2010

The (Inter)Active Soap Opera Viewer: Fantastic Practices & Mediated Communities

Melissa R. Ames, *Eastern Illinois University*

Writing and the Digital Generation

Essays on New Media Rhetoric

Edited by
HEATHER URBANSKI

Cover image ©2010 Brand X Pictures

Manufactured in the United States of America

This book began in science fiction and fantasy fandom
and so is dedicated to all those in that community.

1

The Inter(Active) Soap Opera Viewer: *Fan*tastic Practices and Mediated Communities

Melissa Ames

In today's cultural realm, everything exists within a hierarchy of sorts — fandom has not escaped this process of judgmental ranking and social stratification. Admitting to be a "fan" of something often earns people mixed responses depending on the subject of their devoted following. The more one's object of choice strays from the mainstream, the lower one exists on the fan hierarchy. If the masses find the fan subject matter to exist on the cultural periphery, fans are often quite ridiculed. As a pop culture scholar studying a "low-brow" entertainment form, I encounter the latter in regard to the genre of the soap opera.

What is often overlooked, however, is the utility of even the most "trivial" cultural artifact. While some do not see the point in analyzing mass-produced entertainment forms, others understand that much can be read beneath the surface of these products. The regular consumers of these items are doing a plethora of things with them and, as a result, they are affected not only by their interactions with these cultural products, but by the cultural status acquired in being associated with them. In analyzing this cyclical relationship among the soap opera, its diverse fan base, and the social-cultural setting it evolves within, I am attempting what Mary Ellen Brown calls "feminist culturalist television criticism," which Brown argues "addresses the issue of how ordinary people and subcultural groups resist hegemonic pressures and obtain pleasure from what the political, social and/or cultural system offers" (12). My analysis of soap opera fandom does this but also notes the situations when fans cannot, or simultaneously do not, always resist the hegemonic pressures filtering in from outside ideological system(s).

In order to study how soap opera fans both simultaneously reject and assimilate those hegemonic pressures on a daily basis, this chapter reviews existing fan research and studies the ways in which fans intermix with their chosen shows, social networks, program paraphernalia, and other outside depictions of what they cherish and who they are. The second part of this chapter deals with secondary products tangentially linked to the soap, products targeted at the traditional soap viewer: various fan websites and program paraphernalia. The overall argument throughout is that consumption is production and that although fans are not creating the actual texts themselves, they are "producing" in various ways through their active viewing.

Fan*tastic Research Results:*
The Soap Fan — A Breed of Its Own

Although popular culture now has a firm footing in academia, researchers often insist upon maintaining proper academic distance when analyzing their objects of study. However, when studying fandom, this sort of critical distance has proven to be unproductive because one often needs to have an investment in the community, or the entertainment outlet grounding it, in order to fully understand the texts being studied and to navigate successfully through its mass of followers. Both Henry Jenkins and Laura Mumford advocate approaching popular culture as a fan — the latter even admitting she wrote her doctoral dissertation on soaps while they played in the background (4). Having one foot in the foyer of the ivory tower and one foot in the cellar of fan circles is not an impossibility. In fact, it would be unrealistic to assume that any fan does not play a dual role of sorts in her individual pursuits. Jenkins explains this phenomenon by examining the *non*-autonomy of fan culture and argues that no one exists entirely in the realm of fandom alone, nor is that realm static in nature since it is responsive to the historical conditions surrounding it (3).

A glimpse into these forever changing cultural communities can be seen in Jenkins's ethnographic study of television audiences, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture,* where he analyzes fan culture by studying the various ways that television viewers actively interact with and rework the cultural materials they follow. Although he only mentions soap operas in passing, his analysis of *Star Trek* fans easily applies to those of my chosen cultural artifact.

Early on Jenkins discusses the etymology of the word "fan," a term which often carries a derogatory connotation. Considering the topic of this study, the most interesting part of the term's history is the fact that the word "fan" was gendered from the start: Jenkins reports that the word was first used "in reference to women theatre-goers, 'Matinee Girls,' who male critics claimed had come to admire the actors rather than the plays" (12). Moving beyond the birth of the term, Jenkins discusses the history of fandom and the development of fan practices up to the present televisual moment, focusing in particular on the communicative nature of the fan. This crucial criterion is interesting being that women are more often associated with oral culture and are (arguably) socialized to talk. Inadvertently, cultural forces have therefore primed women for easier entry into fan communities. Although fans can (and do) talk about anything, Jenkins found that most often television "fans offer moral judgment about characters' actions, they make predictions about likely plot developments or provide background about the program history to new fans" (81). The spoken dialogue fans embark on result in the text becoming endless in nature, a characteristic important in postmodern literary and feminine artistic practice.[1] Although the soap opera itself exists as an endless genre, one that has continuity, in terms of its run time, that surpasses all others, part of its textual extension comes from the conversations (oral or print) that surround it. The storylines do not stop on the screen; they are expanded through the informal discussions fans share with one another in person, through the online speculations found in Internet chatrooms, and even, on an individual level, through the lone experiences a viewer might have talking back at the screen in her own home.

So, sure, talk can be equated with activity, with secondary creation even, but more important, talk also breeds relationships. This idea of a shared viewing community can be seen with the soap opera viewer as well. In their research on soap opera fandom, Lee Harrington and Denise Bielby note the particulars of the community, claiming that it is not built around a traditional social structure but instead rests on a foundation of "common experience and feeling in the pursuit of affective ties to a soap narrative" (45). Part of the emotional ties fans have to one another stem from the fact that they value products that others in mainstream culture devalue.

Jenkins claims that almost all fans make "meaning from materials that others have characterized as trivial and worthless" (3). His studies have shown that, whether they do or do not actually exist on the cultural periphery, "fans resist cultural hierarchy with their own tastes and preferences" and are able to "raid mass culture, claiming its materials for their own use, reworking them as the basis of their own cultural creations and social interactions" (Jenkins 18). For Jenkins, fans are "active producers and manipulators of meaning," a conceptualization that reworks Michel de Certeau's view of "active reading as 'poaching'" (23, 24). Following this analogy, Jenkins parallels the producer-fan relationship with that of the landowner-poacher (32). In his con-

clusion, Jenkins makes two important statements that prove useful in this argument. The first is as follows: "I am not claiming that there is anything particularly empowering about the texts fans embrace. I am, however, claiming that there is something empowering about what fans do with these texts in the process of assimilating them to the particulars of their lives" (284). This line of thought easily clears up the problem some scholars might have in using soap operas for serious theoretical study or suggesting that they can be political tools for reformation. The soap opera by itself is not, as Jenkins clearly states, empowering, but the reading, the consumption, the appropriation of it by the female viewer can be. Utility is key.

Jenkins's second noteworthy conclusion comes with his last line: "Fandom does not prove that all audiences are active; it does, however, prove that not all audiences are passive" (287). This alone is the greatest retort for critics who claim that viewers are simply passive receptors gobbling up mainstream ideology in neatly formed cultural packages. Jenkins's study of fan culture proves that, while some viewers may passively take in television programming, that is not the case for every single viewer. So it can be argued that the viewer of a soap opera can actively consume the programming and, hence, refunction it in various ways. This concept of an active audience is perhaps the greatest hope of all scholars who wish to utilize popular cultural products for revolutionary means.

Since the term fan is gendered from the start, it should not be surprising that much of the research on fandom is likewise gendered. Many of the fan phenomena found by Jenkins in his study of fandom in general can be found in more narrow studies focusing on cultural products fashioned primarily for female consumers, the most important of which is that of activity. One such example of a gendered fan study that dealt with this fan trait would be Camille Bacon-Smith's *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth*, which deals almost entirely with the female science fiction fan community. She focuses heavily on the female followers of *Star Trek*, their practices, fanzines, communication patterns, narrative adaptation, conversations, reworkings of scripts, conferences, costuming, etc. Bacon-Smith's text is written in a semi-ethnographic/semi-autobiographical manner as both researcher and participant. Her major points are that women enjoy creation, a space for dialogue and belonging, and they are active in nature. Her key phrase to describe fan behavior is IDIC, "Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combination," and she echoes the previous conclusion concerning the impossibility of coming up with a one-size-fits all description of fans and their practices (6).

Bacon-Smith's notion of IDIC applies to followers of any genre. Whatever the cultural artifacts may be, fans are systematically drawn to them because they fulfill some need through the regular interactions with these

products. Janice Radway's infamous work with the Smithson romance readers found that female fans approach texts that express "women's dissatisfaction with the current asymmetry in male-female relationships" (129). Radway found that by interacting with these texts regularly, female fans were able to get a daily fix of sexual empowerment by entering into a fictional world quite different from their own (50). However, Radway admitted that, even if they were reading to buck the system, they often were not aware of this purpose and most certainly were not vocalizing it. Despite the possible utility of a text like the romance novel, Radway notes that "women never get together to share together the experience of imaginative opposition, or perhaps the important discontent that gave rise to their need for the romance in the first place" (212). Moreover, she worried that such regular consumption was too passive a response to gender inequality and that it "might disarm the oppositional impulse" that sparked it (213). Nonetheless, despite this concern Radway does see value in the interactions fans have with these popular texts and advocates a conscious re-functioning of the fan behavior and fan communication so that it reaches another level of oppositional use. I would advocate the same move in terms of the soap opera. Just as Radway sees potential in the oppositional use of the romance novel and the conversations they spark, I see untapped opportunities within the genre itself, and the plethora of fan sites it inspires, to do feminist work — to stimulate conversations about why these fantasies are needed and how they contrast with society at large. It is an unlikely place for social work to occur, but not an impossible one.

Although the majority of fan research, and not just specific studies like Radway's, can be applied to the specific genre of the soap opera, there are some noteworthy differences between the media form of the soap opera and other pop cultural products. As Harrington and Bielby point out,

> Most media fans engage a closed text that makes limited installments of the official story available: a finite number of episodes, the occasional feature film or reruns in syndication.... [But] because serials' structure differs from that of other narrative forms, the fanship and fandom that surrounds serials also differs. The open-ended nature allows for an endless genre [21].

The questions then surface: Are fans' relationships and practices different when based on an endless genre? Do the regular interactions fans have with this endless medium offer up a different sort of utility, a different space for subversive cultural work?

I would argue that the genre's longevity, coupled with its seriality, changes the structure of the fan community to some extent. First, the longevity of the soap operatic form makes it more likely that fans will filter in and out of the group during the course of multiple years. While fans of television series that run for a finite time period do not often drop out of the fan group, soap cir-

cles do see member drop out. Because soap operas run for decades on end, they witness viewing depletion as shifting lifestyles and entertainment preferences cause fandom to dwindle and cease in individual cases. Longevity thus affects the nature of soap fandom. Second, because of the serial nature of soaps, the rapid delivery of installments means most fans cannot organize to watch communally like fans of other programming. The regularity of the soap also affects the type of fan communication and networking possible. Whereas other media products inspire meeting together "en masse" at conferences, co-producing fanzines, or exchanging derivative artistic work, soap fandom tends to lend itself more to participant isolation.

Largely due to the seriality and longevity associated with the soap, the Internet has risen as the ideal forum for soap opera fan communication as it offers an open-ended dialoguing space free of time restrictions. Of course, it could easily be claimed that the Internet functions in this way for all types of fandom, as it is used across the board as a communication forum for various groups and caters to the consumption of various cultural artifacts. However, the specific characteristics of the soap opera make this genre much more limited as far as fan communication options go. With the ceaseless distribution of soap opera episodes at extremely high intervals, the Internet is one of the few viable communication routes for the average soap opera fan.[2]

The Soap Opera (Internet) "Connection"

In *Tune In, Log On: Soaps, Fandom, and Online Community*, Nancy Baym analyzes the Usenet newsgroup Rec.arts.tv.soaps (r.a.t.s) to study soap fan behavior (1),[3] conceptualizing r.a.t.s as a community and the computers they communicate through as social tools (1–2). Baym comes to the conclusion that r.a.t.s is an example of a virtual community, one joined by common interest, practice, and interpersonal communication. Using the term community forced her to justify "how people who rarely (if ever) met face-to-face, whose participants came and left, and who seemed to have such a limited communication medium managed to create not just a social world but a social world that felt like a community" (2). Limited or otherwise, the fact that r.a.t.s opened up a space for a constant string of communication is important as, once again, the oral nature of soap fandom flaunts itself even through this technology-based communication forum. Baym quotes one participant who claimed that she simply enjoyed "having some people to *talk* about the show with" (13, emphasis added). Baym notes the use of the verb "talk" to exemplify "the naturalness with which people apply a talk metaphor to online language use" (13). Her final determination is that interaction within the Usenet message system "is a novel hybrid between written, oral, interpersonal, and mass communication" (13).

Although the Internet does provide ample opportunity for this sort of program "talk," it would be amiss not to note that there are many other options on the Internet for soap opera fans. In order to see what a newcomer to Internet soap fandom would encounter, I analyzed a basic Internet search for fan sites devoted to one specific soap opera, *General Hospital*.[4] In an attempt to land myself on a few good sites I did what any advanced Internet searcher does — I "Googled" it. After a few misguided search prompts that directed me to a plethora of county hospitals, I searched using the phrase "General Hospital ABC Fan" and was overwhelmed by the number of hits I received — just over 145,000. After reviewing pages and pages of the listings, I realized the great variety of sites that housed information on *General Hospital* and that a lot more people were benefiting from these sites than happy-go-lucky communicating fans. In order to make sense of this mass of Internet options, I decided to group the various sites into categories by systematically analyzing just the first 100 hits.

I grouped the websites into six distinct categories, with some cross-listed under two different categories. The first three groupings were commercial sites and those with the potential to profit from site visitors. Category A sites were "official" corporate websites created by the actual network, its cable subsidiary, or various affiliated soap opera news networks. Approximately one-third, twenty-nine websites, could be cross-listed under this banner, including various pages from ABC, *TV Guide*, Soap Central, *Soaps In Depth*, *Soap Opera Digest*, and the Daytime Emmy Awards. Category B sites, of which I found fifty-five, were also well-established corporate websites, often functioning as information databases, entertainment information centers, or television specific sites. Some of these included informational blurbs, historical overviews, episode recaps, or critical evaluations posted on America Online, Wikipedia, BuddyTV, Amazon, Media Village, TV Fan Forums, IMDB, About, Soap Zone, Soap Opinions, and Soapdom — to name just a few. Category C sites were slightly different. These too were well-established sites devoted specifically to *General Hospital* but were not officially affiliated with the mother companies of ABC or Disney. Compared to Category A and B sites, these were more fan-directed than commercial and included MSN's *General Hospital* Fan Site, the *GH* Fan Club, the *General Hospital* Haven, and — the most cleverly titled — the Port Charles Herald. Approximately eight sites fell into this third category.

After analyzing the overlap in the categorizations, the commercial, or "official," sites (Categories A, B, and C) represented just under half of the first hundred websites available to novice fan searchers. Although quite a few of these offered links to fan forums, a surprising number were quite unlike what one would expect when searching soap opera fan sites. Under this col-

lection of sites, searchers could easily click on a link and get transported to ABC's home page where they could fill out surveys, register for various contests, shop at the "ABC TV Store"; they could be connected to the megastore of Amazon.com and buy videotapes of noteworthy *General Hospital* Weddings and must have trivia books; or they could surf various sites and jot down the official mailing address to write to the studio, listen to exclusive *General Hospital* songs, etc.

The other three classifications of websites were all more fan-centered (often fan-created), less commercial, and more in line with what one would normally expect of a "fan site." I divided these into three categories based on the site's specific purpose. Category D sites are the closest to what one would consider a standard fan site, housing chatrooms, communication forums, fan event information, personal blogs, and so forth and ranging from informal to formal and established to non-established. Some of these sites were run through larger recognizable sources, such as Geocities, Angelfire, Soap Town USA, Fan Mail, or Myspace. Approximately two-thirds, sixty-four, of the sites produced by my search could be classified as Category D. More narrow in their focus, Category E sites were devoted solely to fan fiction. Only three of the one hundred sites advertised themselves in this way — one listed itself as a fan fiction site for the teens of *GH* and other ABC soaps, while another, titled "Carlie's Fan Fiction Page," advertised one specific fictional derivative of *GH* — *General Hospital Hungry Eyes* — and the third simply touted fan fiction alongside of spoilers and a critique of *General Hospital's* temporary spin off primetime weekly series on the Soap Opera Network — *GH Night Shift*. While writing fan fiction is not as common with soap opera viewers as with fans of other genres (like science fiction), this number is mostly likely under-representative. Upon closer analysis, quite a few Category D sites are likely to have links to fan fiction alongside of their communication forums, episode recaps, and social event listings; the fan publications are simply not often the major draw. The last group of sites, Category F, contained web pages devoted to specific characters and/or actors. On this given search, there were ten of these covering the following actors and actresses: Rick Springfield, Natalia Livingston, Maurice Benard, Jason Thompson, Finola Huges, Kelly Monaco, and Leslie Charleson. And, most amusingly, there was a Myspace under the name of "Carly," created to be a fan site for the character Carly Corinthos.

In short, television networks, entertainment journalists, and devoted program followers have crafted a variety of Internet sites for soap fans to use. By just attending to the first one hundred sites offered up out of a list of 145,000 plus, I was solicited to buy soap opera paraphernalia; I was asked to join fan groups; I was invited to message boards; I was offered pictures of both soap actors and their fans; I was tempted by plot spoilers; I was sub-

jected to detailed episode summaries; I was informed about upcoming fan events; I was given historical overviews of the show, its writers, and producers; I was reminded of who won the daytime Emmys in years past; I was invited to a casting call for *GH* auditions; I was given the opportunity to read various interviews with soap actors and fans; I was instructed to write to *General Hospital* about my anger directed at the show for killing off longtime character Dr. Alan Quartermaine (Stuart Damon); I was invited to a purchase fan guides from a woman's Ebay account; and I was invited to click on one disheartened fan's website to read more about how *General Hospital*, with its heavy mob focus, has become just a "Lightweight *Sopranos* in Disguise." Quite obviously the breadth and depth of material available on the worldwide web for soap opera fans is incredible, inconsistent, and incalculable.

In some ways the use of the Internet by soap fans (and corporate profit by said use) is no different from that of other fan groups. However, due to the regularity of the episodes and the amount of "text" possible for viewers to comment on, it is safe to say that there exist many more opportunities for soap fans to comment and post about their shows in comparison to other programming. This unending range of material to view/read most definitely motivates a plethora of sites devoted to favored soaps. The large number of soap sites can also be explained by analyzing other characteristics of this media format. Soap operas house more characters than normal television shows, hence the multitude of soap actor websites. Soap operas have a duration that surpasses other narrative forms, so it only makes sense that there exist more archived episode recaps, spoilers, and news storylines devoted to them. The intricacies of the soap opera format itself shape the soap opera fan. So while soap fan practices align with those of other cultural artifacts, they also differ in part due to the unique characteristics of the daytime serial itself. Although academic research acknowledges this and many scholars have proved the complexity of soap opera fandom, outside depictions rarely acknowledge the depth and variety of soap fan groups and both the indirect power they yield over the production of their shows and the ways they are manipulated by those very same powers-that-be in the industry.

Existing on the (Capitalistic) Cultural Periphery: A Look at Soap Products and Program Paraphernalia

Historically, and even more today in the age of the television-Internet coalition, the daytime fan has the ability to control some of this entertainment form's idiosyncrasies. Although many types of television programming are beginning to attend to the practices and preferences of fan groups, soap

operas have decades of experience over the newer shows attempting to master this strategy. John Fiske discusses the three levels of any given televisual text: the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels with the program itself (physically created by outside sources, not directly altered by fans themselves) being the primary text (85). Items such as soap opera magazines or network websites (often systematically crafted by the producers with some direct contribution from fans) would fall into the category of secondary texts (85). The more unstructured communications, such as unscripted dialogue of fans to each other (be it informal, in person, and untraceable or written, electronic, and trackable) would fit into the third level of the text (85). Soap opera producers and writers have strategically utilized these secondary texts for years and, in recent decades of increased Internet activity, have turned to studying the tertiary texts when making important decisions concerning storylines, renewals of actor contracts, and so forth. Because of the swift pace at which these shows are written, produced, and aired, the creators have the ability (more so than any other type of programming) to quickly cast aside what is not working and make alterations as needed — a disliked romantic interlude will quickly fizzle, a popular recently deceased character will suddenly have a look-alike cousin breeze into town, an actor unsuccessfully playing a long term character role will find himself replaced with new blood, a well-received minor character slated to depart will suddenly find herself with a major plot line and contract renewal, etc.[5]

All of the above influences of fans are noticeable but not directly advertised. Although many fans understand the power they have (en masse at least) to control their favored entertainment form, their silent-party say in the show's creation is subtle in the way it unfolds. However, some soap operas have been more direct in allowing fans to wield their power and put in their proverbial two cents concerning various show developments. For example, the telephone-television tag team, especially useful in voting type situations, has been used by soaps in recent years. Louise Spence discusses how soaps across the networks have utilized 900 numbers to have fans vote on things such as which backup band should remain on the show, a name for a newborn baby, or the wedding dress a main character should choose (16). Soap websites also run similar polls and even contests that allow fans various opportunities such as attending the daytime Emmy awards, visiting the set, shadowing an actor for the day, or even starring in an episode of their favorite soap (the latter eventually turned into the reality show *I Wanna Be a Soap Star*) (Spence 16). Also these sites, definitely commercial creations in and of themselves, allow fans to let their love for their favored programs spill over into their outside lives through fan purchases (ones that, of course, simultaneously advertise their program affiliation to the network's profit).[6]

However, one of the most successful maneuvers that the networks use to fuel soap opera fandom comes not in the form of anything physical but instead comes in the form of experience. The networks strategically offer fans proximity to their fictional worlds and favored characters and help to minimize the distance between the fan and the show. Special events have become a huge deal in the soap industry and all three of the major networks have capitalized on this hyped-up media practice. Studies of these forums show how real life fans both do and do not match up to outside depictions of fandom (be they spawned from pop cultural parody, network pigeon holes, or academic analyses).[7]

Consumption as Second-Order Production

In conclusion, soap operas and their viewers are often unjustifiably devalued by the cultural powers that be and much is overlooked concerning the genre itself and the behavior of its regular consumers. Because of the soap opera's "continued accountability to consumers, inscribing responsiveness to audiences within the production process, serials may offer cultural models for material transformation, models that come not from the directives of academic critics, not from marginal pockets of cultural resistance, but from within mass culture itself as a result of the influence of fans' voices over time" (Hayward 196). Hence, the daytime soap opera may provide one of the most ideal televisual sites for social work to covertly occur. Much can be done with television beyond its original, official "produced" state.

Again it all comes down to how "production" itself is conceptualized. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau argues that we must analyze how an object and/or representation is manipulated by its users, claiming that "only then can we gauge the difference or similarity between the production of the image and the secondary production hidden in the process of its utilization" (xiii). He speaks directly of television: "Television (representation) and time spent watching television (behavior) should be combined with analysis of what a consumer does/makes with time and images just like products purchased in a supermarket" (xii). He claims that consumption itself is a form of production, a form "characterized by its ruses, its fragmentation, poaching, clandestine nature, its tireless but quiet activity, in short by its quasi-invisibility, since it shows itself not in its own products but in an art of using those imposed on it" (131). Once we accept and internalize this argument that consumption is really just a different type of production (second-order production, I suggest), we will be one step further in proving that fans exist on the active side of the active/passive binary. Perhaps then those non-passive

fans (and the academics who love to study them) can work on disrupting other binaries, for example the high-culture/low-culture binary that keeps the products important to so many hovering at the bottom of the cultural hierarchy where their utility is often overlooked.

Notes

1. In *Feminism, Postmodernism, and Affect: An Unlikely Love Triangle in Women's Media*, I compare the endlessness of the soap opera narrative to that of écriture féminine. Both exist as a form of female-directed storytelling and share similar characteristics, such as repetition and non-closure. Concerning the repetitive endless nature of écriture féminine, Helene Cixous, the creator of the term, writes that a "feminine textual body is recognized by the fact that it is always endless, without ending: there's no closure, it doesn't stop" ("Castration" 53). But this is not true of just écriture féminine. Mary Ellen Brown, also focusing on daytime soap operas, picks up on this tendency for women's stories to stick close to the narrative stylistic of the oral tradition which is "often circular, lacking a clear beginning, middle, or end" (1).

2. This difference is glaring when compared to traditional primetime programming. The fact that soap operas run all year round without break and air five days a week contrasts greatly with the practice of most evening serials which air only once a week for twenty-four — often non-sequential — weeks. Even compared to other daytime programming that runs all year round on a daily basis (talk shows like *Oprah* for example), the soap opera still remains an anomaly since, unlike its daytime neighbors, one will almost never find the soap airing a re-run episode at a later date. (There are a few exceptions to this rule now with Soap Network's new practice of retrieving soap operas from decades past and re-airing them on primetime cable. Still, this is not a "re-run" in the standard sense).

3. A similar study was conducted by Christine Scodari in *Serial Monogamy: Soap Opera, Lifespan, and the Gendered Politics of Fantasy*. As an Internet lurker on soap fan sites, she studied the messages, transcripts, bulletin boards, and online chat room activity without participating in the dialogue, coming to many of the same conclusions that Baym does (1).

4. To be perfectly honest I too could be considered a newcomer in regards to most fan practices. Although a faithful viewer of *General Hospital* for nearly twenty years, I have only on occasion read soap magazines and almost completely avoided soap websites due to fear of spoilers since I am almost always a week or two behind the broadcast schedule, watching back episodes at my own pace.

5. Robert Allen actually attributes the soap opera "renaissance" of recent years to the secondary or tertiary texts, which he calls the "soap opera intertext" (88). Allen draws attention to all of the sources now "available that give fans information about soap opera actors and the 'behind the scenes' world of soap opera production in newspaper columns, specialized magazines, and television shows," arguing that "since the mid-1970s, an entire industry hyping the soap opera has emerged, one which rivals in scope, if not in size, the promotional infrastructure of Hollywood in its heyday" (88). Included in his conceptualization of this "soap opera intertext" would be newspaper columnists covering the beat, actors making public appearances, fan magazines, and journalism-type television shows about soaps.

6. This practice stems rather far back and even has carried into the primetime soap realm. For example, Ien Ang discusses the plethora of "I Love JR" or "I Hate JR" para-

phernalia available during *Dallas'* heyday in the eighties (15). Daytime soaps have offered viewers a variety of memorabilia connected to their shows. To list just a few touted by ABC: in the 80s, *All My Children* created a board game where players were able to be a character and travel around the board (the city of Pine Valley) fulfilling semi-storyline related tasks; in 2005, *One Life to Live* published the novel *The Killing Club*, a novel supposedly written by a character on the show that spawned a copy-cat murdering spree on the show itself; throughout the decades *General Hospital* has published a variety of show-related paraphernalia including *A Complete Scrapbook* full of character information and photographs, various trivia books testing the knowledge of loyal viewers, "Nurse's Ball T-Shirts" that were worn by characters on the show and aligned with its fictional annual AIDs charity event (although notably with the actual profits gained from the T-shirts sold actually going to support the cause), and in 2006 when the infamous Luke and Laura pairing was reunited for (none other than) sweeps month, the show's website allowed viewers to purchase a look-alike engagement ring that matched the one Luke gave his beloved bride. From time to time, the network at large will combine promotions, such as their line of clothes where viewers can browse through racks of clothes and accessories and buy things worn (or imitated from those worn) on the three serials or the holiday CD launched in 2006 that had songs covered by actors from each of the daytime soaps on ABC.

7. For further information see *Feminism, Postmodernism, and Affect*. In this I compare the results of self-reported fan behavior (collected through surveys at ABC's Super Soap Weekend) to the fan behavior depicted in soap opera parody films, such as *Nurse Betty*, *Delirious*, and *Soap Dish*, and theorized by many of the academics celebrated in the field and mentioned in this very chapter.

Works Cited

Allen, Robert C. *Speaking of Soap Operas*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985.

Ames, Melissa. *Feminism, Postmodernism, and Affect: An Unlikely Love Triangle in Women's Media*. Saarbrücken, Germany: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller Aktiengesellschaft & Co., 2008.

Ang, Ien. *Watching* Dallas, *Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination:* New York: Methuen, 1985.

Bacon-Smith, Camille. *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992.

Baym, Nancy K. *Tune In, Log On: Soaps, Fandom, and Online Community*. London: Sage, 2000.

Brown, Mary Ellen, ed. *Television and Women's Culture: The Politics of the Popular*. London: Sage, 1990.

Cixous, Hélène. "Castration or Decapitation?" *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 7.1 (1981): 41–55

de Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. 1974. Trans. S. Rendell. Berkley: University of California Press, 1984.

Fiske, John. *Television Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1983.

Harrington, Lee C., and Denise D. Bielby. *Soap Fans: Pursuing Pleasure and Making Meaning in Everyday Life*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995.

Hayward, Jennifer. *Consuming Pleasures: Active Audiences and Serial Fictions from Dickens to Soap Opera*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997.

Jenkins, Henry. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Mumford, Laura Stempel. *Love and Ideology in the Afternoon: Soap Opera, Women, and Television Genre.* Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995.

Radway, Janice. *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984.

Scodari, Christine. *Serial Monogamy: Soap Opera, Lifespan, and the Gendered Politics of Fantasy.* Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2004.

Seiter, Ellen, Hans Borchers, Gabrielle Kreutzner, and Eva-Maria Warth, eds. *Remote Control: Television, Audience, and Cultural Power.* New York: Routledge, 1994.

Spence, Louise. *Watching Daytime Soap Operas: The Power of Pleasure.* Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005.