up to Fox’s lawyers and Etsy’s policies, but many of the fan crafters, the fans, and the Big Damn Heroes all seem willing to support these exchanges.

CRAFTERS AND ETSY

Crafters are artists who create handmade objects, as opposed to mass-produced creations made in factories. Similar to the do-it-yourself (DIY) maker community, the crafter community is an online and offline phenomenon attracting the attention of researchers across Internet studies, participatory culture, and digital rhetoric. These communities are useful locations for examining how crafters use technology to share, remix, and mentor other participants. Within the crafter community is a sense of openness and sharing, a similar attitude found in fan fiction communities (Busse & Hellekson, 2006, p. 6). Scholars such as Jenkins (2010a) have considered DIY culture as part of a longer historical movement that he referred to as DIO (Do it Ourselves), a component of participatory culture and community-based action. Colin Lankshear and Michele Knobel referred to how “new technologies make it possible in principle for everyday people to produce artifacts that have the kind of sophistication that could previously only be obtained via very high cost infrastructure” (as cited in Jenkins, 2010b). It is that kind of activity that led to the activism in this case study, crafting and writing to align themselves with a particular fan community. While the Jayne

hats are derivatives of *Firefly* and not fan fiction, the similarities between these two types of production are clear in terms of ideology, values, and orientation. Like the “female fanzine editors” that Jenkins (2013) talked about in his work, these crafters are mostly women who are “asserting their rights to create and manage their own small-scale business within the support structure fandom provided” (p. xxx).

While crafter fans create hat patterns (Fung, 2012) and share advice through websites and podcasts (‘dillo, 2013), it was the crafters on Etsy who garnered the ire of Fox. A space for crafters, Etsy encourages shoppers to “buy from creative people who care about quality and craftsmanship” (2014a). Etsy is a supporter of the DIY/DIO movement, creating a space for crafters to sell their products and asking its shoppers to participate in a “marketplace where people around the world connect to buy and sell unique goods” (2014b).

It is within this space that we can often witness “fan culture as folk culture” (Jenkins & Scott, 2013, p. xxvii) as crafters create objects for different kinds of fans. It was in a space where such folk culture flourishes—Etsy—that crafters selling their Jayne hats received notification of cease-and-desist orders sent by Fox (Pantozi, 2013). Although many of these takedown notices were not documented, most of them have one element in common: They all referred to the hats using the name Jayne and hat or noted the *Firefly* connection. Here, Fox is exercising their power as a major corporation and media company as a strategy to stop the sale of the hats by the fan crafters. But they are taking action by invading a space known for building communities and relationships through selling handmade products. The crafters who set up shop on Etsy do so through a number of rhetorical moves. First, they must create their shop, using images and text to create an ethos as a crafter and seller of products that are distinctive and compelling to other community members. Then they must do the same for each object they list, describing the item and encouraging others to see it as a unique product that will convey a sense of homemade crafting legacy that normally would only be found at art fairs or one-of-a-kind style art shops. In fact, many of the Etsy crafters offer customization of their products, both in made-to-order and personalization options. This all occurs within this community that encourages crafting.

Undeterred, many of these crafters wanted to continue selling their hats. In discussing how to circumvent the issue, *Firefly* actor Nathan Fillion suggested in a tweet that crafters “Maybe just call them Enyaj hats from Erifylf” (Fillion, 2013a). Here, the star who plays the central leader on the show appropriates the language of the fandom in ways that would signal an attempt to deploy a tactic to circumvent the strategy of Fox. Is Fillion a strategist or a tactician? As the star of the show, he could be considered part of Fox’s strategic machine, but

as an independent actor on Twitter, he is aligning himself with the tactics of the fandom and the Etsy crafters.

The most vocal of these Etsy crafters referred to herself as Ma Cobb, the mother of *Firefly* character Jayne Cobb who crafted his hat. This act of enunciation aligns her with the fandom and the show through her appropriation of the character. In order to protect themselves, the crafters asked *The Mary Sue* to remove their names from their geek news articles. Some of these crafters were more reluctant to oppose Fox publicly, possibly due to the risk of litigation given the wording of the cease-and-desist orders. However, many of them continue to sell hats similar to the one worn by Jayne in *Firefly*, just under different names, as mentioned earlier in this case study. Again, these names would be easily recognized by other fans of *Firefly*, an act of poaching and appropriation that becomes both a strategy (as a business on Etsy) and a tactic (as a fan of the television show).

“OFFICIAL” AS A STRATEGY

Fox is the copyright holder for *Firefly* material and merchandise, and legally speaking, they are the entity who can issue an “official” Jayne hat. Working with third-party manufacturer Ripple Junction, an official hat was made for Think-Geek. Ripple Junction has stayed largely silent about the incident, and Fox has spoken to fans—whether they realize it or not—through their cease-and-desist orders sent to Etsy to shut down the fan crafters. Fans were upset at Fox for sending these letters; the letters effectively shut down the Jayne hat listings on Etsy. Some crafters, taking lead *Firefly* actor Nathan Fillion’s advice (2013a), sought to route around this issue by reworking the genre on Etsy to serve the *Firefly* fans and become an activist that supported them. It is unclear how long this resistance can last, as Jenkins (2013) noted that a “utopian imagination often fuels fandom’s resistances to corporate efforts to commodify its cultural productions and exchanges” (p. xxix).

While it is not disputed that Fox holds the copyright to the show, fans and some of the writers, producers, and actors in the show—known to fans as the Big Damn Heroes—disagree over whether the hat is a an item that Fox can copyright. Fox believes they can copyright the hat, and they have the weight of their production company and the lawyers to enforce it. In this situation, “the company still seeks to set the terms of our participation and fans are by and large still refusing to play by those rules” (Jenkins, 2013, p. xxvi). Their strategy was to deploy letters through lawyers, attempting to silence their fandom and crafters alike. Siding with the fans, actor Nathan Fillion tweeted, “How do you license hats? I don’t think FOX invented hats” (2013a). His tweet contained a link to

the article about the incident, attaching an image from an article of a baby wearing a tiny Jayne hat. His move here is clear, following de Certeau's framework for enunciation. Fillion realized the efforts of the fans through this speech act and went on to appropriate the language of the fandom in further tweets mentioned in this article. He worked to act as an interlocutor connecting fans with geek news websites, the ThinkGeek operation, and the fandom itself.

SUSSING OUT THE REACTIONS ACROSS DIGITAL SPACES

The *Firefly* fandom is known for being activists for women's rights. In describing these moves, one scholar notes that many "Whedon fan activists have cultivated a distinctive character: specifically, a feminist one" (Cochran, 2012). These fans are active and activist across a number of causes, most notably Can't Stop the Serenity, a fan-based charity that supports Equality Now and other organizations promoting "human rights of women around the world." The ways in which they use digital spaces as a community promotes these kinds of values. It is notable that the crafters in this case study are mostly women, and several of the digital spaces where this story was told and participation the most visible were woman-centered in both demographics and design: Etsy and geek news sites such as *The Mary Sue*, *io9*, and *Buzzfeed*, and to a lesser extent, Twitter.

Some fans reached out to the Big Damn Heroes of the show, contacting Nathan Fillion, Adam Baldwin, and others asking for their support. In one example, a crafter asked Fillion to help "unload illegal hats" in Twitter. This tweet also included an image of knitted Jayne hats. Fillion retweeted this tweet, adding "You got a job? We'll do it. Don't much care what it is" (Fillion, 2013b). That phrase is one uttered by the character he played in *Firefly* to indicate his crew's feelings towards smuggling, a necessary ambiguity towards right and wrong. In making this move, Fillion and the fan acknowledged each other's roles within the fandom with Fillion as the smuggler captain and the crafter in need of moving her merchandise: appropriating the language of the show and fandom, inscribing it to create a relationship, and situating it within the context of this case study. And it did not go unnoticed; his tweet, an act of participation and activism, was favorited 2,324 times and retweeted 2,145 times. Both numbers are significant in showing how fans were acknowledging this use of Twitter and sharing them with others. Here they used this social media genre in useful ways by not-so-subtly stating which side they are on: The crafter calling him- or herself by the handle PirateKnits, and Fillion reposting the material in his *Firefly* captain persona. It was through this kind of work on Twitter and their reworking of hat names on Etsy that the crafters and allies showed their ability to use these genres to rally fan community members.

During the events of April 2013, these Big Damn Heroes (BDH) expressed their concern for the situation by either tweeting or retweeting content on Twitter. Fillion was outspoken about the treatment of the show's fans, posting numerous times about the hats and fan crafters (Fillion, 2013a, 2013b). Like Nathan Fillion, the actor who played Jayne, Adam Baldwin, also temporarily aligned himself with the crafters, retweeting a post by a fan that states, "I don't have a 'Jayne' hat. I have an Adam Baldwin Hat" (Baldwin, 2013). This retweet has since been removed from Baldwin's Twitter feed, while Fillion's tweets remain. The tweet and the retweet are interesting conventions on Twitter, with the former being a statement made directly from the participant and the latter being the resending of a tweet made by a different participant. The tweet is authorship, while the retweet can be considered endorsement or at least interest by the retweeter. These tweets are interlocutors that enunciate the fandom's activism. Various geek news outlets speculated about the various stands taken by the BDH, with one stating, "it seems clear that they're all a little nervous about biting the hand that feeds, but it's also clear that they're not happy, either" (Roth, 2013). This insight may point to why Baldwin initially retweeted and then deleted the tweet.

FUTURES FOR DIGITAL RHETORIC, WRITING, AND PARTICIPATION

Spaces where fans congregate, pushing and pulling against the fandoms that they collectively enjoy, are a compelling site of study for researchers wanting to understand digital rhetoric, power relationships, genre conventions, and new models for participation. Understanding how fans draw on rhetoric, realizing a system of communication, connecting to one another through interlocutors, appropriating language, contextualizing speech, and establishing a sense of time and space for their fellow fans can help us piece together activity, use, and genre. Through this understanding, we can become better researchers and teachers of and in digital spaces. These kinds of explorations can tell us how our students might be producing content, remixing, and participating across digital spaces. We can learn about best (and worst) practices to teach and inform. Bringing in these kinds of case studies to the classroom helps students see the connections between how they might play in these spaces and the work they might produce in practice. Questions about ownership, intellectual property, and participation are all up for discussion both in thinking about social media use and crafter culture.

In this case study, Fox is aligning itself with *Firefly's* Alliance by deploying strategies where they are trying to control the power in their relationship with

fans—fans that they see as consumers, and not crafters or makers. *Firefly* fans—makers, actors, writers, costumers—align themselves with their fandom while deploying a combination of strategies and tactics and enunciating their fandoms through their activities in various digital spaces. Short of a limited understanding of fans, the Internet, and rhetoric, it is unclear why *Firefly*'s rights holders would want to do further injury to their relationship with *Firefly*'s fans. As Jenkins (2013) noted, “we are seeing far fewer cease-and-desist letters as media companies have come to value networked audiences” (p. xxv). Why go after these fan crafters? As one geek news reporter noted, “Fox has actually decided to license merchandise based on the ten-year-old television series” (Polo, 2013). Why now, when these hats have been available online for years? Are they really a threat to Fox's ability to sell licensed hats on ThinkGeek? While not embracing their short-lived show's fandom, Fox continues to look like an adversary to the Browncoats. Through the use of the genre of a cease-and-desist letter, Fox missed an opportunity to network across these crafters, creating the possibility of licensing their work or at least allowing them to continue their comparatively low output without conflict or interruption. How do these issues of intellectual property, the rights of a community, and the ability to spread this kind of content alter the relationships between content owners, content producers, and fan crafters?

As with these kinds of case studies for research purposes, the implications for teachers of social media is clear: Understanding how students participate in these spaces, providing them the tools to understand how to use various digital genres, and guiding them through the elements of enunciation in professional spaces is a critical part of the writing and rhetoric classroom. By paying attention to these practices, we can create pedagogies for social media (Daer & Potts, 2014) and continue to research these spaces with an understanding of the participants who inhabit them and often route around established practices for social activism, feminist entrepreneurship, and community.

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