

Creators, Audiences, and New Media:  
Creativity in an Interactive Environment

BY

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## **Abstract**

Composition and media scholars have in the past examined the participants and steps in the creative process as distinct roles and actions, with a separation between creators and audiences, including gatekeeping audiences (such as editors and publishers). The act of creation was viewed as taking place in isolation. The media emphasis on traditional genres such as print books has limited the examination of the distribution of these works. New media scholarship explores the ways media creation software and online distribution can complicate creativity and provide new venues for distribution. In this thesis, I claim that the new media environment has changed the traditional creator and audience roles, with boundaries being crossed regularly. Creators may be inspired by the ideas of a particular audience, the distribution of their works might bypass gatekeepers, and the audience may use these works in their own creations. The Internet allows us to observe and examine these changes both in real-time and after the fact.

Chapter One, “Creator/Audience Roles and New Media Interactivity,” presents a framework for discussion that incorporates several existing definitions of audience roles, with a look at more recent perspectives on how audiences dynamically interact with creators. In the process, the conceptual limits of bounded roles such as “publics” and “fandoms” will be examined, and the complicating factors of new media interactivity will be established. Chapter Two, “Permeable Boundaries: The Shifting Roles of Creation, Reception, and Utilization,” examines how audience actions allow readers and creators to cross these conceptual boundaries, sparking creative impulses. Attention is also paid to the different kinds of value for creativity and interaction

established by fandoms. Chapter Three, “Creativity, Information Technology, and New Media,” looks at the ways in which the availability and relatively easy use of digital tools and the Internet have allowed more people to perform and share their creative acts. This chapter will include case studies that illustrate how online creators deal with the difference between traditional and new media versions of success and integrate digital tools and distribution to find creative fulfillment; the chapter will also examine the benefits and problems inherent in a high level of creator-audience interaction, such as the successful use of social media to create new opportunities for releasing media works while opening oneself to criticism from unintended audiences.

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## **Chapter One: Creator/Audience Roles and New Media Interactivity**

In academic conversations about audiences and writers, especially in the field of Rhetoric and Composition, I find a problem with the fundamental premise behind audience models. In texts from Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Lloyd Bitzer's "The Rhetorical Situation," Walter Ong's "The Writer's Audience Is Always a Fiction," Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford's "Audience Invoked/Audience Addressed," and even current texts such as Mary Jo Reiff's *Approaches to Audience*, we see the conversation center on the ways writers (or my preferred term, "creators"), as a separate group unto themselves, have to conceive of audiences in all their various, but fundamentally isolated, roles. The discussion relies on putting boxes around each role, so that we can identify common traits and behaviors, a series of invisible conceptual boundaries. Ede and Lunsford provide a typical image of such processes in order to critique these views. They choose the model developed by Ruth Mitchell and Mary Taylor, which shows a cycle that travels from the writer (a static box in this chart) engaging in writing, creating a written product which somehow reaches the audience (another static box), who somehow create a response that becomes feedback to the writer. One part of the image for this model given is a gap inserted into the feedback process, an inadequate representation of the complexity that lies unexamined within this gap (5-8). Models such as this are embedded in our imaginations as rhetoricians and in our scholarly discourse, creating a static and idealized picture of each role, genre of communication, and process involved in creativity. Even when Ede, Lunsford, Ong, or others discuss dynamic interactions between audiences and creators, they are speaking of distinct and individual roles, separated by clear boundaries (often presented as Mitchell and Taylor do, with boxes and lines).

In essence, these models make us stop talking about the reality of creative processes, simplify the complicated and varied forms of interaction between creators and audiences, and instead focus our discussions on unrealistic, unchanging models.

While there are several ways to address this issue, I believe the first thing that we must do, as a discipline, is to acknowledge that these labels—of audience, creator, publics, readers, watchdogs, gatekeepers, and anything else we may use in our discussions—are not descriptions of static roles, but of purposeful actions taken by one or more people at a given time. This focus on an action, rather than a static role, reminds us that we are talking about dynamic behaviors that can shift and change. The boundaries become permeable again, because they are now referring to actions that by their nature evoke transition from one state to another. When examining these boundaries through new media, we have a further shift toward more permeable roles. As Ede and Lunsford explain while discussing the work of new media scholars Michele Knobel and Colin Lankshear, “[T]hose whose experience grounds them primarily in a physical-industrial mindset tend to see the individual person as ‘the unit of production, competence, intelligence.’” However, in what they call a “cyberspatial-postindustrial mindset,” (or put simply, in the experiences of those who are familiar with new media), “the distinction between author and audience is much less clear” (“Among the Audience” 44-5). Building on Ede and Lunsford's arguments, I claim that the roles of creators and audiences are not easily delineated in new media. The theoretical boundaries used to separate creators and kinds of audiences are not just dynamic but permeable, and constantly shifting based on the actions of individuals and groups. In addition, thanks to the visibility of these actions online, we can see that each step in the writing process

and cycle of creation, distribution, reception, and feedback can be exposed through interactions such as interviews, blogs by the authors, and lasting records of conversations between audience and creator. In posts, tweets, and status updates, it is possible to see individuals or groups pass through the boundaries in all directions. In order to clarify this movement from tightly defined roles of kinds of audiences and creators to more dynamic interactions, this chapter will provide a brief overview of various conceptions of audience, from traditional models of the imagined audience, to social views of audience as community, publics, and fandoms, and finally, to more interactive new media perspectives. In so doing, I should emphasize that these new media perspectives are not necessarily “better” than traditional viewpoints, and in fact may be more difficult to examine critically. However, new conceptions of audience behavior may give us more accurate representations of creator-audience dynamics.

### **The Traditional Models of Creation and Reception**

When we refer to a writer, musician, artist, or anyone else who performs creative work, we often describe them in the following terms. He or she sits in some isolated environment, and creativity happens. The creative act is rooted in the external world, crystallizing from an image, an idea, a fact, a place, a moment in history, but the writing is internal. The creator goes into his or her head and invents both the work and the audience for which it is intended. Of course, this concept of audience often starts with the self, as discussed by Barry Kroll, Bennett Rafoth, and Jack Selzer. This stems in part from the concept of cognitive egocentrism (as Kroll refers to it), which places the burden of audience creation—the imaginary audience Selzer notes “that writers conceive of” while working, because these audiences “influence the creative process—even if



the resulting texts are never actually read”—on the shoulders of the isolated creator (“More Meanings” 164). This idea of creativity is so ingrained in our dialogue that it has become our default concept of the role of “creator.” Even musicians, who collaborate with others early in the process, have to start with the solitary invention of lyrics, a melody, or a topic to write about. We can think of many exceptions to this stereotype, of course, but we consider these exceptions because we know, and are taught, that creation, despite the acknowledged social aspects of the process, comes down to a single person working on their own. We conceive of the author as having to consider the audience, which is ultimately exists only in the author’s imagination. It is that individual creator who distills the social and cultural contexts and feedback into their creative act, and even creators will say this requires isolation of some kind.

Even attempts to complicate this model are filled with these bounded concepts of the solitary writer. The questions of how a writer performs the creator role and is acted on by their social contexts “challenge scholars and teachers of writing to examine not only the complex processes involved in the production of the text and its consequences (what writers do when they write and its effects), but also the complex processes involved in the production of the writer and its consequences (what is done to writers when they write and its effects),” says Anis Bawarshi in his examination of how scholarly discourse envisions the role of writer (12). While Bawarshi goes on to talk about how a writer’s actions and creations are influenced by a socially constructed set of rules for addressing audiences, this still takes the form of an individual, on his own, making choices about a way to communicate with an imagined (or real) audience. These

roles are set, and while the act of writing may change the writers themselves, those changes take place within the role of writing.

Peter Elbow also acknowledges the creator isolation during writing, saying that at times it is necessary to even ignore the concerns of audience: “An audience is a field of force. The closer we come—the more we think about these readers—the stronger the pull they exert on the contents of our minds.” This pull is something that may be “helpful” at times, but might also “confuse” or “inhibit” the author (“Ignoring Audience,” 51). This later discussion by Elbow, while it acknowledges the concept that the creator and the audience influence each other constantly, still gives the creator role the unequal power and burden in the relationship with audiences. Elbow says that the author has the power to acknowledge or not acknowledge the audience. This idea, that creators are able to isolate themselves, can be seen in practical terms by observing creators working in public or semi-public spaces. Even when writing with people nearby, the assumptions of the writer’s isolation focuses on the mental context, not physical, and is not changed whether a writer is in a book-filled office or sitting in the middle of a Starbucks while wearing headphones and staring at a laptop screen. We only need to watch how people act around an isolated person in a social environment, quietly trying to avoid disturbing him or her, not engaging in conversation or any other typical social interaction. This is because even if this person sits beside us, we know they are performing a solitary act.

This concept of isolation, of discrete stages and roles in the process, permeates the study of the rhetorical act of creation and ultimately how audiences respond to these creations. In “AA/AI,” Ede and Lunsford, referring to Mitchell and Taylor’s “general model of writing,” show

that this model distorts both the roles of the writer and the audience by making each role's response to a work respectively follow rules that the "self, the person writing, [is] the only potential judge of effective discourse," or, "the audience has the sole power of evaluating writing" (6-7). This model, with a few modifications from other scholarship, is common to many creative texts. It begins with an individual author, or a function performed by individuals or groups, who create a work and pass it through the accepted genres of communication (such as writer giving a draft to an editor) to the first of several distinct audiences, the gatekeepers who decide first whether the creative work is worth taking up, and who then require modifications through editing or the production stage. If the work passes through the gatekeeping audience, it is distributed through accepted channels to potential audiences, often seen as a passive group of readers. The audience takes up the work, interprets it according to their cultural biases, and then may respond to it. These responses often follow well-understood genres, such as feedback initially as sales, then reviews, limited conversations with other members of the audience to form discourse communities, possibly letters (or emails) sent back to the publisher and then to the author, or possibly engaging in short direct conversations at signings. The audience may continue to discuss or make use of the work for some time, but in general, the creator is assumed to have moved on to the next project, again making creative choices in relative isolation. Later, I will show the dynamic complications of these roles, expressed both in the ability to cross boundaries between roles and the role of new media in permitting the creation of more works and increasing the ability for audiences to actively perform in a variety of roles. Moving us closer to

a recognition of the dynamic interactions between audiences and creators are social perspectives, which I will describe below.

### **Audience Roles in Social Perspectives**

In this section, I will briefly explain the types of audience roles that I find come closer to encapsulating the permeable boundaries between creators and audiences. It is worth nothing that in all of these examples—which hardly form an exhaustive list of types of audiences—the discussions focus on the closely defined (and thus limited) conceptions of these roles, that an audience is *this* or it is *that*, even if the role in question is seen as the center of dynamic actions. The discussion defines a given role, which creates the illusion of a static conception that role and its purpose. Each of these concepts of audience have their limitations. They take a highly complex set of behaviors that are sometimes contradictory, sometimes unified, and attempt to place them into categories that provide a basis for theoretical work. The problem is not with the need to develop these ideas of audience but the way the essentialized definitions can obscure the actual messy, constantly-shifting actions of audience members and creators.

In order to show these complexities, let us examine in brief the main audience roles seen in current rhetorical scholarship. Working on a spectrum of perceived passivity to activity (according to these common conceptions), we begin with readers (listeners, viewers), who are generally considered passive individuals who experience the work. This role is a basic part of the way we imagine audiences, dating back to Aristotle, and is often the concept that more recent audience theory is meant to complicate or disprove. The fact that many modern rhetoricians have to continually redefine audiences and assert their fluid and ever-changing qualities shows that the

idea of the passive, static audience dominates most views of creator-audience interactions. From this view of passive receivers, we move to social views of audiences who interact with each other within a discourse community, an idea that Porter traces back to James Kinneavy's 1971 book, *A Theory of Discourse*, among others. Discursive interactions happen within various social contexts, "a defined field" as Porter says, often constructed by mutual interests, knowledge, or social links—Porter uses an example of a reception with "several groups engaged in discussion" to indicate this common space. Once in this community, which may be transitory or well-established, the audiences and creators are brought together by shared values, and discourse "is thus constrained by topics and styles already established" (80-1). Porter also examines how creator and audience roles "coalesce" in a discourse community, saying that the community's "announced borders" are poor representations of how these actually work in light of "the dynamic nature of communities, the fluctuating borders, the intermixing of [disparate] communities" (105). As Porter shows, this has implications for the role of a writer (and the audience) within the community. In his analysis, writers are both limited by the needs of the community, because they attempt to provide the content that the community focuses on, but as with any other member, may bring in experiences and ideas from outside the context of the creative work to shift the community's goals and needs (109-110). While Porter and Rafoth argue that the audience and creator are both participants in a discourse community, in common creative discourse communities, such as websites that review television episodes or groups that discuss a given book, the expectation in most discussion groups is that the audience is speaking primarily with each other and the appearance of a creator in the conversation is unusual, and may alter the

tenor of the conversation. When a creator does appear within a community, or forms a discourse community of their own (such a personalized message board), the social aspect of the community often shifts rapidly to one in which audiences play more engaged and active roles. The discourse community, then, brings in dynamism and interaction as important elements of audience behavior, but this view falls short of showing the degrees and kinds of potential interaction. The focus on discussion as the primary action of a community limits study of other behaviors, such as public action.

### **Audience as Publics**

Further defining a more engaged role for audiences with established social interaction—such as the discourse community—Sonia Livingstone defines audiences as “publics” who are moved to take some form of social action. The original definition of “public” came from Jürgen Habermas, who claimed that the public sphere’s purpose is to engage the members of the public “in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor” (27). While these discussions often centered on political or social issues, they also sprang from art:

Released from its functions in the service of social representation, art became an object of free choice and of changing preference. The ‘taste’ to which art was oriented from then on became manifest in the assessments of lay people who claimed no prerogative, since within a public everyone was entitled to judge. (Habermas, 40)

Livingstone offers a more complex and relevant definition of public, in that she shows that it can spring from all kinds of communities with a variety of goals: “a common understanding of the

world, a shared identity, a claim to inclusiveness, a consensus regarding the collective interest” (9). The question that is often debated is what, if anything, is the difference between an “audience” and a “public”? Livingstone shows the limits of her perspective when she says that part of this discussion relies on differing focuses of study, with publics implying “an orientation to collective and consensual action,” an action that is not often conceived of being part of the audience experience (17). She continues by saying that this view of active publics can lead to specific assumptions about the differing roles of a public and another kind of audience. “In both popular and elite discourses,” Livingstone says, “audiences are denigrated as trivial, passive, individualised, while publics are valued as active, critically engaged and politically significant” (18). This view of the boundaries between social roles also places audiences in the private sphere, engaged in small-scale conversations with friends or family with few visible external consequences, whereas publics by their very nature are generally considered larger in scale and generate appreciable responses to their discussions from other groups, such as policy-makers in the government or gatekeepers of art. As I will show in the next sections and the chapter, this view of the divide between public and private do not take into account new media contexts and the permeability between the distinct “spheres.” In the next section, I will discuss the variable actions of audiences behaving as publics can further be complicated by those engaged individuals who let their private enthusiasms lead to engaged actions in public spaces.

### **Audiences as Fandoms**

The next level of active engagement builds on that “common understanding of the world, a shared identity, a claim to inclusiveness, a consensus regarding the common interest” that

Livingstone discusses: the fans, or fandom (9). For a working definition of “fandom,” I refer to Baym and Jenkins, who together suggest various qualities that turn an active public into a fandom. These qualities include: identifying with the media works in ways that allow certain values and ideas from those works to inform personal ideas and attitudes (Baym, 4); and the strong desire to be engaged in a “participatory culture” that interacts with the works by producing various responses, either critical or creative, to those works (Jenkins, 33-4). In short, fans are those people who move from a general discussion to considering topics brought up by the works deeply and seriously, and moreover form strong opinions about these topics and enthusiastically share their responses either in person or online. They perform actions in public spaces that allow them to be identified as fans by others, from wearing t-shirts with distinctive logos to discussing favorite works with non-fans. Their “collective identity” gives these individuals the impetus to come together as an engaged audience, or a fandom. As Jenkins puts it, “Fandoms are one type of collectivity (in that they are acting as communities rather than as individuals) and connectivity (in that their power is amplified through their access to networked communications) whose presence is being felt in contemporary culture” (139). He discusses how many fandoms are using social networks and their traditions of participation to debate issues ranging from private details to major political concerns that may or may not have relevance in the context of the creative works, but which may directly impact the lives of the audience members themselves. This definition, relying as it does on participation and engagement, allows for both positive and negative fans. Those who love a work may be content to share general praise, but those who hate a work often put a great deal of energy and time into expressing that



hate. Fans often perform socially-visible actions that reflect the works they identify with and sometimes will use these actions to guide their approach to other social matters, such as fans of the television show *Star Trek* advocating for better science education or embracing diversity. One reason to study fandoms is that these audiences often visibly engage in boundary-crossing actions. However, defining an audience as “fans” and studying them only in that context once again imposes limits—in this case, it obscures the action of becoming a fan, leaving a fandom, or individuals putting aside their fandom to take part in other types of audiences.

In addition to the audiences I have briefly discussed, there are several other commonly-described audiences that can exist within these larger audience groups to perform certain functions, such as “gatekeepers,” a term popularized by journalism scholars such as Edgar Trotter to describe the individuals who serve to determine the value of a work and whether it can pass boundaries from creator to audience, or whether feedback can travel back to the creator. A similar audience role is performed by watchdog audiences, as discussed by Vincent Brown’s study of multiple audiences in technical writing, serve a similar role, commenting on and judging the value of creative works, creator behaviors, or audience actions. In a discourse community, for example, a gatekeeper may be the instructor in a classroom directing a conversation along approved lines. In a fandom, a watchdog audience may be those self-appointed individuals who respond positively or negatively to new ideas or members. As I show in the next section, the limits of these definitions becomes obvious when one considers the power of new media to enable audiences to freely interact with creators and perform varying roles almost at whim.

## **Interactivity and New Media**

As I have stated, the shifting between individuals, discourse communities, publics and fandoms challenge the bounded ideas of creators and audiences in separate roles. However, it would be naïve to suggest that these boundaries only became permeable with the advent of modern telecommunications. Many scholars, from Ede and Lunsford to Livingstone and Jenkins have shown that these static roles do not reflect reality. Conversations have happened between audience members in different roles, and between audiences and creators, for as long people have tried to express themselves. Greek poets and scholars addressed amphitheaters where they received immediate feedback—Aristotle wrote *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* in order to help orators and artists to better communicate in such an environment, where the audience could respond instantly. Patrons told creators what they wanted, and what they liked or didn't like. Nineteenth century authors such as Charles Dickens or Samuel Clemens met with crowds, had publishers, received mail, and had regular conversations with people who had strong feelings about their work. For example, according to James Gunn's comprehensive study of the history of the science fiction genre, most of the writers of the 1930s and 1940s were inspired by previous authors such as H.G. Wells or E.E. "Doc" Smith. These writers were the passive individual readers who may have believed they were the only ones in the world who loved this genre, and as they became more engaged fans, they decided to become creators themselves. These creators then serve as gatekeepers for other works, creating fanzines (fan magazines) to publish the work of their fellow audience members, who continue to act as fan audiences while looking at each other's stories, and then become creators again to respond to them. In this way, Gunn demonstrates that

everyone involved in the science fiction genre is part of a discourse community with one another, and within that community may sometimes be a creator, a passive audience, or a fan. Yet I contend that while this kind of boundary-crossing audience action could be observed throughout history, the speed and variety of these actions has grown considerably thanks to new media facilitating interaction and experiments in fan creativity.

New media, with its ease of access, immediacy, and ability to preserve even trivial interactions, offers a different way to study creativity and audiences. Thanks to digital technology and cheap tools that lower barriers to complex creation, as well as the ease of self- and small-publication through the Internet, we have seen an explosion in the number of people who can assume the creator role. Ede and Lunsford recognize the increased complexity of the interactions between writers, their texts, and the online medium:

In a digital world, and especially in the world of Web 2.0, speakers and audiences communicate in multiple ways and across multiple channels, often reciprocally. This momentous shift has challenged not only traditional models of communication but also the relationship between “creators” of messages and those who receive them. Today, as we have pointed out, the roles of writers and audiences often conflate, merge, and shift. (48)

Thanks to this environment, we can also watch a work be shared with potential audiences with minimal gatekeeping (except that performed by the audiences themselves), see quickly how people respond to the work, and watch almost in real time as individual readers take on different audience roles. As each transition takes place, we can observe the discussion involved; trace the moment when a passive reader performs a fandom activity by becoming a creator of fan art.

When these moments are preserved online, either in raw form on the sites or social media spaces where they happened, or on archival sites such as Know Your Meme or Wikipedia, we can study not only the products but also the discussion and actions that surrounded them.

In this way, we can see that the traditional boundaries within audience roles and between audience and creators are permeable. At any given time, an individual may be a solitary audience member, may find others of like mind to discuss the work, may identify with the work, may take action based on that work, and may be inspired to adapt the work to a new genre, create a story within the same milieu, or create their own works. For example, Lara F is one of my previous students who described to me the audience actions she could remember taking recently. She is a fan of the young adult dystopian science fiction book (and movie) series *the Hunger Games*, who happily wears t-shirts or jewelry from the show and is willing to talk about its themes at any time. At the same time, she says she liked the HBO fantasy series *Game of Thrones* but does not wish to join the discourse communities available online, a different level of participation from her *Hunger Games* fandom, that might change if a specific incident spurs her to talk about what she's just watched. She also has watched a single episode of the Netflix series *Orange is the New Black* but is disturbed by what she saw there that she does not wish to watch any longer. However, she claims to have been inspired by this emotional reaction to join in a public that advocates for changes to the justice system, although other members of the public do not talk about the show and she never sees another episode—bypassing the “discourse community” and “fandom” roles to be in a public that is generally not built around the audience of this one show. As either a fan or a passive observer, Lara takes other audience and creator actions for every kind

of kinds of media she encounters, blurring the distinctions in these roles. Recently she told me that she has tried her hand at being a creator, by writing fanfiction for *The Hunger Games*, another action that represents a shift in roles. For her, the boundaries rhetorical scholars imagine around each creator and audience roles simply do not exist.

This tension between roles and actions allow creativity to blossom, and it is not limited to writing. All manner of creative endeavors and genres work like this, and always has: someone creates art, from text to music to paintings, other individuals see that art and want to improve on it, present their own take, or want to offer a response to the emotions or ideas that art gives to them. What new media gives us, and what I will show with several case studies in the next two chapters, is both the tools and access to allow individuals to express themselves in new creative efforts, as well as to find other like-minded people to form communities, discuss works, and potentially act publically or otherwise engage deeply with the ideals expressed in a work.

In the Internet age, we can observe the process of crossing these boundaries. Creators can respond to questions about inspiration and can further address these answers later, expanding on them in instantly archived blogs, comments, or articles. Creators do not have to question themselves in order to see how the audience roles are being performed—they can simply see for themselves, by visiting any of the various social media where these actions are taking place. Creators can have almost constant interaction with their own audiences, can record and reflect on their own actions when they fill audience roles, and can see what matters or does not matter to other audience members. A creator is able to directly converse with, or silently observe, audiences discussing their works. They can sift through the deluge of questions and comments

on their offerings to see what seems to matter the most, and conversely, what no one seems all that interested in. They can view the adaptations, modifications, and inspired works to see what has most grabbed the imagination of their audiences. In the second chapter, I will study the concept of these permeable boundaries between creator and audience roles in more detail, as well as the new ways the various roles interact. The third chapter will focus on the ways information technology has historically enabled us to express creativity, and how new media makes creation and distribution easier, finishing with two case studies about creators who have made use of new media to express themselves, and how the ever-present audience interaction has affected them.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Permeable Boundaries: The Shifting Roles of Creation, Reception, and Utilization**

As I have shown in the previous chapter, when rhetorical and media scholars examine creator and audience roles, they often conceive of conceptual boundaries that distinguish specific roles and the processes and actions within each role. An example of these theoretical boundaries lies in the origins of the field of rhetoric, which distinguishes “sides” of a “rhetorical triangle,” separating author, audience, and the situation from each other (even as the triangle indicates that each side must be involved in a communication). For quite some time, “audience” was the least-studied of these rhetorical roles. James Porter, in his history of the development of audience theories, notes that from “after the Civil War until the 1960s ... this was an age marked by neglect of some of the main topics promoted by classical rhetoric—including audience” (39). Even then, most of research was on the writer, conceiving of the audience as “existing apart from the text,” a view which follows a creative work’s meaning as originating “in the thoughts of the rhetor” and “represented, however perfectly or imperfectly, in speech or writing; and...then transmitted to an audience” (40). In other words, the audience only matters as a group to be acted upon and otherwise exists within its boundaries, not interacting with the writer. Even types of audience members were to be described demographically, in terms of masses that collectively want and do the same things, setting up more boundaries of thought. Many early studies of creativity follow this line, looking at the author’s intention, or the audience type as imagined by the author.

Carol Berkenkotter sums up this writer-centered model in an examination of the writer and audience that compares professional or rhetorically-trained writers to novice writers:

“Professional writers automatically internalize their audiences; as they write, they ask themselves the questions that their readers might be expected to ask. In the process of being one's own reader, an expert writer is constantly revising (in the root sense) her own work” (396). Note the separation between the writer and the audience. A writer is not part of the audience, but with training, may understand some of the audience's needs. This imagined boundary is visible in every step of the process. We discuss gatekeepers—a kind of specialized audience that acts as the guardian of the boundaries between creator and audience by determining whether a work meets the criteria to pass from one to the other. When we look at the distribution of creative works, we discuss the audience reacting to a finished work that becomes available in the bounded spaces of bookstores, theaters, or in front of the television. Once the audience members have experienced these works, then they may express their opinions through channels that are allowed to pass through the boundaries, such as sending fan mail (or e-mail), posting comments and reviews on various bookseller or publisher-sanctioned sites (such as Amazon), making recommendations through social media, or simply smiling and cheering with other audience members. As I discussed last chapter, audiences will then take actions that will allow them to be redefined in bounded roles such as a discourse community, as Porter or Rafoth defines it; as a public—in the fashion of Sonia Livingstone as people who identify with and take other actions inspired by the works; or as what Nancy Baym or Henry Jenkins would refer to as fandom. Each audience role has its own implications for the proper rules (or bounds) of behavior and social



purpose. These boundaries can be useful for theoretical discussions: they allow us to narrow our research to see what exactly this fandom does or how this discourse community acts. They make it easier to talk about the roles of the author, the audience or a public, and how these idealized figures act and interact. However, they also hinder us by making scholars unconsciously expect an audience role to fit within its established box. More dangerously, we may assume that an audience member is a discrete unit that fills a certain role, rather than one who can choose to act dynamically in different audience roles at any given time, even within the same creative work.

These conceptual boundaries involve rules of discourse that define the interactions of audience communities and creators. These common expected behaviors are what Amy Devitt would call “genres” of social communication, which help articulate our “perception of recurrence” that “comes from socially developing understanding of situations” (33-4). These rules of conversation are sometimes created by the publishers, the artists, and the requirements of the technicians who set up review systems, commercial websites, or design the way comments are posted or displayed on forums. Each of these genres of interaction comes with distinctions among those communicating, the medium being used, and the formalist styles of the interaction. Each set of rules can be seen as another boundary between the audience and the creator. Issues of copyright and concepts of who has the right to work on these creations provide other boundaries in the sense of approved and official works and those generated by the audience, with approved works having the highest valuation within the moral economies of these communities.

These conceptual boundaries I refer to may also be seen as the limits imposed by the various genres of the creative work, the discussions about that work, marking the differences

between approved or unapproved creations. These differences, which form another boundary, also separate the perceived worth of official and fan-created works. For example, when we consider a writer creating a story, we imagine that the story resides within the boundaries of that writer's mind and workspace. Once that story is completed, it passes through accepted channels to other readers, possibly in a workshop, or perhaps on to a magazine or publishing house. These places have specific rules (more genre limits) for how the story must be formatted, length, even subject matter. Editors fill their constrained roles in an approved interaction with the author, suggesting changes or accepting the story. Once the story is published, it passes through the boundaries according to the publisher's rules, printed in magazines or distributed on official websites, until it reaches the audiences. These audience members may read the stories and send in emails to official addresses, or communicate with each other in forums devoted to the purpose, and everything works according to the plans and limits of the various genres.

Under careful analysis these generic boundaries are neither rigid nor forbidding. We can see several instances of audiences who can take on the temporary roles of a discourse community, public, or fandom, and individuals who pass between these audience roles on a regular basis. We are able to observe audience members interacting directly with creators or becoming creators themselves, and we can see how these audience creations and efforts are given validity within their communities. These theoretical boundaries appear to be constantly permeable to ideas, actions, and modifications of the genre rules. In the digital landscape, it is easy to see these permeable boundaries being crossed willy-nilly, and to record when and how that happens and observe the results of these crossings.

In the rest of this chapter, I will examine three theoretical boundaries, with the goal of showing that these boundaries are permeable and often crossed repeatedly, sometimes quickly, and that this fluid exchange of ideas and social roles allows for clearer understanding of the creative cycle. First, I will look at the boundaries between audience roles, and show that these roles are the result of dynamic actions, and are not static. Second, I will discuss the separation between creators and audiences, and how this separation is reinforced by traditional genres and subverted by the easy and constant interactions available through digital tools and the Internet to form a fluid cycle of inspiration and ideas rather than a one-way stream of concepts. Finally, I will examine the separation between canonical, officially approved, works and the fan-created responses to these works, and the moral economies that assign values based on following or defying genre expectations.

### **The Actions of Audiences**

Audiences are active expressions of the behavior of individuals or groups, the results of choices made by the people involved in a creative cycle. Each role can be referred to in general terms in order to better study them, as I refer here to “discourse communities” or “fandoms,” but none of these groups are simply passive. As Karen Ross and Virginia Nightingale demonstrate in their survey of media and audience studies, even the readers who simply read a newspaper or watch a program are performing an action with effects: “a subtle shift had occurred in the sphere of critical appraisal of art that allowed artists and art critics to register that audiences play a role in making images meaningful.” They do this, in short, by choosing to “pay to attend, buy or view the work” (15). This is backed up by Jenkins’ description of Dallas Smythe’s work on how even

nominally passive television audiences function as commodities: “the audience’s attention may be a ‘commodity’ approximated, packaged, and sold in commercial transactions between broadcasters and advertisers, but audiences also ‘work.’ Both as a commodity and as labor, audiences produce economic value” through paying attention to given programs, being measured, and therefore generating worth for the production companies (*Spreadable Media*, 107).

When these audience members communicate with each other, though, they form discourse communities—from the illustration used by Porter of small talk during a reception, where individuals drifted from group to group finding new topics to talk about, to the “knowledge communities” Jenkins describes who exist in an era of media convergence that “enables communal, rather than individualistic, modes of reception.” Jenkins points out that new media is not required for these discourse communities: “Not every media consumer interacts within a virtual community yet; some simply discuss what they see with their friends, family members, and workmates” (*Convergence* 26). Yet in both cases, and almost every other example of discourse communities, the key factor is the action of having a conversation about an incident, a piece of knowledge, or a creative work.

These discussions may also lead to social or policy actions, in what is Livingstone would refer to as an “audience a public.” New media contexts lead to a blurring between what rhetorical scholars refer to as the private and public spheres. Many actions that an individual may consider private (such as searching for a text on Google) are actually public, in that they are recorded, become part of an evaluation of a large company’s action, and will have wide-reaching consequences. When examining how audiences are formed by actions, it is important to consider

that not all publicly-visible actions were meant to be shared outside of a private sphere of close friends or family, or discussion groups in a closed environment such as a message board. This private/public question, as it pertains to individual choice and action, is the basis of a recent case in Europe wherein it became public policy that companies such as Google must allow users to have more control over the information they considered private (their user data) so that they may consciously decide how to shape their public audience roles (Streitfeld). The debate about what it means to act privately or publicly is relevant to our discussion of audiences when private lives are broadcast as entertainment or people may easily and willingly share private thoughts with strangers. Dominique Mehl says, “The articulation agreed between the speakable and the unspeakable...between what is for the self and what is for the public, is no longer socially instituted but does remain subjectively elaborated.” In other words, a person defines for him or herself whether an action is private or public in a given case. As Mehl further notes, it is the action, not the grouping, that defines the “distinction between the public and the private,” and that the boundary between the two “has not been abolished but it has become subjective and individual and is no longer the outcome of social elaboration” (89). For example, when a creator either lets slip private information or chooses to display it for everyone to see, this becomes part of the discussion about the creator and their works and may lead to similar public sharing of private matters among audiences. For example, when blogger Jenny Lawson discusses online, and in her book, intimate details about her miscarriages and struggles with depression, her audience can respond by offering stories about their own problems. Together, this audience action leads to conversations about seeking psychological help when confronting these issues, as

well as concerted efforts to improve mental health treatment and access to suicide hotlines. The deliberate crossing between private and public spheres can spur an audience to decide to engage in even wider-reaching social action.

This relates to Livingstone's earlier points that the "collective and consensual action" is one of the defining characteristics of a public. If Mehl is correct, and it is an individual's subjective choice—an action—that defines whether that person's behavior is private or public, and Livingstone is correct that publics are a collective action, then it follows that any individual's role as audience (or as creator) is the result of these subjective decisions. The audience is not limited by social standards and rules in their discourses imposed from an authority, even the creator, but create them through their actions. As previously mentioned, a creator's works can lead to audience actions. When those actions are not private, the creator is then caught up in inspiring (or actively taking part in) a public action. Actions can take the form of choices about when and how to engage, publicly or privately, with an issue or a work, either following existing forms of interaction or developing new ones, such as use of the "retweet" in indicating acceptance or support for a statement made on Twitter. The boundary between the public and private spheres is crossed casually: a group of friends may enjoy a show together, discuss it briefly between themselves, and then go home to join separate discourse communities such as a group of friends on Facebook, a Goodreads discussion group, or a message board and have a larger-scale conversation about the text. Even these groups may not be a full public, as their access could be limited to those who were invited or chose to participate in the community. From there, though, the same individuals may be inspired to take their discussions, or plans of

action based on discussions, to the public as a whole. However, these audiences, which can casually transition from discourse to limited public action, do not easily fit within the concept of Livingstone's (or other rhetoricians') definition of a public as activists.

These interactions could be seen as trivial, from a private text that becomes a "viral" (rapidly and widely spread) joke on the Internet, or as meaningful as a group of people who share the love of a series such as Harry Potter deciding to work together to form The Harry Potter Alliance charity organization. As Jenkins observes during his study of the HPA, "Fans have often entered civic discourse when they assert their collective rights as the most active and engaged segments of the media audience" (2.1). In the case of the HPA, we have a creator, JK Rowling, making a point in her books about behaviors she sees as socially acceptable and beneficial. A segment of her audience of readers then became a narrowly-defined "public" of writers and critics in a discourse community, by choosing to be members of a public activist group. An individual, fan and activist, has private and public roles based on context and action. In the new media environment, the boundary between the two roles, if it can be said to truly exist, is completely porous. This happens in part because audiences can go online to communally discuss and adopt new shifts in behavior, and share their reasons with others, inspiring yet other kinds of activism. A private action, such as creating a meme image to share between friends as a joke, on a semi-protected Facebook feed, can be transformed into a public one, with activist/celebrities such as George Takei amplifying the image through his much larger social media presence on Facebook. It is rare for the participants in these actions to think of themselves as an audience, a private actor, or an individual determined to create a public. Rather, these

people perform actions that are later defined as belonging to either the public or private spheres. Even a cursory examination of public action in new media, then, leads one to conclude that a set definition of “a public” does not fully encompass the kind of dynamic and fluid behaviors observed by these sorts of audiences.

As an example of permeability of private discussions leading to public action, I refer to Lori Lopez’s study of audience conversations about the casting of actors for the *The Last Airbender* movie, based on the animated television show *Avatar: the Last Airbender*. While the show featured a multi-ethnic cast, with character designs based on Inuit, Chinese, Japanese, and other Asian ethnic groups, the primary cast of the movie was mostly Caucasian. The only non-white primary character was Indian, and as the character was a villain, this was also considered problematic casting by the fans. While this discussion took place first within various discourse communities on- and off-line, it led to public action by organizing letter-writing campaigns and contacting reporters to draw attention to the problem of casting white actors for non-white parts. This group’s ultimate effort, a site known as Racebending.com, continues to draw attention to the issues of diversity in media. While the discussion that led to public action began in fan communities, the website that remains the lasting expression of the audience-as-public is not entirely a fan creation:

Out of the six leaders of the movement, only one had been an active fan, participating in fan communities and engaging in fannish practices such as fan art and fan fiction. Four considered themselves general fans of the show but not at a serious level, and one had never seen an episode of the show and only joined the group to protest the casting. (3)



These casual audience members and non-fans chose, through their actions, to take part in a public. Lopez herself acted not as a fan of either the show or the movie, although in the process of learning about the subject acted like an audience member, saying, “I had never watched an episode of *The Last Airbender* (although over the course of my research did dedicate myself to viewing the entire series” (4).

Fans or fandoms are fluid audience roles, and that fluidity makes it difficult to find a single, specific definition of “fandom.” I have quoted Jenkins and Baym in previous chapters in an effort to develop a working definition. Jonathan Gray, examining many aspects of fan studies—including non-fans and anti-fans—also has trouble defining what is meant by a “fan” or “fandom.” This is strange, considering how much the fan audience role is studied. As Gray says, “Indeed, as the wave of post-encoding/decoding model audience research continues to hit media and cultural studies, it is remarkable how often the fan can be found atop the crest of this wave” (64-5). There are many reasons for this, but most rely on the convenience of examining fans; their actions are easy to identify and study. A fan (and the counterpart, an anti-fan, who reacts boldly but in the negative sense) acts passionately in response to a creative work. This response is almost always visible, taking the shape of comments on social media or message boards, branding oneself with merchandise from the work, such as wearing a t-shirt with the logo of a favorite superhero, or in the form of appropriation and acting as a creator, reimagining the work in new formats like fanart or fanfiction. The most attractive aspect of fandom is that almost everyone acts as a fan about something. There are fans of sports, crafts, hobbies, food, politicians,

and of course, every kind of creative work. There are even fans of academic studies and specific scholars (note how often I cite Henry Jenkins).

This overview of the kinds of actions that lead to different audience roles should indicate two things. First, that anyone may, at any time, act in a certain role—for example, as readers giving attention to this thesis, who will then shift to a temporary discourse community to discuss the thesis. Second, that these shifts happen rapidly, allowing audience members to cross the boundaries with ease, which shows how permeable these concepts truly are. Each of us, then, may temporarily be part of a general audience who consumes a work, but be relatively unaffected by it and go on with our lives, not giving the work another thought. Or an individual may have an opinion about another work that and want to talk about it, but still be in a private space with friends or small groups of casual acquaintances when they share their thoughts. The same person could then find a work that they wish to talk about publicly through social media or writing reviews. All the while, that person could be intensely passionate about this work or other works that speak to some part of their individual identity, assign a moral value to those works beyond the monetary, and wish to engage personally with those works and others who similarly value these works. In the previous chapter, I discussed my student Lara, who takes on several of these roles depending on various stimuli. Her experience is hardly unique. For example, I am a member of many fandoms, in that I define myself in part as someone who enjoys works such as the *Star Wars* movies or the book series *A Song of Ice and Fire*. I have never engaged in the most visible fan activities common to these groups. I have never dressed as any character from either series and own only a small amount of merchandise from them. Yet I will discuss the

stories and analyze the rhetoric of the various adaptations with other members of the audience (or with scholars in general). At the same time I have dressed in the costume of my favorite comic book character, Superman, even while not caring for any current portrayals of that character. All the while I have reached out through social media to some of my favorite independent artists in the hopes of receiving even a brief, “Thanks for listening,” that means nothing to anyone not in the fandom but is highly valuable in the fan community for that artist.

My story is not unusual. Every audience member similarly occupies multiple roles based on their subjective choices. As Selzer says, “Once a stable referent, audience has become fractured into audiences, into a not-always-peaceable and too-often-fragmented kingdom of terms, complete with colorful relatives, feuding rivals, strange bedfellows, and new arrivals turning up each month” (161). Extending this ideas from the actions of groups of people we can observe the roots of shifting audiences within each person. In a single individual, we observe the permeable boundaries between individual audience, discourse community, public and fandom. What’s more, a person’s opinion can shift over time, perhaps becoming indifferent to something that once inspired public action, losing interest in a fandom, but developing new enthusiasm when rereading a book that had little impact the first time through. It is the interest and actions caused by that interest (or lack of it) that causes this person to cross these theoretical boundaries. For these reasons, I use the term “audience” or “fans” to refer in general to the transformable roles of any given group of consumers of media—at any given time, a person may be acting in any of these roles. Either term, as I use it, includes the possibility of being a private, passive, unengaged reader or a deeply involved member of a public, based on the actions being taken at

the moment. From this point, we will move to the next, and conceptually most imposing, barrier: the one that lies between any of these given audience actions and the creators.

### **Creators and Audiences**

To examine the ways in which creators and audiences communicate with each other, and act in one another's places, I will once again turn briefly to genre theory, which provides a framework for describing the standards and common forms of interaction among participants in discourse. Here I rely on the broad examinations of genre as put forth by Devitt, as well as Anis Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff, where the term refers to a series of actions that are based on "recognizing, responding to, acting meaningfully and consequentially within, and helping to reproduce recurrent situations" (3). The creator role traditionally filled the conventions of communication with the release of a book, piece of music, or other creative work, possibly supplementing these with the limited contexts of an "Author's Note," liner notes for an album, or a press interview. At times, the publisher would allow greater access between creators and audiences, passing fan letters to the creator, or setting up limited personal interactions at book signings or signings. The audience, of course, was expected to fit the conventions of the written letter, or the few minutes of time in the signing line, or possibly by sharing views in opinion pieces or expressing their enthusiasm with fan-created magazines. As digital technology has advanced and the Internet has become prevalent, many creators now share a great deal more information through the new genres of email newsletters, official websites, social media press releases, and audiences have adopted an even greater number of responsive genres, from sharing new releases to offering "likes" or "thumbs-ups" on sites such as Facebook or Reddit. Creators

may also use these genres to take the communicative authority away from the gatekeepers entirely, and in this new situational context, develop their own rules for interaction. For example, musicians such as Amanda Palmer may ask audiences to create their own videos for her songs, or demand expressions of personal intimacy online, such as asking people to provide “virtual” hugs, kisses, or statements of love—although she claims to accept all of these in person, as well as through social media.

Traditional genres of interaction, such as the Author’s Notes or a book signing helped reinforce the boundaries between creators and audiences. This reinforcement sometimes comes in spite of the efforts of theorists to point out the fluidity of communication. Devitt, Bawarshi, and Reiff show that these socially-reinforced actions “links patterns of language use to patterns of social behavior” (542). These patterns of language use influence our conceptions of these social roles. It is easy to look at these common ideas of social roles and consider them solid and unchanging. Yet in the same essay, all three provide case studies that show the mutable and changing ways that genres can be adapted to the needs of the specific context. In examining the value of the genre of ethnography, Reiff emphasizes the flexible nature of the genre: “Shifting the usual teacher/student relationship, students assume the role of investigators who are learning to speak from their own authority as researchers. As a result, classrooms become, in part, research sites at which all members are investigating, teaching, and learning” (557). Despite this illustration of what I am calling permeable boundaries, many others believe that genre rules “invite reductionism, rules, formalism,” as Carolyn Miller says when discussing criticisms of genre studies (151).

These mistaken perceptions of rigid genre rules of communication, where interaction was limited to specific, approved channels, can lead to the impression of the isolated creator, hidden away by relative distance both emotionally and physically from the audience. Creators may once have been as isolated as author J.D. Salinger, or as talkative as the members of the rock group the Beatles, but in either case, there were limited ways for them to directly have discussions with audiences. Today, however, a creator may still want to minimize public appearances, such as author Suzanne Collins, and yet have given several interviews and make personal appearances during publisher-sponsored book tours or movie premieres. Creators may also be like the musician Amanda Palmer, constantly communicating with audiences through social media. In either case, no matter how open the boundaries seem, these conversations are by necessity limited in time and scale; no one person has the free time or attention span to send personal messages to each and every audience member who wants to have a discussion. It is easy for a fan to believe that these limits of the interactive genres have a real force, and actually keep creators separate from their audiences in a meaningful way. This leads to the impression that creators are too busy creating to have in-depth conversations about their own works or talking at length with each and every fan, except in specific contexts such as providing commentaries or marking out an individual fan, adding value to these acts by crossing the generic boundaries. However, as I will show in the next chapter, many creators are able to modify or create new genres of conversation to bypass these boundaries, both real and imaginary.

The audience at large does not have the same constraints on time and availability as the creators, and may have as many conversations about the works as there are members. These

interactions may be as complex or shallow, brief or drawn-out, as they wish. Their boundaries are in the separation of time, attention and intimacy with the creator, and so they find other ways to communicate. Primarily, they discuss or debate these works, but they may simply share parts of the work that they enjoy, dislike, amplify other people's opinions, or engage in their own creative acts based on the work. These genres of discussion are many and various, and for that reason they can be hard to classify properly. This is even more the case now that the traditional venues of the fan letter, the so-called "coffee house" discussion, or reviews are complicated through digital practices, some of which are still emerging, such as fanfiction, meme pictures, comment threads, or transformative intertextual blending of ideas with other works from other creators. These interactions follow rules that are being created even as they are being used, which means the audience members are generating their own social roles.

These audience roles are difficult to pin down, since the communications may shift rapidly, and because every specific audience community puts their own take on the expected rules. Following Miller's advice to apply genre studies "inductively, as critics" rather than "providing a framework that will predict or limit the genres that might be involved" (153), we could examine a specific kind of response, such as the reaction to an episode of the television show *Castle*. On the now-defunct Television Without Pity forums, a site devoted to discussing television shows, the culture is one that leads to most episodic reactions being writing sarcastically, in a critical tone, where thoughtful discussions about themes can be layered with casual vulgarities and rude comments about actors or writers. The TV Fanatic *Castle* reviews feature a central piece written by a freelance writer who often takes a generally positive tone,

with many comments of reaction, from posts discussing the number of stars (1-5) that the episode deserved, and the occasional reaction to the review itself, with limited back-and-forth discussion. RPG.net's forums, however, do not have dedicated threads and may have fewer responses and less detailed reactions, as well as looking at influences from other media and being irreverent in tone although strict rules for polite discourse are in place. Members of one of these forums can participate in discussions on other sites, and take on different roles there, from one of many commenters to the official reviewer or from someone without much community presence to one of the established members whose opinion is given a lot of weight. These accepted genres are shaped by the forums, the administrators, and the discussants, and agreement or disagreement with these genres may shift how the audiences may participate in their communities.

Creators can also modify social roles for both themselves and the audience. They do so by stepping outside the traditional rules of communication. Rather than receiving audience feedback through questions, whatever fan letters the creator actually chooses to read, and critic's reviews, a creator may directly engage the audience, using various social media. Each of these crossings can change how the audience values the creator and the works. These personal interactions may be more valuable to the audience than the works themselves, since "the meaning of a cultural transaction cannot be reduced to the exchange of value between producers and their audiences but also has to do with what the cultural good allows audiences to say about themselves and what it allows them to say to the world," as Jenkins says (*Spreadable* 66). A prime example of this kind of personal communication can be seen in the recent career of Amanda Palmer, the previously-mentioned musician, artist, and occasional actress.



Palmer took control over her online persona several years ago, after leaving her music label. Primarily through use of her Twitter feed, @amandapalmer, she communicates with her audience on a daily, often hourly, occasionally minute-by-minute basis. Through that venue, in the genre of the tweet message (limited by 140 characters, with hashtags, retweets, replies, and direct messages) she offers her personal thoughts about various events, reactions to statements made by other artists, and insight into her creative process and issues. This conversation may seem one-sided, but she receives feedback for almost every tweet. As stated earlier, Palmer may ask for emotional support and receive it from dozens, if not hundreds, of followers immediately. As my analysis of Palmer in the next chapter will show, this interaction with her audiences has changed not only how she communicates but how she funds her musical projects and how her fans see her creative works. Many other artists also complicate traditional boundaries, using Facebook fan pages, reading emails, using Twitter or Tumblr or other tools to pass messages of various lengths and seriousness to audiences and have near-immediate feedback. Many creators have said these tools allow them to better understand what their fans want to see, but in Palmer's case, she has put action to her words.

On April 25, 2011, Palmer, together with musicians Ben Folds and Damian Kulash, and her husband, author Neil Gaiman, worked on a day-long project called "8 in 8," an effort to write and record eight songs in eight hours. Using Twitter, the artists crowdsourced (asked for feedback from their fans) various aspects of the creative process, from subjects of songs to help writing lyrics. The collaboration blurred the line between audiences and creators until the boundaries were almost nonexistent. While the project failed to meet its stated goals—they came

up with six songs in twelve hours—it clearly succeeded in demonstrating in a compressed way the potential of digital genres to provide new channels for unregulated (or at least, regulated by either the creators or audiences themselves, and not gatekeepers) audience and creator interaction. Palmer demonstrated the ongoing mixture of audience and creator by encouraging her fans to create YouTube videos to go with the songs, retweeting links to these videos so that others could take part in the process. Every time she did so, members of her audience received recognition from others.

Not every creator has the time, energy, or interest to reach out to their audiences the way Palmer has done, and not every creator who does so has had the same experiences. Values can differ from audience to audience, and even within the same community at different times. Not every audience reacts the same way to creators who reach out to them, and not every audience member feels the creative impulse in the same way. Part of these shifting values can come from the knowledge that new media makes it easier for audiences to be creators, and creators to be part of the audience, blurring the lines between the two. It may be that by making themselves more accessible to their fans, creators seem more ordinary, more human, and their interactions less valuable.

### **The Moral Economy of Canon and Fanon**

The formation of an audience community by necessity includes generic construction not only of intercommunication but social roles within that community. As Charles Bazerman has noted, any work with in a genre can lead to “thinking in actively productive ways that result in the utterances that belong in that form of life,” because “genre shapes intentions, motives,

expectations, attention, perception, affect, and interpretive frame” (14). In other words, the genre we use on a regular basis can shape our perceptions of who we are as people. When an audience is engaged with a work, members of that audience accept the rules of that work’s genre. This is true not only when consuming the original creative work, but when responding to that work with other members of these diverse communities, and shaping their responses according to the rules of the various subgenres in those communities. For example, a fan of the works of Joss Whedon may watch his shows and movies, communicate with fellow fans using a language based on the patterns of characters in Whedon’s works, and pass around or wear images such as the words “Joss Whedon Is My Master Now,” playing with generic phrases common to a related fandom, *Star Wars*. By adopting the identity of a fan of this work, the audience member accepts the related genres and makes use of them, sometimes even spinning out of the normal genre rules to create new genres, such as fan films, fan fiction, or a new image meme. If the fan’s creations are accepted by other fans and shared (or further modified, as is often the case with image memes), then that fan’s future contributions may be given more attention—which is valuable in an environment where attention is the difference between success and failure. These genre rules not only shape intercommunications but internal approval within these communities. These boundary-crossing activities, between audience and creator, complicate issues of gatekeeping—such as asking whether anyone in the fandom could stand in judgment of the quality of a fan-created work and whether it should be distributed, and if so, from whence does the authority to make this judgment come? These questions are made more difficult when a fan audience stops

being centered on the publisher-approved work and shifts to being fans of the act of creation itself, as in fanfiction groups, or what constitutes the “canon” of a piece.

These fan creations, and inter-audience actions, constitute a moral economy that is based not on money but how much all members of the economy value work within that economy, as Jenkins explains: “Economic systems ideally align the perceived interests of all parties involved in a transaction in ways that are consistent, coherent, and fair” (52). Here, Jenkins defined moral economy as a type of opposition to content owners and their valuation of creative works, the creators, and their audiences. I take a broader view of this subject, one in which “moral” refers to how a community determines the worth of an action or product, rather than whether an act is morally justifiable or not (although sometimes the morality of the act or product form the basis of the community valuation). These valuations are the result of the community’s consensus, and usually are reflected in standing in the community, appreciation of a member’s efforts, and paid out in the form of praise, favors, or respect.

Moral economies, in this sense, are differentiated from what I am calling “monetary” economies in these ways: The owners of the creative works (who sometimes but not always include the creators of the works) may freely set the monetary value of the works according to how much they believe the market can bear. However, these works must also be accepted by the audiences, and therefore must meet their community standards of moral value. This valuation helps form the boundaries between creator and audience. In traditional moral economies as applied to creative contexts, the creator shares new works. These “canonical” works, by which I

mean officially approved by the creator and/or the owners of the works, are usually considered highly valuable in both the monetary and moral sense.

Audiences then consume these works and, like any market force, renegotiate the actual moral value of the works, through positive or negative commentary, recommendations, debates about the quality of the content, and purchasing habits (sometimes influenced by the community discussions). Audiences may then generate their own fan-created works in response to the canon, which is referred to among some fandoms as “fanon,” as outlined by Keidra Chaney and Raizel Leiber. My definition of fanon is a modification of the original meaning of the term that typically refers to the ideas held to have some value within fanfiction communities. Often, even in communities devoted to fanfiction, the moral value of fanon works is rarely held to be equal to that of the canon which forms the original structure which is being redefined and transformed. This division in value reinforces the boundaries between canon and fanon. When I speak of fanon, I refer to fan creations of all kinds, including fanfiction, fan art, fan films, and fan games. This fanon could include agreed-on interpretations of explanations for things happening in the canonical works (such as an accepted timeline for events in the *Star Wars* setting that tries to incorporate movies, animated shows, and books published in the setting), or it could be a set of fanfictional stories that many fans value nearly as much as the canon—and in some cases value more. But why would fans put so much effort into works that have no effective monetary value and uncertain moral value? We must be wary of binary distinctions that ignore the complications of these economic questions. After all, the roots of both kinds of value negotiations come from the same source: a creator wishes to have some return for the effort required to produce a work.

The audience wishes to feel that a creator's work is worth the time and interest (or money) placed into it. Does, then, this ability to easily cross the boundary between audience and creator have value on its own? Being able to act as a creator, and recognized as such, could explain the many instances of generating fanon.

Fans may be working on their own original creations, but when they work in fanon, they are engaging in what Louise Stein and Kristina Busse have termed, "repetition as a central mode of creative production" (193). Fanon creations are limited sharply by the rules of the original works, but this can be seen as comforting. The generic limits of the work "play a role in shaping fan response," as Stein and Busse say, because any form of fan creation is "in conversation with and against the background of the source text that inspired them in the first place."

Stein and Busse explain how generic (and therefore social, and therefore economic) rules are formed:

These communities in turn develop their own norms and expectations, imposing equally strong limits within which new authorship takes place. Furthermore, broader discourses such as genre inevitably shape and limit fan authorship; indeed, media fans constantly draw on broader cultural generic discourses such as romance and science fiction that circulate beyond fandom and across a wide range of media texts. (195)

Therefore, the fans are creating their own genres, sometimes hybridizing existing genres (such as crossing *My Little Pony's* aesthetics in cartoon designs with *Doctor Who's* characters) and sometimes forming them almost out of whole cloth, such as putting a rationalist scientifically-trained version of Harry Potter, who treats magic as another form of technology, into a series of

fanfiction stories where the plot of the books are completely changed. Another aspect that can add to the desire to create fanon comes from the pleasure in crossing boundaries. As Stein and Busse say, “While a fan may relish the delicate dance of filling perceived gaps in the source text...many also celebrate the rejection of cultural constraints” imposed by content owners and social expectations of the creator/audience boundaries (195). By claiming a portion of the canonical work, the fans are able to reshape the original materials through their labor to transform these ideas into their own valuable contributions to their communities.

This transformative behavior, of course, is not isolated within a community’s boundaries. Permeability means actions and communication can filter through in both directions. Creators can observe the fanon works based on their creations and see the moral value assigned to these works. Some creators even apply their own moral value to these fan creations. R.M. Milner explains, “Fans in many ways are the ultimate knowledge workers ... [t]hey summarize and editorialize on installments of the text, evangelize the merits of the text to others, evaluate storylines and performances, and create their own art surrounding the text” (492). In other words, a creator may acknowledge the value of fan activity and even seek to exploit it to not only seek inspiration for their own works, but to help spread enthusiasm and grow audiences who wish to engage in these works. While this may seem exploitative, Milner shows that this is not always true. In a discussion of fans of the video game *Fallout 3* laboring with game publisher Bethesda to improve the product, he concludes, “Far from worry that their labor would be exploited without just compensation, the injustice to fans on the official *Fallout 3* forum was that their contributions were not being recognized” (505). In other words, the real issue was not found in

the monetary economy, but in the moral one. The compensation they sought was set by the genre rules of their audience community, a desire to be “recognized” as having crossed the boundary from audience to creator.

## **Conclusion**

The concept of the moral value inherent in boundary-crossing may help explain many of the trends seen as the era of digital media, the Internet, and telecommunications continues to progress. The ability to shift between the various audience roles (such as passive reader, discourse community, public or fandom) and even creative roles allows individuals to seek out communities where they receive compensation—in the sense of companionship, feedback, or even just a venue to share their thoughts—on different subjects in different ways. The creator who talks directly with the audience may be seen as having more moral value than one who remains distant. In some communities, the reverse may be true, and the creator may increase value by reinforcing the boundaries. When it comes to fanon, some creators may be praised for acknowledging and supporting these works, such as when George Lucas expressed pleasure at some fan films based on *Star Wars*. Other fans who practiced making fanon, such as author Cassandra Clare, who became an “official” creator by passing through the traditional gatekeepers of finding agents and a publisher, may receive ready-made audiences and fans from their previous communities, transforming moral value into monetary compensation.

The exchange of value is another expression of the rules of a genre of communication or community formation: after all, what is a community without some level of consensus about which behaviors have worth and which should be punished? These generic limitations provide a



measure by which people can identify themselves as someone who understands at least some of the rules, who knows how to communicate, who can derive value from interacting with others with similar knowledge. This valued activity is most noticeable in a fandom, where engaged audience members are passionate enough to actively voice their opinion of an individual's contributions, be they responses to creative works or fanon of their own. Each of these interdependent ideas functions because the groups involved and those who study them identify boundaries that form the shape of individual roles and actions.

I have shown that these boundaries are far from being rigid social or prescriptive strictures which present serious challenges to people involved. To either the individual experiencing a work with no special interest or a person who wishes to be part of a public sphere, taking action based on or in response to a work, these boundaries exist only to help us discuss what roles each one is filling. A boundary, a description of social actions, a genre, a moral economy, are all tools we can use to understand how we act within the creative cycle. As I have stated before, when used in this way, reflecting the complications of these concepts, boundaries are valuable to the fandom of rhetorical scholars.

It is only when we try to assume that boundaries are more than these useful labels that problems arise. As Miller warned, when we consider these boundaries to be something like solid walls, we are turning them into "closed classifications," which means we "sacrifice the diversity and dynamism of rhetorical practice to some theoretical *a priori*" (154). We set out with our walled gardens and put the practices we observe into these spaces, even if they better fit in other spaces, or between those spaces. Perceiving boundaries as permeable and the practices they

describe as fluid helps us see what is actually happening, not only in the realm of creators and audiences, but in society at large. In the next chapter, I will look at how new media technologies and permeable boundaries inspire creativity in new ways.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Creativity, Information Technology, and New Media**

Before we can properly appreciate the contemporary state of information technology, especially as it is expressed in a collection of tools and communications that we refer to as “new media,” it is necessary to examine the role technology has always played in allowing us to express our creativity. Once we have seen how new media has come into existence (and found a working definition for what it is), then we will examine its differences from traditional media and how these affect both the genres of the creative process and the audiences of the works and the ways in which they interact with creators. I will examine how digital tools can allow people to exercise their own creativity. Then I will analyze the ways in which lowered barriers to distribution reduce both the importance of gatekeeper audiences but permit more creative risks. Next will be a discussion of the tension between different standards of commercial and creative success often associated with new media and traditional media forms, and how that tension can actually encourage new creative efforts, referring to the story of the band Pomplamoose to demonstrate the point. I will also examine the case of Felicia Day, an actress and writer whose career illustrates these principles in conjunction. Finally, I will study the case of musician Amanda Palmer, who has recently called on her audience to fund her directly, and the implications this has both for new media interactivity and the positive and negative consequences these connections may have for the artist.

## **Creativity Through Technology**

The creative impulse has always been shaped by the technology used to express our ideas. Franz Boas, in his exploration of all kinds of “primitive art,” has described our desire to make creative works as “the craving to produce things that are felt as satisfying through their form,” a statement that encompasses any given genre and medium (9). In his study, Boas shows that the tools and methods used form a kind of technical process, saying, “The manufactures of man the world over prove that the ideal forms [of esthetic value] are based essentially on standards developed by *expert technicians*...” (emphasis mine). He goes on to say, “Form, and creation by our own activities are essential features of art,” which, he insists, “must be made by some kind of human activity or by some product of human activity” (12). In essence, the need to create art requires humans at every stage to utilize the technology to express information—in this case, aesthetics, emotions, and ideas—even in its most primitive forms. Yet access to this technology has historically been the province of only a few, as Dennis Baron shows: “Each new literacy begins with a restricted communication function and is only available to a small number of initiates.” He describes these initiates as a “priestly” class, until the information technology becomes cheap enough that the larger population can make use of it. “Only then does the technology come into its own,” Baron says, “no longer imitating the previous forms” but making it possible for audiences to “creat[e] new forms and new possibilities for communication” (424).

This is borne out through even a cursory study of the development of art, such as Marcia Pointon and Lucy Petlz’s *History of Art*. This text, and others like it, shows how artists used technology even in prehistory, even though it took the form of unsophisticated tools such as

simple brushes, sticks, rocks, and dyes, to produce rough paintings, worked beads, and knotted strings. Oral storytelling allowed the transmission of cultural concepts, ideals, and a sort of history, but these works were modified (or created) on the spot, modified for the present audience, and were essentially local phenomena. Barry Powell explains that the advent of writing was transformative not only because of its power to describe our inner thoughts, but because it allowed the transmission of those thoughts to other people according to rules created by the needs of the culture and people who were using the technology. Powell says, “Writing is the most important technology in the history of the human species, except how to make fire. Writing is the lens through which literate peoples see the world” (25). In the transformative sense, the stories that had been spoken, danced, or portrayed in drawings or sculptures could now be encoded and captured in what Baron describes as the earliest forms of “communication technolog[ies],” such as clay, stone, papyrus, or pencil and paper. Discussing the same ideas that Powell does, Baron further explains that there has always been a conflict between the old and new forms of sharing information: “Of course the first writing technology was writing itself. Just like the telegraph and the computer, writing itself was once an innovation strongly resisted by traditionalists because it was unnatural and untrustworthy” (426).

One reason these technologies may not be trusted was that they could transform a work from an immediate transaction between creator (or performer) and audience to an encoded format that could be conveyed across long distances and years without being significantly altered—one of the earliest examples of the distribution of a work to an audience that was not immediately present. Carl Sagan has described the unsettling power of this information

technology as a kind of magic: “But one glance at it and you’re inside the mind of another person, maybe somebody dead for thousands of years. Across the millennia, an author is speaking clearly and silently inside your head, directly to you” ("The Persistence of Memory"). One benefit of these innovations was the preservation of social mores and the common mythology represented in these stories allowed the spread of human thought and broadened the scope of personal interaction. Yet as a consequence, the ability to transmit information across distances and the years created a forced separation between creator and audience. There was a real disconnection, the raising of a conceptual barrier between artist and audience member, even as it became possible for a large and diverse audience to share the thoughts of the abstracted author.

Every major change in communication technologies has both extended the reach of a creator and imposed boundaries between artist and those who viewed or heard those works. This was especially true when our information technology had such sharp limits on what it could convey (a concept I am referring to as “bandwidth,” as the word applies to the smallest amount of space in which a strong signal, or idea, can be transmitted). Pointon and Peltz refer often to these limits in conveying data about works and their creators. Clay tablets only included their content, with the names of scribes or speakers nowhere to be found. A glance at a mural or a sculpture rarely revealed the name of the artist. Even the most complex songs, passed from musician to musician, were not accompanied by the name of the composer. Another boundary between creator and audience came in the frangible media being used: paint wears away over time, clay can break and crumble, as does papyrus and paper over time. Ink fades, documents are

lost, and memories are unreliable, especially when ideas are conveyed through something as slippery as words.

Even when the information technologies could be relied upon to last (or at least, be refreshed with backups, such as scribes copying ancient texts), and the data about authorship and other contextual clues were sometimes preserved, the audiences could only respond directly when they were in person. As James Porter indicates, while reviewing the meaning of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, in the interaction between audiences and artists (in this case, rhetors), the audience had "distinctive characteristics that should influence the speaker's approach" (17). Yet if the creator was not physically present, the audience was not seen as able to respond, especially not through the same channels used to convey information. Karen Ross and Virginia Nightingale discuss how art historians and theorists often discuss the way traditional media viewed audiences interacting with the art, by "being immobilized or inactivated by stationary interfaces (the printed page; the film screen; the television set; the computer screen)" (14). These limits, the strictures on response and interaction, force the audiences to be inactive and unresponsive.

James Anderson refers to this as the "communication contract," which only exists when two or more people may engage in "the mutual accomplishment of meaning." He further states, "No such relation exists between producer and auditor in the industrial production of symbolic products" (76). What he means is that when creators and audiences are unable to interact due to barriers of time, distance, or other barriers that limit bandwidth, the ability for an audience member to respond meaningfully is almost negligible. Among other boundaries placed around the possibility of interaction is that the audience only rarely had access to the same technology,

and related skills, required to make meaning in the same, or even related, genres as the original work. A person moved by a beautiful painting may not have sufficient talent or skill to sketch a simple flower, much less express themselves in the same way the creator did. Even if the audience members possess the ability to create their own art, they may not have access to the tools, or have the time, to create their own works. While appreciation may be shared through word-of-mouth, perhaps even letters or later reviews, the gulfs of time, distance, and language presented another of those boundaries between creators and audiences. The conversation only exists when both sides exert themselves to bridge the wide gaps in communication.

The improvement in information technologies has had several effects. Not only did these advances make it easier to distribute the created work (or facsimiles of that work), but each one gave audiences the ability to respond to these works in their own ways, from written discussions to attempts to create their own art. As shown by several texts, such as Marilyn Stokstad's *Art History* (2011), printing presses helped spread literacy and made it possible for books to appear in more places than ever before; cheaper paper and better pens meant that more individuals could try their hands at writing, send letters or compose texts about their reactions to the works, and either to send these to the creators or share their ideas with the engaged audience. Photography meant that more people could see the great works of art, and could show off their own works. They could also make their own, completely novel, forms of art in the new genre and medium of film. Radio began as a passive medium, but as the technology became cheaper and easier to acquire, more people made their own shows and could spend more time using this medium to permit conversations. As these technologies have shaped creator/audience interactions, new



media has changed the nature of these interactions in dramatic ways. The next sections look at how current information technology allows for an unprecedented surge in creativity and interaction.

### **Media: Traditional Becomes New**

One of the biggest questions in studies of new media is, as Martin Lister has put it, “What is ‘new’ about ‘new media’?” Every time there has been a shift in information technologies, the ways that we communicate experience periods of transition between old and new forms, times with “minority audiences, media that escape easy regulation, hybrid genres and ‘intertexts’ etc” (10). This means that the term “new” is not as accurate as we might wish it to be; everything was once new, and some things that are under the banner of “new” may just be traditional media with a different delivery mechanism. This period of transition and hybrid genres makes it difficult to study the intersection of past and current, much less the future. Despite the difficulty in narrowing down a term, Lister has suggested several characteristics that distinguish the technologies, genres, and methods of interaction that we currently refer to as “new media.” This includes the assumptions of Internet communication, which is commonly seen as an asynchronous, rapid, world-spanning, highly accessible virtual space where discourse communities—some long-term and with large numbers, some no more than a few people who speak for a short while—may form around almost any conceivable topic. Another complication in defining the term is that in many cases, new media is often created through putting traditional media content into digital formats and then uploading them to the Internet. As Lister explains,

So, while a person using the term “new media” may have one thing in mind (the Internet), others may mean something else (digital TV, new ways of imaging the body, a virtual environment, a computer game, or a blog). All use the same term to refer to a range of phenomena. In doing so they each claim the status of “medium” for what they have in mind and they all borrow the glamorous connotations of “newness.” It is a term with broad cultural resonance rather than a narrow technician or specialist application. (12)

I combine the concepts of digital delivery of traditional media, games, social media, websites, and other online forms into the overarching term, “new media.”

While new media in itself does not require a social dimension—solitary activities such as creating video clips with FinalCut Pro is one way to work with new media, as is writing text on a computer, or composing music with GarageBand—the distribution of these creative works involves discursive interaction at some point. When the digital work is shared, it usually reaches its audience through the Internet. A link or file can be passed around the audience members, as described by Nancy Baym, Henry Jenkins, Lister, Ross and Nightingale, and many others, and some significant fraction of these people will shift from passive reception to active engagement. This audience can share their thoughts about the work with other interested individuals, which might be seen by unintended audiences (as described by Jayasinhji Jhala or Barbara Tomlinson), who normally would not seek out these kinds of art on their own. Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford describe the problem of not always being able to knowingly choose one’s audiences online in terms of neglect or inability to monitor every action we take online, saying that people can “easily forget that when they post something on the Web they may encounter unwanted or future

audiences—such as an employer checking their Facebook entries or a researcher checking on their use of his or her scholarly work” (17). However, the unwanted and unintended audiences are not always a negative, because they may allow people to stumble on works they might have never known about before. Henry Jenkins suggests that these audiences, both intended and unintended, may then share the works, and conversations about them may spread quickly along multiple nodes of discussion to various audiences based on “[c]ollective decisions people make about whether to pass along media texts” (*Spreadable Media*, 12).

In contrast, “traditional media” as represented by Jenkins, Lister, Nightingale, Ross and others is associated with the genres and formats that have been common for the past several decades if not longer. For example, printed text (and sometimes images) such as stories, novels, letters, articles are usually bound in some form and have to be physically located, opened, and read page by page. Radio is another traditional medium, over a century old at this point, and includes a signal that either carries informative or persuasive programs such as news updates or shows where a pundit offers his opinion on a wide variety of topics, sports broadcasts where the listener can follow along with the action, or music of almost any genre, chosen by a disc jockey or program director. Individual art pieces, such as paintings, sculptures, or photographs, are other forms of traditional media. Television and movies are also seen a traditional media, although they have complicated heavily by the advent of new media, not only in interaction with fans but in the ways that audiences can remix video clips or create their own. Where traditional media broadcast works to large groups at one time, new media focuses on “narrow-casting,” sending specific content to individuals or small groups with common interests. Where once an

individual's audience experience was removed from all but a few other audience members, such as a conversation with another reader, new media technologies allow both members of the audience to read a work online and respond immediately with the same device, sometimes as a comment directly under the work in question. Multiple other audience members can see these comments and respond to them, as well as to the original work. This transition in communication is one of the most profound changes from traditional to new media. Where once it required effort to offer a reaction to works, now a reaction can be as simple as pushing a button—and possibly reflect as little thought behind the response.

### **Digital Tools, Making Art Possible**

The tools required for new media creativity are easier to obtain and learn to use than those of traditional creative works. Many scholars, such as Jeffrey Bardzell, Jason Ohler, Frank Rose, Leslie Rule, and Ben Shneiderman have examined the effects of these tools on creation. Ohler describes the story of Kim, a 6th-grade student who tells a personal narrative not just through text, but through images, voice-overs, and titles to explain the story of her family's move to the United States from China, and the problems they faced. What is most notable about this anecdote is the creativity Kim exercised in making it: "Kim created practically every element of this digital story. She took most of the photographs and scanned in older ones, created artwork, mapped and storyboarded the story, wrote the script, narrated the story, and created titles and credits. She even produced the soundtrack, using music composition software geared toward nonmusicians" (1). Ohler explains that this kind of artistic story-telling was not something a

young student could expect to create previously, because the tools and access to them were too expensive or difficult to come by. However, digital tools reduce these costs significantly.

Shneiderman also looks at the many ways digital tools can aid creativity even for adult scholars, scientists, businesspeople, and other professionals:

For example, we already know that an accelerator for creative efforts is the capacity to locate, study, review, and revise existing projects and performances, such as open source software modules, Web page source code, architectural drawings, or music scores. The Web has done much to make existing projects and performances accessible and search engines like Google have helped innovators to quickly find what they want. (22-3).

Now let us apply Bardzell's three key elements for examining creativity: "*Agency*. Who or what causes creative activity? ... *Support and scaffolds*. What characteristics, external to acts of creativity, appear to support them? ... *Artifacts*. What kinds of artifacts are particularly understood or marked as the result of creativity?" (14). Clearly, Shneiderman's discussion of being able to look at the Internet for inspiration, instruction, and examples of creativity provides the "support and scaffolds" for creative action, while the "artifacts" are found everywhere online, from "software modules" to "music scores."

While there is a concern about the ability of certain groups to gain access to digital tools, the spread of computers, especially easily portable devices, means that it is possible to find a device fully capable of recording and editing video, composing music, combining still images, writing text to go with these elements, and then posting everything to the Internet in the hands of people in almost any country. According to a recent report by the Pew Research Center, many

people around the world have access to cell phones and use them share texts, take pictures or “make or receive payments.” While smartphones are still relatively rare devices, in countries such as Lebanon, Chile, Jordan and China, more than a third of all cell phone users own smartphones. Those who can access the Internet will do so regularly: “Across the 24 emerging and developing nations surveyed, the percentage of people who are online varies widely. In six nations, half or more use the internet, at least occasionally” (1). This means that young people in Turkey or South Africa are as likely to be making use of the same tools as any budding technocrat in California or digital artist in the United Kingdom.

The cost of access is not trivial, but it has been reduced and is continuing to drop over time. There have been several experiments in countries such as Cameroon, as outlined by Richard Heeks and Andrew Robinson’s examination of the project to put the inexpensive Raspberry Pi computers in the hands of schoolchildren. While those who can now use computers are not always experts, it is possible to learn how to draw finger-paintings on a program like Fingerpaint Magic or Sketchpad in the space of a few minutes. With computers and word processors, especially on mobile platforms like laptops, tablets, or even smartphones, anyone who wants to write down thoughts and stories may do so—and have spelling and grammar checked as they go, if they wish. Would-be musicians can not only find programs that can emulate musical instruments, but can watch instructional videos online to learn how to play those instruments, record and mix them, and find free sites where they can find audiences.

All of these possibilities lower one of the barriers to creativity in traditional formats: the difficulty in finding training in those media. Any visual artist knows that sketchpads, pencils, and

paints can be expensive, and can take a long time to learn how to properly care for and use. An easel, canvas, set of brushes, palette, and full range of oil paints can cost roughly two hundred dollars for a cheap set at hobby shops in a small town in Kansas. An iPad art app such as ArtRage costs about two dollars, and many free versions can be found with relatively inexpensive upgrades to fully-featured versions. It should be noted that these digital canvases can be erased or modified without limit. The supplies of colored pixels never run dry. The cheapest traditional format to get into remains writing, with need for little else but paper and a writing utensil, but even so transferring words from paper to a format that can be published still requires several steps that are folded together into the use of a word processor. And at every step, there is the Internet to offer instruction, encouragement, advice, feedback, and tutorials to better develop one's skills. It has always been possible for traditional creators to teach themselves their art, but new media simplifies the process and expands access to creative tools.

### **Internet Distribution, Allowing People to Be Artists**

The value that the ease of distribution of new media has to creativity cannot be understated. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, the gatekeeper role of editors and publishers in traditional media not only reduces the number of works that find audiences, but it can have a chilling effect on those who seek to be creative. Baym, Jenkins, Livingstone, and others have all indicated that at some levels of audience engagement, those who pass judgment about the quality or acceptability of texts sometimes do so for reasons not related to quality, but specific standards within given communities that do not account for the possibility of finding new, different, or unexpected audiences, or for the potential shift in what an audience's tastes

may be in the future. While some individuals do not mind the idea that their creations will find sharply limited audiences of friends and family, many others are discouraged by the thought that their fiction will not make it out of a slush pile, they will never find an editor or an agent, might not be published, might not sell very well, and that future works will be even more difficult to distribute. This is true of all forms of artistic endeavor—the idea that an artist needs a “real job” or to find a “realistic goal” is pervasive, especially in industrialized nations. A Google search for the term “discouraged artists” gives over two million hits, most of them links to websites offering advice about how to deal with rejection from the gatekeepers of creativity. Many scholars, such as Bardzell, Jenkins, Peter Levine, Marva Solomon, and Ohler have examined the sense of “freedom” that new media provides, showing that the ease of production lowers the stakes for those who want to create art. Why not try to make art if the cost is so low? Once the work is created, why not find ways that have similar ease of access to share it? These points of distribution may entirely bypass traditional gatekeepers, allowing the audiences themselves to make the decision about a work’s value.

Another way that new media encourages creativity is in this ability to circulate the works with little effort. It is simple for a creator, or audience member, with Internet access to find well-known online communities such as YouTube, Fanfiction.net, DeviantArt, Soundcloud, Bandcamp, Renderosity, or Vimeo, or niche-focused sites like Blip.tv, TED.com, or Pandora, in order to share their works. Each of these online communities has built-in audiences who are well-disposed to finding works that are not necessarily supported by traditional publishers. This atmosphere of openness encourages people to try their hands at creativity, from the simplest



additions, to established templates, such as joke memes, to complex amateur works that lead to professional efforts that allow the creators to support themselves. One example of this is Freddie Wong's *RocketJump* films, which started as a pair of film school graduates making effects-laden short videos on YouTube, and has progressed to a professional production company creating the well-received *Video Game High School*, which is being distributed on Netflix as well as YouTube and the company's own site. Another example is Troy Wagner and Joseph DeLage's webseries *Marble Hornets*, which picked up the image of a creature known as the Slenderman from an online forum and has spun their efforts into three seasons on YouTube, DVD sales, a video game, and a deal to make traditional movie. There are many success stories in new media that exist with the backdrop of the stories of thousands of other people who created something without any notable success. Yet in a larger pool of creators who can share their works and receive rapid and wide-ranging audience feedback, there is more room for successes and more creation.

### **New vs. Traditional Media: A Dynamic Tension**

These notions of success can vary between the communities surrounding digitally-created, Internet-distributed works and those that follow traditional media. Many people perceive a difference in kind between being played on the radio and having printed books in bookstores or being sold through Amazon, as opposed to being "self-published" or distributed through the same sites that anyone can access or use for little or no cost. Even when the creative work has some measure of perceived authenticity, such as a series produced by Netflix, the method of distribution comes with a pre-conceived notion of quality. This perception can have a profound

effect on the creative process. Where commercial success is often associated with traditional formats that often rely on reaching large audiences and making profits, success in the new media environment may mean several different things, from how often a work is talked about, popularity within specific (and sometimes small) communities, or the intimate connection between creators and audiences. For example, the band OK Go became popular thanks in part to quirky videos posted on YouTube, such as their famous dance on treadmills for the song “Here It Goes Again.” Yet in an article published in *The Guardian*, music critic Christopher Weingarten observes: “There’s a disconnect that no one talks about. ‘Viral success’ does not always equal ‘actual success.’” In Weingarten’s formulation, “actual success” refers to sales of their albums, even though the band is still popular and generates its own revenue through the Internet. “Now on their own, OK Go are gunning to get as many clicks as possible. Without a label, they’re free to capture every fraction-of-a-penny per stream that YouTube offers” (Weingarten). While not every creator cares about “success,” the same ideas that explain why creators bypass the chilling effects of gatekeepers (see above) apply here as well. As Peter Levine says, “One important motivator is the belief that one can reach other people: an audience.” It is one thing to say that a creator can post any work online, but that does not assume that the work will be seen. “We communicate in a public voice in order to address someone, and it matters *who* listens. It is discouraging to build something if no one comes,” Levine explains (129). For many creators, the attention of an audience equates with success, as Jenkins shows with his analysis of moral economies. However, there is another form of success more valued by traditional media, which

is the economic costs and profits from the work, as well as finding ever-growing audiences in order to give (sell) more works in the future.

Many new media creators claim to not care about “mainstream” success, as evidenced by Jack Conte, a solo musician, music producer, and one half of the popular group Pomplamoose, which found its audience on YouTube, with over four hundred thousand subscribers to their channel and millions of views on some songs. For example, the band has over eight million views of their cover of Michael Jackson’s “Beat It” (“PomplamooseMusic”). This sort of attention is exactly the sort of audience-created “moral” value that can be enough to motivate many creators. As Conte explained in one in-depth interview for a music industry site, “We got offered record deals from every major label that was around at the time. All four basically offered [to sign] us and talked with us about what we wanted to do and we said ‘no’ to everybody because we thought that was a bad approach.” Yet, this standard of attention equaling success in a moral economy does not always translate to the sort of financial success that many artists seek and traditional publishers are meant to generate. In the same discussion, Conte admits that, “So YouTube seemed like a really incredible opportunity, but as good of an insight as that was, it’s not repeatable. It isn’t. So I don’t know how to make it in the music industry and either does Nataly” (Rudden). In these comments lies the idea that success still relies on reaching larger audiences, being accepted by an industry, and making money from one’s work. However, if a creator does not find this success and if the perception is, as Levine puts it, that “no one will come,” that can discourage new creative efforts. Even though many online communities place different moral values on works, some creators will believe that their efforts, which do meet

traditional standards of success, are not good enough to “make it,” as Conte says. And if a creator cannot “make it,” why try to be creative in the first place?

As with so many aspects of new media, this tension between traditional, commercial success and the success of finding an audience who appreciates the work—but not enough to support the creator financially, which often happens in online communities that are based on moral economies as discussed in the previous chapter—is not new. Famous authors in history, such as Harper Lee, Margaret Mitchell, and J.D. Salinger have been reluctant to publish more than once, worrying that the intrusion of the marketplace would diminish the quality of their work. Rock and roll in the 1950s and ’60s was notable for the rise of the amateurs who become professionals, the teenage kids who managed to acquire instruments, play in a garage for a while, and then play some local gigs and, if they are lucky, they would get noticed by music producers and get to cut records and appear on the Billboard lists of top album sales. Punk music had a similar trajectory in the 1970s, with more of a raw, uncrafted and unproduced culture, and yet the punk music scene was known because of those few bands that managed to break out of the underground clubs and house parties and end up being played on the more daring radio stations, or tour in progressively nicer clubs around the world.

There is a tension in any new genre of creation—or in this case, the new media tools, distribution, and genres that can only exist in digital formats—that comes with the concept that the genre is unique, cutting-edge, and not something that previous generations can entirely grasp. One part of this tension lies in these notions of what “success” actually means, but another part comes from resistance to the mediums through which the new art is distributed. Kathryn Zickuhr

and Aaron Smith reported for the Pew Internet Research Project that one in five Americans still do not use the Internet: “Among adults who do not use the internet, almost half have told us that the main reason they don’t go online is because they don’t think the internet is relevant to them. Most have never used the internet before, and don’t have anyone in their household who does” (2). When people do not see how new media is relevant, then they do not see how the creative works and the online notions of success can be relevant, either. After all, traditional media typically shows a finished product, polished and crafted to be acceptable to the widest possible audiences. Yet in new media, as in the older genres that were once new such as punk rock, there has always been a desire for a work to be “authentic.” The audience often wants to see the raw effort that went into making a product, in order to develop the intimate connection between a creator and the audience members. This raw quality, the idea that the creator is not so different than the audience, adds a level of excitement to the work.

Some videos from Pomplamoose possess a charming nature of seeing a couple of talented musicians playing music in a small room in their apartment, cutting together videos shot from the recording sessions that show instruments strewn about, editing software on computers, and occasionally messy floors and minor errors in recording. These videos are often followed by a small clip of Conte and his partner, Nataly Dawn, speaking directly to the camera in their kitchen or living room, adding to the overall impression that are inviting in the people who are watching their videos, as if the audience at large were close friends dropping by to visit. They not only seem like good musicians, but people who are truly living up to the ideal of the self-propelled artists, and any of us in the audience could be like they are. One comment from user “keepshow

keeper,” expresses a common view: “[T]hose two people...are very obviously much more talented musicians than all of those artificial products dominating the charts” (“Michael Jackson - Beat It”). Yet in other videos, especially ones with a different sound and official sponsors, fans are less receptive, such as Dan Dickinson’s comment, “I just thought it was alright [sic]. I just hope the rest of album isn’t like this. Not very soulful, very artsy and plasticity. sorry [sic]” (“Like a Million”). The band’s effort to reach mainstream success through being paid by a sponsor negatively affects the new media economy of audience acceptance. When the band hopes to please their audience without expecting a large amount of money, then they have to consider notions of the cost required to keep making music and posting it online for free, as Conte has said.

Pomplamoose makes a fraction of a penny for every pageview on YouTube. They also sell their songs through various sources such as iTunes and Bandcamp, and have gone on tours. Their music is available on streaming music sites Pandora and Spotify. The band signed a deal to create songs for a short ad campaign for Hyundai Motors, and appeared in the video advertisements for these cars (Kiley). In their individual projects, both Conte and Dawn have looked for ways to record traditional albums and be played on the radio. To this end, Dawn created a campaign on the crowdfunding site Kickstarter to fund her professionally-produced album, and then caused a minor controversy by signing with a small record label to finish the production, fund her tour, and distribute the music (Peckham). Once again, they are trying to negotiate the tension between the needs of creative fulfillment and commercial success, further complicated by the primary way they can make a living is through the traditional formats of live

tours and selling albums. This tension has taken its toll; both Conte and Dawn's solo output, which is not as commercially successful as their band, is minimal. Dawn produced one solo album in the five years the band has been together and has barely broken even on the costs to do so. In the same timeframe, Conte has yet to release more than a few extended play (EP) collections. Pomplamoose, meanwhile, released three albums, three EPs, and dozens of videos. The commercial success of the band has led to more creative output on that end.

Part of the controversy about the band is the same one that is found in many forms of creative endeavor—when Pomplamoose agreed to produce advertisements, they were accused of “selling out,” of looking for a financial windfall rather than just working on their music. When Dawn signed with a label, this was seen as another betrayal, this time of the do-it-yourself ethos with which Pomplamoose was associated. It was assumed that Dawn's creative vision would be compromised to fit the label's commercial goals. Dawn's Kickstarter success did not prove sufficient to meet the costs of her album, but her audience did not know about these financial issues. Dawn says that this led to misunderstandings and harsh feedback: “If I'd just made the album and given it to my backers and not gotten the whole label involved, there would have been a lot less negative sentiment” (Peckham). Her attachment to a music label was seen as going against the very ideas Conte described in the interview, of saying “no” to the labels because “that was a bad approach.” There's a tension between the mainstream, traditional-format success that allows the band to own a home and support themselves and the mystique that surrounds so much of new media of the small-scale, intimate, creators speaking directly to audience.

That tension has often been described, for example, as part of Jenkins' discussion of the "moral" or "gift" economy and how it characterizes new media. The idea that creative works can be shared, and shared alike, taking on value only in the most nebulous sense of the respect of fellow members of a community, is an alluring one. As discussed in the previous chapter, Jenkins describes this as a "moral economy": "The relations between ... contemporary media producers and audiences—reflect the perceived moral and social value of these transactions. All participants need to feel the parties involved are behaving in a morally appropriate fashion" (51-2). However, many moral economies have to struggle with the fact that moral value does not help a creator make a living. It is this tension that sparks so much energy in discussions about a cheaply-made, freely-shared creative work and its quality. The community may find a webvideo to be entertaining, or a fanfiction or original story to be well-written and worth sharing, but many discussions lead to the question of whether the creator could make money from their efforts. In some conversations, this idea of "making money" is sometimes summed up as "doing this for real."

"For real," in this case, means that the new media effort will be taken away from its original context and its moral value translated to financial worth. The creative work then is no longer just a gift to a community, but is a vehicle for the somewhat impersonal calculation of the exchange of money. When a creator uses new media to find success, there is almost always an argument among the discourse community about whether that success cheapens or reduces the quality of the work. After all, these creations no longer are mere labors of love, but a way to



make people—usually the same people who first appreciated the creator’s efforts when they were free—pay for the right to appreciate more creations.

This tension is not necessarily a detriment to either creators or audiences. In fact, it might feed into the ill-defined “spark” that some works have, the ones that stand out and feel to audiences as if they might appeal to more people than just those in a narrow community. There is a tug-of-war between the initial community audience that had thin barriers between themselves and the creators, and the larger audience who discovered the works later and might not have been present to observe the creator’s initial struggles. The sense that this creator is “moving on” or “getting too big” means that something exciting is happening, that a part of one’s communal experience is being appreciated by strangers, by the larger world. That traditional, mainstream success informs and energizes the efforts of thousands of amateurs who would like to be professionals.

### **A Case Study of a New Media Creator: Felicia Day**

To examine these characteristics of new media, from the creativity enabled by cheap and easily accessible digital tools, to the permeability of barriers to distribution, to the dynamic, inspirational tension between new and traditional media, I have chosen as a case study Felicia Day, actress, writer, musician, and producer. Day has achieved some measure of traditional success as part of her career trajectory, but is still mostly known for her new media work. Her story is told in several interviews and articles. In 2007, Day was like many other actresses living in Los Angeles, struggling to find parts. Her biggest role to date had been as a minor character in crowd scenes during the final season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in 2004, one of several young

girls referred to as “Potential Slayers.” She had a handful of lines in the show, which was more than some of her fellow “Potential” actresses. However, this part did not lead to bigger and better roles. She supported herself with advertisements, working as an extra or other bit parts in movies or television, just enough to pay the bills. “I became extremely unhappy,” Day told [the audience at an event at The Wharton School]. I’m paying my bills, I’m making a lot of money. But I’m working, maybe, one time a month” (“Day on Creativity.”).

One way Day dealt with her depression was to play video games, specifically the Massively Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Game (MMORPG, or MMO) *World of Warcraft*. Day says, “I played online games for eight hours a day. ... I spent years not doing anything because I was inhibited. I didn’t know if people would approve of what I was doing” (Mastrapa). Eventually, in order to break out of her shell and to find parts that she would be happier with, she wrote a script for a show she would like to act in, about socially awkward people who mostly interact through a *Warcraft*-like MMO. After several rejections by traditional producers, she recruited friends from improvisational groups and self-funded a couple of episodes of her show, and used the idea of webcams set up on the computers to show each character in turn. She found to her surprise that it was much simpler to get the cameras, film segments, and edit them than she thought it would be. While the cost was not negligible, she was able to fund the first few episodes by herself, despite the high-quality production values—an example of how the cost of digital tools allowed her to express her creativity.

The first episode of *The Guild* (named after the term for groups that form inside the gamespace in order to play together) was released on YouTube in 2007. It was discussed on

social media common to the sort of fans who enjoyed those kinds of games—which had nine million registered players that year—as well as audiences who defined themselves as “gamer geeks.” The success of the first couple of episodes led to her using social media to ask her online audience for financial help in making the next video. In time, the computer software company Microsoft noticed the popularity of her show and gave her a deal to pay for the production of new shows as long as they could show the episodes on their XBox Live entertainment channels (“Day on Creativity”).

Almost by accident, Day went from small-time new media producer to one of the biggest successes in the still-young industry of webvideos and webseries. However, as Day herself says, the gap in between success in new media and traditional formats was rather large. Soon after *The Guild* became popular, Day was asked whether the popularity of the webseries has led to more parts in traditional shows, to which she answered, “It’s very funny. No. It’s a little frustrating. Having done this for two years, I’ve gotten used to the fact that it’s not going to cross over” (Mastrapa).

While producing *The Guild*, Day and her cast also made a small number of musical videos about the show and the characters. The first of these videos, “Do You Wanna Date My Avatar,” currently has over twenty-three million views on YouTube. The song’s release on iTunes was highly successful, about which Day says, “When our music video hit the top 10 on iTunes over all the label stuff, I have to admit that I was definitely heartened. I do like breaking the common patterns of behavior” (Mastrapa). She won awards for her work promoting the webseries, and appeared in a few traditional cable shows thanks to her work. She was also cast in

recurring roles on network shows such as the CW's *Supernatural* and SyFy's *Eureka*. At the time, she was criticized for "abandoning" the fans of *The Guild*, even though she was barely making a living from the show despite its relative success online—a tension between new media "success" in terms of moral value as opposed to the traditional "success" of making profits. YouTube then offered Day funding to create a web "channel," a small-scale production company that would put together several related webseries and promote them. She founded Geek and Sundry, a channel that still has over nine hundred thousand subscribers and currently produces six shows on a regular basis (and fifteen more in the past). Day continues to split her efforts between her new media "empire," as she mockingly refers to it, and traditional acting pursuits.

Reflecting on her current career, straddling the line between traditional and new media, Day says:

To me, it's so funny, because in my world, I'm always struggling. I'm always the underdog. I'm always the person that's going to be passed over. I don't know if that's something that I hold on to from my past as the actor who was rejected a lot, but at the same time, as somebody who lives in Hollywood and works in Hollywood as an actor still and works on the web, and still to this day, people in mainstream Hollywood don't really understand or acknowledge the web as anywhere near equal or on par with what traditional Hollywood makes. There is, not a snobbery, but a lack of understanding and credence given to people who work on the web, even to this day. That mentality accompanies me with everything I do because I still have my foot in a world that doesn't see what I do on the web as something legitimate. ("Interview: Felicia Day")

This struggle to prove herself helps spur Day's current and future efforts to be creative. She is "the underdog," and therefore must work as hard or harder than others in order to prove that her creations are "on par" with the standard content. While the new media environment allows her to have the success she has enjoyed, the tension she faces means that she cannot relax. Her only option, as with many who work in the new media environment, is to continue being creative.

### **A Case Study in Creator-Audience Interaction: Amanda Palmer**

While Felicia Day provides a useful study in the ways that new media tools and distribution enables novel forms of creative expression, the other side of new media is interaction with audiences and fans. New media, specifically the type known as "social media," allows for direct contact between creators and audiences. Amanda Palmer is a musician, performance artist, and actress who spends significant amount of time seeking out this interaction. Her official website [AmandaPalmer.net](http://AmandaPalmer.net) lists among her various forms of online outlets Twitter, where she makes dozens of posts, retweets, and conversations every day; a Facebook page she updates at least once every few days; a Tumblr site where she puts random ideas, pictures, and things she has found on the Internet; her YouTube page where she posts music videos, interviews, promos, and live performances; and an Instagram photo feed that she uses every few days. In addition to all of this, she also has blog on her website that she uses for long-form, sometimes rambling, posts exposing her fears and hopes to her audience. She encourages commentary (and criticism) in the comments for these posts, and often curates and shares some comments in other areas, such as Twitter. She publicly praises her fans, and relies on them for assistance at almost every stage of her tours, and in her famous TED talk, she discusses asking them for help finding places

to stay and practice space, arranging side performances she calls “ninja gigs,” and helping to publicize her shows. In exchange, almost every post she makes on one of her social media outlets received several responses, some from people who want to tell her that they love her, to people who are criticizing something she has just posted or has done publicly.

Between Palmer's website, interviews about her career, and her social media feeds, she has provided an extensive recounting of her career. Palmer worked for years as a “living statue,” performing as “The Eight-Foot Tall Bride,” in several venues, forming her initial ideas about interactions with audiences at the time. This experience formed the initial basis for her TED talk about forming intimate connections with her audience, if only for a moment: “So I had the most profound encounters with people, especially lonely people who looked like they hadn’t talked to anyone in weeks, and we would get this beautiful moment of prolonged eye contact being allowed in a city street, and we would sort of fall in love a little bit” (“Art of Asking”). After meeting drummer and performer Brian Viglione in 2000, she formed the band The Dresden Dolls with him. In 2002, their self-titled album received some fame, including the song “Coin-Operated Boy,” which was played on the radio, in clubs, and shared through the Internet. She also produced solo efforts with the same company. However, after a dispute with her record company involving body image issues as well as musical direction, Palmer sought to leave her contract and make her own path. It was a long struggle, involving pleas to her fanbase to illegally download her previous albums to make Roadrunner Productions, her company, want to end her contract. She also produced her own album, *Who Killed Amanda Palmer?*, which included an art book project featuring photos of herself in various poses faking death, with short text blurbs

written by noted fantasy author Neil Gaiman. She promoted the album using Twitter, went on a tour organized in part through social media—including, at times, finding new venues—and at the same time developed a friendship and then a romantic relationship with Gaiman.

In the previous chapter, I briefly discussed Palmer, Gaiman, and other artists working together on the *8in8* project, and how they used Twitter to help compose their songs. Since that experiment, Palmer went to her audience for another, even more controversial, project: she created a Kickstarter campaign to fund her most recent album, *Theatre Is Evil*. As an indication of how she interacts with her fanbase, she describes the process of settling on the spelling of “theatre” by posting to her blog (one of Palmer’s written affectations is to not use capital letters except for emphasis): “so i took a poll on the shadowbox (our forum) and the votes spoke the truth: out of hundreds of votes: 83% wanted THEATRE” (“Album Title”). She went to Kickstarter, a site known for crowdfunding projects of any kind, with the goal of making an album that would both be commercially and creatively successful, that would come in traditional formats such as on vinyl, and be easily distributed online as MP3s. Palmer obviously places great importance on her connection with her audiences, and can be considered a new media success story because of these interactions.

Palmer uses the metaphor of crowdfunding as being similar to crowdsurfing, where an artist jumps into the crowd around the stage and hopes her fans will keep her from hitting the floor. “I fell into those thousands of connections that I’d made, and I asked my crowd to catch me. And the goal was 100,000 dollars. My fans backed me at nearly 1.2 million, which was the biggest music crowdfunding project to date” (“Art of Asking”). However, this money caused

problems. Palmer was used to working on the margins, for little money, with the kind of moral economy described by Jenkins. Now she was financially stable and this changed the context of her interactions with fans. A major incident came when she went to her blog and asked for local musicians who wanted to be her opening, as she had more than once in the past. The problem came when she wrote, “we will feed you beer, hug/high-five you up and down (pick your poison), give you merch, and thank you mightily for adding to the big noise we are planning to make” (“Wanted: Volunteers”).

None of her volunteer bands would receive a portion of the money she made from Kickstarter. This led to a controversy among her fans, and the unintended audience who did not understand her context. Many of the bands who might have once agreed to the deal refused, angrily, saying she was rich now. Palmer explains in an interview with the Guardian newspaper, “In my community, it has always been like that. A lot of people volunteer for a lot of things very willingly. As do I. A lot of exchanges without money happen.” She is describing the moral economy, but here the tension of new media versus commercial success is too much, and few people accept the value of the transaction. When it comes to the money she made, she says:

I immediately spent all that money on the packaging and the mailing, and it was all gone six weeks later. The pain and irony of my situation now is that everyone thinks I’m rich. It’s not like I needed \$100,000 and anything above that was pure profit. It was a pre-order. The costs just go up. The profit margin went up a little, but honestly not much.

(“Visionary or Egoist?”)



The costs for Palmer were not just financial, or to her reputation. While the tension between commercial and creative success can be inspiring, in her case it was draining. The joy she normally received from interacting with her audience drained her. She posted to her blog nearly a year after the controversy began to say, among other things, that “i don’t have any songs for you.... i’m not sure where they are. i’ve only written two new songs in the past two years. all i have for you right now is this blog” (“Homelessnesslessness”). Even though Palmer has later said repeatedly that she does not regret the crowdfunding and has come to terms with the controversy, the question must be asked whether losing her desire to write music for two years was worth it. To further illustrate the question about the costs of this audience interaction, columnist Joshua Clover wrote in *The New Yorker’s* Culture Desk blog to say that this controversy about the value of these actions is complicated when “we understand it as putting a value on Palmer’s own creative capacity. How do we value that, when the market—the very mechanism that we rely upon to set value—has imploded, and most anyone can listen to a new album for free?” (“Accidental Experiment”). Palmer is known for her ability to communicate with her audience, which gave her the ability to become an independent artist, create the *Kickstarter* campaign, and even promote the album and the tour. While it is common to say that new media, digital tools, and audience interactivity are all positives, it is sometimes necessary to discuss the other side. Palmer has been involved in many controversies, as her new media success has led to her being noticed by many people outside her targeted discourse communities. The action of these unintended audiences is to criticize her, not look at the context of her statements, and to share her words without examining their actual meaning.

Palmer is still successful, both in the sense of new media (she has over one millions followers on Twitter at the time this is being written) and commercially. She is writing a book about her experiences with her audiences, based on her TED Talk, and is composing music for a future album. Her Twitter feed is full of fans who praise her, and her music. Yet this success is not without its cost. While Palmer is an exceptional case, because of the way she straddles the line between traditional and new media for her output and her success, she is an example of how complex these studies of creativity in the new media era truly are.

### **Further Examination**

These case studies only form the outline for the deeper research that needs to take place. In the era of new media and with the ability to bypass gatekeepers to interact directly with either audiences or creators, it is possible to interrogate individuals on a personal level as well as study actions in aggregate. We can take advantage of these archives and contacts to learn to study the creative process, to discover how individuals cross boundaries and act when in specific roles, and to examine how aware we all are of our actions in this process—or whether awareness makes any difference in the choices we make. A lot of the current theory of audience roles and creator inspiration and creative processes are based on personal, small-scale, studies into these subjects. Now we can improve on our models and further study the interactions of real creators with real audiences.

The next obvious steps in this process will be to make use of the interactive potential of new media to contact creators, especially those who often work in new media, as well as highly visible members of their audiences, and ask them about their impressions of several key

questions. Researchers might investigate their ideas about whether new media enables more creative expression, their awareness of the audience roles they serve, and what creator roles they wish to next perform. This continued research will help us enrich our understanding of permeable boundaries and creator/audience interactions in the new media context.

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