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Enterprising Women

Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth

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Chapter Eleven

Looking Backward: Play, Creativity, and Narrative

In the past, scholars have approached the media fanzine community much as the three blind men tried to describe the elephant. By focusing on one particular facet of the literature, and not on the context of its production or the wide variety of options open to writers and artists in the community, scholars such as Joanna Russ[1] have inadvertently projected a distorted picture of the group as a whole. Russ describes the community from a radical political perspective held by only a small minority of the participants. Her implication of lesbian dominance in the community does an injustice to both the majority of heterosexual women and the lesbian minority who make up the group, both of whom enjoy and depend on their female friends for companionship and support regardless of their sexual orientation. Russ' emphasis on the explicitly pornographic nature of the homoerotic fiction belies the fact that only 25 percent of the material written is predicated upon any kind of homoerotic relationship. While much of the total corpus does revolve around intensely romanticized friendships, a much smaller percentage includes explicitly graphic depictions of either heterosexual or homosexual activity brought to orgasm.

More recently, communication scholars such as Henry Jenkins III have used the group to further their political agenda as well.[2] In Jenkins' portrayal of oppressed women struggling to create their own entertainment, the graphically sexual is passed over for the description of strong female characters created by the women. The corpus of homoerotic fiction is dismissed as being large in volume but disliked and ignored in the community, again a minority opinion in a group that has produced surprisingly few strong female characters in its twenty-five years of existence. Neither Russ nor Jenkins is wrong, exactly. They have simply described the trunk and tail at opposite ends of a very large elephant.

I began my study with an agenda no more praiseworthy than that of my colleagues: curiosity. During a survey study of the science fiction community, I heard many of my male informants speak with scorn about the "trekkies," and I discovered that many of my female informants had entered the fan community through their involvement with *Star Trek*. I wanted to know why a group of women so obviously intelligent and so involved in commercially published science fiction would spend so much of their time pursuing an art form that earned them venomous disdain on the one hand and no hope of financial reward on the other. But neither Russ nor Jenkins had written their articles yet, and my own political position—a firmly held "undecided"—gave me no direction but to follow the group in search of the answers they found for themselves. In my zeal, I went looking for Truth as the community I studied lived it.

Conservation of Risk and the Ethnographer

When I began my study, I had not yet become aware of the risk participants experience when they engage in community activities, nor did I understand how my own efforts to understand compounded that risk. Exposure is the ethnographer's prize and the community's fear: when my investigations took me too close to sensitive topics, the community sidetracked me with something of value, something that conserved the risk I as ethnographer sensed was present but that did not expose *too* much, that did not reveal the heart of the community.

The symbolizing heart of the community, by its very nature, remains both dangerous and out of sight even to most of the participants, who incorporate its forms and structures integrally throughout their work. Community members do recognize the nature of the perceived risks attendant upon their work, however. They surround the fiction with appropriate layers of defensive language and protective secrecy from the outsider.

The search for meaning in fandom took eight years and moved me deeper into other people's fears and pain and conflict than I ever wanted to go. I remember sitting in an Omni Hotel room with a fellow ethnographer after a particularly wrenching interview, my hands over my ears and my eyes closed, repeating over and over again: "I don't want to know this, I don't want to know this." The deeper I went into my study, the more often I found myself experiencing this response. The most difficult part of ethnography is not necessarily finding the information that the ethnographer needs, but keeping her

eyes and ears open when that information challenges her sense of how the world works.

This Truth[3] as I found it, then, and if such a term can be applied to any human being's perceptions of the actions and motives of others, lay not at any mean between the two extremes of Russ and Jenkins, but in the limitless variety of positions available to any participant in the community. While issues of support and comfort and creative expression draw the women together, each brings to the community her own individual preferences, tastes, and politics. Precious few generalizations apply in a community founded on Gene Roddenberry's concept of IDIC: infinite diversity in infinite combinations. In spite of which, however, I will try to isolate a few mechanisms that seem to underlie fanzine culture as a whole.

The Marketplace of Culture

Everywhere I looked in the women's community created around fan fiction I found apparent simplicity on the surface that upon closer examination unfolded level after level of complex interaction. At first, media conventions seemed like a supermarket of goods and experiences purchased by an entry fee. That observation gave way to an understanding of the convention as a place where various groups of men and women from all over the United States and abroad take part in gender- and/or interest-segregated communal activities. Moreover, conventions are only the surface of a social order that for some revolves around club activities but for many women and a few men is built around the creation of art and literature based on media characters and settings.

Like middle-class women in the nineteenth century,[4] the fan women travel extensively to visit with one another in small groups. They maintain long-term, intense friendships. They create together in a community of women, a concept that, far from being new, has been debated for centuries. The reader of this book should find the following a familiar description:

> Let us imagine a little community of young women, among whom, to do an act of disinterested kindness should be an object of the highest ambition . . . and where those who were known to exercise the greatest charity and forbearance should be looked upon as the most exalted individuals in the community . . . women do know what their sex is formed to suffer, and for this very reason, there is sometimes a bond existing between sisters . . . chiefly out of their mutual knowledge of each other's capacity of receiving pain.[5]

In *Communities of Women,* from which this Sarah Stickney Ellis quote is drawn, Nina Auerbach describes the nature of women's communities as debated in literature—a debate that continues in the fan community. Some women, like Trek novelist Diane Duane, who define themselves as part of the commercial establishment only peripherally connected to the wider community, believe that each must determine her own destiny as an individual.[6] Others, like Lois Welling, find that the tightly knit community of women enriches their lives and strengthens their work in conjunction with marriage and family. Yet others find in the community of enterprising women their only source of social relationship and communal support.

The women of fandom share more than their own interior debate with the literary communities of women. Auerbach points out that such communities have been an object of curiosity and revulsion to men since Herodotus described the Amazons as self-mutilated warriors, physically incomplete as their society was sexually incomplete. The reaction of Western masculine culture to the serious enterprise of creating women's culture is no more accepting today than it was in antiquity or the nineteenth century. Lois Welling has won the support of her husband, but her writing teacher at the local university refused to consider seriously her media-based work in class.[7]

Almost without exception the women fans have complained that their interests are trivialized at the least, and are often criticized by family and workmates.[8] In spite of ridicule and paternalistic disregard, however, the women in media fanzining continue, in this, the twenty-fifth year since *Spockanalia* first appeared, to create a vital community behind a mask of play which is not always of their own choosing. Fanwriting is, after all, not a money-making enterprise. It's just a hobby.

But science fiction fandom has a set of terms known to the media fans as well: for each fan who declares fijagdh—fandom is just a Goddamned hobby—another replies that fiawol—fandom is a way of life. The co-existence of the two terms is, of course, one of the esoteric paradoxes in which fans delight. If one knows the term fijagdh, fiawol is more likely the case. A fan won't know the words unless she is a part of the community, by which time fandom indeed has become a way of life.

Play

The existence of the two terms in the context of a recreational community highlight a thorny issue: Is it play? By the definitions of Western masculine culture,[9] which alternately seeks to elevate the

category of play to include the sacred and the significant and at the same time to trivialize those same processes under the rubric of play, the answer would seem to be yes. Calvin and the other good puritans who guide not only our work ethic but our scholarly hand in the construction of theories of play would have it that a hobby is play. Central to this issue seems to be the functional value of the activity in the material sphere. Does the participant act for material gain? For profit?[10] In Western culture this translates to money, and the members of this community create and disseminate their arts under specific prohibitions against making a profit.

A covariant in the work-versus-play binary axis is the pleasure principle. That which is pleasurable, in particular that which creates what Czikszentmihalyi[11] calls a state of flow, is play. Work is by definition not pleasurable, and those who find pleasure in activities that others define as work are met with ambivalence and suspicion by their more properly striving fellows. In Czikszentmihalyi's early analyses, he looks at surgeons who attain the state of flow, but he cannot comfortably decide whether the surgeons may be said to be playing at those times, or whether the state he defines is no more relevant to play than to any other activity. In some cases enthusiastic researchers have suggested that religious ritual is likewise play, being both intrinsic—creating no discernible profit—and producing in participants the pleasurable state Czikszentmihalyi identifies as flow.[12]

More traditional modern Western art worlds, steeped in the ideal of flow, have teetered on the brink of respectable work, rescued from triviality by the network of profit-making support industries that surround them and by financial valuation on the artistic product.[13] Like religious ritual, fan activities produce no intentional profit and frequently generate a pleasurable state identifiable as flow in participants. However, neither of the latter activities can be viewed as intrinsic on any but the most material terms, nor, given the poverty of most struggling artists, can the creation of art within the institutions of the avant-garde or other schools be seen as existing for the profit-making peripheral structures of gallery and patron.

If we move away from the materialist and physiological, however, more pertinent and perhaps more generalizable distinctions begin to emerge. Games, Brian Sutton-Smith[14] and others have told us, refract the cultures in which they arise. Pleasure results from learning and functioning competently within the overt rules of the game and the covert rules of social relationship taking place in the game, and in developing the physical or mental skills necessary to demonstrate that competence. At the same time, the player exercises, and often learns

through manipulation of the symbolic structures of the game, the rules of his culture. He develops competence not only in the game but in his relationship to the social institutions the game symbolically represents. Games can teach players the existing institutions, they can reify those institutions, they can even give the player practice in resisting those institutions. Play cannot, however, change those institutions.

Nowhere is this more graphically demonstrated than in Clifford Geertz' model of deep play, as he describes it in his article "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight."[15] According to Geertz, deep play raises the level of risk in the game, but not to the extent that it has a concrete effect on the actual social status of the players. In deep play participants flirt with the possibility of status change; players must perceive the risk as real on the symbolic level of value prescribed in the society—in the case of the Balinese of Geertz' example, wagers and betting alliances. Deep play often represents those stresses and tensions inherent in the social institutions that cannot be expressed more directly without risking real damage to the social structure. It may vent the frustrations of members of the group, thus allowing the structures to continue without change. The most important point here is that deep play may lessen rather than increase the potential for change in a culture, but cannot stop change from occurring outside the game. Change came violently to Bali in 1965 in spite of, not because of, the cockfight.

Imaginative play, carried on with companions or as solitary play, represents greater freedom and less structure than that which defines either less fraught game activity or the high-risk deep play. However, even imaginative play reflects the rules and structures of the fantasist's culture. The content of imaginative play draws on a repertoire of images available in the culture which also restricts and defines how the player will manifest the imaginative play in the real world. As a common example, many children fantasize in church or school but find their actions severely curtailed if they act out the fantasy. These children are likely to imagine scenes that mix everyday behavior with the airplane or monster they've created out of existing culture models in their heads.

Nor, as John Caughey has pointed out,[16] is imaginative play truly solitary. Rather, the mind of the fantasist is populated by a host of characters from real life, television, and other media, with which characters the imaginative player interacts according to the rules of her culture or in deliberate inversion of those rules. Some practitioners of imaginary play even share their fantasies in structured role-playing games such as Dungeons and Dragons.[17]

During play, the cultural symbols continue to manifest their affective presence, and may create a short-term change in the ambient affect generated among the participants. Through the affecting presence of the culture symbols in play participants may carry away a stronger sense of their culture, a lessening of tensions about social structures that constrict or limit action in the world, or even a sense that the players have defied those limits. The end result, however, is what many critics see in the fan community: a turning away from active resistance, tacitly accepting the oppression they fight only in imagination.

Play, Imaginative Play, and "Real Life"

But what about imaginative play, "make believe"? What about playfulness? In fact, the boundaries that define imaginative play are the most permeable, in that the fantasist, operating essentially out of sight of the guardians of social institutions, can most freely cross the line out of play without being noticed and ushered back into the realm of symbol without power to create change. Imaginative play represents the highest risk to any society, because the society's power to control only extends to what it knows. Imaginative play, combined with a talent for recombining cultural possibilities in unlikely constructions and a high tolerance for risk, can move the "solitary" player from play into the effectively playful, which we label creativity. Out of the secret lives of the playfully imaginative, the creative members of Western culture, have come such diverse culture-changing developments as the Salk vaccine, relativity physics, and the personal computer.

Truly creative people are the most courageous members of society because they must recognize, first, that their actions may have profound effect on some cultural institutions and, second, that, on the contrary, those ideas may make no impact at all. Then the creative person must set aside knowledge of that double-edged risk and "play" with the culture symbols as if they had affective presence only. By moving into a play mode, creative people can test a variety of possibilities. When they move out of play they take with them only the most viable of their test models with which to transform the reality of their culture. Playfulness, which may be defined as action based upon the perception of fluid boundaries between imaginative play, the nonreal, and "real life," may in fact be the most serious, and certainly the most dangerous, activity arising within a culture. Its joyfulness can exist only in people who recognize that "la grande bouffe"[18] really means laughing in the face of painful truth, in full knowledge that laughter can change the very nature of truth itself.

The Mask of Play and the History of Women's Media Fandom

But what does this have to do with the women of media fandom? As we have seen in Chapter 2, women at the core of their fan community have created their own social institutions, they share in some of the institutions created by other "hobby" groups such as science fiction fandoms, and they actively shape their lives around the structures they create. Women regularly travel thousands of miles to participate in the conventions where they strengthen community ties through face-to-face interaction with their counterparts from all over the world. Members re-create the institutions in their homes and move long distances to participate more actively within a particular circle. They share in the creation of their work through the process of "talking story." When I asked fanwriters for permission to quote their work in this book, they often responded that I should also recognize a friend who created a character or developed the idea from which a final work was drawn. Communal culture exists in every aspect of fan activity, in units as small as the sentence or as large as the corpus that defines the group.

Many fans in the fanzine community report feelings akin to those of ethnic immigrants when they interact with the mainstream culture of job or town. They feel like outsiders whose true identities reside elsewhere. While some community members participate on a more peripheral basis, staying in the play mode when they do so, core members practice creative playfulness in the construction of alternative social institutions and ways of relating to each other in what they term "real life."

This does not mean that the fan women never play. In parodies and sketches, and in the highly prized witty conversation,[19] women's play carries out the program of play we have already examined: the women's play teaches the rules of the art and the culture of the media fan community. In play the women joyously demonstrate their competence to manipulate those forms while they reify and critically comment on both the institutions they create and the material with which they create them.

Creating a Culture

If we accept the possibility that a group of women who write, illustrate, edit, and publish a fanzine, consuming all of their discretionary income and a great deal that others would not consider discretionary in the process, are not participating in a game but are inventing a cul-

ture, we must next ask the question "Why?" Why create a culture using a method that outsiders perceive as play, by definition "not serious"?[20] The answer is twofold:

1. The history of oppression experienced by the generation of women who constitute the fan community would direct them to mask their culture-building activities in the guise of trivial pastimes, and
2. The narrative properties of imaginative play and creative playfulness lend themselves to the work of constructing new culture models, or reconstructing models that have been lost.

The first of these responses addresses why, if the women in this group are masking their serious activity, do they feel the need to hide? As an oppressed group women often have been perceived as mysterious and dangerous. The masculine culture minimizes this discomfort it creates for its members by devaluing the women it oppresses: "If women are incomplete men, unfinished, not fully grown, they are like children. Developmentally they *are* children." Children—so white, masculine middle-class culture tells its members—are weak, helpless, and under the control of men, therefore safe. Historically, women who refused to be so categorized found themselves alone, abandoned by a culture that refused to see them as mature, capable, or equal.

Organized feminism, which presented itself as "to be taken seriously," set itself the program of storming the male bastions and demanding admittance. The feminists met with opposition both from men and from many women who disagreed with the stated program of the organized groups. Many women inside the feminist groups found this program unsatisfying and open resistance to a dominant masculine culture exhausting. These women were looking for community ties in a fragmented world, and they needed a safe harbor against the day-to-day battle to survive. Women's activities that the masculine culture could view as trivial and women could see as nonthreatening might flourish unnoticed, or meet with smug tolerance should they come to wider public attention. If they were beneath notice, they were safe.

Adult play meets this criterion, since it is implicitly nonserious behavior, a "trivial" exercise for passing the useless time between working and sleeping. Fans use this cultural bias to mask their culture-building activities behind the appearance of play. The imaginative play they do engage passes unseen into the creatively playful, masked by the symbols recognized as play in masculine culture but bearing a

different set of meanings in the hidden fan culture. To put it more simply, the women media fans use television characters as the basis of the activity for two purposes:

1. the familiar characters connect their activities to the entertainment sphere, the not-serious, in the masculine culture, and
2. the television products provide members with a ready-made symbolic discourse shared by initiates and outsiders alike—a pidgin, metaphorically speaking—with which they can begin to narrate their lives.

Imaginative Play and the Playful Construction of Narratives

Earlier in this chapter I enumerated two reasons why fan women have created their culture in the sphere of the playful. As we have seen, the mask of play protects the group from detection as a serious alternative to masculine culture. Perhaps more important to the positive action of the group, however, is the fundamental connection between imaginative play and narrative.

In his article "In Search of the Imagination," Brian Sutton-Smith points out that

> . . . The discovery that children remember their scripts better than their categories in recent developmental psychology research (Bretherton, 1984) has turned more attention to the fact that the mind works better as a narrator than as a categorizer. As a result, we are suddenly at liberty to realize that the imagination as narrative is contributing to the linguistic mode of intelligence such as much as the imagination as logic is contributing to the logical mode of intelligence.[21]

To this description of the narrating imagination I would suggest the possibility that all imaginative play, spatial-graphic or verbal, requires at least an underlying assumption of narrative, a "what if" carried out to its structural completion. The child who roars like a jet engine and dashes across the room with his arms extended at both sides does not merely imagine himself to be a jet airplane. He is an airplane going somewhere for some purpose, all of which may be actualized as visual images, as verbal story, or remain implicit. For the fantasy to have meaning, however, it must be grounded in a context which can be defined as narrative.

When the fantasist moves out of play and into creative playfulness,

she still operates in a realm of narrative, but with the clear awareness that in this state the construction of narrative may redefine the perception of reality for herself and for those who hear her words or see her pictures. The mathematician like the novelist must create in the context of narrative: what if energy and matter were not different things but different states, and the speed of light were the factor that distinguishes them? Theoretical physicists have been plotting the mathematical "what happens next" for almost a century.

Through narrative,[22] language gives us the fundamental power to create reality:

1. Narrative affords structure for communicating and sharing experience with others in the culture.
2. The levels of structure in narrative organize experience in an aesthetically satisfying way.
3. Over time, the organization of experience in structures that can be communicated and shared develops into a worldview.

Narrative and the Containment of Culture

The inverse of the above, however, is also true: to create the worldview, a community needs narrative structures that can communicate the experience that community members actually have. This book demonstrates that the alternative structure for organizing experience does exist, and is recognized and shared by many women, but it has no place in the worldview created out of the narrative experience of masculine culture. Its falsehood lies in its incomprehensibility to members of that culture. Authorities[23] and cultural gatekeepers regularly dismiss narratives created by and for a women's sensibility as unstructured and therefore false not only in a personal sense but in a cultural sense.

Joanna Russ has ably summarized women's struggle to gain access to narrative in any form in the public sphere.[24] As I have described before,[25] however, women who try to broaden the infringement upon accepted narrative forms into the public sphere meet with even greater opposition. Their narrative reality is dismissed as unformed, unstructured, and unworthy of a public audience. Only when a woman has sufficiently mastered the narrative structures of masculine culture may she win the right to compete for a place in the public arena. Since a woman cannot reach a wide audience unless her message conforms to the expectations of masculine culture, she has no opportunity to offer women alternative narrative realities that might be more satisfying to them. Deprived of alternatives for expressing her experience, she is left in the position of the insane: her reality can find no common ground in the culture of power.

Narrative and Imagination

The description of narrative given above would seem to militate against change in the culture. In this context, we must ask how the process of imagination works on the narrative givens to create alternative narrative possibilities in which change may occur. The very complexity of narrative seems to provide a clue. In the rational worldview, the content of the narrative is closely linked to the structure. Airplanes are made of steel, and girls are sugar and spice. How they are defined as content organizes their behavior in the structure of cultural expectation. In the nonrational worldview, content is not so tightly linked to the structure of cultural expectation, or more precisely, content may move among several mediating structures. A man has the same fortune in life as his father, or he suffers the harassment of demons or the wrath of God, or he may even experience a miracle.

In imaginative play, content and structure come unstuck. Content held to content in the structure of the narrative has the potential to become separated and recombined in "unreal" combinations. Little boys can be airplanes, and little girls can be captains of spaceships. Content, which operates on the surface of narrative, is more available for renegotiation in imaginative play than the more deeply hidden structure of the narratives of cultural expectation. Like content, however, the pieces of structural reality can be fragmented and recombined, alternative structures may be recaptured and put to new uses. Most importantly, the implications of suppressed models can be explored and their application broadened in the imaginative realm. The media fan community engages in this process when it first fragments and then recombines the pieces of its favorite action series (as described in Chapter 7) and later, when it creates its own stories out of the fragments.

Narrative, the Mask of Play, and the Construction of Culture

In the foregoing sections of this chapter I have described a way of thinking about play and a way of thinking about narrative. On the one hand, masculine culture sets play in the leisure world and values it as trivial. On the other hand, narrative is seen as powerful, dangerous, and accordingly, is closely guarded by masculine culture. Women have access to play, and in fact many of women's serious creative en-

deavors are classed as play by masculine culture. Commercial and academic institutions alike deny women the right to an alternative cultural experience of narrative. Gatekeepers in commercial publishing filter out narratives structurally organized to be aesthetically satisfying to women, and gatekeepers in academia collude to deny in women's narratives the very existence of structure or of truth.

Women in the media fanzine community use this outsider perception of their activities as a mask of play. They explore narrative, but with the characters and scenarios of television, valued as more trivial even than play. Hidden from sight by their own secrecy and masked by the trivial appearance their activities wear to outsiders, community members move in and out of play freely, testing models of narrative and models of social interaction and incorporating them into the structure of a worldview. The group can be playful because of the way it sees itself, where it places the lack in masculine culture, and thereby where it places the risk in its own exploration. The risk is real; many fanwriters and artists share a sense of danger from exposure even when the specific content of their own work seems less than threatening. More importantly, however, the perceived lack is so great that any risk is worth taking to fill it, the need so obvious that it hardly seems innovative to try to meet it.

The women in fandom need to find ways of organizing the information about their experience structurally, according to a grammar that is aesthetically satisfying. They want narratives that express cultural experience in forms that resonate with structures of cultural institutions within which that experience may comfortably be shared. As they experiment with narrative forms, they likewise experiment with ways of relating to one another. The search for expression feeds the struggle for social organization and vice versa, but always both are founded *not* upon an ideal of how things might be if they were different, but upon how women feel right now, and how they can sanely hold on to what they are. They resist all dictates to change themselves to fit either a masculine or feminist ideal, insisting that structures should build upon the way people are, and not the reverse. They create narratives to meet current needs of communication and sharing, of community, and not to anticipate a politically correct feeling one might wish to have.

When a fan writes a story that touches the way women feel or relate in the group, she knows it because she feels it. Her readers feel it, and both readers and writer joyfully affirm for each other the knowledge that a way of thinking, of feeling, is shared. When fans engage in the play-forms of parody and puns and witty conversation about their own material, they strengthen the sense of shared community, shared

Farewell. A self-portrait of artist-fiction-and-song-writer-singer-editor Sheila Willis. Many active members of fandom participate in more than one form of expression, though few are as multi-faceted as Sheila.

structures. The incomprehensibility to outsiders of many of the serious forms created in the community points to more than the simple divergence in content one might expect about, for example, a book one has not read. Rather, the structures and language that fans use arise out of a distinct cultural model, a worldview separate from that of masculine culture.

The significance of this model for theorists of women and film cannot be overestimated. Laura Mulvey condemned the pleasurable experience of film narrative with the statement, "Sadism demands a story."[26] The importance of the statement, however, is not in its connection of narrative pleasure to sadism, since all patterns of behavior likewise demand a story. Rather, Mulvey goes on to describe the narrative sadism demands: "Sadism demands a story, depends on making something happen, forcing a change in another person, a battle of will and strength, victory/defeat, all occurring in a linear time with a beginning and an end."[27]

In this quotation, Mulvey describes binary oppositions such as victory/defeat, and implies the binary opposition of winner and loser in a battle of will and strength. The narrative structure she describes—linear time, with a beginning and an end—is consistent with the structure of the masculine worldview in Western culture. Her solution, to create alternative films that deny narrative pleasure to the viewer, is ultimately counterproductive. Women need more narrative forms, not less of them. They need choice in the narrative of life with which they will identify. By denying narrative pleasure, theorists would impoverish women of the narrative choices they need to reconstruct their own reality.

Notes

1. Joanna Russ, *Magic Mammas, Trembling Sisters, Puritans and Perverts* (New York: Crossing Press, 1985).
2. Henry Jenkins III, "*Star Trek* Rerun, Reread, Rewritten: Fan Writing as Textual Poaching," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 5, no. 2 (1988): 85–107.
3. For a discussion of "Truth" in ethnographic and documentary studies, see Bruce Jackson, "What People Like Us Are Saying When We Say We're Saying the Truth," *Journal of American Folklore* 101, no. 399 (1988): 276–92.
4. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth Century America," *Signs* 1 (Autumn 1975): 1–29.
5. Sarah Stickney Ellis, 1843, as quoted in Nina Auerbach's *Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 17.
6. Diane Duane, taped interview, Philadelphia, 1984.
7. Lois Welling, untaped conversation, 1987.

8. Taped group interview, New York, September 1985.
9. See Brian Sutton-Smith, "The Metaphor of Games in Social Science Research, in *Play, Play Therapy, Play Research,* papers presented at an international symposium, Amsterdam, 1985 (Berwyn: Swets North American, 1986).
10. John Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (New York: Beacon Press, 1959). This is one aspect of Huizinga's definition of play that seems to linger implicitly in more modern debates about intrinsic (play) and extrinsic (work) activities. (See Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Speech Play and Verbal Art," in *Play and Learning,* ed. Brian Sutton-Smith (New York: Gardner Press, 1979), pp. 219–37.
11. Mihalyi Czikszentmihalyi, *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety* (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1975). Czikszentmihalyi's work follows that of Raymond Williams' use of the term *flow* by eighteen years. Although he seems to be unaware of Williams' work on the flow of television through an evening of viewing, the state he describes is in some ways similar to that which Williams asserts is created in the viewer. Specifically, time seems to pass unheeded by the viewer experiencing the flow of television and, to use one of Czikszentmihalyi's examples, the chess player in flow during a game of chess. Likewise, the perception of the experience seems heightened at the time of the experience, but the memory is no more detailed than for experience not in the flow. It is not surprising that both models should compare quite closely, because they both use the metaphor of the flow of fluids in a channel. The properties of the metaphor lead the use of the term in certain directions, rather than the direct knowledge of the other's use of the term.
12. Steven Fox, "Theoretical Implications for the Study of Interrelationships Between Ritual and Play," in *Play and Culture,* ed. H. Schwartzman (New York: Leisure Press, 1980).
13. Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).
14. See Brian Sutton-Smith, ed., *Play and Learning* (New York: Gardner Press, 1979); Sutton-Smith, "Games of Order and Disorder" (paper presented to symposium on "Forms of Symbolic Inversion," at the American Anthropological Association, Toronto, 1972); and idem, "Cross Cultural and Psychological Study of Games," in *The Folhgames of Children* (Austin, Tex.: American Folklore Society Special Series no. 24, 1972), among other sources.
15. Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).
16. John Caughey, *Imaginary Social Worlds: A Cultural Approach* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984).
17. Gary Alan Fine, *Shared Fantasy: Role Playing Games as Social Worlds* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).
18. Mikhail Bakhtin, in *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), describes the marketplace in pre-Renaissance France as inversion, where the cultural institutions are laughed at. Implicit in the festival definition of the great, primordial laughter of medieval man is that the status quo remains after the festival is over. In the ongoing festival atmosphere of the marketplace, however, cultural transformation can in fact occur. Modern scholars have given a materialist reading to the meaning of the marketplace, but such a reading is only viable in the materialist context. In fact, equally transformative employment of the playful occurs in ritual contexts and, as we see here, in contexts where profit is not perceived in material

terms at all. As applied to imaginative play, however, *la grande bouffe,* laughing at the devil, so to speak, can exist as a concept in the mind of the creator, or it can be shared subversively outside the traditional avenues of public communication.

19. See Chapter 6 for a detailed description of play in the group.

20. Brian Sutton-Smith and Diana Kelly-Byrne address this very issue in the book they edit, *The Masks of Play* (New York: Leisure Press, 1984). In particular Sutton-Smith describes how activities I here define as not-play take place behind the mask of play, and likewise, how play is often carried on disguised as not-play.

21. Brian Sutton-Smith, "In Search of the Imagination," in *Education and Imagination,* ed. D. Nadarer and K. Eagen (New York: T. C. Press, 1987). The full citation for the Bretherton work cited in the excerpt is I. Bretherton, *Symbolic Play* (New York: Academic Press, 1984).

22. See Appendix A for a more detailed discussion of language, worldview, and narrative.

23. An example will demonstrate the point. Several years ago a well-known male sociolinguist (for obvious reasons I feel it politic to protect the identity of this prestigious scholar; I will note, however, that the sociolinguist in question was *not* Dell Hymes) was discussing ghost-sighting reports. He was not concerned with the reality of the ghosts, but wanted a gauge for the belief of the narrator—did an experience occur, and did the narrator believe that it was a ghost? He used two examples. The first, told by a man, was a short, linear narrative. The second, told by a woman, was a long circumlocution filled with extraneous detail, digressions, and with references to other people and events during the period surrounding the experience. The sociolinguist declared that the man had in fact experienced some event which he believed to be a ghost encounter; his story was clear, concise, and neither anticipated disbelief nor courted the researcher's belief. The sociolinguist determined that the woman was lying, however, because her story kept to no structure. He said it was diffused, overly complicated, temporally scrambled, and assumed disbelief in its constant references to peripheral people and events as evidence. Of course, a number of women scholars in the audience recognized the woman's narrative for what it was—a personal experience narrative as they are told by women.

24. Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983).

25. Camille Bacon-Smith, "Spock among the Women," *New York Times Book Review,* November 16, 1986.

26. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 14.

27. Ibid.