

Fan Art/Fiction Production as Creative Processes*

Laura J. Hetrick

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, laurajh@illinois.edu

Abstract

In line with the theme of digital and new materialist artistic and art educational practices and theories, this paper theoretically considers Crossover Fan Art/Fiction through Deleuze/Guattari's concept of reterritorialization. Deterritorialization and reterritorialization exist simultaneously. Deterritorialization is a "smoothing out of a space or a stripping out of syntax so that it loses all symbolism and signification; a coming undone; a movement producing change; freeing up the fixed relations that contain a body all the while exposing it to new organizations" [Parr, 2005, pp. 67-68]. In this way, fans are taking their favorite characters out of their intended storylines, stripping away what is written by the originator, and giving the characters reimagined lives in newly crafted artistic/literary scenarios through the process of reterritorializing. This paper focuses on fan art/fiction production as creative processes in a manner that may offer arts scholars/teachers new insight in reading such works as theoretically complex texts and/or as functional modes of being as opposed to classroom distractions, hobbies, or third space creations.

*Major Portions of this Paper Previously Published- Citation: Hetrick, L. (2018, April). Reading Fan Art as Complex Texts, *Art Education*, 71(3), 56-62.

Keywords

Fan art, Fan fiction, Deleuze & Guattari, de/re territorialization.

Introduction and Overview

My name is Dr Laura Hetrick and I am a professor of art education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in the US. I have been there for eight years and will begin my ninth year of teaching this fall. I am the graduate coordinator for our department and I advise masters and doctoral students in a variety of topics, although my own research areas are mostly influenced by the two theoretical threads of Lacanian psychoanalysis and Deleuze and Guattarian philosophy. I also work with undergraduate art education students and teach their pre-practicum courses focusing on pedagogy, assessment, classroom management, and lesson planning. Of possible interest to you, I am also the co-editor of *Visual Arts Research Journal* and encourage you to send me your manuscripts as we have a rolling acceptance for submissions.

Today I focus on fan art production as a creative process in a manner that may offer new insight in reading such works as complex texts as opposed to classroom distractions, hobbies, or just mindless copy-cat creations. This InSEA presentation and the resulting proceedings are based on an article¹ that came out in May 2018 in the US National Art Education Association's publication *Art Education*. There I related to the readers with my personal experience of being a licensed teacher for 19 years and incorporating popular art, such as drawing the *Pokémon* character *Pikachu*, into the classroom. At that time, founded on the discipline-based art education curriculum I was taught in my undergraduate experience, I didn't have the proper nomenclature to call the art we were doing in my classroom *fan art* or *visual culture*. In my own subversive way, I called it *including students' interests* in the curriculum, which was different (and admit-

¹Hetrick, L. (2018, April). Reading Fan Art as Complex Texts, *Art Education*, 71(3), 56–62.

tedly more interesting) than the mandated history, aesthetics, studio, and criticism that I was supposed to teach. Little did I know then that there were other arts educators out in society that were concurrently considering the same pedagogical interjections. It should be noted that while this presentation is based on a published article, I am adding much more anecdotal information than was present in the original piece.

I begin with an introduction to the concept of fans, fandoms, and fan art and then segue into a brief glimpse of Deleuze/Guattari's deterritorialization and reterritorialization. I want to acknowledge that what I touch on of the theoretical framework is cursory because explaining just those two concepts would take more time than this twenty minute presentation allows. Last, I offer implications for re-envisioning fan works as more than triviality or pastiche.

Fans and Fandom

To begin, I define some key terms. Fan is an abbreviated form of the word *fanatic*, which has its roots in the Latin word *fanaticus*. "In its most literal sense, 'fanaticus' simply meant 'of or belonging to the temple, a temple servant, a devotee' but it quickly assumed more negative connotations, 'of persons inspired by orgiastic rites and enthusiastic frenzy' (Oxford Latin Dictionary)," (Jenkins, 2013, p. 12). Through its evolution in meaning, fan came to mean someone with excessive enthusiasm, often seen by some as overly obsessive or misguided. The contemporary understanding of a fan is perhaps less negative, but is still seen as someone that is considered overly enthusiastic or devoted to a popular entity such as an actor, musician, book series, TV show, movie, athlete, or video game, and this enthusiasm is often accompanied by uncritical zeal. Any individual may be a fan of more than one entity at any given time and may be a member of several fandoms.

Fandom (consisting of fan [fanatic] plus the suffix *-dom*, as in kingdom) is a term used to refer to a subculture comprised of fans collectively identified by inclinations of "empathy and

camaraderie with others who share a common interest. Fans typically are interested in even minor details of the object(s) of their fandom and spend a significant portion of their time and energy involved with their interest” (Wikipedia.org, 2018).

Modalities of Fan Art

One such way fans are involved in their interests is by creating fan fiction in the manner of written texts, videos, and/or visual art. Just as there are many expanded modalities with which fan art can become actualized, such as digital art, (e.g., made with PhotoShop and Illustrator), literary art (e.g., written on blogs and fan fiction sites), and visual art (e.g., drawings and graphic novels), there are also various reasons why fans might create fan art. This leads me to ask whether any of you ever created fan art or fiction. To be clear, I speak from a subject position inside this cultural group. I have been making fan art for over 25 years, which back then I



Figure 1: By Laura. *Pumpkin Daydream*. Mixed media printmaking techniques and acrylic on paper.



Figure 2: By Laura. *Hello Kitty Burger*. Acrylic on paper.

didn't call fan art, just art, much to the chagrin of my studio instructors in undergrad. Though the focus of my art has changed over the past two decades, from depicting my favorite rockstar (Figure 1) to *Hello Kitty* (Figure 2) to *Doctor Who* (Figure 3), I still create fan art for myself and others.



Figure 3: By Laura. *Waiting for 10*. Acrylic on canvas.

Creating Fan Art/Fiction

Most people have probably read a book or watched a movie and contemplated what might have happened next, or what happened before this particular storyline, or what happened in those moments not written/shown, or conjectured more depth into any given character's personality or backstory. I use a popular franchise like *Star Wars* to give an example of these notions. There were three original movies from the late 1970s and early 80s, *Star Wars*, *The Empire Strikes Back*, and *Return of the Jedi*. Then, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, there were three prequels, or movies that predate the recognized fantasy timeline of the original three films, *The Phantom Menace*, *Attack of the Clones*, and *Revenge of the Sith*. Next in the mid-2010s, picking up after the *Return of the Jedi*'s timeline, there were two new movies extending the fantasy timeline with *The Force Awakens* and *The Last Jedi*. Intermixed within those extension releases were

three other standalone movies inserted after the prequels but before the originals, functioning as expansions, called *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, and *Solo: A Star Wars Story*, which are prime examples of conjecturing more depth into any given character's personality or backstory, and in these cases, expanding the story outward, but not extending it forward. While the *Star Wars* movies were not written by fans per se, they expertly illustrate the concept of fans extending and expanding stories or characters which can occur at different times in relation to the original narrative and its timeline, but maintain aspects of necessary elements for relatability and relevance within the story's already-accepted universe.

While some individuals are satisfied by merely wondering about these ideas in their own imaginations, “with fan fiction, fan videos, and fan art, devotees take the leap from speculation to creation (Figure 4). They use their talents to fill in the gaps, to create alternative timelines, and mix universes,” (Brenner, 2013, p. 33).



Figure 4: By Andrew. *Untitled*. Colored paper and perler beads. Crossover fan art of *Star Wars* characters BB-8 and Obi Wan Kenobi with Sanrio character Hello Kitty. Using recognizable elements of the original *Star Wars* characters, the fan transformed them into new characters by (re)mixing them with Hello Kitty.

Likewise, some fans draw on “available media to engage in a wide range of innovative and sophisticated literature practices, such as creating robust characterizations, developing new histories for characters, and/or generating alternate settings and plotlines that are not present in the original media,” (Black, 2008, p. xiii). A few more potential reasons individuals make fan art may be self-explanatory, such as:

- fan art and fiction can be self-directed, or not bound within institutional rules
- students can wield power in deciding a character’s fate
- students can learn authentic uses of technology by choosing the most effective tool(s) to achieve their creative purposes
- students can foster creativity and innovation
- many find/offer social support online and in person
- fans can play out fantasies and desires that they may not play out in real life with real consequences

Whatever the reason(s) for creation may be, fan art should be considered more than just a classroom distraction, hobby, or mindless copy-cat creation. To support this reasoning, some theoretical considerations for re-imagining fan art as *something more* are provided.

Deterritorialization

Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization offer a theoretical framework for expanding understandings of the complexity of fan art creation. To be clear, what I offer of Deleuze and Guattari’s writings (1983; 1987) is a cursory explanation of a much deeper concept; however, even a surface introduction to the concepts of deterritorialization

and reterritorialization illuminate fan art as something worthy of study and acceptance. First, deterritorialization is a smoothing out of a space or a “stripping out of syntax so that it loses all symbolism and signification; a coming undone; a movement producing change; freeing up the fixed relations that contain a body all the while exposing it to new organizations” (Parr, 2005, pp. 67-68). This is where the concept of creating fan art begins to be explained by this concept. Fans are stripping away the symbolism of a territory, understood as an existing character and/or storyline, and producing change through their own creations.

Reterritorialization

“Reterritorialization does not mean returning to the original territory but rather refers to the ways in which deterritorialized elements recombine and enter into new relations in the constitution of a new assemblage or the modification of the old” (Patton, 2010, p. 52). This concept explains how fans might view their creative practices and processes and perhaps how we as arts educators should, too. Fans may seem like they are returning to the original territory of the storyline or character and simply copying, but rather they are recombining elements of their own creation and mark making, and entering these into new relations that they see fit in exploring and depicting. They are taking the territory of the book or movie or TV show and deterritorializing it in order to reterritorialize it.

New Territory

As famous characters and storylines are uprooted from certain art/book/movie/TV show territories, they gain a special meaning in the new territory which they are taken into by the fan. Figure 5 is an artwork that exemplifies this concept. Created by an eleven year old boy, Salvador Dali’s piece St George and the Dragon is mixed with the artistic styling of anime artist Takashi Murakami.



Figure 5: By Lucas. *St. George Slaying the Dragon*. Markers on paper. Salvador Dali's *St. George and the Dragon* is mixed with the artist Takashi Murakami's anime style. There is now special meaning in a new territory created by the fan.

Reterritorializing

Reterritorialization is when people within a place start to produce an aspect of popular culture themselves, and as with fan art, making it their own in the context of their local cultures. In this way, fans are taking their favorite characters out of their intended storylines, stripping away what is written by the originator, and giving the characters reimagined lives/abilities in newly

crafted artistic scenarios through the process of reterritorializing. A great example of reterritorialization is crossover fan art. This is fan art in which two or more fandoms are combined or crossed over in some way (including characters, settings, and/or universes). Fans are taking two or more extant territories, deterritorializing them by stripping away the syntax of the storyline, and reterritorializing the characters and storylines together to make something new and transformative (Figure 6).



Figure 6: By Laura. *The Princess' Pet*. Acrylic paint on canvas. Crossover fan art of Jim Davis' Garfield and Disney's Sleeping Beauty. These two popular characters' storylines have been uprooted and placed into a new territory, leading to discussions of recontextualization and meaning making.

Postmodern Strategies

There are two ways that I am suggesting bringing fan art into the classroom: 1) student made creations; and 2) readymade works from other artists and/or various Internet sites (that should be previewed and preselected first due to perceived inappropriate subject matter). With fan art, there are certain postmodern artistic concepts that are readily (in)visible in a majority of creations that can be used as talking points in the classroom. First, the three major postmodern principles being utilized in most fan art works are appropriation, juxtaposition, and recontextualization (Gude, 2004, p. 9). Appropriation is the process of “borrowing and changing the meaning of commodities, cultural products, slogans, images... by putting them into a new context or in juxtaposition with new elements” (Sturken & Cartwright, 2018, p. 426). Juxtaposition is putting two or more items/ideas close together for the purpose(s) of comparing, contrasting, changing, or enhancing meaning. Recontextualization is to put something in a new context (such as a storyline or universe) and harkens directly to the concept of reterritorialization that was mentioned earlier.

Two more postmodern principles to use when talking about fan art are the concepts of power and intertextuality. “Power is central to a consideration of imagery because all images involve an assertion of ideas, values, and beliefs that serve the interests of those for whom they are made” (Duncum, 2010, p. 6). Returning to one of the reasons fans may make fan art, power can be addressed in relation to the fans and how they used their powers as artists to create narratives they are in charge of (instead of the originator), and also in relation to the notions of power in relation to the characters within the artwork (Figure 7).

Intertextuality is also important to address in fan art, especially crossover fan art, since “all images relate to other cultural texts such as books, poems, music, and, of course, other images (Wilson, 2003). Images draw from other sources, copy them, parody them, and, in turn



Figure 7: By Lucas. *Untitled*. Markers on paper. Crossover fan art of *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings* trilogies which borrow from J. R. R. Tolkien's novels, appendices of other novels, and additions by screenwriters. Because these are two separate (though related) series, the artist was able to use his power to combine them in one scene, as he pleased. Likewise, the juxtaposition of heroes and villains from two series leads to discussions of power in relation to the characters in the work.

influence other cultural texts," (Duncum, 2010, p. 9). Talking through the influences of other cultural texts will provide a multi-layered discussion in regard to the many sources that fan art may borrow from and add to.

Cleverness

The value in this type of artwork is not necessarily about technical skills in elements and principles of art and design; rather it is more about the cleverness of the intertextuality, appropri-

tion, juxtaposition, and recontextualizing. Cleverness is “showing inventiveness or originality; ingenious” (dictionary.com), and while the *originality* of fan art may be questioned due to appropriation of existing entities, originality is also about re-envisioning things in fresh or novel ways (Figure 8).

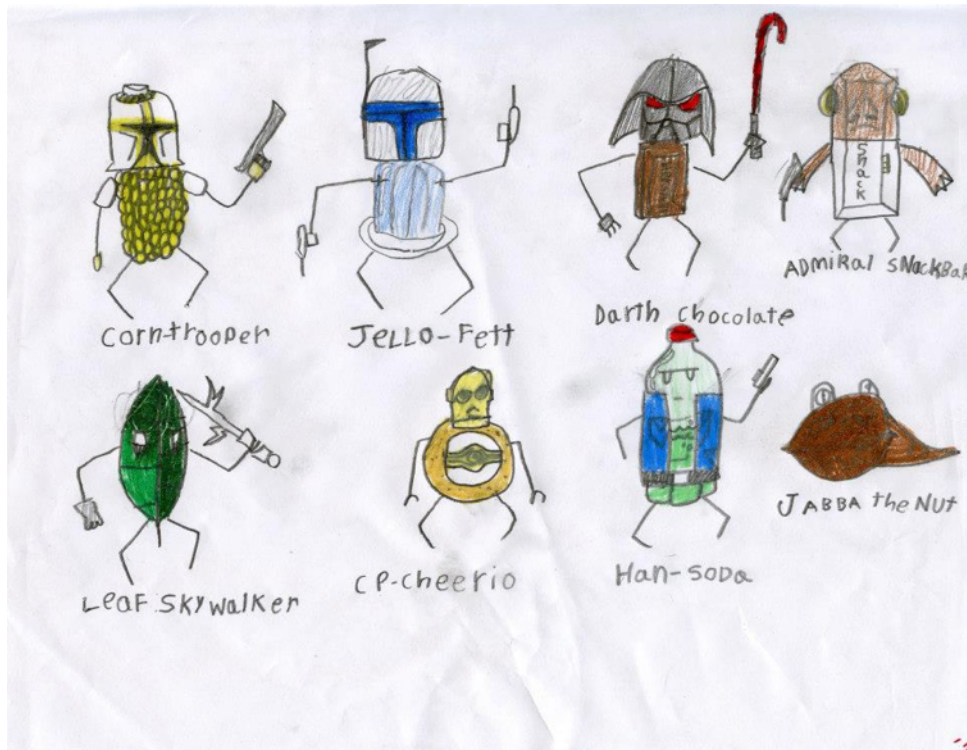


Figure 8: By Jorge. *Star Wars Puns*. Markers on paper. Fan art of Star Wars characters—Storm Trooper, Jango Fett, Darth Vader, Admiral Ackbar, Luke Skywalker, C-3PO, Han Solo, and Jabba the Hutt—mixed with ordinary natural substances such as corn, Jell-O, chocolate, snack bar, a leaf, Cheerios, soda, and a nut. The artist transformed the characters in a way not previously conceptualized, which leads to discussions of originality, cleverness, puns, and metaphorical consumption of popular visual culture.

This freshness can become apparent in fan art that transforms the character or story in a way previously not conceptualized by the originator or other appropriators. Remember, fans are interested in even minor details of the object(s) of their fandom and are typically excited and interested in engaging with the work just by recognizing their favored entity’s involvement

or representation.

Re-Envisioning and Artistic Innovation

I encourage us to think like fans think about the works. “Fans speak of ‘artists’ where others can see only commercial hacks, of ‘transcendent meanings’ where others find only banalities, of ‘quality and innovation’ where others see only formula and convention,” (Jenkins, 2013, p. 17). We need to realize that fan art creations, in whatever form, use postmodern skills such as appropriation, juxtaposition, and recontextualization, and ultimately, fans are creators of meaning through transformative works. We should realize that artists engaged in fan art creations are changing the form, appearance, or structure of an original work; and in some cases initiating a metamorphosis of a character and/or storyline.

In summary, it is important to remember that fan art lends itself to a great deal of artistic innovation that is intimately tied to issues of empowered learning, utilizing postmodern principles and conceptual artistic strategies, and playing with identity (of the characters and of the fan). Instead of copy-cat art, let’s think of it as the creative production that it is.

References

- Black, R. W. (2008). *Adolescents and online fan fiction*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Brenner, R. (2013). Teen literature and fan culture. *Young Adult Library Services*, 33–36.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1983). *Anti-oedipus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Duncum, P. (2010). Seven principles for visual culture education. *Art Education*, 63(1), 6–10.
- Gude, O. (2004). Postmodern principles: In search of a 21st century art education. *Art Education*, 57(10), 6–14.
- Hetrick, L. (2018). Reading fan art as complex texts. *Art Education*, 71(3), 56–62.
- Jenkins, H. (2013). *Textual poachers: Television fans and participatory culture* (Updated 20th anniv. ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Parr, A. (2005). *The deleuze dictionary*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

- Patton, P. (2010). *Deleuzian concepts: Philosophy, colonization, politics*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Sturken, M., & Cartwright, L. (2018). *Practices of looking: An introduction to visual culture*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.