After the Match and Beyond

Football Fanfiction and the Mediatization of Football

RESEARCH MASTER THESIS

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To Mom and Dad, who taught me everything

ABSTRACT

       This thesis studies *footballslash*, an online community dedicated to writing slash (homoerotic) fanfiction about football players. It analyzes how its participants utilize football to construct their stories, drawing upon football's media landscape and presentation in order to creatively expand its narratives. It looks at how they transform what is there through their own creative practices, refashioning the information they encounter in order to better suit their own needs and desires. They do not claim that their interpretations are true; rather, they seek to explore the possibilities of the football text through fiction, enjoying the act of interpretation for its own sake. This thesis draws upon the history of fanfiction practice and community in order to comprehend this viewpoint. It argues that fanfiction and slash fanfiction, as it has moved to the Internet and become more expansive, has become a way to interact with potentially any media narrative. Those familiar with the practices expect there to be fanfiction for everything.

       This thesis, therefore, also investigates the corollary to this: how did football come to be seen as a media narrative to expand? It utilizes the concept of "mediatization" to present a long-term, historical account of the media's influence on football. It explores the different stages of football's mediatization, from the Edwardian printed press to newsreels to digital television, and argues that football, in some way, has always been understood as a media object. It also explores the role that new media plays in contemporary football fan practice, and how media convergence both intensifies and complicates previous models.

       As a whole, this thesis presents a study of "convergence fandom," the way in which previously separate fan cultures interact and hybridize in the current media environment. In doing so, it comes to an understanding of *footballslash* and its practices, but also the context in which it exists.

KEYWORDS: fanfiction, slash fanfiction, football, media convergence, mediatization, convergence fandom, mediatization of football, new media, participatory culture

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Introduction: Lineups and Shaking Hands

When I have mentioned the focus of this thesis, I am usually met with disbelief. Even those familiar with fanfiction more generally find it hard to imagine. Fan fiction, after all, is based in re-imagining and re-writing works that are already fictional, based in the longtime practices of television and movie fan communities. Football, being both not fictional and usually placed in opposition to the interests of fans of the programs which have been the base of fan fiction activity, does not seem like something that fans would write fan fiction about. Moreover, fan fiction, and particularly the style of fan fiction that this thesis focuses on, slash fiction, is considered to be a female practice, and football fandom is considered to be primarily a male pastime. Despite this, the community and practice discussed here is a thriving one, in recognized existence for over a decade, and showing no signs of disappearing.

As might be guessed, this thesis concerns fanfiction about football, specifically a style/genre known as "slash." It focuses on the website *footballslash* (http://footballslash.livejournal.com), a website and community that has existed since 2002, and the fans who utilize it in order to post their fanfiction stories. Fanfiction is a form of fiction where the writer uses already-published worlds and characters as the basis for his or her works, such as *Star Trek* or the *Harry Potter* series of books, and slash fan fiction is a subset of this, a style that focuses on a homosexual relationship between the protagonists of the story. Its name comes from the way writers put a slash, "/", between the two characters' names in order to indicate who the couple in the story are. Both are well-recognized as practices within the fan communities for "cult" media objects, particularly science-fiction, fantasy, and supernatural television or film series, and it is in this context that they have been studied and understood.

The context of *footballslash* is obviously quite different. Therefore, this thesis asks several questions. It asks what *footballslash* offers to football fans, why it has developed, and how football is understood, used, and transformed by its participants. It also seeks to discover what the existence of football slash fanfiction indicates about the transformations of both football and the practice of fanfiction. These two fan cultures, once very distinct, have hybridized. This thesis therefore asks how football could be the source for fanfiction, and uses the existence of

footballslash as a starting point from which to investigate greater changes within popular culture.

The starting point of the thesis is observation of *footballslash* and its supporting sites during the 2011-2012 football season. These supporting sites include *Football Meta* (http://footballmeta.livejournal.com), *Football Kink Meme* (http://footballkink2.livejournal.com/), *Touchline*, (http://touchline.livejournal.com/) *RPS Football Fiction- Comment Porn* (http://commentporn.livejournal.com/), *Corner Flag*, (http://cornerflag.livejournal.com/) and several personal journals of *footballslash* participants. All these sites are English-language, although there do exist other football fanfiction communities in other languages. Observation consisted of reading stories, story prompts, and general discussions regarding football, slash fandom, and the confluence between them. Additionally, in April 2012, a survey was posted to *footballslash* and *Football Meta*, with results kept anonymous. Fifteen questions regarding demographic data, football viewing habits, and the discovery of *footballslash,* both the community and the practice, were asked, and sixty-seven participants responded.

The participants of *footballslash* are varied in origin and their relationship to football. Like most fan fiction communities, particularly those devoted to slash fan fiction, the vast majority of participants are female, with only two respondents to the survey identifying as male. North Americans make up nearly half of the respondents, with 24 Americans and six Canadians, followed by England with nine respondents, Germany with seven, and Brazil with four. The remainder came from other European countries, South America, Asia, and Australia. Many were childhood fans, raised in the game, who had been following football for as long as they could remember. Others only started paying attention during the 2010 World Cup, or the 2006 World Cup. Some follow their hometown team, some followed big clubs far away, and many follow a mixture of the two. All spectrums of football fandom are therefore represented within the community, from the most "traditional" to the "new consumer."

However, this thesis is not only about *footballslash* itself, but also about its context within both football and fanfiction communities. The existence of *footballslash* is not only due to the fans who write football slash fiction, but the changes that both football and the fanfiction community has underwent in the past several decades. Its existence is therefore a reason to investigate and reevaluate

how its constituent parts have been previously understood, and to look at the role that media convergence has played within both over the last decade.

One way to understand football fanfiction is to understand football's media identity. Football exists through the media. It is learned about through media, viewed through the media, and for a large amount of football fans, this is the only way they know the game. Nearly every high-level game is available on television worldwide and newspapers and magazines are filled with information about games and players. It is viewed on a screen at a set time, every week, with a recognizable cast of characters that can be learned about and discussed through the Internet. For the majority of football spectators, football is, essentially, a television show, functioning in the same manner as the sort of programs that fanfiction is traditionally written about.

Understanding how football came to be understood in this manner is integral to understanding how *footballslash* can exist. Using the concept of "mediatization" as a starting point, this thesis investigates how football, a real-life sporting competition, can be seen for the *footballslash* participants as a media narrative. Rather than assuming that this understanding is a radical departure, it historicizes the role of the media within football. It presents a long-term view of football's mediatization and how the sport came to exist in media terms, from its origins in the Victorian and Edwardian popular press through to the changes brought by live satellite broadcasts and digital pay television. It also expands the current scholarship on the media landscape of football, by looking at the way in which developments in new media have changed football's media models. The rise of networked online communities helps all varieties of football fans connect to each other, from the most traditional to the most "new." New developments in home technology, from video-editing software to blogging platforms, also encourage and enable these fans to make their own football media as they use football media. These developments have again changed the media environment of football, but have so far been given only minor attention, and therefore will be considered here.

The existence of *footballslash* also indicates changes in the way that fanfiction, and especially slash fanfiction, is understood. The practice of fanfiction has changed from its early days in the *Star Trek* fan community. It is larger, faster, and involves more source texts than ever before. The move to networked online communities over the past two decades has changed the way in which fanfiction is not only accessed, but created and experienced. From being reserved for certain

texts, with certain characteristics, it has become available to fans of almost anything. Fanfiction and slash fanfiction can be seen as mode of fandom for a wide variety of texts, and a community or subculture that has its own identity regardless of the source text being explored. It also suggests that the practices involved in reading and writing slash fanfiction have become a way of potentially looking at and interacting with all media objects. This thesis therefore historicizes and explores fanfiction itself, looking at how fanfiction, and the fanfiction community, has developed, and presenting a new way of understanding the practice.

The thesis is therefore arranged in three parts. The first chapter discusses the concept of "mediatization" (Schulz 2004, Hjarvard 2008, Strömbäck 2008, Lundby 2009), and presents a history of the mediatization of football. It discusses how professional football has always influenced by media to some extent, but by the 1990s patterns of consumption had shifted so that football could be primarily considered as a media object. It concludes by looking at the changes, and opportunities, to the existing football media models brought on by the increasing ubiquity of the Internet, along with what this has meant for the practices of football fans.

The second chapter presents a history of what is called "media fandom," (Bacon-Smith 1992, Jenkins 1992, Coppa 2006) and the practices of fan fiction. It looks at the structure of *footballslash* and how it fits into the broader fan fiction community. It traces fanfiction's origins in the science fiction community, its early practices, and how it, as well, has been profoundly influenced and changed by the Internet. It considers how fanfiction practices, particularly the interpretive practices of slash fanfiction, can be learned and applied across media texts and objects.

The third chapter looks more specifically at what the participants of *footballslash* do. It analyzes two football slash stories, using them to demonstrate how football fans utilize the events and figures of football in order to create their plotlines and characters. It discusses the emotional underpinnings of football slash fanfiction, how football slash writers interact with football media, and the balance between reality and fiction that is at play within their work. Additionally, this chapter discusses the role that eroticism plays in slash fandom, and how that interacts, and conflicts with, the more traditional conceptions of football fandom and media presentation.

Through this analysis, an understanding of the world of football slash, both the practice and the community, can be gained. It provides the first step in

understanding the community, and what this community displays about what football and fanfiction are in the 21st century.

Chapter 1: The Mediatization of Football

When asked how they regularly watched football, the respondents of the survey posted to *footballslash* mostly referred to media – either online streaming, or television. While many did also go to games, with a few holding season tickets to various teams and others going anywhere from once or twice a season to ten or more, the majority of the respondents watched and experienced football mostly through the media. They gave many reasons for this: tickets to their favorite team were too expensive, or too difficult to acquire. The team might be based too far away, either by driving hours or continents. A few couldn't make the time. Whatever the case, for this group, football is most experienced through the screen of the media.

In this, they are by no means unusual. For perhaps the majority of football fans, it is through the media that they experience the sport. Televised games reach far more than it is possible to fit into even the largest stadium. It was estimated that 650 million people watched the English "title decider" game between Manchester United and Manchester City on April 30. Manchester City's stadium, the fifth-biggest in the English Premier League, could only hold 47,805 of them. This meant that the majority of watchers had to view the game through other means: the media. Whether watching on a pub's screen, the home television, or in a small window on the laptop, the most common, basic experience of a football game is through the media in some form or another.

Not only is a football game viewed through the media, it is surrounded by media. The Manchester derby mentioned above did not begin and end in the 90-some minutes spent on the field, and those watching were not only those who considered themselves fans of one of the two teams involved. The game was surrounded by storylines, from the controversy regarding a rebellious star player brought back into the fold to the history of the relationships between the Manchester teams and the role of money in the modern game. These storylines, and many others, were debated and addressed across multiple media sources in the days (and weeks) before the game aired, and continued to be discussed after Manchester City won a middling 1-0 game to put them on the cusp of their first title since the 1960s. These storylines would have been well known to anyone with an interest in top-level football, making the game extremely interesting to anyone who wanted to keep up. The Manchester derby, watched by millions, discussed across newspapers, radio

shows, blogs, and podcasts (among others), was built, shaped, and enjoyed by the media.

What this recent example shows is how football, and sport in general, has become increasingly mediatized. This is a process with a long history, dating from the origins of spectator sport, but that has become more prominent in the past two decades. The rise of digital television and global communications satellites created changes in the general environment and character of football, and the explosion of new media has only accelerated these trends. However, what this chapter demonstrates is that it is by no means brand new to football, and the acceleration of football's mediatization only builds upon trends started at its origin. Rather than an interloper, as it is often categorized, media should be seen as an integral part of football. Additionally, the changes wrought by this increasing mediatization are neither entirely negative nor entirely positive, but simply changes.

This chapter deals with the mediatization of football. First, by using the framework devised by Hjarvard (2004, 2008), Schulz (2004), and Strömbäck (2008) it will explain the concept of "mediatization" and how it will be used throughout this chapter in regard to football and its changes over the past two decades. Then, I will give a history of the mediatization of football, and how it has developed to this point. Finally, I will look at the way that the Internet, and particularly the role of online participatory culture (Jenkins 2006) has on one hand accelerated and intensified these media trends within football, but also challenged the way that the use of media by football fans has been conceptualized and discussed in previous studies (Sandvoss 2003, Boyle and Haynes 2004, Rowe 2004, Williams 2007, Boyle and Haynes 2009, Kennedy and Hills 2009, Boyle 2010). In doing so, this chapter will explain these important developments in the world's most popular sport, as well as demonstrate the process through which *footballslash* participants come to their understanding of football.

What Is Mediatization?

Football is, of course, not the only element in contemporary society to be impacted and changed by the media. It is difficult to find a sector that has not been, in some way, transformed by the growth of mass media. Football and sport join with other elements of social and cultural life, such as religion, politics, and music, in being altered by and incorporated into the media. Media is a key element to most of

the institutions we encounter in our daily lives, of which football is just one example. To make the point that football has "become mediatized," however, it is necessary to define the concept of mediatization, and how it can be applied to what is, and has been, going on in the world of football.

One of the more useful definitions of the concept is from Danish media theorist Stig Hjarvard. Hjarvard's definition of mediatization is twofold, relating both to the ostensibly non-media institution as well as to the media itself. For Hjarvard, mediatization is "the process whereby society to an increasing degree is submitted to, or becomes dependent on, the media and their logic. This process is characterized by a duality in that the media have become integrated into the operations of other social institutions, while they also have acquired the status of social institutions in their own right." (2008a, 113) This sets up two conditions that need to be met for something (from society itself down to smaller elements within it, such as football) to be considered mediatized. There has to be an entity that was not created by, or native to, the media. The thing has to submit to, and be transformed by, the "logic" of the media, incorporating the needs of the media into itself and the way in which it operates, which might be different from the way it would operate without the media's involvement. At the same time, the media needs to have developed into its own institution, one that operates independently from other institutions, as well as having its own resources separate from them (but that might prove tempting for other institutions). Taken together, "mediatization is about the long-term process of changing social institutions and modes of interactions in culture and society due to the growing importance of media in all strands of society." (Hjarvard 2008b, 14) It is the process through which an institution that is ostensibly not of the media becomes subject to, and incorporated within, the media.

Within football, both conditions can be seen. For example, the scheduling of games has moved so that more can be shown on television, moving games from the traditional Saturday afternoons to across the weekend (and week), altering the way in which the game is experienced and perceived. In the second, we can point to the recent scandal surrounding the English commenting duo of Richard Keys and Andy Gray, who were caught on camera making sexist comments about lineswoman Sian Massey. As the scandal played itself out on television, print, and the Internet, it showed how the media itself was the story, something that was being talked about on its own rather than simply reporting on the game itself. Here, the football media exists for itself, as much as it exists for reporting on football.

Hjarvard builds his argument on, among others, the work of Winfried Schulz (2004). While Hjarvard's definition is slightly more focused on institutions, Schulz focuses on four ways in which mediatization relates to social change: extension, substitution, amalgamation, and accommodation. In the interrelations and complexity of these actions, we can see how the use of mass media affects football and other sport. Extension refers to how media of all varieties "extend the natural limits of human communication capacities," (Schulz 2004, 88) allowing communication to take place over larger physical spaces, making them potentially irrelevant. Substitution refers to the ways in which "media partly or completely substitute social activities and social institutions and thus change their character." (ibid) Watching a game on television, or having a discussion as to the relative merits of a player on an Internet message boards, can be seen as substitutions of attending a game at a stadium and having a pub discussion respectively. Amalgamation is how "[m]edia activities and non-media activities amalgamate," (ibid, 89) in which using the media is woven into the habits and patterns of everyday life and "the media's definition of reality amalgamates with the social definition of reality." (ibid) Accommodation is more based in economics, in which "the various economic actors have to accommodate to the way the media operate." (ibid.) That the media exist – that they provides exposure, money, and other desired resources – requires non-media actors to accommodate its needs and operations in order to take advantage of it. This sort of "accommodation" is often the most obvious when discussing the changes brought on football by the media, but all four, at different times and for different reasons, have made their impact on football, the way it is understood, and the way it is used by its fans and the world around them. As football becomes mediatized according to Hjarvard's definition, we can more easily see Schulz's four elements at work.

It is important here to note that mediatization is a process, not an event. It is something that takes a long period of time, and it is somewhat impossible to point to an exact moment in which an institution is mediatized. In clarifying mediatization as a process, it is useful to look at the work of Jesper Strömbäck (2008), who defines four phases of mediatization. For Strömbäck,

> The first aspect of the mediatization of politics is the degree to which the media constitute the most important or dominant source of information on politics and society. A second aspect is the degree to which the media are independent from political institutions in terms of how the media are governed. A third aspect is the degree to which the media content is governed by a political logic or by media logic. A fourth aspect, finally, is the

degree to which political actors are governed by a political logic or by media logic.

While Strömbäck specifies politics here, the concept of the phases of mediatization can just as equally be applied to football. Questions of the prevalence of media for information about football, whether the media focuses on "good stories" and characters or actual sporting merit, whether a club does an action for sporting reasons or media reasons abound within the discussions of football. While major actors of football cannot be said to "govern" football media in a direct sense, the relationship has been marked, at different times and locations, by various degrees of independence and freedom from major actors and forces within sport (Rowe 2007).

This is not to say that all phases apply to every aspect of football equally, or that the "phases" are a strictly linear concept, although that is often how they are played out in this particular field. Some "football actors," such as Manchester United or Real Madrid, might be at a different phase of mediatization than others, such as Aldershot Town or Xerez CD, owing to the different degree to which media logic is of importance to their regular interactions, and some leagues depend on the media to a different degree than others. What thinking of mediatization in phases does is emphasize how mediatization can and should be considered a process, one that enfolds over a long period of time and that still may be distributed differently for different actors/institutions and different situations. When discussing an institution like football, the idea of a process, of a becoming more mediatized over a period of time, is an important concept.

By utilizing these perspectives on mediatization, it becomes possible to define what the mediatization of football is, and why one can speak of an increasing mediatization in regards to football. Football becomes mediatized as it increasingly comes to rely on the media, submitting to its logic(s) and needs, while at the same time the football media itself comes to be important for more than just a reporting on who won what game. Within this process, there are also several social dimensions, relating to how those who use media find their social lives and situations changed through this use. It is, however, important to keep in mind that the mediatization of football is a process, and a long-term one. When the mediatization of football is discussed, it is necessary to take such a long-term view in order to understand how football has come to its current situation, and what that means in how people relate to and utilize the sport, without getting caught up in nostalgia. It

is this combined concept of mediatization that I will use throughout this chapter, and greater define for the specificities of football.

The First Media Football

  When discussing mediatization, and especially when looking at mediatization from a temporal perspective, there is often a certain frame of argument set up. Strömbäck warned against arguments where "[t]he present situation when politics is mediated and mediatized is implicitly or explicitly compared to some kind of golden age, the exact timing of which is conspicuously absent in most accounts, when politics was more true to its ideals, when people were more civic-minded, or when the media facilitated, rather than undermined, the way political communication and democracy work." (Strömbäck 2008, 229) Within football, this tendency is particularly pronounced. Whatever era we are in now is inevitably compared to a "golden age" of some mysterious past, where the media did not have an influence, where footballers were humble workers from the immediate area rather than global superstars, and the entire experience was somehow purer. Discussions of the mediatization of football often reference Jean Baudrillard's account of a Real Madrid-Napoli game that was held in an empty stadium as punishment, but broadcast on television and for Baudrillard perfectly demonstrating "a world where a 'real' event occurs in a vacuum, stripped of its context and visible only from afar, televisually." (Baudrillard 1993, 79) The media's role in football, for Baudrillard and others, is that of an interloper, coming in and stripping the content from what was once meaningful, turning it all into an unreal, empty spectacle.

  However, if one takes the history of spectator sport, and football specifically, into account, it is difficult to fully sustain this position. While there is no doubt that mediatization has altered the traditions of football, this alteration did not simply appear when the first digital television box was sold. Rather, the process of mediatization was set in motion as football became a spectator sport, soon after it was codified into the form we know today.

  Some variety of football, a game or sport played by kicking a ball towards some sort of goal, can be found in the history of many cultures. The current FIFA president Sepp Blatter cited the Chinese game of cuju as the sport's ancestor in a visit to the country, while the Italian word for football, calcio, derives from a game played in 16th-century Florence. However, the general origins of football as we know

it are thought to be in western Europe, particularly England, where a popular peasant's game occurred over holidays and other special occasions. These versions had no set rules and were often unruly, leading to several (unsuccessful) attempts at banning throughout the centuries. By the 19th century, residents of towns and villages were playing various forms of football, often against residents of other towns and villages, with the rules – such as style of play, size of goals, and number of players – set ahead of time, but not fully standardized from place to place. (Goulstone, 2000)

What we might recognize as football, in the sense of its standard of rules and style of play, can be said to have originated in the 19th century in the English public school system. Set up to educate the sons of England's elite classes, by this period the ethos of "muscular Christianity" (Hall, 1994) had become a major component of its education. This ethos focused on physical health and strength along with a strong Christian morality, and specifically encouraged team sports due to their perceived usefulness in developing moral character (encouraging a competitive-but-cooperative mentality and respect for authority). It is here in the public schools that the various football games took on their standard forms, and eventually were codified into what we would recognize today. The graduated public schoolboys who made up the (English) Football Association published their first rules in 1863, providing a standard code of rules that would, eventually, spread across the country and eventually the world, with occasional changes and tweaks.

Even at this point, however, we can see the influence and use of the media in football. Nearly every school, as well as non-school-affiliated clubs such as those found in the Sheffield area, played by different rules that did not mesh (Harvey 2001). In London, where the Football Association was founded, the "impulse for the creation of the FA, an organisation to establish and regulate rules for football, stemmed from a debate within the letter columns of *The Times*." (Harvey 2011, 335) Without the use of the newspaper, at the time the major mass media, it can be argued that a common code of rules, one that could travel between locations and enable matches to be played against teams from other cities, not to mention countries, would not have existed. The debate allowed and fostered by the newspaper and its letters section, which allowed communication between those who might not meet face-to-face as well as allowing others not in the vicinity to follow along with the debate. The mediatization phase of "extension" is here already at work within something so basic as the creation of the rules of the game.

By the end of the 19th century, thanks to reforms in labor laws that allowed greater free time for leisure pursuits and the "civilizing" efforts of Reformist (muscular) Christians, who saw team sports and games "as 'improving' of body, health and character," (Huggins 2000, 5) the British working class were both playing and watching the sport in large numbers. With this increased popularity, there became increasing stress on the middle-class control of the sport. While the "gentlemen of leisure" could afford to spend their time on playing, the working-class players could not take enough time away from work to train for and travel to games. The Football Association, made up of these middle-class gentlemen, stressed an amateur ethos, but the needs of the players, and the increasing profits generated by those willing to pay to watch high-level football, eventually won out and professionalism was legalized in England by the turn of the 20th century. Players were now allowed to officially earn money from their exploits on the field. Thanks to the growing mass media, in the form of a sporting-specific press and popular newspapers, they also became increasingly known figures among those who watched the game, increasing their earning potential for themselves and their clubs.

While many commentors on the game like to date the idea of "football stardom" to changes in the game in the 1960s (namely television), there is increasing evidence that individual footballers were known figures in popular culture much before then. Joyce Woolridge (2002) provides an excellent account of the media world that surrounded early football, and early footballers. Cigarette cards, produced by national concerns without localizing for individual areas, featured the likenesses of popular footballers of the day, and "[b]etween 1892 and 1905 there are 14 known sets of cards which featured footballers, a total of 558 individual cards which showed recognisable players, rather than just figures in club strips." (Woolridge 2002, 56) These cards carried the images of the top players of the day, with information about their background and history, and encouraged collection.

The players who appeared most often were also prominent in the print coverage of the sport. The specialty athletic press was thriving by this point, and by 1905 had shifted its coverage from simply reporting games to giving considerable space to the new stars of the game. In this, they were joined by the papers that catered to the now-literate working classes. The Daily Mail, established in 1896, was devoting at least 10% of its pages to sport from the beginning (Whannel 2002), for example. These papers soon found that football sold the most copies, with the Daily Mirror announcing in 1905 that "football had now replaced cricket as the national

sport" (Woolridge 2002, 58) and that they would be adjusting their coverage accordingly, a change that included more "casual" stories about footballers at home or at play. Stars emerged for reasons related to, but not entirely based on, playing prowess, such as the "physical idiosyncrasies and certain mannerisms" (ibid, 59) of the extremely popular Billy Meredith or Stephen Bloomer's showmanship after scoring goals. The narrativizing effect of the mass media was already at work here, creating a football world that went beyond the results and beyond the stadium, amalgamating itself with daily life. Print media, both in newspaper form and in the form of specialist football and sport publications, would continue to endure as an important element of the media relationship with football even as other technologies would develop and become ubiquitous.

The ethos and allure of team sports, especially football, were additionally encouraged by weekly magazines aimed at the young boys, who, thanks to the restriction of child labor and the establishment of state schools, were now literate and familiar with team sport. A wide variety of popular titles included fictional stories about heroic, sports-skilled public schoolboys as well as other columns dedicated to soccer, and "[t]hese weeklies helped shape positive attitudes to the previously middle-class games cult in a way that was very seductive." (Mangan and Hickey 2006, 78) The media presence of football reinforced and encouraged its already-burgeoning popularity among the youth of Britain. The publications also promoted an ideal in their fictional heroes, who were brave, spirited boys that fought hard but fair, without tricks or flourishes, and gave their all to the team. (Winner 2005) These fictional heroes became reference points for the media description of real football players, and the resonances continue to be felt today.

Football was not restricted to the United Kingdom for very long. Great Britain was the greatest power of the time, and its nationals spread out worldwide, bringing their sports and games with them. Football, with its easy-to-understand rules and minimal equipment, was easily and quickly adapted, first by the educated elite, "who aspired to British power and prestige and emulated the educators and merchants of Great Britain," (McFarland 2007, 205) and then, fairly rapidly, by the greater population. In Spain, for example, football was popular by all classes by the 1910s, especially in the major cities, with a vibrant sporting press where "even the most aristocratic publications covered football throughout the 1910s." (ibid, 213) This press served to build up the nascent professional clubs, and "stirred up interest in general, helping to build rivalries and passions over specific matches around which

club identities were formed." (ibid, 215) Association football spread out across Europe, and to the places Europeans went - South America and Africa being particular fans of the game. While the exact trajectory of England or Spain did not always hold (in Germany, for example, professionalism was not officially allowed until the 1960s), by 1905 there was enough worldwide interest in the sport for an international governing body to be founded. Football was global quite early.

Print was not the only medium to incorporate itself with football. In Vienna, one of the most successful music-hall songs of the 1920s was "Uridil Is Playing Today," celebrating Rapid Vienna's star Josef Uridil, who also played himself in a popular feature film as "a football player and a man of the people, who helps an impoverished but well-meaning ex-aristocrat 'redeem himself and his lost livelihood through honest work.'" (Horak 2011, 118) Bobby Robson, one of England's legendary players and managers, summed up the media world of football in his youth when he spoke of Stanley Matthews, saying that "we knew what a great player he was from the clips we saw on Pathé News at the cinema, reading *Charles Buchan's Football Monthly* and from information on the back of cigarette cards." (quoted in Whannel 2002, 30) This shows the sort of ways in which sporting celebrity, and knowledge about the sporting world, was constructed in Robson's pre-television youth. Stanley Matthews was a national star that Robson, from a different city and area, learned about and learned to admire via a variety of media sources rather than through face-to-face appreciation of Matthews' talents.

Newsreels were an important site of this football knowledge, especially in Britain, where the cinema was massively popular. Displayed before the feature film, they were "a key cultural site, expressing in its concentrated sight and sound-bites the values, prejudices and attitudes of its audiences." (Huggins 2007a, 81) While newsreels could feature, in theory, anything that was a current event, it was sports, and especially football, that became the driver of newsreel sales, and securing the best footage was a highly competitive endeavor. More saw football in the cinema than could, or did, go to live games. Newsreels found in football what television would later find - a "highly visual, action-filled, competitive and often dramatic experience that was ideal for motion filming." (Huggins 2007a, 87) Football was already of interest to a large amount of the newsreel's audience, and increasing coverage made it even more so, emphasizing the exciting qualities of the action and the dramatic nature of the games and players.

Appearing well after the games, they "concentrated far more on the cultural proximity of an event to the audiences, matches played by leading clubs, those seen as reflecting social issues or providing amusement and entertainment." (Huggins 2007a, 87) Lacking the immediacy of print, and later, of radio, the newsreels could offer both visual spectacle and an increasing dramatization of the action. Games had to be edited to their most dramatic moments, and narratives enhanced by additional football-related content like profiles of teams or leading players. The arrival of sound in the 1930s continued this, emphasizing the spectacle and excitement of football events. The new technology "enhanced soccer's excitement and drama far more than could the press, and the voices of the main soccer commentators were increasingly recognized." (Huggins 2007a, 88) The main commentators became celebrities in their own right.

While the newsreel and the press could provide information and excitement about games that would happen or had happened, the introduction of radio "allowed listeners a new dimension, a vicarious presence as events unfolded." (Huggins 2007b, 493) What radio could do that print or newsreels could not was offer accounts of games as they were happening, meaning that attendance was not strictly necessary in order to experience a game of football in its entirety. Media could, for the first time, be substituted for the physical experience of a football game. Already in the 1930s, "running commentaries of football were changing the nature of football fandom to create the 'armchair supporter," (Haynes 1999, 152) something that continued into the next decades. As a domestic medium, it brought football, and the "experience" of the match into the home, for both casual and dedicated supporters. Radio enforced the importance of "big" games like World Cup games and FA Cup finals by not only offering an approximation of "being there," but by emphasizing their importance within the coverage itself. They were presented as having relevance for the entire country, rather than just fans of the team that happened to be playing.

However, while the idea of substitution was introduced through radio, it was not fully realized. The football establishment was reluctant to let full games be broadcast outside the "special events" of a cup final or World Cup. Gate receipts and refreshments were the only source of income to football clubs, and they were reluctant to jeopardize this with a new technology that did not have direct benefits to them. In Britain, for example, the Football League was often openly hostile to the BBC and placed heavy restrictions and what and how they could broadcast games

domestically. (Wyllie et al, 2011) There was simply not enough of a direct financial incentive for football clubs, who were the source of the everyday fandom of most, to embrace live broadcasting. Additionally, while the radio could offer "the sounds of the game and the crowd, the uninterrupted flow of events and real-time information," (Wyllie et al 2011, 11) it could not offer the actual action of a profoundly visual sport. This in combination with the lack of support for broadcasting by the football institutions meant that this substitution was partial at best.

As demonstrated, though, this does not mean that football was unmediatized. As the Robson anecdote shows, quite early on there came the point in which "the depictions of reality as conveyed by the media presumably have an impact on how people perceive reality, and these perceptions arguably matter when people form their opinions." (Strömbäck 2008, 237) Children (and adults) did not know that Stanley Matthews or Josef Uridil were great players because they saw them play in a stadium, but because of the media information they received about them: profiles in magazines, statistics in newspapers, moving images in newsreels. The importance of the FA Cup final or the rivalries between Spanish clubs were stoked by media representation, reproduced across the press and given special coverage on radio.

What could be said about the pre-television era of football is not a lack of mediatization, but rather that mediatization was functioning mostly in the first and second phases, to use Strömbäck's specifications. The mass media "constitute the most important source of information and channel of communication" (Strömbäck 2008, 237), and the sporting press went through "increasing journalistic professionalization, a more pragmatic and less sacerdotal approach to [sport], and increasing commercialization." (ibid, 238) However, mediatization was still limited by scarcity. Radio was limited to certain games and times and newsreels were short, and while the press did fill in many of these gaps, it was still incomplete. It would be with television that the mediatization of football would enter a new stage.

The Rise and Rise of Football on Television

Television combined the immediacy, and domestic nature, of radio with the visual characteristics of cinema and the newsreel. While radio invented the idea of the "armchair supporter," television offered the capability to refine it, bringing not only the sounds and information about a match as it unfolded, but the visuals of it as well. With television, the capability for true media substitution (rather than the

partial substitution of match reports or radio commentary, which were still how the majority of fans experienced football) became available. Live television of a game could approximate "being there" to a much higher degree than its predecessor forms, and eventually would overtake them as the primary way to engage with football via the media.

This is not to say that this possibility was immediately realized. While the potentiality for live football games existed from the birth of the medium, it was not embraced for several decades. As with radio, "clubs were fearful that live television broadcasting would decrease attendance at the stadium, thus shrinking their major source of revenue." (Andreff and Staudohar 2000, 259) Live football was limited, for the most part, to the same special occasions: domestic and European cup finals, the World Cup, international games. In England, for example, a live league game was not shown on television until 1983, and after that the amount of league games shown every season was small. (Boyle and Haynes 2004) The structure of European television, with limited channels and time, a strong public broadcasting system, and limited potential for funding (either from public broadcasting or advertising), limited the role that direct substitution would play on football for several decades after the mid-1950s introduction, and mass adoption, of television as a medium.

Rather, television served to displace newsreels, although this is not to say that this did not make a major impact. Football highlight shows such as the United Kingdom's Match of the Day (started 1964) or Italy's 90 Minuto (1970) provided the selected best moments of the week's league games, introducing the home audience to the biggest teams and players, regardless of where in the country they might be located. Unlike newsreels, these shows displayed clear shots of the games in their correct context with others, and provided discussion and debate about the games and their players. They also offered much more coverage than the scant few minutes available on the newsreel, with the important parts of all the week's games relayed to the home viewer. Becoming a fan of the team from outside the immediate area became easier, as all teams of the top league were featured in the highlights, with particular emphasis given to the best teams (with the best players) of the day.

Perhaps most importantly, though, these highlight shows were television shows. They occurred at a set time each week, for a set time, encouraging viewers to follow from week to week. As part of television, these programs sought to broaden football's appeal by making it seem more exciting, and "conventions that were adopted during [this time] have remained in television sport—the magazine format,

patterns of long shots and close shots, styles of commentary—were apparently intended to liven up broadcasts and thus to woo a floating audience of novices or occasional viewers." (Kennedy 2004, 122) Instead of merely reporting and displaying the results of games, these shows worked to shape a narrative regarding football, explaining what was happening to those that might not know the sport, and spectacularizing what was seen. More exciting games, with more relevance to the major narratives, received more time and analysis. The filming patterns, which allowed focus on individual players as they played, celebrated, or grimaced, made football look like other television shows, which featured similar shots of actors. Television brought the game and its stars into the home directly, and the "importance of close-ups in the new medium foregrounded faces and personalities," (Whannel 2002, 110) intensifying what had gone before with newsreels, cards, and magazine profiles, and allowing this to be spread to a wider group of players. They could become even bigger media stars.

In this, television was supplemented by the football press, which maintained its importance as "print does create much more space for the journalistic analysis of sport than television or radio." (Rowe 2004, 40) Even if a fan of a team could see the goals scored, there was still more information and analysis possible, and football journalism provided that. The "characters" learned about on *Match of the Day* could be further explored through print; their performances assessed at length, their lives profiled. The highlight shows could only spend so much time talking about a given team, even the most popular team. The printed press could fill in this lack.

Changes to this model came in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Deregulation of television across Europe, and the introduction of pay channels, rapidly changed the relationship between television and football. The oft-repeated statement by media tycoon Rupert Murdoch "that sport was the "battering ram" that would break down the barriers to new audiences and media applications" (Rowe 2011, 514) typified the view of the new pay-TV services towards sport. Football, being the most popular sport in Europe, was particularly sought after. The eagerness of these companies to secure football coverage, in order to gain subscribers, can be seen in the amount paid to top football leagues and clubs for their television rights. As an example, in England in 1983, the Football League was paid £2.6 million by terrestrial commercial channel ITV for ten games. In 1992, the recently-launched satellite service BSkyB "secured the exclusive live rights for the newly created FA Premier League in a deal worth £304 million." (Boyle and Haynes 2004, 21) In not quite a full

decade, the financial model of English football had changed. From a situation where television was viewed as a threat to the revenue and profits of football clubs, "television has become, or is destined to be, the main source of professional sports finance." (Andreff and Staudohar 2000, 263)

With certain variations in funding models, this became the case throughout Europe. The rights for particularly desirable football content, be it the Premier League or dominant European clubs like FC Barcelona, have only gone up since 1992. With the massive amounts of money on offer to football leagues and clubs from television broadcasts, as well as the rise in sponsorship income that came from companies wanting to be seen on television, resistance to regular live broadcasts crumbled quickly. While certain regulations remained in place in many countries to, in theory, protect ticket sales of live games (such as the ban on broadcasting domestic 3 PM Saturday games within England), the focus of football has shifted from the stadium to the media, especially to television. Live televised games, once scarce, are now constant.

This financial element of television is important when accounting for the changes in football in the 1990s. As Hjarvard observed, "mediatization implies that other institutions to an increasing degree become dependent on resources that the media control, and they will have to submit to some of the rules the media operate by in order to gain access to those resources." (Hjarvard 2008, 117) Most obvious is the case of kickoff times in many leagues, which shifted from a set weekend time to times staggered throughout the weekend (and sometimes into the week). We can also look at the changes in the European Cup, an inter-European club competition, which became the Champions League in 1991 (King 2004). It expanded its admission, increased the amount of games played, and provided a much more spectacular format for television viewers across Europe and the world. The amount of money provided by simply participating in the competition has led to an increasing importance being placed on qualification, devaluing the domestic cups (which had been given their importance by previous media regimes). The resources provided by the Champions League – money, press, and prestige – overshadow these completely.

Television's de-regulation throughout Europe and elsewhere also led to an increasing number of channels to fill, leading to an ever-growing amount of football on television. Technological and regulatory developments meant that "[f]ootball can be consumed far away from its actual place, the stadium, through television. The

event exists in a sphere globally and simultaneously accessible, unbound by physical settings." (Sandvoss 2003, 88) Satellite broadcasts and dedicated sports channels "undermined the embedded localism of sport, enabling the emergence of global fan bases for the market leaders." (Whannel 2009, 213) Football fans were exposed to teams outside of their country on a regular, standardized basis. The wealthiest European leagues were promoted heavily outside of their own nations, especially in Asia (Manreitzer and Horne 2004, Majumdar and Bandyopadhyay 2005, Rowe and Gilmour 2010) or other countries thought to be peripheral footballing nations (Ben-Porat 2000, Hognestad 2009, Rookwood and Millward 2011), who offered potential audiences without preexisting football attachments. It is also important to recognize that so-called "dominant" football nations also experienced an influx of international football on their screens. This fed into a football media landscape that was increasingly international, in the sense of the interrelations between major players.

The increasing amount of televised football also had an effect on the other media around football. Dedicated sports channels provided dedicated sports news, with hours spent on analyzing the comings and goings of football teams and footballers, turning even small events into large stories. In addition, in hopes of increasing sales, press coverage, already integral to the media landscape of professional football, expanded, and "national newspapers now dedicate whole sections to football with nearly every national tabloid newspaper providing a pull-out football section on a Sunday and Monday, and the main broadsheet papers publishing a separate sport section (focusing mainly on football) throughout the week." (Cleland 2011, 301) This coverage is as much about the needs of the media for "good stories" as it is about its relevance to football, especially as tabloid-style newspapers rose in prominence. What is reported about football stars, and therefore the characters constructed of them, is geared as much towards scandal and compelling personal narratives as it is about anything related to their play. In many papers, scandal and personal lives matter substantially more.

Football also spilled out from the sports pages, as the increasing money given to, and national/international attention put on, football stars increased. Players became far more wealthy and recognizable, more in line with other celebrities, and publications "that have a largely female readership, included, during the 1990s, a significant number of cover spreads and features on sport stars." (Whannel 2002, 31) Radio, instead of withering when faced with the increased intimacy of television, broadened, not only by providing cheaper live broadcasts but that "the majority also

encourage fans to phone in and discuss either the result of the game or the build up to it," (Cleland 2011, 301) and increased coverage of more "local" teams." Sports information and stories became a constant media presence.

What a proliferation of live television and football information did was normalize and acknowledge what had already been the case in previous media eras: the majority of football fans experience football through the media. The ability to watch nearly every game live via television narrowed, if not completely eliminated, the difference in information between the spectators in the stadium and the spectators at home. Both are capable of experiencing the game as it happens, seeing the skills (or lack thereof) of the players, and being caught up in the emotions of the game as it unfolds. While differences continue to be maintained between the "live" and the "mediatized", these become abstract, rooted in notions of tradition and authentic practice, rather than definite. The surrounding environment of football had always been media-based, from print stories about star players to Match of the Day highlights, and having a large amount of football on television meant that it was now possible to completely substitute a non-media form of football with a media one.

As the capability of television to extend the coverage of football to a place outside of not only the stadium, but the stadium's immediate surroundings and nation, was embraced, watching football on television became the normal way of experiencing football for the greater majority of spectators. Many fans in "non-footballing" countries have never attended any game in a stadium, much less games for the teams they consider themselves fans of, but this can also be said for those in European countries with strong leagues. Football became accepted as something primarily experienced through the media. Interviews with fans of multiple teams found that "all considered themselves fans, including those who followed football exclusively through the media." (Sandvoss 2003, 16) While there is still debate, especially from those who are concerned about their local football club abandoning them in favor of wealthier foreigners or those concerned about the effect that the severe increase in wealth for the larger teams and leagues has on smaller teams and leagues (both valid concerns), it is generally accepted that fandom can be media-based.

That the entireties of games are now presented through television also means that instead of just a portion of a game being treated as a television program, the full game is. The techniques that had been used to create television highlights – combination of shots, replay, commentary – now apply to the full event, and color

how the majority of spectators understand and see the game. It is experienced as other television is experienced – from week to week, with an ongoing narrative, recognizable characters that are frequently talked about and looked upon, with (hopefully) action and excitement. The televisual codes of football increasingly take precedence within the minds of football viewers, who expect replays and close-ups and defer to the screen when it comes to controversial decisions. Football functions as a television program, and this shapes how it is understood.

This is not to say that in-stadium football disappeared, or is even likely to disappear, as Baudrillard might have expected. As Hjarvard notes, "[v]irtualization, however, is seldom total; most institutions still maintain physical-geographical bases as an important framework for social praxis. What is new is that these places and buildings now interplay with virtual places and spaces, and the reality and forms of interaction that take place in the virtual world will also have consequences for social praxis in the physical locality." (Hjarvard 2008, 129) The stadium, and attending live games, does not disappear with an increase in televised football, but it does adjust to accommodate the new reality of television's primacy. This is not only by the more comfortable seats in new stadiums, or the way in which "the spectator can watch live (with slight delay) replays of the action on giant screens at one end of the ground," (Redhead 2007, 234) which make watching the game in the stadium more like watching the game via television, but also in the increasing valorization of being in the stadium. Rather than watching in the stadium being the normal experience of fandom, for many, it becomes something that is seen as an occasion. A German fan of Liverpool who responded to the *footballslash* survey answered the question about going to games with "I wish I could but since I live in Germany I can't really go to Anfield. Besides, it's almost impossible for a foreigner to get a ticket for a match. It's depressing, really." (survey response) A Canadian respondent responded to the same question with "[c]ould if I would. I really, really would." For these respondents, and many more in the survey, games in the stadium are something rare and special, especially when it comes to the favorite teams that they have developed relationships with via the media. Football clubs accommodate this sense of specialness by incorporating museums and memorials into their ground for out-of-town visitors. Being in the stadium is a precious thing that can happen on vacations and other special occasions, and those who can go regularly are considered lucky. Normal is watching through the media.

With the combination of football coming to rely on the media's resources, and the normalization of experiencing football as a primarily media experience, we can say that football has fulfilled the conditions for mediatization. The institutions of football, from individual players to international governing bodies, shift themselves to better suit the needs of mass media institutions, which have their own identities and histories. (Whannel 2005) The experience of live football is extended worldwide, and is widely substituted with a media form. It can be said that the actors of football are as concerned with media logic as football logic, a process that begun with its origins as a spectator sport. However, media logic is not static, and as the media changes, so does it.

Welcome The Internet

If television increased the amount of football in the media, by establishing frequent live broadcasts, daily news programs relating to the sport, and provoking an increase in football coverage by other media (such as print or radio), the Internet has intensified this. The near-limitless capacity of the Internet and its low bar for entry in terms of content production, compared to other forms, means that there is more football content than ever for a fan to consume and experience. Instead of football being a relatively controlled substance, doled out at set times, it is everywhere and on demand. It is now clear that "[o[nline sport content distribution mechanisms, particularly video streaming and download technologies, are restructuring the media sport content economy by creating "digital plenitude" where once there was comparative scarcity in terms of quality content and channels of communication." (Hutchins and Rowe 2009, 356) Video highlights, for example, once a prized rights package and available only once a week, are now available to anyone with an Internet connection, traded across social-networking sites and message boards. When a fantastic goal is scored in a game, within less than an hour it has usually made it to a video-hosting site and is distributed across the world. Video clips aren't just reserved for new goals, either – equally as common, if not more, are highlights of games past or edited collections focused on a single player or team. Instead of something limited by broadcast time and space, video highlights are something expected to be found whenever the viewer wishes to have them. This content can also be duplicated and spread with relative ease.

It is not only audiovisual content that has expanded. The live-television era in football ushered in increased press coverage of the sport, as discussed, with larger sports sections in newspapers and increased coverage of football even in non-sport publications. The "digital plentitude" that has restructured video highlights of football has also restructured print coverage, with more and more space available for more and more coverage of football. A major news publication now updates hourly, rather than daily, adding new content on a rolling basis throughout the day. Speed is a particularly key element of this: as representatives of the Australian sports media argued in court, in regards to their rights to post live scores on their websites, "the presentation of digital news, including moving and still images, is a product of technological evolution, with audiences having grown accustomed to 24/7 on-demand content. A failure to adjust to changing audience habits, such as accessing "breaking" sports news, regular score updates, image archives, and highlights packages online, would, they claim, be impractical and commercially counterproductive." (Hutchins and Rowe 2010, 9) Football and sports news is increasingly fast, with "breaking stories" being posted as soon as they happen, and live updates being expected across sports news sites. This assumption of immediate reaction is not reserved for games – when the provisional England squad for the 2012 European Championships was announced, multiple English news websites provided a "liveblog" of the announcement, with updates every minute as the players selected were announced. The minutest aspects of football become newsworthy in the 24-hour cycle of football information that fans now expect.

Additionally, we are seeing that "lower barriers of access and cost have multiplied the number of media companies, sports organizations, clubs, and even individual athletes who can produce and distribute content for online consumption." (Hutchins and Rowe 2009, 356) The newspapers and magazines are no longer just in competition with each other for readers, they are also in competition with official websites of football clubs, "where sports organizations can bypass external media organizations and communicate directly with their fans." (Cleland 2011, 301) This provides both greater access to their inner workings, in the hopes of increasing fan identification with the club, and news stories presented exactly how the club wishes to see them presented. The space made available by the Internet means that while the websites of *The Guardian* and Liverpool FC might see themselves in competition with each other, in practice, the fan is unlikely to stay exclusively with one. While looking for information and news stories, she is likely to utilize both, as well as a

number of others. With most websites being free to access, once fees for Internet access itself are paid, the fan does not have to invest much in order to have as much information as she wants.

More information builds an increasing desire for more information, as "the production and consumption of media messages proliferates rather than uses up information resources." (Schulz 2004, 93) Schulz credits this somewhat-paradoxical phenomenon to the observation that "[m]edia messages provoke reactions, which, in turn, give rise to further media messages. Communication arouses interest and increases the demand for messages." (ibid) This is especially true for a content-rich subject such as football, which incorporates a wide variety of actors across multiple countries, each with their own situations and stories. As a Northampton football journalist put it, "with all the different media now fans are just hungry for more and more information, whereas 10 years ago they might have been happy just to see who was playing, who was injured and what the result was. Now they want to know everything about the club, they want to know what's happening on the financial side of things, they want to know how much players are earning, they want to know everything and it's our job along with everybody else [in the communication process] to try and give them information." (Cleland 2011, 305) The more information football fans have, the more they want.

This means that there is not only an increasing amount of information, but an increasing amount of different kinds of information. Statistical information about top scorers, minutes played, league positions, and nearly anything else is easily accessible. Detailed statistical analysis of individual games can be found on one page, a full history of a football club on another, and a click will find an interview where a star player discusses which of his teammates takes the longest to do his hair. Information about players, the star performers of this network, is particularly proliferated and sought-after. This information is not always governed by the logic of sport, but by the logic of the media – what would make a good story and secure pageviews and ad revenue. Sensationalism and clear narratives attract the most pageviews, and football coverage tends to utilize those styles even when having a "pure" sporting discussion. A story about "[team] in crisis" is more popular than one about the same team's tactical formation. Yet, the limitless scope of the Internet means both are available.

It is also increasingly international in scope. As "football has become increasingly transnational, in terms of player migration, team competitions,

supporter association, and the educational backgrounds and global connectivity of football's various stakeholders," (Giulianotti and Robertson 2007, 178) there has been "growing interest in domestic sporting competitions outside their country of origin." (Sandvoss 2004, 44) Increased coverage of Spanish or Italian football on English television, or increased coverage of English football on German television, means that there is increased interest in these leagues. The Champions League, by bringing top European clubs together, also contributes heavily, as fans "see that European context as the crucial arena in which to assert their status in their relations with other fans both domestic and European," (King 2000, 432) and therefore they have to know what the European context is. Football news outlets cater to this by offering coverage of major events in foreign leagues, leading to a situation in which the resignation of FC Barcelona's manager was covered and analyzed by no less than ten articles in English newspaper/news site *The Guardian* (a popular website for football information for *footballslash* survey participants)*.* The scope of the Internet accelerates football's trend towards international awareness.

The Global and the Community

Football fans, too, are increasingly global. The aggressive promotion of European top leagues to non-European countries has led to an increasing amount of fans of big teams in "minor" football nations. Major clubs market themselves abroad with tours, websites in multiple languages, and webchats with players geared towards Asian markets. However, the "unlimited range and scope" of the Internet also means that most fans with Internet access can access any site on it, including news outlets from other countries. For example, North American football fans, who for most of football's history were isolated from information about the sport, can now easily and instantly access English newspapers and have the same amount of information as any "native" fan. (Wilson 2007) They can read the same match reports, the same gossip columns, and, most importantly, interact and debate with other fans from outside their country.

Television made high-level European football accessible and attractive to non-Europeans, but these "audiences [were] situated on the receiving end of a one-way communication process." (Sandvoss 2003, 150) Information about the game and the teams were provided to these fans, but they were isolated from the greater culture surrounding the teams and surrounding football. Cornell Sandvoss (2003) spoke of

these fan communities as imagined and deterritorialized, increasingly unmoored from any physical space and constituted through interactions with the media. A Chelsea FC fan in South Africa watched games, read "Internet newspapers", and talked with his brother in the UK, always considering himself a Chelsea fan and part of that community while he did so, despite never interacting with UK-based Chelsea fans. These communities were often reconstituted on local level, "manifested in everyday interaction with members of the same or other communities within a (distant) locale." (ibid, 99) The example Sandvoss used was of Norwegian Chelsea fans who are deeply involved in organizing the fan community of other Norwegian Chelsea fans, and who interact with Norwegian fans of other English teams. The way fans from Norway or South Africa dealt with their "community" was either locally, interacting with other fans from their immediate environment, or through "informational" media sources like television or early Internet sites. In all of Sandvoss' interviews, however, there was no discussion of these "deterritorilized" fans interacting with fans from other "foreign" communities or from the "origin" region.

However, the Internet is not only a source for information about a faraway, but beloved, football club. It can "also link people into more inter-personal relationships, such as bulletin boards, newsgroups, or Internet discussion sites." (Crawford 2004, 143) Football fans do not only use the Internet to find information about teams, they use it to find information about being a fan, using it to interact with other fans of their team from throughout the globe, including the part of the globe that is in the shade of the stadium. Many football fans "as well as attending games in person, also contribute to online discussion forums, blogs, email loops and message boards and use the Internet as just one form of communicating with fellow football fans and showing solidarity with their club." (Gibbons and Dixon 2010, 604) Unlike other forms of communication between fans, this is immediately accessible from around the world, meaning that it is possible for fans of the same team in different locales can have the same conversation. The creators of an American podcast on Liverpool Football Club "often make a point of telling listeners that they use the forums that Liverpool-based fans post upon." (Rookwood and Millward 2011, 43) While television might create an attachment to a foreign team, the two-way communication model of the current Internet brings the members of these deterritorilized communities together and allows them to communicate with each other. The "imagined community" of football fandom can become slightly less

imagined, especially as the Internet becomes increasingly prevalent. In Hjarvard's words, "[o]nce an abstraction, community has, thanks to media, become concrete experience." (Hjarvard 2008, 128) This is not to say that every fan can or wishes to take advantage of this concretezation, or that disparate fans of a team will abandon the local ties that have been established for the new "international" community, but it is possible for fans of the same object in different physical space to have the same conversation.

The example of the American Liverpool podcast recognizes two important trends in new media as they relate to football – disparate fans can interact with each other directly, and that "[t]he hegemonic control over popular sport content once exercised by highly capitalized broadcasters is under challenge from online operators, Web sites, and digital media." (Hutchins and Rowe 2010, 2) Neither the podcast nor the forums used by both American and English Liverpool fans were created or controlled by major broadcasters or by the club itself. This is not to say that they are not influenced by what is shown on Sky (or Fox, in the United States) or what is officially coming out of Liverpool FC, but that with the rise of the Internet there is a greater possibility of an independent space for groups of fans and fan communities, rather than having all media be under the control of major media conglomerates.

This independent, fan-controlled media also disrupts the ways in which media-using football fans have been discussed. Richard Giulianotti's influential "taxonomy" of football spectators (2002) for example, reserved media use for only "nontraditional" fans; "followers" who like what a club represents politically or because a favorite player plays there, "fans" who have a consumer-oriented identity, or "flâneurs" that flit through the "marketplace" of football looking for an "instrumental identification with an avant-garde, winning brand" (Giulianotti 2002, 40) and either refuse team identification or change it regularly. The traditional "supporter," on the other hand, is not seen to use media at all, in favor of "a long-term personal and emotional investment in the club" (ibid, 33) that is focused on physical presence. The "flâneur" is most readily associated with media use, coming to football via "interactions with the cool media of television and the Internet." (ibid, 38) Perhaps not coincidentally, this is the type that Giulianotti most readily criticizes, saying that "if supporters become flâneurs, then the spectacle that is created by the spectators themselves will be threatened." (ibid, 42) The more heroic "supporter" as described by Giulianotti does not use media and is not a consumer, and it is he who

can be seen as the authentic way to be a football spectator compared to the looser-tied "follower," the celebrity-obsessed "fan," or the heavily mediated "flâneur."

What Giulianotti's ideal types of football spectator demonstrates is a codifying of the "sense on the part of many that the game has lost its soul to an alliance of merchandisers and 'inauthentic', Johnny/Jackie-come-lately supporters." (Wagg 2004, 1) This assumption leads to a division when discussing football fans between a traditional/authentic and a new/inauthentic, where the "'traditionality' category, in short, consists of supporters who attend in groups and are loud and aggressive, with a close personal and local identification to the club and the 'new fandom' group, in contrast, are those with a much weaker attachment to their club as for them football is simply another form of late modern entertainment." (Pope 2011, 474) The media, which both greatly enriches football and presents it to "nontraditional" fans in a manner consistent with other entertainment, is considered to be most at fault for disturbances in football fan practices, and as a result is overlooked when discussing the practices of fans. As Liz Moor states, "many commentators have assumed that such cultures of engagement with football will be full of (predominantly middle-class) people whose interest in the game is simply a knee-jerk response to the marketing activities of clubs and corporations, ignoring the fact that many "traditional" supporters may make use of the Internet as well as television and radio, and that newer fans may prefer a more "virtual" relationship to football for reasons that have as much to do with the game's historically gendered and racialized norms for participation as they do with either its or their own class identity." (Moor 2007, 139)

The Internet, especially, shows how impossible it is to maintain a distinction between the authentic fan that does not use the media and the inauthentic fan that does. Most of the fans that Giulianotti and others would see as "authentic" utilize the Internet in various ways. For example, German ultra groups, who pride themselves on their ""topophilic" relationship toward the club's core spaces, primarily the home ground," (Giulianotti 2002, 33) which Giulianotti claimed was key to the position of a supporter, "have their own web pages which document their activities on photos and video clips, and provide a forum for self-presentation, discussion and the exchange of information." (Merkel 2007, 233) Additionally, they can post videos and photographs of their exploits and accomplishments on web forums such as ultras-tifo.net, which brings them into contact with other Ultras groups worldwide and allows a dialogue between these different groups of "authentic" supporters. We can also see how the media becomes a tool to be used by traditional fans when they feel

their interests are threatened, rather than just a tool to threaten them. Fan protests about the Liverpool FC owners from 2008 to 2010 were organized by long-term local fans who were also "cultural actors who were well experienced in the use of viral campaigns operating mainly from the backrooms of pubs and houses in the city," who "had the necessary contacts, technological capital, developing knowledge about global football finance and, perhaps above all, the sheer passion and determination required to manage the manipulation of the key media narratives concerning the Liverpool crisis." (Williams 2012, 438)

It also becomes difficult to abstract away the experience of fans who do not attend live games regularly as inauthentic when they make themselves and their relationship with football visible. Closer examination shows that fans who claim an "authentic" relationship with their team despite being located outside of its area, in some cases always outside, has been part of football for much longer than the pay-TV experience. Pat Slaughter's recounting of a "day out" in 2002 with a group of Leeds United ex-hooligans stated that "[o]f the older members all except one have been attending Leeds games since at least the early 1980s" but that "[f]ifteen of these older fans have always lived in London." (Slaughter 2004, 60) The authenticity of these fifteen men was never questioned. Scandinavian fans of English football, who have a long and well-organized history dating back to the first showings of English league games on Scandinavian television in 1969 (Reimer 2004, Hognestad 2009), found that when they took trips to England to see games "they found a strong communal ethos with local fans, who treated them as simply another type of supporter" (Nash 2000, 10) and saw them as genuine fans with true "passion" for their team. When the Scandinavian fans became a reality to the English fans, it was difficult to see them as other than genuine. The Internet, extending communication outside the face-to-face realm, also extends this. Interviews and studies show that when "New Zealanders and Australians who have never visited England [watch Manchester United], these enthusiasts assume a genuine fan status, their commitment often involving watching live satellite match broadcasts from Britain in the early hours of an Australian or New Zealand morning." (Hughson and Free 2006, 78) When they discuss the team and their experience on RedCafe.net, they are no longer abstract "foreigners" with inauthentic experiences, but genuine fans who clearly feel the same way about the game that a Mancunian would.

Even more importantly, however, is the potentiality of the Internet to destabilize and problematize the concept of the "authentic supporter" altogether. As

Garry Crawford writes, "the distinctions made by many academics between 'fans' and 'consumers' are often little more than an attempt to legitimize the author's own interests as 'authentic' and 'resistant.' This is particularly evident in many academic considerations of sport, where authors often seek to identify their own sporting (masculine) interests as *different* to other forms of fan culture, such as cult-media interests, which tend to be deemed as more 'feminine' and hence less 'resistant' and 'authentic.'" (Crawford 2004, 34) This sort of thinking has greatly limited the willingness of many to recognize the "new types of fan culture and modes of spectatorship in response to changes in the nature and scope of media coverage." (Moor 2007, 139) Abstracting fans who do not follow the accepted patterns of "authentic" fandom as "more detached 'new middle-class consumers' of football" (Crabbe and Brown 2004, 30) is easier when they only appear as anonymous faces in the crowd or specters taking football away from its "true" fans.

New configurations of what football fandom is and how communities can be made of the raw materials of football become increasingly visible and concrete with the Internet, and *footballslash* can be seen as one of them. A mostly-female group focused on representations of players, with most considering themselves fans of (sometimes multiple) non-local teams, they are almost exactly how many commentators would define an "inauthentic" football fandom. It is certainly not traditional. However, it is still a valid mode of football fandom, and it is not the only form of "new" fandom that de-abstracts itself with the Internet and displays its own sort of validity. The connectivity of the Internet can also mean that these fans find each other, and can enjoy their own communities and interpretation of football without being pressured by the "authentic" or "traditional" fans that would abuse them. Football in a mediatized age can belong to a variety of fan groups.

Use Media, Make Media

What both the Liverpool podcast and protests and *footballslash* indicate is not only the disparate forms of football fandom that exist online, but also that football media is increasingly becoming as much about participation as it is about information. Across the Internet and world, "[f]ans are now the authors of their own websites, blogs, discussion forums, online commentaries, social networking sites,

podcasts and digital video productions distributed via YouTube." (Boyle and Haynes 2009, 217) Fan-produced, or perhaps user-generated, media content has been a growing element of the media landscape as the Internet takes prominence, "suggesting that, today, the majority of people *make* media when they *use* media." (Deuze 2009, 476) While for many, this takes the form of less-intensive practices like updating one's Facebook page with pictures or commenting on a message board, for many who are particularly invested in their preferred media object (and football fans pride themselves on their deep investments), this takes on a more involved form.

One of the most prominent forms of this user-generated football media content is the blog. Somewhat a refashioning of the print (now Internet) media surrounding football, blogs are increasingly prevalent across the world of online football media. The general sense about blogs is that they are "typically created by individuals in their spare time and provide commentary and rhetoric on a plethora of topics based on recent events with links to various news sources." (Boyle and Haynes 2004, 142) Passionate, often personal, and frequently anti-authority, blogs are seen as providing an "alternative" media space compared to the more established publications, specifically allowing for the extreme partisanship and crassness that characterizes football fandom. (Leading Arsenal blog Arseblog, for example, uses the tagline "It's fuckin' excellent," frequently refers to other teams and their players as cunts, and has developed a specific lexicon for discussing his drinking and hangovers.) However, blogs have grown increasingly broad in scope, covering everything from in-depth analysis of the finances of football clubs to recounting games attended while abroad. Through blogs, fans can contribute themselves to mediatized football, intervening in its narratives and offering their own interpretation of events.

This culture, however, like other participatory media cultures, did not simply appear as the Internet became prevalent. As Henry Jenkins has noted, "[t]hough this new participatory culture has its roots in practices that have occurred just below the radar of the media industry throughout the twentieth century, the Web has pushed that hidden layer of cultural activity into the foreground." (Jenkins 2008, 137) The predecessor of this style of fan-created football media can most readily be found in the "football fanzine" movement of the 1980s and 1990s. (Jary et al 1991, Haynes 1995, Giulianotti 1997) Fanzines are, as the name suggests, fan-produced magazines, sold at games by their producers. Like blogs, fanzines promoted an

irreverent, critical look at football and the footballing authorities, including the running of the clubs that they supported. However, they were limited by the exclusivity of their availability, as well as the need for physical materials and somewhat-specialist skills – paper, the ability to lay out a full magazine – and this limited the actual ability of fans to both consume fanzines and participate in the creation of them. Blogs are cheaper to produce, with the software and platforms needed to create them being free in most cases, more immediate in that they can be updated daily, and easier to operate, allowing for a wider range and scope of individuals to produce them. They also do not require a physical distribution network. There are dozens of blogs dedicated to Arsenal FC alone, for example, and more keep appearing as individual fans consider their perspective as something that needs to be heard. This does not mean that fanzines have disappeared. Many are still available before games as they always were, and many are also, like mainstream magazines, available online. They are, however, no longer the only "voice of the fan" that can be found among the media.

Increasingly, though, the line between the "amateur" blogger and the "professional" journalist is blurred. Some blogs have become full-time careers for their authors, either by absorption by major media interests (such as the incorporation of football humor blog *Dirty Tackle* into the Yahoo! Sports umbrella) or by monetization of popular blogs by the bloggers themselves (such as the aforementioned Arseblog). In other cases, bloggers use their platform as an "audition" for a career in football media, becoming staff writers for mainstream publications or freelance journalists. There has also been a trend among mainstream "print" football media to adopt some blog formatting or refer to occasional pieces of its production as blogs, a case not wholly unlike other media outlets in which the "commercially viable of these [fan-produced] practices are then absorbed into the mainstream media […] through a second-order imitation of the same aesthetic and thematic qualities." (Jenkins 2008, 153) "Blogs" on major news sites are now commonplace, featuring a more casual, humorous tone than the more traditional match reports, offering greater analysis, and allowing user comments. Intriguingly, there is also increasing collaboration between journalists and bloggers as the practice becomes more mainstream, but also more professionalized, and the line between which is one and the other is increasingly blurry. Journalists contribute more personal or experimental pieces to blogs, bloggers publish articles on the websites of newspapers, and media projects such as *The Blizzard*, a quarterly football

publication, combines both into one space. Yet as football blogging becomes more professionalized, it becomes increasingly difficult for the "individual in their spare time" to participate in this world. Over the past months, several prominent amateur football bloggers have stopped updating, realizing that their "free labor" consisting of "productive activities that are pleasurably embraced" (Terranova 2000, 37) is still labor.

While blogs represent one way of "participating" within football media, the blurring between the blog and the mainstream print media show how connected the form is to the way the relationship between football and the mass media has been constructed since the early stages. There is also an increasing amount of fan-generated content that addresses the role of football itself as a media object, and "editing and manipulating media material is the is the key practice of the contemporary media environment." (Meikle and Young 2012, 114) The contemporary media environment that football is in encourages manipulation of media, with digital media objects being increasingly easy for amateurs to modify and create with software at hand. Football fans, just like fans of other media objects, utilize these tools. Fan-created video content, hosted on sites like YouTube, is prevalent. Compilations of "best goals", a player's career, hilarious misses, or anything else that a football fan might find entertaining are created and distributed with regularity. These are joined by videos that take football and reinterpret it in other ways, such as the "Lego Fussball" series of videos created by German teenager Florian Moritz (bricksports.de) that recreate game highlights in Lego bricks, using stop-motion animation and the game's original commentary. Graphic design, drawing, and painting utilizing football are found on blogs and across social network sites. There are also more "casual" uses of image manipulation, utilizing the jokes, references, and stylizations of both football and other media objects to create images and .gifs that mock, celebrate, and critique the sport. The uses of the "Zidane headbutt" is a good example of this. French superstar Zinedine Zidane was sent off in the 2006 World Cup final for headbutting Italy's Marco Materazzi, knocking him down. Video and images of the headbutt were quickly recontextualized over the Internet, recast as a Mortal Kombat fight, a Pokemon battle, or as Materazzi simply walking into a lightpost.

What the "Zidane headbutt" as an Internet meme also demonstrates is that football, and sport culture more generally, is becoming more and more mixed with other media cultures. Where at one point being a fan of video games, television

shows, or sports took place in different venues, increasingly, being a fan for everything is an online practice. It is increasingly prevalent for the signs, symbols, and practices of one fan group to bleed into another, and easier to know what fans of other media objects and texts are doing and saying. The culture of one can easily bleed into another, now that most acts of fandom occur online, utilizing digital media that is easily transferred without cost or damage to the original. The Zidane headbutt found its way onto a wide variety of message boards, dedicated to a wide variety of topics. It itself was manipulated to include references to a wide variety of other media objects. The thinking of football as media opens up football to be used as media, used by its fans as a source of creativity and humor, but it also means that football can be seen more easily alongside other popular entertainments. The dividing lines between different parts of popular culture are no longer sharp, which means that football can be treated in the same way as other forms. It can be the source for online discussion, Internet memes, or fanfiction.

Conclusion

The sport of football, a peasant's game turned elite entertainment and back again, has been transformed by media. It can be said to have become mediatized, as described by Hjarvard, Schulz, and Strömbäck. It relies on the resources provided by the mass media, and reshapes itself to better suit the media in order to maintain these resources. The experience of football has also been mostly replaced by a media form, and the knowledge that fans have of football, its players, and its institutions comes from the media as well. Digital and pay television, by providing large sums of money to football leagues and clubs and broadcasting live league games, are often given credit for mediatizing football, but this process was set in place from its very beginning. From the newspaper letters section that provided the forum for codifying football's rules, to the boy's magazines that presented the ideals of team sports, to the newsreels that showed important games to the nation, to the printed press that provided information about players, football has always been mediatized to some degree. Pay television intensified this mediatization, making it more complete by making it possible to watch football games in their entirety via the media, diminishing the difference between the media and non-media experience. It became accepted, normal, and valid for the whole experience of being a football fan, from watching games to learning about teams, to be done through the media.

The rise of the Internet both intensifies and complicates this model. There is more football information, available faster, and on demand. The foreign fans that learned to love their teams through media can now not only read the same press as domestic fans, but participate in their discussions as well. Additionally, fans match their consumption of football media with production of football media, with blogs, podcasts, and fan-produced videos all proliferating. Some of this work also points to another important change in the football media landscape. If football is considered as a media object, it becomes something for fans to transform and recontextualize, just as other media objects are transformed. Football fan practices online rub up against other online fan practices, as the divisions between football and other popular entertainments become less sharp. It is this reason that *footballslash* developed only after the mass introduction of the Internet, despite the reading of football as a media narrative being available for a long period of time.

The next chapter will address the fanfiction community, and how its own changes, as much as those within football, lead to an environment where *footballslash* can thrive.

Chapter 2: Convergence Fandom and Understanding Fanfiction

The majority of respondents to the *footballslash* survey had prior experiences in fanfiction – indeed, only two reported that they had never read fanfiction before. They had written or read slash fiction in a variety of different fandoms, from *American Idol* to anime to *Stargate: Atlantis*. Fanfiction had been part of their media life and experience before writing or reading about football and footballers occurred to them. When they did think of it, they could easily find a space in which to post their own stories, read those of others, and interact with people who saw football in the way that they did.

The basis for this can be credited to the mediatization of football, as discussed in the last chapter. Football's mediatization put it in the same space as other media texts, on the same screen as *Star Trek* and *American Idol*. Football's wide range of media possibilities, from print articles to full games to an individual footballer's Twitter feed, means not that there is an increasing amount of material for a fanfiction writer to draw upon when creating her stories. With its mediatization, especially with the increase in information available via new media, the world of high-level international football can be seen as an infinitely vast narrative world, open for discovery.

However, the development of *footballslash* and its attendant community also indicates a change in the world of fanfiction itself. From its origins in 1970s science-fiction and crime fandom, fanfiction has become an established practice within fan groups for a wide variety of media texts and objects. The low bar to entry and limitless space that transformed football media in the Internet age also changed the way in which fanfiction, particularly slash fanfiction, was not only accessed, but created and discussed by its readers and writers. That there could be slash fanfiction for football is a result of the changes within fanfiction itself in recent years. From being a niche practice among fans of certain media texts, it has become a way of interacting with, and seeing, a wide range of media objects.

It is this development that will be the focus of this chapter. It will situate *footballslash*, its practices, and its attendant community within fanfiction practices as they stand today, explaining the way in which it can be considered as part of this world. Then, I will trace the evolution of the community and practices of fanfiction

writers and readers, from its origins in 1970s science-fiction fandom and 'zine publication to its current practice in online networked communities, and how this shift has encouraged fanfiction, particularly slash fanfiction, to be seen as both a community/subculture in and of itself as well as a way of understanding and interpreting media texts. Rather than something inherent to a source text, fanfiction has become part of the general media experience for many. This development, as much as football's mediatization, has led to the creation and maintenance of *footballslash*.

Footballslash and its surroundings

The actual Livejournal community called *footballslash* is, like so many other Livejournal communities devoted to fanfiction, the depository, distribution, and archiving hub of a practice that extends outside of it. It can be considered the center of this broader community, a place for authors in the football "fandom" to post their stories and find an audience, and readers to find stories to their preference. It is expected that when football slash stories are ready to be presented to the wider community of football slash fans, they will be posted on *footballslash*. Community members post stories frequently, with the community usually being updated by its members several times a day.

Around *footballslash*, there is other cultural and subcultural activity, much of which takes similar form to similar communities dedicated to fanfiction for other media objects. There is an anonymous "kink meme," a format of fanfiction writing that has grown in popularity in the past several years, where users post anonymous prompts for other writers to take on, which are then posted as direct responses to the original idea. While many of these prompts are sexually explicit and non-mainstream, hence the name and tradition of anonymity, there are also a wide range of more general prompts and ideas for potential stories (a wedding between two players, a situation where German star Mesut Özil is a model instead of a football player). In this vein, there are also several more "general" prompting communities, which serve, alongside the kink meme, as more casual place to try writing and post smaller, more spur-of-the-moment fictions, as well as discuss the potential of certain events, images, or interviews to become future works. Many of these stories find their way to *footballslash* when considered "finished" enough by their author. There are also several "exchanges," where an author is assigned another author to write a

story for, usually based on prompts provided by the person she is assigned to, and "challenges," where works are written based around a theme. These, too, usually find their way to *footballslash* when the exchange or challenge is considered over, with the signups for these events also advertised on *footballslash*. Additionally, there is a recently-formed "meta" community, designed for talking about issues in writing football fanfiction, rather than posting the fanfiction itself. This meta activity, a common one in various fanfiction communities, also, and more regularly, takes place across the individual Livejournals of the *footballslash* members.

The community called *footballslash* was created in 2002 during the World Cup, always a major period for media football. The first post in the community gave creator bubosquared's reasons for creating it in the first place:

> So I noticed that all of the sudden, a whole lot of football fen seemed to be gravitaing towards my journal (I am nothing if not egocentric), and I suddenly realised that the interest for footballslash is a lot bigger than I thought. So, in order to avoid alientating the noon-fen amongst my friends, I created this community. :)

Bubosquared's personal journal, while open to whoever was interested, was proving to be too small a space for the interest generated by such a large media event. The creation of the "community" provided a space that would not be controlled exclusively by bubosquared, somewhere others on Livejournal could easily find and participate in. In its first two years, however, posting was sporadic, with only a handful of posts a month (and sometimes not even that). Posting picked up rapidly over the European Championships in 2004, and after the tournament was over, continued to be steady, with posts made nearly every day. The World Cup in 2006 brought another new wave of fans (as did the 2008 European Championships and the 2010 World Cup), and activity has steadily increased ever since. In April of 2012, 123 stories (or sections of stories, in the case of new updates to several long-running series) were posted to *footballslash.* As of May 2012, there are over 3200 "members," although it is difficult to tell which of the users listed are still active, in terms of reading or writing football slash stories. This makes it a rather healthy fandom, although still small compared to "large" fandoms like *Harry Potter* or *Lord of the Rings*, which feature a wider range of active communities and larger amounts of users in them.

In short, *footballslash*, and its surrounding community, operate much in the same way as similar communities for fanfiction based on other media objects. While football is not often thought of as something that would inspire fanfiction, much less

a community for it, it exists in almost exactly the same manner as more traditional communities. The same trends as found in other fandoms (to use proper terminology), such as kink memes, are found in the same format as in the football slash community. In practical terms, it is difficult to find a difference between *footballslash* and other communities, except for the names of the people who are the subject of the stories. Instead of Draco Malfoy or Captain Kirk, there is Fernando Torres and Daniel Agger.

"Media Fandom," 'Zines, and the Internet

This would have been a strange concept for fanfiction writers in the 1970s, when the practice was coalescing into the forms recognizable today. Fan-produced fiction had been prevalent among fans of literary science fiction since at least the 1930s, with many well-known writers getting their start in fan-produced magazines. However, what is described by Camille Bacon-Smith (1992) and others as "media fandom," fan practices that relate to objects and texts originally found in the media, specifically television, dates back approximately to the late 1960s. Francesca Coppa, in her history of media fandom, says that it "emerged from within science fiction fandom around 1966." (Coppa 2006, 43) There is some debate as to whether *Star Trek* or *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* was the first television show to have what is now recognized as a "media fandom" surrounding it, with passionate, proselytizing fan groups who were deeply attached to the show, but it is generally accepted that it was *Star Trek* that started the actual creative practices of media fandom. As Coppa writes, "[f]rom the start, *Star Trek* fans produced not simply the critical discussion typical of science fiction fandom but creative responses to their favorite show." (ibid, 45) Bacon-Smith, in her important early account of the culture and production of media fans, says that "[m]edia fandom began as *Star Trek* fandom." (Bacon-Smith 1992, 16) It was through *Star Trek*'s connection to the broader science-fiction fandom, with its tradition of amateur/fan writing and publication, that fan-produced fiction based on a television show became possible.

This is not to say it became accepted. As Bacon-Smith writes, when she decided to study fans in the early 1980s, she found that there was hostility in the science fiction community towards *Star Trek* fans, "who were seen by my predominantly male informants as a blight on the convention scene, an

embarrassment to right-thinking science fiction fans, and something less than intelligent." (Bacon-Smith 1992, 86) Being a media format, instead of a literature format, it suffered from the general negative perception of television's merits. Spending this much focus and mental effort on a television show was considered unseemly by the "traditional" literary fans. Additionally, from early on, the driving force within *Star Trek* fandom was female, especially when it came to fan writing and fanzine production. This is not to say that there were no male fans of *Star Trek*, but that the primary drivers of this new form of fan-produced fiction were women, and "[h]owever else they were participating in the community, male *Star Trek* fans weren't writing fan fiction." (Coppa 2006, 47) From the very start, fanfiction was considered a female hobby and social practice. The origin of the characters, settings, and worlds being based in already-existing work also had an influence on the nature of this sort of fandom, compared to its literary fandom predecessor, as due to *Star Trek* being copyrighted by its creators the writers and editors of a fanzine were not allowed to profit on their work. Media fandom, from the start, indicated two of its key elements: it was a female space that was required to remain amateur.

Despite the scorn from the science fiction fan community, that media fandom came out of more general science fiction fandom was a key shaper of its early practices. Media fans, like science fiction fans, organized conventions in order to meet up with other fans, discuss their favorite shows, encounter new media texts, hear favorite performers speak, and sell or purchase new fanzines with new stories. At the time of Bacon-Smith's research, the fanzine was the primary conduit for fanfiction. In her description, "[t]he standard format for the media fanzine is 8 ½ by 11 inches, and may include illustrations as well as text. Three hundred pages of reduced print is not unusual, and few fanzines run less than one hundred pages." (Bacon-Smith 1992, 45) Fanzines took time and money to produce, with "a year to two years' preparation time the norm." (ibid, 213) This expense meant that fanzines, and media fandom communities, tended to be limited to shows (and the occasional film) that appealed to those already in the community. From *Star Trek*, this style of convention-and-fanzine-based fandom extended into other science-fiction shows, such as *Blake's 7*, or to action-adventure shows such as *The Professionals*, especially as home video became more prevalent. They were still, however, limited to what would have been considered "cult" shows. As Henry Jenkins noted, writing at roughly the same time as Bacon-Smith, despite the expansion of media fandom from *Star*

Trek, "fans tend to focus their social and cultural activity around programs with the potential of being accepted by sizeable numbers of other fans." (Jenkins 1992, 93)

That fandom was spread face-to-face, usually after meeting at a convention or becoming "inducted" by someone who was already a fan, contributed to the limits on what could and could not support a media fandom. Bacon-Smith describes how for herself and the fans she studied, becoming "inducted" in media fandom involved a significant investment of time, and that fandom had "developed an extensive mentor-apprentice system for training newcomers in the structures and customs of the community." (Bacon-Smith 1992, 81) While there were "multifandom" zines that allowed stories from fringe or smaller fandoms (fandom here meaning the fan works and community based around a specific media object), the majority of fan practices were based around media objects that fit the profile of others – science fiction, fantasy, or action-adventure shows that appealed to those already involved with the community.

By the time of Jenkins' and Bacon-Smith's publication, though, the culture and nature of fanfiction was already changing. The Internet was already starting to make its appearance into media fandom practices. Thanks to media fandom's grounding in science fiction, it attracted, in Coppa's words, a "core group of highly educated, science-oriented women." (Coppa 2006, 54) This core group was comfortable with technology and tended to be early adopters, or those who worked in places where what would become the Internet was available. By the early 1990s, fans had spread onto Usenet and onto email mailing lists. Rhiannon Bury (2005) provides a good exploration of media fandom at this stage, which used these email lists to form communities that did not rely on the ability to meet physically, either at one's house or at a convention. Email lists also contributed to the "mainstreaming" of what had been a controversial, clandestine fanfiction genre, that of slash fiction.

Slash fiction, fanfiction depicting a homosexual relationship between two characters and so called because of the habit of putting a slash mark between the names of the two characters being depicted (Kirk/Spock, in the classic example) had been around since the early 1970s (Jenkins 1992), but was even more underground than regular fan practices and required a much longer "initiation" process for potential fans – it took several years for Bacon-Smith, for example, to be introduced to the concept and its fanzines. Once email mailing lists entered the picture, though, it meant that there were clearly-marked spaces that "fans who wanted to read homoerotic stories could join and that other fans could avoid" as well as "[s]lash-

friendly discussion lists [that] allowed these fans to consolidate and talk openly to each other." (Coppa 2006, 54) Slash fanfiction, which despite its clandestine nature had been growing in popularity throughout the 1980s, became easily accessible without a vetting process and as a result became even more prominent in fan circles and completely dominant in several.

As the Internet itself moved out of academic and professional settings and into the home, access to fanfiction and media fandom expanded further. The ability to make an email list no longer required special software or access other than a standard Internet connection, and new lists for "marginal" fandoms could and did spring up regularly, bringing together whoever wanted to discuss fannish interests in a particular program. Online archives, websites dedicated to hosting fanfiction stories, also became prevalent as creating and maintaining a website became cheaper and easier. Fandom no longer required an apprenticeship period – "people could just google their favorite show, join the available lists, or start reading fiction – even erotic fiction – on a public online archive." (Coppa 2006, 54) Compared to print fanzines, online archives and mailing lists were easy and cheap, often free, to create, and thus did not require a large extant fanbase to maintain themselves. While major media fandoms to develop in the late 1990s and early 2000s were in genres that fit the profile of previously popular media fandoms, such as *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer* and *Stargate SG-1*, there was also growth in what could be called nontraditional fandoms, such as "real person slash," fanfiction based on celebrities rather than television or films. Football fanfiction had its own online archive, for example, the now-defunct opengoal.tv. The Internet's worldwide reach, along with the lack of a need for physical presence at a convention in order to learn about and read fanfiction, also moved it away from an American (with outlets in the UK and Australia) practice. The maintainer of opengoal.tv gave her location as Hong Kong and her nationality as Chinese.

Eventually, however, the mailing-lists system died out in favor of the more customizable, networked experience of Livejournal, the site where *footballslash* is hosted, and easier-to-use-individually multi-fandom archiving systems like fanfiction.net. A combination blogging/social network, Livejournal was founded in 1999, but Coppa suggests that it was not until around 2003 that it was widely adopted by media fans, making *footballslash*'s 2002 founding date, and 2004 increase in popularity, roughly contemporaneous with other fandoms. On Livejournal, users create a personal blog, or journal, which also functions as a username across

the site. Users can "friend" the blogs of other users, with new entries from friends showing up on a custom webpage called a friend's list. Comments made on other journals show up with the name of the commenter's journal alongside an icon chosen by the commenter (basic accounts have six icon spaces, with the number going up depending on the chosen payment tier), and comments are stacked to create an easy-to-follow, conversational format. Journal posts can be set, or "locked", to various levels of privacy, from completely open, to readable by friends only, to readable by certain groups of friends only, to completely private. Additionally, users can create what are called "communities," journals where multiple users (using their own usernames) can post. Once a user joins a community, its posts also show up on the friends list. Communities have different levels of access as well, with some being open for anyone to post in or read, some with posting access restricted to moderators/maintainers, and other combinations. Livejournal's combination of privacy and sociability, along with its textual focus and capacity to store text, made it ideal for fanfiction communities. While its popularity as a personal blogging platform for the general public has been eclipsed by social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, it has continued to thrive as a hub for fanfiction activity.

At the same time as Livejournal, the multifandom online archive fanfiction.net was founded. Unlike previous archives, which were focused on a single media text, fanfiction.net allowed stories to be posted about everything. Popular fandoms, such as the anime *Naruto* or the *Harry Potter* series, could be accessed in the same place as "rare" fandoms like *Citizen Kane* or the short-lived *Friends* spinoff *Joey*. Its lack of editorial oversight – users could post whatever they wanted, without it having to be approved (although "real person" and explicitly sexual fiction were disallowed in the early 2000s) – allowed the site to grow quickly. While fanfiction.net did not fully eclipse one-fandom archives, especially for the more popular fandoms that could better support them, it, along with Livejournal, showed that this was not necessary. Anyone could produce fanfiction, for any possible media object, and they could post it and be read soon after writing.

While media fan conventions continue to exist, and continue to be popular, the general activity of fandom is now done over the Internet. Discovering, reading, and publishing fanfiction no longer requires access to conventions or the purchase and maintenance of fanzines. New fandoms can blossom quickly, and small ones can thrive even with only a handful of participants. It is clear that "the Internet's unique combination of personal privacy and access to a sympathetic public has enabled a

huge subculture of adult fan fiction to thrive, in which the abbreviated characters of popular culture can be "fleshed out" by fan writers." (Cumberland 2003, 268) The next section will explore the consequences of this shift on the fanfiction community, and how it now stands.

Convergence Fandom

Henry Jenkins described convergence as "the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want." (Jenkins 2008, 2) He saw convergence as the defining feature of the current media age. Media platforms, such as television, film, and the Internet became increasingly difficult to separate, which each becoming increasingly incorporated into the other. Media companies become increasingly concentrated, incorporating television networks, film studios, newspapers, and broadband providers into one corporate umbrella, but at the same time, users of media become increasingly able to put out their own messages across digital spaces and subvert these concentrated media outlets. The changes in football in the past two decades can be easily seen as an example of the complications and contradictions that Jenkins covers in his discussions of convergence. The effects of this convergence, in its forms, can be profound but complicated on the media industry as we know it. (Dwyer 2010) More simply, convergence can be described, as Graham Meikle and Sherman Young do, as "the coming together of things that were previously separate." (Meikle and Young 2012, 2) Meikle and Young also stress the importance of the fact that the current media landscape is networked, "enabling complex relationships of two-way communication." (ibid, 3) That media are all, at least potentially and increasingly actually, connected to each other through networks is the key element of convergence.

It is the centrality of the network that is key to the current state of fanfiction, and the fanfiction community, which can be best defined as "convergence fandom." Multi-fandom archives and Livejournal has increasingly brought fans of different media objects and texts into a network, rather than keeping them in their own separate spaces. This in and of itself is not new to the experience of media fandom. Jenkins' research in the media fandom community in the 1980s and early 1990s

found that most fans "use individual series as points of entry into a broader fan community, linking to an intertextual network composed of many programs, films, books, comics, and other popular materials. Fans often find it difficult to discuss single programs except through references and comparisons to this broader network; fans may also drift from one series commitment to another through an extended period of involvement within "fandom."" (Jenkins 1992, 41) He pointed to the existence of several fanzines that dealt with multiple topics, from "genzines" that covered potentially any fandom to those that dealt in specificities like "detective shows" or "the film roles of Mel Gibson", as well as the popularity of "crossover" stories that placed characters from one story-world into another. Media fandom had always been intertextual, with new media objects being added to the network as fans introduced each other to new shows and fans saw connections across different media objects. That media fandom already thought of itself as a network, even before the advent of fanfiction.net, Livejournal, or email lists, encouraged quick adoption of these technologies of networking. Rather than introducing a new concept to the world of media fandom, they allowed better expression of what had already made up an important part of the community.

What the use of networked media, especially Livejournal, in a media fandom setting does is make this connectivity and intertextuality instantaneous. A fan can get into a new fandom, make a Livejournal post about it, and direct her friends towards it immediately, or whenever the friends found time to read her post. Many *footballslash* members found the community through this sort of linking, such as the one who got into the fandom from "[s]pecific fic recs from a livejournal friend with whom I shared a different fandom." (survey response) Trying a new fandom via a Livejournal recommendation requires little risk or investment, as the recommendation comes from a friend with already-trusted taste, and the story is free and easily accessible. If the new fandom is liked, its community or communities can be joined, therefore showing up on the friends list alongside the "old" fandom. Fandoms can therefore rub up against each other, occupying the same space and time. Fans can move from one to another, or be part of many at once, discussing *Sherlock*, *The Avengers*, and football all within one Livejournal post. The networked functionality of Livejournal (and of other journaling sites that use its format, like Journalfen or Dreamwidth, both of which utilize the open-source Livejournal coding and focus more directly on fandom but have yet to eclipse Livejournal in use) encourages this sort of mixing, and encourages fans to make connections to fan

works for media objects other than what they started with, even if they do not consider themselves fans of the new object. One *footballslash* member recalled how that before she joined the community, she "had friends from other fandoms who were into footballslash (the comm and the subject matter) before I became interested in football generally, and I was always aware of that." (survey response) Even if a fan is not a fan of a particular program or media object, it is likely that she is aware of it, particularly if it's a popular one. This connectivity between fandoms also means that trends in fanfiction, such as the kink memes mentioned above, travel quickly. *Footballslash* can resemble other fandoms because fans know what is going on in other fandoms.

The convergence of the media fandom community onto one platform, rather than a division of either physical space (as in pre-Internet media fandom) or Internet space (as with email lists), has, as Rebecca Lucy Busker puts it, "served to take the focus off the source and put it on the fan, and in turn, on fandom." (Busker 2008, 2.2) Fandom itself is presented as an overarching group, with the different fandoms around different media objects as interconnected subgroups. Communities like Metafandom (http://metafandom.livejournal.com) or FandomSecrets (http://fandomsecrets.dreamwidth.org) present topics on many fandoms, or even media fandom itself, all at once. On FandomSecrets, users submit anonymous images detailing their 'secret', which are then collected and posted daily. Complaints about a specific anime pairing follow admission of a crush on a video game character, or frustrations as to the way sex is written across multiple fandoms. They are all seen as part of the same general community, indicating that it is fanfiction, rather than similarities between source texts, that connect the participants. As Jenkins had indicated before, this has long been the case. What the move to a digital network did was make this faster, easier, and more visible.

At the same time, however, there have been substantial changes. In her work, Bacon-Smith described the years of involvement in the media fandom community it took before she could see and read certain stories. Entrance into fanfiction first required attendance at a convention, and "[f]or the outsider, finding the fan-run media convention circuit presents a challenge" (Bacon-Smith 1992, 15) as they were not often well advertised. Additionally, one had to feel secure enough in her fandom to actually attend such a convention, both in the sense that she might have to "prove" herself to established fans, but also because the sort of devoted fan who attended conventions was "seen as being irrational, out of control, and prey to a

number of external forces." (Jenson 1992, 13) Finding media fandom itself took courage and effort, the willingness to identify oneself as a fan in a public space. Once contact with media fandom was made, it had to be maintained, within what Bacon-Smith referred to as a "circle." A circle consisted of ten to thirty people, and while "a member may participate in a circle primarily through correspondence, but more often, members of a circle live within reasonable travel distance of each other, since circles meet informally at house gatherings or other social activities quite often." (Bacon-Smith 1992, 27) This need for face-to-face contact and communication meant that full participation in media fandom was limited to those who could find a circle, and acceptance into one hinged on whether "the new member add[ed] to the group any particular creative, administrative, or social skill it valued." (ibid, 30)

Once a member was accepted into a circle, she underwent an "apprenticeship" period where she learned, in essence, how to be a media fan and participate in the community through the guidance of more experienced fans. Once she was considered trusted, she could be let in to increasingly more esoteric and "hidden" aspects of media fandom, such as the "circuit" stories that ran around outside the more formal fanzine settings. The "circuit," consisting of photocopied stories passed between circles, could be more casually-written stories on their way to more formal publication in a purchasable fanzine, highly erotic stories, or otherwise a "less widely accepted kind of fiction." (ibid, 210) Bacon-Smith estimates her "initiation" into the media fandom community more generally took two years, and it was even longer than that before she realized the existence of the circuit, as "only the most experienced writers and readers have access to it." (ibid, 215)

This highly-structured and face-to-face based media fandom had its benefits, but also drawbacks. Fans learned from other fans the norms of the community, and the norms of its production. From a system where new fans were guided carefully through the community in different stages, there became nearly no mentoring system at all, and "[s]omeone who enjoys watching a show may thus slide easily into the world of fan-generated content, without any prior screening and without much effort." (Tushnet 2007, loc 1238) Erotic and homoerotic fan content became easily accessible without having to go through the "training period." The latter, slash fiction, has emerged as extraordinarily popular among fandoms for nearly all media objects, despite the controversy it once may have held within the community.

Within the convention and circle system, fans grew very close with each other, with Bacon-Smith recounting how some distant members of a circle moved to

the center, where other members gave them accommodation and even helped them find jobs. However, the necessity of proximity to other fans limited those unable or unwilling to drive long distances to meet up with others in their participation in the community, as well as limiting participation to those who could find a group. This has changed, and as Catherine Driscoll and Melissa Gregg observed, "the entwined commercialization and domestication of the Internet normalized everyday access to the technology required to participate in such communities. Moreover, the assembly functions of the Internet and the search functions of the World Wide Web have vastly simplified the processes of finding and joining one." (Driscoll & Gregg 2011, 570) It is accessible with just a small amount of online searching, instead of a long initiation process, which makes it more available for a wider amount of fans. It is no longer as much of a step to make the move to a fan position, not only because being a fan itself is less stigmatized, but because it takes very little for the fan to become a participant. The need for proximity to other fans also made participation in "smaller" fandoms difficult, as without other local fans or conventions around, it would be hard to find others who shared your interest. With the Internet, the potential for a fan to find her fannish interest in a certain media object reciprocated, even if it is outside the norm of what would be found in the convention space, is much higher.

This increased connectivity has therefore increased what fanfiction can be found for, and how quickly new fanfiction communities are formed. The increasing speed of communication in general, and especially, faster distribution of now-digital television and film texts can also be credited. Before digitalization, tapes of "new" shows had to be acquired, with fans often ending up with "copies of copies [that] can be almost impossible to interpret" (Bacon-Smith 1992, 121) that travel along a circuit, slowly making their way to interested fans, although this was still much faster than the official distribution channels (which might be nonexistent for many shows, particularly foreign programming). Now, however, "viewers interested in seeing series from abroad have fast and easy web access, and online fandoms congregate as global communities." (Newman 2011, 6) If a potential American *Blake's 7* fan in the 1980s had to make do with watching copies-of-copies of the show well after it had aired, an American fan of *Sherlock*, the BBC's modern-day retelling of Sherlock Holmes which has a very strong fanfiction community, can download a crystal-clear copy of the show's newest installment within hours of its UK airing. This, when combined with the already-connected nature of media fandom, allows media objects to flow between the fanfiction community with speed. Additionally, instead of the one

to two years and few hundred dollars necessary to produce a new fanzine, the distribution of fanfiction for this new media object can be done instantly. A fan can post her new fanfiction to her already-existing Livejournal, or create a new community for others to find and join with a few clicks and no monetary outlay.

This ease of distribution and the breaking down of the mentoring and convention system means that it is also more possible to find fanfiction, and a fanfiction community, for what there would not have been fanfiction of before. Fanfiction about celebrities has been a major beneficiary of this – Jenkins says that "fandom has long maintained an ethical norm against producing erotica about real people rather than fictional characters" but newer fans "have not always known or accepted this prohibition." (Jenkins 2006, 142) (Coppa disputes this somewhat, noting that Duran Duran fanfiction was circulating in 1991, but noted that the authors were unlikely to come from "regular" media-based fandom and did not realize that it was taboo.) While not all fans agree with the practice, it has become widely available, with vibrant fanfiction communities.

This points to an increasing hybridization of what media fandom is, as all forms of fandom are found in the space where it is practiced: "television-based fan fiction becomes the same process as television discussion boards and television shows themselves." (Driscoll & Gregg 2011, 571) Instead of the segregation of media fans in one place, music fans in another, and sports fans in yet another still, increasingly, most acts of fandom occur online. This is not to say that media fans were never also sports fans, but that there were more set borders as to where which fandom occurred. There was a stadium and a convention, a pub and a circle gathering. As discussed in the previous chapter, however, more and more of the enactment of sports fandom takes place online, on message boards, blogs, and streaming video screens, making a fan's experience with both football and fanfiction take place in the same space (their computer). Moving from one to another is a matter of clicks and moods, rather than a physical change. This creates a greater potential for forms of fandom to hybridize. Media fandom becomes easier to find for fans of other subjects, who may have never thought of creating fanfiction for what they are fans of, but see the potential once they are exposed to the practice. At the same time, existing media fans might see other subjects as ripe for fanfiction as they become more exposed to them, and as previously lowly mediatized objects become more highly mediatized. Sport or celebrity fanfiction is not the only subject matter that has seen expansion in the move to the Internet – video games, comic books,

and literature of all kinds have seen a rise in fanfiction written about them. All kinds of fandom are potentially "media fandom," and the term itself becomes difficult to use, as not only television and film texts become incorporated into the community and its practices. As use of other social media, especially Twitter and Tumblr, picks up pace in both media fandom and other fandoms, this hybridization is likely to continue.

The increasing mediatization of previously non-media objects, and the incorporation of them into an expanded participatory media landscape, has therefore impacted the way in which the production of fanfiction is conceived. A glance through the Yuletide "rare fandoms" fanfiction challenge (http://yuletidetreasure.org) shows how many different objects fans are willing to write fiction for, if even only once. There is now an expectation that there will be, or at least could be, fanfiction for everything.

"I Knew It Had To Exist"

While many *footballslash* participants discovered the community and the practice through other friends who were already participants, many others discovered it by actively seeking out the community. One respondent said that "I used to be part of the LOTR fandom, then as I got into football, i googled "football slash,"" while another came to the community via "LJ search, I knew it had to exist." (survey response) These discoveries are not always contemporaneous with the respondent becoming a football fan, as a fan who was a Real Madrid fan since childhood said that "it took me a while to realize that there was sports RPS and football was the first sport i looked for" (survey response), but it can be. At some point, the football fan thinks there should be fanfiction about football, and goes off in search of it.

This is often because, as one respondent stated, "I saw a slashy pic and wondered whether anyone writes slash about footballers." The respondents to the *footballslash* survey, excepting one who had stumbled upon the practice after searching for confirmation that two players had kissed after winning the Champions League final, were familiar with slash fanfiction, its practices, and its visual codes. Many went looking for football slash fanfiction, and found the community, because they had seen or read something that resonated with what they already knew about

the practice. Seeing a "slashy pic" of footballers or reading an intriguing article about them, once they were already aware of slash and fanfiction, made them want to either read or write fanfiction about the players. This points to the way that fanfiction, and slash fanfiction in particular, has become a mode of interpretation and interaction with all media objects. As fan scholar Kristina Busse puts it, "slashers are trained to tease out homoerotic subtext in the texts they encounter." (Busse 2006, 208)

As discussed above, much of the fanfiction community has changed since its origins in the 1960s and 1970s. Access to, volume, and subject matter of fanfiction have all undergone significant alterations from what Bacon-Smith and Jenkins wrote about in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Despite these changes, however, there is still significant continuity from the past to the present. The context and place might have changed, but the writers in 1970 creating Kirk/Spock fanfiction are essentially doing the same thing as a writer in 2012 creating a Steven Gerrard/Xabi Alonso story. Fandom still "involves a particular mode of reception" and "a particular set of critical and interpretive practices." (Jenkins 1992, 284) New fanfiction writers and readers still learn these modes of reception, and still learn to utilize the interpretive practices of fanfiction, even if they don't learn these modes directly from another fanfiction writer. What the changes in the fanfiction community engendered by the Internet and media convergence has done is widened the scope of this interpretive practice to include a far wider range of media, as long as they are seen as media objects that can be interpreted. Rather than being tied to a source text, fanfiction is instead a media practice (Couldry 2004), something that is generally done with media.

The practice of fanfiction is about expansion and interpretation of the source text, using what is revealed to explore what is not. Most often, fanfiction focuses on the characters in the source text – how they came to be who they are, what they might do when the camera is not on them, or how they might behave in a completely different situation to the one they are normally part of. The practice of fanfiction, and of being in media fandom, is "reading through the surface semiotics of the diegesis and beyond into the implied interior and exterior realities of the characters and their world." (Gwenllian Jones 2002, 86) It is about exploring the characters presented in a media text, and about expanding their world. As only a small amount of the potential world is ever seen, fans found ways to fill this in with their own work. Fanfiction is about the possibilities for greater information and narrative in and of the

story-world, or the characters in it, that are not given by the actual text. These greater explorations became needed because "popular narratives often fail to satisfy, fans must struggle with them, to try to articulate to themselves and others unrealized possibilities within the original works." (Jenkins 1992, 24) These "unrealized possibilities" can be anything from missing scenes to detailed explorations of a character's motivation in a scene we do see to a complete reimagining of the characters in a different setting, and much else besides. Fanfiction writers ""treat the program like silly putty," stretching its boundaries to incorporate their concerns, remolding its characters to better suit their desires." (ibid, 159) These become learned skills; ways to interpret media objects in order to draw out what the writer finds most interesting and most worthy of further explanation.

In fanfiction, this is most often focused on the characters and the relationships between them. These works can be created for multiple aims, such as romantic scenarios that writers and readers hope will come to pass (such as the *X-Files* "shippers" profiled by Scodari and Felder, 2000), ones that they know will never "happen" but are curious about, how characters and their relationships might react to new scenarios, and many more. These texts and media objects become raw materials to be interpreted and used by fanfiction writers. The awareness that narratives can be stretched and remolded has led to a transference of these skills from the "cult" texts of their origins, a realization that potentially all media narratives can be further explored by the fans themselves. There is never a media narrative that shows everything possible within its world, and fans have learned that rather than this limiting their enjoyment of the text, it can expand their enjoyment by acting as a launching point for their own creative work. The skills learned in expanding one text can then be transferred to others, potentially any other.

Learning to interpret texts in a certain way, and then applying that knowledge, is particularly integral to the practice of slash fanfiction. While this might have been a secretive practice within media fandom in the first decades, since the arrival of the Internet, slash fanfiction has become "the most evolved, analyzed and, if sheer volume is an indication, the most popular" (Cumberland 2003, 273) of all fanfiction genres. It is also a genre that relies especially on fan analysis and interpretation to function, as it is unlikely that the homoerotic interpretation of the characters will ever "become canon," meaning become official and resolved in the source text, and also unlikely (although not impossible, particularly in contemporary texts) that it was put there deliberately by producers. The point is to "expose what is

at least thinly veiled, and often deeply repressed within the universe of popular television shows." (Keft-Kennedy 2008, 56) "Slashing," to interpret two character's relationship as homoerotic, is therefore a practice that especially relies upon the fan's imagination, as well as her embedding in the practice.

What slash fanfiction is, essentially, is the eroticizing in fan-produced fiction of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick referred to as male homosocial desire – "the whole spectrum of bonds between men, including friendship, mentorship, rivalry, institutional subordination, homosexual geniality, and economic exchange." (1984, 227) As Sedgwick (1985) explains, this has a long tradition in literature, and its history is frequently drawn upon when creating new works, particularly pop-cultural works. *Star Trek*, for example, builds upon "the friendship of two males" (Selley 1986, 89) that characterizes much of American literature – two men with contrasting but complementary personalities exploring the wilderness (universe), with a great bond that cannot be matched by any other potential companion. It was this relationship between Kirk and Spock that led to the first slash fanfiction, where "the fan has recognised the ambiguous possibilities of *Star Trek* and comprehended them as referencing the ambiguous area where the homosocial codes begin to be transgressed and friendship moves towards desire." (Woledge 2005, 246) These codes are based in "the images the viewer sees on the screen, and the way women read those framed images," (Bacon-Smith 1992, 232) and once learned, could be applied to homosocial relationships outside of Kirk and Spock. This form of fan-based textual interpretation carried into other media fandoms on the convention circuit, before emerging even more strongly in Internet fandom, as perhaps not coincidentally many of the media texts available are built on, or at least include, strong male homosocial relationships. Interpreting this subtext has become a practice in its own right, and once learned, can be applied across all media texts.

Slash fiction is built on certain signs. Of particular importance is "the extreme close-up, which focuses on eyes and eye contact, [and] can be interpreted as a display of intimacy." (Bacon-Smith 1992, 235) The way two characters look at each other is considered to be one of the enduring symbols of romance, carried on throughout different media eras. Eye contact, expression, and length of gaze all have significance. Fans have learned to interpret these looks as romantic, even if nothing is specifically said in dialogue about their relationship. Within television and film with strong homosocial relationships, however, the use of eye contact and certain expressions are as likely to be shared between the two male characters as between a

male and female character. Fans of Kirk/Spock as a romantic pairing recognized "shots in which Kirk looks at Spock in the way a hero might look at a heroine" (Woledge 2005, 243-44) and read them as romantic, especially as Spock was a much more interesting character than the nondescript and underwritten female love interests presented within the narrative, and one that fans already had an understanding of. Once this potential reading was understood within the media fan community, it spread to other media narratives with homosocial relationships, and therefore similar visual codes. As slash fanfiction became a more common practice, so too did homoerotic readings of images. The idea that "there is a ''homoerotic subtext'' revealed in the way certain male characters look at one another has become so familiar within fandoms that it is even possible for slashers to speak of such looks as ''subtexty''" (Allington 2007, 48) Once the subtext is recognized, fans know it can be turned into text through fanfiction, and wish to do so.

There are other signs that slash fanfiction writers and readers know, recognize, and utilize. The invocation of the "special bond" two male characters share, whether it is positive or negative, is often refashioned into slash fanfiction. Similarly to the visual codes of looking, the way two characters touch or interact with each other more generally also becomes a starting point. If two male characters touch more than is "necessary," or in ways that seem intimate, it becomes possible to read them as "slashy." Learning these visual and textual codes is a method of training slash fanfiction fans, both writers and readers, to recognize the homosexual in the homosocial. Once a fan learns how to "see" this subtext in one media object, it becomes available in others – such as the Lord of the Rings fan who "entered the realm of LotR slash, and now I slash like hell!!" (in Allington 2007, 55) Slash becomes a lens from which to see popular culture. The *footballslash* participant who "saw a slashy pic" of footballers had previous experience with the *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings* fanfiction communities: she knew what she was seeing when she came across the picture, and knew what she wanted out of it. As the opening up of fanfiction meant that any media object could be expanded in that way, her reaction, and the reaction of many others, was that football fanfiction could and should exist.

Conclusion

What this suggests is that fanfiction, and especially slash fanfiction, should be thought of in two ways, both of which have expanded within the past two decades as the Internet has become more prevalent in private life. First, fanfiction is a networked community, where those who read and write it frequently share stories for a wide variety of source texts. The networked nature of online communication, and the structures that the fanfiction community have built and claimed for themselves, encourages fast sharing of content and interaction between those interested in it. Fanfiction writers and readers increasingly think of what they do as linked to all other fanfiction writers or readers, regardless of what text or narrative they focus on.

At the same time, this also means that what is possible to write fanfiction about expands. What started as a practice deep within the fan communities for "cult" shows has grown, spreading across the fan groups for all kinds of media narratives. Fans who learn that narratives can be expanded, and that the work of expanding them is enjoyable, apply this knowledge everywhere. While "cult" texts are still highly prominent, fans increasingly see the potential in a wider range of narratives. This is especially true for the practices and interpretations involved in slash fanfiction. Once the codes of slash are learned, fans see them as applying anywhere. The next chapter will focus on this application, by exploring how it works within the *footballslash* world.

Chapter 3: The Practices of Football Slash Fanfiction

The mediatization of football not only changes the way and manner in which football is viewed. It also changes the way in which football is understood. Football on television is not simply the transmission of a sporting contest: it is "part of popular television, functioning under the sign of entertainment, and therefore also has to frame its own representations in the context of the values that constitute 'good television'." (Whannel 1992, 106) The mediatization of football also means the narrativization of football, constructing, framing, and displaying the sport in a way to make it more suited to the needs of the media that publicize and fund it, a submission to (commercial) media logic. It is not enough to report scores or show goals. They have to be put into context, framed, and given meaning in such a way that keeps the audience's interest and possibly attracts new fans.

It is this narrative that appeals to the fanfiction community. As the previous chapter indicated, fanfiction has become a practice that has spread beyond its origins in science-fiction television. The connectivity and convergence engendered by the Internet means that fanfiction about "nontraditional" narratives, such as football, becomes conceived of and distributed among fans. These developments, both in football and in the fanfiction community, are what makes the concept of *footballslash* and football slash fanfiction possible.

However, it still has to be written, and it is that writing that I come to now. This chapter will focus on the interpretations of football that fans make with their fanfiction. It explores how the text is utilized in order to create fiction, and how this works similarly to, but different from, more traditional sources of fanfiction. As a text drawn from "real life," without authorial intent or input, it relies strongly on the interpretive abilities of fans, who utilize whatever media at their disposal – print, photography, audiovisual, social media – in order to craft their stories and the relationships that they explore. The fans turn what is real into a fiction, ready for their own use. This basis in reality, rather than a fictional, authored world, gives football slash fanfiction a different relation to its source text. There is no idea that the authors are monitoring the fans, no hope that a preferred pairing might become part of the source text, and no sense that their interpretations are anything but fiction.

It is these interpretations, and how fans come to them, that are the focus of this chapter. It looks at two stories, using them as examples of how the football slash community interprets and plays with football towards their own ends. These two stories were selected because they are excellent, but still typical, recent representations of their particular styles, with one being a retelling of real events and the other an "alternate universe" story that puts football players into a different fictional environment. They are strong demonstrations of the ways in which fans create their own narratives out of the text of football and use the wide variety of media now available regarding football to interpret character and relationships. This chapter shows how football fanfiction, and the football fanfiction community, both resemble and differ from fanfiction and fanfiction communities based around fictional texts. In doing so, it more carefully explores the actual work that fanfiction writers do in their re-interpretation and reimagining of source texts, and how the questions of reality and fiction operate within the creation, discussion, and consumption of fanfiction. Additionally, it looks at the role of sexuality and eroticism in the world of football fanfiction, and how it relates to the broader football fan culture, which is not always receptive of recognizing the erotic potential of players.

By utilizing these stories, this chapter therefore shows how football is used as a source for fanfiction, and provides greater insight into how fans more generally interpret and utilize source texts for their own purposes.

The Missing Spaces of the Football Narrative

The structure of mediatized sport revolves around two things: its never-ending narrative and its focus on strong, individual players. In football, "[n]o single game ever represents the game for players or spectators." (Hughson and Free 2006, 76), as each game is part of the narrative of the season or the tournament, and each season or tournament is part of the seasons or tournaments that came before it, or that will come after. These games rotate around the comings, goings, and doings of the players (and managers) that perform in them. In combination, these two elements are what keep football engaging and entertaining to the majority of its fans, and are heavily discussed and promoted in all facets of the football media, contributing to an ongoing interest in the narratives by the fans who continually discuss and debate them.

This style of narrative frequently leads sport to be referred to as a "male soap opera." Often, this is with some level of irony or scorn, a chance to juxtapose the common belief in the lack of quality or importance of a soap opera with the constructions made of televised sport. Barbara O'Connor and Raymond Boyle considered the relation a bit deeper, by comparing "the characteristics they have in common such as their broadcasting at frequent and regular intervals, their indeterminate (continuous) life span, their range of characters, and the introduction of multiple narrative strands which reach various stages of resolution." (O'Connor and Boyle 1993, 3) They do, indeed, have many similarities, both in form and function for their respective fan bases, especially due to their long-running nature, with the same "storylines" having the capability to span across decades in a manner unlike other forms of popular narratives. Players, managers, and teams all "have a past, a history, which the audience is aware of, and through which they are read." (Whannel 2002, 152) Soap operas, several of which have been running a continued storyline since the 1960s or earlier, can match this in a manner unlike other forms of television.

However, it might also be fruitful to think of sport, and football specifically, as an analogue of a different, but related, form, that of "cult" media texts, and especially that of cult television. It has become increasingly difficult to actually identify what a cult text is (Pearson 2010), with many television shows and movies that might have once been considered "cult" having substantial financial success, and the term spreading to include narratives well outside the science-fiction, horror, and fantasy texts that made up its origin. However, there are some defining attributes to the form. Sarah Gwenllian-Jones and Roberta Pearson, in their introduction to a book on the topic of "cult television," describe the form as featuring "a potentially infinitely large metatext and sometimes the seemingly infinite delay of the resolution of narrative hermeneutics" along with "[i]nterconnected story lines, both realized and implied, [that] extend far beyond any single episode to become a metatext that structures production, diegesis, and reception." (Gwenllian-Jones and Pearson 2004, xii) Matt Hills refers to cult texts as featuring as "hyperdiegesis: the creation of a vast and detailed narrative space, only a fraction of which is ever directly seen or encountered within the text, but which nevertheless appears to operate according to principles of internal logic and extension." (Hills 2002, 137) Cult media, and especially cult television, are considered to have complex, potentially

infinite narratives, with questions that might never be truly answered, even when some are resolved, and a world and story that is never fully revealed to the viewer.

Not only does the world of cult fiction feel hyperdiegetic, but the characters feel hyperdiegetic as well. They appear to have a detailed history and personality, although the narrative proper may only display a small fraction of it. As the complex narratives of the text unfold, the characters become more developed, revealing complexities that are difficult to find in non-"cult" texts. The characters have their own specificity and identity, and are considered to have moved beyond the stereotypes and archetypes that are thought to make up most popular texts. As a result, the fans know whom the characters "are" as people, and feel that the narrative world has the complexity to support them doing a wide variety of things. It is this "hyperdiegesis", the feeling that there is more of the world and the characters out there, that suggests one reason why fanfiction developed within the fan communities for cult media texts, rather than others (such as soap opera). Within a cult text, "[t]here is always a deficit between what is (or can be) shown and what the avid audience wants to see, explore, develop and know," (Gwenllian Jones 2000, 13) The thought that the fans can fill in this deficit themselves leads to the creation of fanfiction. It is within cult texts, or at least within texts that exhibit cult tendencies, that fanfiction thrives. It might be increasingly possible for any text to have fanfiction written about it, but for it to become a sustained practice, the source text exhibits cult traits.

If we take the descriptions of Gwenllian-Jones and Pearson and Hills as the core of what makes a cult media text, football's relation to the form becomes clear. Its narrative is complicated, but focused on a question – who will win, applied to the game, the season, the tournament, which is instantly deferred again as soon as it is resolved, with the new questions maintaining continuity with the old ones. Intertwined with this overarching narrative there are countless other storylines, interconnected into the main question when necessary. The world created by the various media platforms around football is extremely detailed and vast, with a wide variety of clubs, countries, players, and managers all featuring different environments, situations, and personalities. It is as intriguing and full of potential, and yet as fundamentally unknowable in its entirety, as the one found in the various iterations of *Star Trek*.

The difference is that the world of *Star Trek* is fictional, and the world of football is real. It is possible to experience part of it, to be there when the games

happen. Additionally, the focus of football is on judged results (win, loss) that cannot be changed. This leads Marcus Free and John Hughson to state that "[d]espite meeting independently and writing their own fan materials, sports fans contrast with the likes of Jenkins's (1992) *Star Trek* fans' creative writing, which was inspired by and exceeded the 1960s series' social liberalism, because they cannot creatively refashion the cultural commodity." (2006, 92) The reality of the results, and that there is, ideally, a place where the fan can experience and be part of the results, leads to this assumption that there is no creative refashioning of the games themselves that can be done.

The work of football fanfiction writers displays how limiting that viewpoint is, and how it is impossible to sustain in a world of mediatized football. If football is a media object it can be transformed. What Free and Hughson observe might hold true for the standard conception of football fandom, but as football connects to other media texts, it becomes possible to see the ways in which it can be creatively refashioned in the manner of *Star Trek* fans (not all of whom wish to write fanfiction, after all). Within the world and practices if football fanfiction, the "cultural commodity" of a football game or season are reinterpreted and refashioned into new forms, ones that offer new insights or different meanings into what happened. They see the narratives promoted by mediatized football for what they are, narratives, and utilize them in the manner of other narrative spaces.

"Filling Up the Space," a football fanfiction story by Luxover, is an example of how the narrative of football is transformed via fanfiction. Here, Liverpool FC's 2009-2010 season is reconstituted as the backdrop of the breakup and eventual reconciliation of a romantic relationship. It utilizes points in the actual events of Liverpool's season to show how Steven Gerrard, Liverpool's native-born captain, deals with both the disappointments of his failed relationship with Xabi Alonso, the Spanish midfielder who played for Liverpool before transferring to Real Madrid before the start of the '09-'10 season, and the disappointments of a poor season. The plot centers on Gerrard and Alonso, after their breakup at the beginning of the story, dividing the world between them so that they do not see each other, and the both of them then breaking the rules they set with each other. It is written from Gerrard's point of view, utilizing the author's imagination of his emotions and actions throughout the season. The well-documented games and events in the narrative space of the football season provide the framework to build the story and its emotional impact, as shown in this excerpt:

October rolls around and Liverpool loses to Chelsea; Stevie feels the loss somewhere in his chest and so he goes home and thinks, *It shouldn't be this hard. It never used to be this hard.*

To keep himself busy, he empties his closet, makes a pile of everything that he doesn't want anymore and adds to it until everything he owns is thrown on his bed, pants and shirts and ties and two watches. He finds a pair of cufflinks that used to belong to Xabi and he wants to laugh. He does laugh. They're Xabi's favorite pair, white gold and plain and so completely boring that Stevie's heart flops a little; he's excited.

Stevie puts the cufflinks on his dresser top and takes a picture of them with his phone. He sends it to Xabi, says to him, *Finders, keepers.*

Xabi says, *That's not on the list.* He's terrible at this game.

Stevie puts everything back in his closet and goes downstairs to watch crap television.

Writing after the events of the season (the story was posted to the *footballslash* community on September 26, 2011), Luxover intertwines the professional and personal disappointments of Steven Gerrard, both becoming of equal importance to the emotional impact of her piece. In doing so, she offers a new version of the well-known events of the season, seeing them as a media text to be expanded, rather than a factual event that has ended.

The games she references in the story were ones that were heavily covered in the media, sticking out in the mind of supporters and football fans. Because they were so heavily covered, they become reference points that those familiar with football will understand, as they have their own memories of the event. However, despite the coverage and knowledge, there is still much that is unknown. The fan knows that Liverpool lost to Chelsea in October, but does not truly know what went on outside of the field. It becomes possible, then, to imagine what could have happened before, during, and after the game. Football fanfiction works to fill in these gaps in the narrative space of football, speculating on the parts that cannot be shown. The games become thought of as episodes, parts of an ongoing narrative, in addition to or rather than sporting contests. While this might be a nontraditional reading of the text of football, it is not one that comes from outside of the text. Football is constructed in the media in such a way to keep viewers "interested in the next 'instalment' and provide an ongoing sense of the importance and uncertainty of upcoming events." (Kennedy and Hills 2009, 76) The presenting of football as 'installments' or 'episodes' has been part of its makeup since the earliest days. The

football press, fully in place by the early 1900s, encouraged their readership to see the football season(s) as ongoing, something that they would need to keep buying papers to follow and that did not end when the whistle blew. The presentation of football on television makes this connection even more explicit. In scheduling terms, football functions almost exactly like a television show – games at a set time, once or twice a week, with a break in the summer – and in content and presentation terms, there are also, as discussed above, strong parallels.

Within this presentation, however, there is significant missing information. The viewer sees very little of the players/characters outside of their workspace. While there is an increasing amount of audiovisual information about football, and football players, made available on the Internet by both news organizations and football clubs themselves, there is still a necessary limitation on what can and will be shown. Only a limited amount of what football players do in training, for example, will ever be seen, even on a club's official Internet video channel, and an even smaller amount of a football player's personal environment will be displayed. The actual episodes of football, while supplemented with an increasing amount of texts from other media, therefore have much that could still be known and explored. If football games are thought of as media texts, fans who have experience with fanfiction recognize the unseen parts of the text as something that can be filled in with their own work and creativity. In "Filling Up the Space," the author imagines the spaces of the football narrative that are not displayed – the training ground, the dressing room, the home of the players. In pairing these with the spaces that are already known, the text of the football games are creatively expanded.

Football fanfiction does not only expand the narrative space of football, by imagining what goes on in the parts of the narrative not shown, but also expands the emotional space. As discussed by Eileen Kennedy (2000), football is a text with a masculine address; its presentation focuses on what are considered masculine traits. The match is presented under the banner of clarity, considered by Kennedy to be a specifically masculine mode of address, and is supposed to be about what is happening and what has happened. The game presented in a realistic style and much of the commentary, both during the game and in the studio afterwards, focuses on things that did or did not happen – how the referee made a poor call, how a goal was scored, missed, or saved. The more casual modes of address within the football text, which takes the form of "banter" between the analysts or commentators, "approaches intimacy without engaging in the personal" (Kennedy 2000, 77) by

focusing on triumphs or disappointments in the player's professional life, such as wins or injuries in the past, or direct reactions to game events. The narrative of football is masculine, and "[e]motions and sexuality [are] part of the domestic sphere and the domain of women." (Whannel 2002, 101) While anger or joy in relation to actions in the game might be acceptable, more subtle emotions are excluded.

One purpose of football fanfiction is to rectify this exclusion by writing the emotional lives of football players back into the text. The Steven Gerrard of "Filling Up the Space" is at turns melancholy, proud, and happy; he misses Alonso, relies emotionally on his friend and teammate Jamie Carragher, and spends time reflecting on what Liverpool FC means to him. The emotional life that is left unrevealed within the actual text of football takes central place within the story, providing it with its meaning even more than the recounting of the games. The reader understands Gerrard's hurt after Chelsea's loss, a loss that somehow seems more painful than other losses, and can contextualize it within the relationships Gerrard has as well as the problems with the way Liverpool has been playing. Writing fanfiction becomes a way to supplement the text of football, giving it the emotional impact that it normally lacks and creating a more well-rounded narrative. The recontextualizing of "masculine" genres into a more "feminine" form has long been standard to fanfiction, with the shows popular in the early years of the practice like *Star Trek* and *The Professionals* considered to have a masculine address. In this, football fanfiction, rather than being a radical shift in subject matter for fanfiction, harkens back to the origin points of the form.

It must not be forgotten, however, that the writers of football slash fanfiction are football fans. They all watch football regularly; they all know the rules and traditions of the sport. Writing slash fanfiction is an understanding of football as a narrative form to be enhanced, but it sits together with the understanding of football as a sport. Neither fully transcends the other. "Filling Up the Space", for example, utilizes the terminology and description of football as a sport as a metaphor:

> Stevie remembers all of that as he watches Xabi get subbed off, and so he takes out his phone and he sends him a text.
>
> *You're always looking for Kaká,* he types, *when Guti's always open to your left.*
>
> He doesn't hear back until hours later, long since the match has ended and the players have gone home.

> *Kaká plays where you played,* Xabi says. *You were always open even when you weren't.*

> And Stevie doesn't know what to say to that, because sometimes he looks for Xabi when only Lucas is there. He wonders if Kaká knows what he's got.

Narrative and sporting performance are not separated. Rather, they play off each other, with the knowledge of sport enhancing the verisimilitude of the story and working itself into its emotional core. The description of Alonso's and Gerrard's playing style becomes possible by the author's familiarity with televised football, but it is given an extra layer of meaning and explanation.

Additionally, football fanfiction can be used as a way to deal with the emotions brought on by being a football fan more generally. Fandom in general invokes a strong emotional response, but fandom of team sports encourages a different mode of involvement than other forms. Football fandom encourages heavy identification with a team or club, and within its norms, "[t]he club is not considered as the *object* of fandom but as forming a unit with the fan." (Sandvoss 2003, 35) Fans refer to their favorite club as "we", and internalize its triumphs and disappointments, understanding them as part of the self. Luxover is an American in her mid-twenties and has been a Liverpool fan since her early adolescence. The story can be seen as working through her own feelings about Liverpool, and why she maintains her fandom of the team even as it struggles:

> The thing that most people don't seem to realize—the thing that *Xabi* doesn't seem to realize—is that losing at Liverpool is better than winning anywhere else.

> Stevie gets the highlights on tv and he sees Madrid win, sees Xabi score, sees all the big name people that Xabi plays with now, and then he goes to Anfield and he doesn't win, he doesn't score, and all the big names are looking to leave because it's better to abandon ship than to go down with it.

> Stevie knows that isn't true. Stevie knows that Liverpool will never go down, and that if it does, it's better to go down with it, because going down a Red is better than going up anything else. Xabi doesn't seem to realize that, and so no matter how everything plays out between them, Stevie's already won. He's *won.* Stevie will never walk alone, but Xabi? What's he got?

That the story rotates around Gerrard is significant. Gerrard, the captain of Liverpool FC, has been attached to the club since childhood and has only ever played for it, despite offers to sign for more successful, richer teams. He is considered by fans to be the embodiment of the ideal loyalty a player should have for his football club, the sort of loyalty that the fans themselves have. Through Gerrard's emotional state,

Luxover can both deal with her own disappointments and reiterate her commitment to Liverpool, through the voice of someone believed to feel the same way.

Istanbul, *The Great Gatsby,* and a Prince's Journey

The core of "Filling Up The Space," however, is in the relationship between Gerrard and Alonso. In this, it fits the conditions and norms of the genre. Fanfiction generally, and especially slash fanfiction, is built upon relationships. While recent scholarship (Keft-Kennedy 2008, Tosenberger 2008) has rightly challenged the early interpretation of slash fiction as an ideal romance (Kustritz 2003) where "sex occurs within a committed relationship as part of an emotionally meaningful exchange," (Salmon and Symons 2004, 98) it is still a form that focuses on the relationship, of whatever type, between the characters utilized. Whether the relationship is antagonistic, friendly, or even the "ideal romance," it is the exploration of it that drives the vast majority of fanfiction practices.

"Filling Up the Space" is no different. While it speculates on how Steven Gerrard would have felt after losing games to Chelsea and Sunderland, and allows the author to work through her own feelings about Liverpool FC, it is about the romantic relationship of Gerrard and Alonso. They break up at the start of the story, spend the length of it circling around each other, and reconcile at the end. All the points of the story serve to define the relationship, from Gerrard's reactions after losing to his reminisces about visiting an empty Anfield stadium with Alonso. The actual events might provide a framework for the author to build upon and work around, but it is the imagined romantic relationship between Gerrard and Alonso, rather than these real events, that are the focus and impetus of the story.

In this, "Filling Up the Space" joins hundreds (perhaps thousands) of other fanfiction stories detailing and exploring Gerrard and Alonso's romantic relationship. This pairing is one of the most popular in the world of *footballslash*. Despite Alonso's transfer from Liverpool in the summer of 2009, separating him from Gerrard, the pairing continues to thrive. Its specialist community, http://stevieandxabi.livejournal.com, created in 2006 as a way to focus on the relationship outside of the general *footballslash* community, is active, and stories that at least touch on the relationship are regularly and frequently posted to *footballslash*. Alonso and Gerrard continue to be star players, despite their ages, and

therefore it is unlikely that the relationship will disappear from *footballslash* any time soon. As a romantic pairing with such popularity and longevity within the community, it is an interesting example of the work that football slash fanfiction writers and readers do with the "source text" of football.

Alonso and Gerrard were teammates for five years at Liverpool FC, one of the most popular clubs in the widely-watched English Premier League. Alonso was signed from his home club in Spain, Real Sociedad, in 2004, while Gerrard had grown up at Liverpool, joining the youth team at age nine and signing his first professional contract with the club in 1997. On the field, Gerrard and Alonso played in complimentary positions in central midfield, bringing them into regular contact with each other. However, the pairing did not establish itself until after Liverpool's win in the 2005 Champions League final in Istanbul, although they both had a presence in the community and were well-respected and well-recognized players among football fans of all varieties. In the Champions League final, Liverpool were losing 3-0 to the Italian superclub AC Milan at halftime, only to come back in the second half to tie the game 3-3 and eventually win the trophy on penalties. Both Alonso and Gerrard scored goals during that decisive half, with Gerrard receiving "Man of the Match" acclimation afterwards. During the trophy presentation and celebration after the win, they briefly kissed, a moment that was filmed by the circling television cameras.

In video, the moment is brief, a peck of lips, with the two laughing afterwards. As a still image, however, it becomes more intimate, resembling images of romantic kisses from other media. Alonso's eyes are closed and his arm is around Gerrard's neck, who is leaning in close to him. The viewer of such an image does not know how long or short the kiss is, how joking or serious. As a photograph, it looks like a genuine romantic moment between the two men. The video might provide context, and show what actually happened, but the fans overwhelmingly prefer the still image, as it more closely mirrors what they want the moment to be. As discussed in the previous chapter, slash fanfiction writers are "trained" to see the homoerotic potential in popular images, and then create romantic relationships out of them. An image of these two players, already known within the community, in such an intimate pose, proved to be an inspiration to authors and potential authors. As it made its way to *footballslash* and its users, the pairing picked up in popularity.

The image of "the kiss", as it became known, provided a base that fanfiction authors could build upon. To this, they added information received from the wide amount of football-related media available, drawing from interviews, games, and the general football fan gossip that populates Internet message boards and pubs. As teammates, Alonso and Gerrard had complimentary styles and played well together, with a noticeable on-pitch harmony that, within the narrative style of football, suggested a good relationship off of it as well. This was a view held not only by the fanfiction community, but by "regular" football fans as well. Fans enjoy the idea that their favorite players get along with the others in the team, with the ideal being that players are willing to play "for" each other in a show of masculine loyalty. Football clubs usually present a sense of camaraderie between players, and rumors of "dressing room discord" are a favorite among tabloids searching for marketable scandal. Gerrard and Alonso also praised each other regularly in the press, such as Alonso saying that "Gerrard is a spectacular player and he provides charisma for the team with his play" and with Gerrard saying that "Xabi is the best of them all" and that "what has impressed me is his attitude and professionalism for such a young lad." (all quotes from the Daily Mail, 2004) Interviews where either player talked about the other circulated within the community and within private journals, appearing alongside collections of images where they shared intimate space, such as while talking at the training ground or celebrating goals. Images, indeed, are often more prominent than text within the community as a reason for writing, as slash fanfiction for a visual source has, since the beginning of the form, been built upon

"the way that homoerotic connotation is suggested by looks and gestures that pass between the two characters." (Woledge 2005, 239) Images of the two touching, hugging, or looking into each other's eyes, readily available through the celebration of goals, consolation after defeat, or simply playing around at training, easily fit into the "subtexty" category that slash fanfiction fans have learned to recognize. Constant repetition of these images across journals reinforced the idea that there is a romantic relationship to write about.

In this manner, fanfiction writers eventually built up what Bacon-Smith referred to as a macroflow, the process where fans build up their understanding of the series, "creating a unified, coherent, and seemingly complete map of the series universe in the mind of the viewer." (Bacon-Smith 1992, 131) The macroflow is made out of the microflow, "clusters of relational movements and constrastive actions that appear in individual episodes […] and that absorb considerably more conceptual time than real viewing time." (ibid, 136) The macroflow is a sense that Gerrard and Alonso have a romantic relationship, one that stretches over several years, that may or may not be finished. It is built out of small moments where they hug and look delighted after a goal, or when Gerrard claimed to be "devastated" after Alonso left for Madrid, or images of the kiss. These moments are continually discussed and debated by fans of the pairing, and slowly, a coherent image of the relationship is created, with certain integral points. Those who enjoy the relationship eventually begin to "agree on the centrality of particular events, characteristics, and interpretations that support their favored romantic pairing." (Stein and Busse 2009, 197) "Filling Up the Space," for example, references Istanbul as one of Gerrard's key memories of Alonso, with Gerrard recalling "the way Xabi whispered to him in bed that night, his mouth pressed to the skin of Stevie's shoulder blade, *Would you have still wanted to kiss me if we had lost?* and Stevie said into the pillow, *I want to kiss you all the time, and football's got nothing to do with it,* Xabi's smile against his skin."

What is noteable about a slash interpretation of Gerrard and Alonso's relationship, however, is the relatively small amount of "actual" sources that fans of the pairing draw upon. Unlike, for example, the constantly asserted deep bond that Kirk and Spock have for each other, the relationship of Gerrard and Alonso is built on fairly innocuous statements of admiration and friendship, pictures of goal celebrations, and, of course, the kiss. For the writers and readers, this is enough. Indeed, the kiss gives the pairing more validation than most within the football slash

fanfiction community, giving it its endurance. Perhaps more than slash fanfiction built upon other source texts, football slash fanfiction relies on the interpretive skills and creativity of its writers. Writers need nothing more than a picture, a quote, or an idea that two players would be "good" or "hot" together in order to write. They don't care whether the pairing can be "justified" via the text of football or not; they only care whether it's interesting to them.

In this, football slash fanfiction displays a clear difference between slash fanfiction for fictional source material. Many slash fanfiction fans often feel like their reading of a homosocial relationship as homosexual needs to be justified, such as the *Lord of the Rings* slash fans profiled by Daniel Allington. These fans seek in other fans "confirmation that her romantic and sexual gratifications originated in the original text, and not in the ''perverted minds'' of herself and her fellow fans." (Allington 2007, 52) They speculate that the director or actors deliberately inserted slash subtext into the movies, or that slash is a valid interpretation of the source text that most people simply just don't realize. They are unwilling to fully accept that it's "all in their heads." Similar logic can be found within some academic discussions of slash fiction as well, with Elizabeth Woledge arguing that "the text of Star Trek played an important part in inspiring K/S" (Woledge 2005, 237) and that decoding the Kirk/Spock relationship as homosexual is based within the text, rather than any "misreading" by fans. Sarah Gwenllian-Jones sees slash fiction generally as arising "out of cult television's intrinsic requirement of distance from everyday reality, its related erasure of heterosexuality's social process, and its provision of perceptual depths that invite and tolerate diverse speculation about characters' 'hidden' thoughts and feelings." (Gwenllian-Jones 2002, 89) Fans feel validated by thinking that they're correct in their interpretation of the source text, either because it was put there by the text's authors or because they're reading the text on a higher level than even its creators intended.

Paradoxically, it is that football slash fanfiction is based in reality, rather than a fiction, that frees its writers from feeling that they have to justify their interpretation. Football slash writers maintain a clear difference between the reality of football and the fictionality of their stories. On one level, they do read the mediatized narratives of football as they do a fictional narrative, but they do not entirely lose the sense that football is real. That the source text is real life, rather than another fiction, maintains the boundary between the original and the fan interpretation without seeing that boundary as necessarily negative. Football slash

writers know what is true, and they are well aware that their interpretations are not, that their reading of the relationship between Gerrard and Alonso (or others) are all in their heads. They do not feel like they have to prove that they are not seeing things that are not there, because nothing that anyone in the community is seeing is really there. The potential homoerotic reading could not have been inserted by producers as a recognition of fandom, or be a latent part of the text waiting to be discovered by utilizing the right tools, and there is no writer of the source text to offer validation of their reading or become persuaded to change the text to better suit it. This acknowledgement frees the participants from feeling that they have to prove they're correct, and instead, allows them to enjoy the acts of interpretation, speculation, and creation for their own sake.

The enjoyment of the acts of interpretation and creation extend to the way football slash writers think about football players, the "characters" that they use to make their stories. The appeal of Gerrard and Alonso as a romantic pairing is not only because of the way they interact with each other, but because of the way Gerrard and Alonso themselves are constructed within the discourse of the community. They are both considered appealing characters that make a good contrast with each other. Gerrard, loyal, proudly Scouse, and somewhat rough around the edges has his counterpart in the elegant, cosmopolitan, and occasionally intellectual Alonso. They both are considered to have not only positive qualities, but ones that are interesting to explore in fiction, from what is going on underneath Gerrard's ineloquence to Alonso's good taste in popular culture. They are appreciated not only good players, with a positive working relationship, but good characters.

This understanding of Gerrard, Alonso, and any other player that is written about comes from a wide variety of sources, combined to make a coherent whole. Fanfiction writers draw upon interviews, magazine profiles, behind-the-scenes videos, personal Twitter feeds, and any other possible source of information about players, investigating them for any sense of who they are as people in addition to who they are as athletes, which also plays a role. Writers draw upon the style in which a player plays, and how that style is written about, whether it's "skillful," "brave," or any other description, and that becomes part of the perceived character of the player. This is combined with the almost infinitely vast amount of content regarding players in the contemporary football media landscape, from soft, human-interest interviews to tabloid exposes. The increased mediatization of football encourages star footballers to be treated like other media stars, with a focus on their

personal history and personality as much as (and often more than) their sporting ability. It is not enough for a football player to be talented; he has to have an interesting personality, a certain amount of charisma, or at least be constructed to appear that way. It is through this personalitization that a talented player becomes a true star, and can therefore build his brand and gain recognition, prestige, and lucrative sponsorship deals.

As discussed in the first chapter, this is not a particularly new development within football. Cigarette cards, newsreels, and print features focused on individual footballers with particular skill, turning them into interesting personalities that the public might pay to see perform, and stars that fans would be eager to learn more about. Print was and is a particularly key format for constructing true football stars, "those players who have more than just footballing skill, as they have a character and personality which lifts them above the ordinary star." (Woolridge 2002, 64) Profiles of star players after the first World War not only discussed their skills and the history of their careers, but their backgrounds, their hobbies, who they might be as men. These stars were the draw for ticket sales and the selling of even more newspapers, just as they are today.

What has changed is style and volume. Part of this has to do with the increasing influence of tabloid publications on the representation of football stars. Tabloid publications, with the express purpose of selling papers and not much more, focused on sensationalism and scandal, particularly that of a personal nature regarding famous figures. The lines between public and private blurred. Tabloid papers were particularly enthusiastic about football stars, something that increased as they became more visible, and wealthy, through continued television coverage. While "sport specialist journalists remained reluctant to expose stars who were also acquaintances and drinking pals, their news-reporter colleagues felt no such constraints," (Whannel 2002, 154) eagerly exposing their sexual affairs or drinking problems. Big football stars were recognizable, and their exploits were different enough from everyday life to be of interest, especially when they did something scandalous. As the tabloids, and their football sections, became more entrenched and wealthy on their own, football players began to work with them as much as against them. Star players sell their wedding photos or "write" columns for them, raising their own profile in the process. The effect of the tabloids was that it showed that any story about a public figure, or a football player, was potentially newsworthy somewhere, and that it would sell.

This had resonances throughout the rest of the football media landscape. The expansion of sports pages and an increase in football-related publications, both online and off, mean that there is an increasing amount of space to be filled with content. Journalists find that "descriptive, personality-based, sports trivia is what they need most to make the kind of copy that will sell newspapers," (Sugden and Tomlinson 2007, 50) and so there is an increasingly large amount of this information available. Personality, more than questions of sport, is increasingly the driver of football media content at this stage of mediatization, where media logic takes equal precedence to football logic. Having a marketable star, or preferably several, to entice television and other media coverage is crucial to the majority of football clubs, dependent as they are on the resources controlled by the media. Additionally, both football clubs and football players themselves have become content producers online, and one of the things they can offer better than the established football media outlets is personality-driven content. The official online video channels of a given football club will have, in addition to game highlights, lighthearted interviews with the team, and a player's own website or Twitter feed will discuss his favorite music and childhood heroes. This is designed to create emotional involvement in the club or player, and hopefully, fan loyalty as well. As a result, there is a wide amount of information for fanfiction writers to draw upon when constructing their narratives.

This information is then incorporated into the discussions that the fanfiction community has with each other about the players and their relationships. Discussion about characters is an important element of fan communities, who enjoy dissecting the relationships, decisions, and future of their favorites. Bacon-Smith observed that that "in interaction with others who share in the fictional relationships, the actions and behaviors of the fictional characters generate discussion and gossip as if the characters were in some way real" (Bacon-Smith 1992, 158), with Jenkins (1992, 81) also referring to this as "television gossip," seeing it as a practice of soap opera fans that was moved into the fan communities that he studied. Bacon-Smith and Jenkins saw the role of this gossip as making the characters and the program more "real" to fans, something integral to their fan identity in that it validates the object of their fandom, making it worthy of their attentions in comparison to others.

However, in the context of fanfiction, and especially for football slash fanfiction, this gossip also serves the opposite purpose – in making the characters "real," it also makes them fictional. Through the process of gossip, fans speculate on what might happen with the characters within the narrative, whether they feel that

they did right thing, how their past may have informed their decision. They become understood by the fans, and therefore become clear enough so that the fan can write about them herself without relying on the text's official author. Eventually, fans create their own sense of who the characters are that goes well beyond what is presented in the source text, developing a "fanon," "a series of details and characteristics that are shared by most slash stories, but that have no factual basis in the original text." (Stasi 2006, 121) The word is a combination of "fan" and "canon" (here used in the sense of what "facts" about the character and world are provided by the original text) and indicates the work done by fanfiction communities in creating their own sense of the characters they are working with through gossip and discussion. It is built on what is provided by the source text, but made of what the fans provide through their own understanding of the character and his world through gossip, discussion, and previously written fanfiction texts. These character identities become something that participants in *footballslash* know, and can reference and build upon. Steven Gerrard's loyalty and Xabi Alonso's love of *The Great Gatsby*, both part of "Filling Up the Space," are elements drawn from the "canon" of football, being referenced in interviews and Gerrard's rejection of wealthier football clubs, but have particular importance as part of the 'fanon.' The identity that has been built, that makes them compelling characters and an interesting relationship, is therefore incorporated into the story.

This process serves to enable the community to see football players "as fully formed, intricate, and interesting characters," (Busse 2006, 214) with an emphasis on seeing them as characters. The fans know that what they are writing about is not the "real" Steven Gerrard, but a construction made by the community, built out of their own interpretation of information that Steven Gerrard's management wants to be known about him. As with constructing relationships, the act of interpreting Steven Gerrard or any other football player into a fictionalized version is an extremely enjoyable activity. Fans enjoy looking through websites for information, discussing them with their fandom friends, and building versions of football players that they can play with. The writer comes to feel that she knows the player she is writing about, but this is different from the sort of "parasocial" (Horton and Wohl 1956) relationship where a fan feels like she has a genuine relationship with a media figure or character. Rather, this is the knowledge that an author has of her fictional creation, a knowledge shared across the community. In some way, it has all served as author.

That players are understood as fictional characters means that they are capable of being taken out of their context without the sense of who they are being lost. "Alternate universe" or "AU" stories, where the main characters are put into a different fictional world than they come from, are popular throughout the fanfiction community, but are especially common within *footballslash*. Football players are reimagined as high-school students, bartenders, superheroes, Mafia dons, and just about everything else. Within these reimaginings, the identities of the football players remain, but everything else about them changes. In recontextualizing the characters in this way, writers can more fully explore the players as fictional entities, exploring how they would behave in situations well outside those that the writer becomes acquainted with through the source text. It also allows the writer to utilize and showcase her creativity in creating the characters and their world, by presenting something new while still maintaining a sense of connection with the source text.

"The Tale of the Prince and his Bodyguard," a multi-part fanfiction story by Mimsie, is an example of the way this recontextualization works, and the sort of pleasures that fanfiction writers and readers get out of it. In this long-running, and as of yet unfinished, story, inspired by *One Thousand and One Nights* (with the author listing "The Tale of the Third Kalendar" and the Jeweler's Son as particular inspiration points), the Germany and Real Madrid star Mesut Özil is cast as the beloved younger son of a powerful king. Sami Khedira, in real life Özil's teammate for Germany and Real Madrid, is his bodyguard, a skilled and devoted soldier. When preparing for a war, Özil's father, the king, is given a prophecy that says that forty days after the king begins preparations, his son will be kidnapped, and "will be ransomed by neither gold nor steel." Frightened, the king sends Özil, along with Khedira and other soldiers, to an island to wait out the forty days. Khedira and Özil fall in love on the island, which is attacked by pirates on the fortieth day. In exchange for sparing Khedira's life, Özil allows himself to be taken prisoner, and is taken to the court of a rival kingdom. Eventually, Khedira finds and frees him, becoming gravely injured in the process, and the two escape, to be taken in by yet a third kingdom to heal Khedira's injuries.

With the details stripped away, characterization is even more reliant upon the "sense" of a player as developed by the community. The version of Khedira described in "The Tale of the Prince and his Bodyguard" is built out of the idea of Khedira as a football player, as well as the way he comes across in interviews. He is one of the stars of the German national football team and Real Madrid, considered to be an

integral part of each team, but his position and playing style is more defensive and efficient than flashy. He works hard for his team, wins tackles, and gets the ball to the more naturally attacking members of the team. This player can be recognized in the Khedira described by Mimsie, a skilled fighter who can win tournaments even while injured and feels that:

> He knew the difference between right and wrong, because it was simple: right was loyalty, devotion, the purpose that rang clear as a silver bell. Wrong was everything else.

While idealized, this Khedira is one that other fans would recognize. The sense of Khedira that the fanfiction community has – that of a good team player who is intelligent and well-spoken – carries through into this characterization. He was already fictionalized before Mimsie started writing, and therefore recognizable when transported into a truly fictional space.

Within the genre references of the story – the prince, his devoted bodyguard, swordfights, pirates, courtly intrigue – is a continued series of references to the narrative world of football. Every character that Khedira and Özil encounter on their journeys are football players, or related to football players, arranged into loose national/tribal groupings analogous with the national and team groupings of football. The pirates are all FC Barcelona players, in the service of the king of Tartessos, also known as the manager of the Spanish national team, del Bosque. Upon escaping, they are taken in by a citadel populated by the players of the German national team (a favorite of the author's). Readers take great delight taken in watching new characters appear, seeing how they are characterized, and recognizing the references to the community's knowledge of them and their histories. Creating new versions of familiar characters becomes something of a game, a way to play with the community's expectations as well as exercise one's imagination. Writing an alternate universe version of the player takes their fictionalization to a higher level, making them even more the "property" of the author and the community.

It's Just Hot

Slash fanfiction is not only about emotion, relationships, and characterization. It is also about sex, and "while it is important to note that not all slash is overtly erotic, the point is that it can be." (Tosenberger 2008, 201) While some stories are

simply romantic, many are expressly, explicitly sexual. Football slash fanfiction is also a way to express and imagine sexual fantasies about football players, in an environment where this is welcomed. In *footballslash*, its related communities, and personal journals of its participants, pictures of footballers are posted with the intention of finding the players attractive – pictures of faces, shirtless torsos, thighs, and the like. The concept of the spaces of the community as dedicated to slash means that fans can "look frankly, safely, and openly at the bodies of others and to repeat that viewing experience as often as they like." (Coppa 2009, 112) Finding football players attractive in such an environment is not shameful, but rather at least half the point of being part of it.

Garry Whannel notes that "[s]port, as a social practice concerned centrally with the body, has been characterised by its striking repression of sexuality." (Whannel 2002, 11) This is especially true for male athletes. The body of the male athlete, ideally, "is an instrument of supreme sporting performance rather than an invitation to libidinal pleasure." (Rowe 2004, 159-160) Its muscles and form are created for a purpose, and that purpose is to perform, and specifically to perform for other men. Within the codes of representation of male athletes, "viewers are encouraged to concentrate on what is being done rather than on how appealing the athlete might look in doing it." (Rowe 2004, 153) Sport has long been constructed as the ideal space of and for masculinity, and "the representation of sport stars is precisely to do with the normalisation of hegemonic masculinity." (Gosling 2007, loc 4817) Within this hegemonic masculinity, "it is wrong to look lustfully at the male body," (ibid) and therefore the ideal way to see male athletes is with the sexual aspect removed, regardless of the intense physicality of the activity. Within this framework, it is perhaps unsurprising that "until recently, there has been a reluctance to objectify sexually the male sports body." (Rowe 2004, 154)

As football stars become media stars, however, this has changed. In recent years, "[t]he gradual freeing up of fixed socio-sexual identities, the influence of feminism, and the increasingly overt sexualization of culture and commercialization of sexuality have resulted in a strengthening trend of openly sexualizing sportsmen." (ibid) Attractive male football players, such as Freddie Ljungberg and Cristiano Ronaldo, have been found to be very effective salespeople for a range of products, especially in overtly sexualized campaigns for underwear. Male football players in states of undress sell magazines, and their attractiveness is written about as a way to "entice" women into paying attention to the sport. From the attractiveness of

football players being unacknowledged, and their bodies covered, their handsomeness is praised and their torsos splashed across billboards. However, this recognition is set outside of regular football fan practice, positioned as something that people who aren't fans of football might be interested in and separating it from any thoughtful or serious consideration of the sport.

The existing male fans see a mode of fandom that acknowledges the attractiveness of the athletes as wrong. One can either be attracted to the players or a true fan of the sport. Women are already widely considered inauthentic fans of football and are constantly asked to prove their fandom by men, and admitting to finding the players attractive is a quick way to be found illegitimate. Female football fans often "are accused that their motivation is not genuine, but is related to eroticism" (Ben-Porat 2009, 888) and work to dispel that notion in order to have their fandom seen as valid. This is common across football fan cultures and internalized by female fans, who look down on those who don't follow the established masculine codes of spectatorship. In England, female fans complain about other women who ""let . . . us all down" by finding players attractive" (Jones 2008, 528) while in Japan, women protest that "'I'm not a *mi-ha* fan, I'm watching soccer seriously'." (Tanaka 2004, 54) The code of proper fandom "prioritizes a particular mode of spectatorship in soccer games," (ibid) and this mode of spectatorship is that of the heterosexual male.

The practices of slash fandom work to overcome this contradiction, by providing a space where the attractiveness of the football player is highlighted and prized that does not feel lightweight. The nature of "proper fandom" is inverted, and eroticizing the players becomes the norm, but a norm that also rewards the sort of intellectual work that goes in to writing stories or analyzing the game. As a community made up of other football fans who share the same outlook towards the players, it also allows fans to see this eroticization of football players as legitimate rather than a distortion of correct fandom. There is no contradiction between being invested in FC Barcelona's results and sexually attracted to Gerard Pique within the journals that make up the football fanfiction community. Many *footballslash* participants do not take part in any other football fan community online, preferring to reserve their comments and discussion for a place where they feel more comfortable.

However, thanks to football fanfiction's relative secrecy, it also becomes possible to participate while still presenting elsewhere as a traditional fan. Football

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slash fanfiction may be relatively easy to find, but only with the knowledge of what slash fanfiction is. Football fans more generally, even those who maintain a strong online presence and identity, are unlikely to be aware of the practice unless they wish to be. Fans involved in the practice do not proselytize, and indeed, there is a fairly strong taboo against making it known to those unfamiliar with fanfiction practices. Within the community itself, writers utilize user names and pseudonyms, further separating themselves from potential discovery. A different pseudonym can then be used on more mainstream football websites. The nature of online fandom means that it is easy to switch between the two spheres, between one form of fandom and the other. The fanfiction writer can therefore maintain her legitimacy as a "serious" football fan, if she so wishes, without having to give up both her attraction to players and her enjoyment of fanfiction practices. The nature of online communication, with its separate spaces with separate identification that are accessed in the same physical way, means that such a division of identities is possible.

Conclusion

What football fanfiction does, therefore, is to suggest a different understanding of football, as a narrative to be explored and expanded rather than a set of events. While this understanding might be nontraditional, and somewhat threatening to those who would rather see the sport as a pure athletic competition, it is not a reading that comes out of nowhere. Rather, it arises from the form that football takes as it is mediatized, and especially its form once it becomes a firmly televisual object.

Once football becomes understood as a narrative, it becomes capable of becoming refashioned and reformed in a way that more suits the fans who choose to view it in that manner. The fanfiction community transforms the narratives and events within football in order to better fit their needs, be they emotional, creative, or sexual. However, this is not to say that the participants of *footballslash* do not understand the difference between reality and fiction. They are fully aware that what they are writing about is not the truth, or even likely to be. This gives *footballslash* some of its uniqueness within the fanfiction community more generally, and also suggests that, rather than considering whether a fan interpretation is correct or not,

fanfiction and fan interpretation should be looked at as primarily a way to play with the source text. The slash interpretation does not preclude a more traditional understanding of football or its narratives, even within the same fan.

What football fanfiction does suggests is that at the same time, the game is a fictional narrative and a real event, a source of creativity and a source of sporting involvement. It points to the multiplicity inherent in mediatized football, and that "we must also recognise that football supporters, like consumers generally, will use, modify and customise in order to satisfy their diverse subcultural needs." (Crabbe and Brown 2004, 34) These needs are, perhaps, far more diverse than previously realized.

Conclusion: After the Match and To the Showers

This thesis presents an understanding of the practice and positioning of the Internet community *footballslash*. Through the practice of slash fanfiction, fan writers and readers work through their emotions regarding football and its players, using their stories to express the anxiety, disappointment, pride, and lust that comes with being a football fan. It provides a welcoming environment to discuss these emotions, without the fear of having one's fandom be seen as illegitimate or wrong. Fanfiction writers re-interpret the media landscape of football, drawing upon everything from a player's playing style to his Twitter feed in order to understand his character, and imagining new versions of the well-known events in the football world. The football text is creatively expanded, becoming in the process a more enjoyable, fuller narrative, one that better suits the needs of the writers, but one that compliments the "official" text. In this, the use of football as a source for fanfiction is similar to the way in which other media texts are used. Fanfiction has for decades provided a way in which fans can imagine what goes on in the narrative world outside of what is shown (Bacon-Smith 1992, Jenkins 1992), and a way in which the emotional lives of popular characters can be better understood and explored.

However, while there are many similarities between football slash fanfiction and fanfiction for other source texts, there are also striking differences. Unlike other media narratives, the media world of football, while large, does not provide in itself the deep relationships that fans write about. Fans create these relationships out of small details, building them, through their own discussion and creative work, into something more meaningful to them and that is better suited to tell the stories they want to tell. They utilize what already exists within football, but put less focus on what "is" and more on "what is possible." Much of the enjoyment of *footballslash* comes from discussing and speculating on these possibilities, rather than being concerned with whether they are correct. The participants are fully aware of the difference between their fictional stories and the reality of football. This suggests that the interpretive practices used in the creation of fanfiction, and what fans get out of these practices, are highly enjoyable regardless of whether they can be "backed up" by the source text itself.

This can be credited to, as I explain in the second chapter, changes within the fanfiction community. The move to online communities from fanzine-based practice meant that not only did fanfiction become more accessible, but also that more texts could be interpreted in such a manner. Fanfiction became fast, free, and relatively easy to find and distribute. Rather than being confined to texts popular among existing "media fans," fanfiction has become a way of engaging with all media narratives, and writing and reading fanfiction has become in itself a community. Those already familiar with fanfiction expect to be able to find it for any media text they find interesting. This is particularly true for slash fanfiction, which deals with a homosexual relationship between two characters. It was a clandestine practice in the pre-Internet days, but moved into prominence with the incorporation of the Internet into the fanfiction community. As it spread, it moved from its focus on ideal romance and reiterating the "special bond" between two protagonists to a more general way of interpreting texts and images, a way of interacting with, and looking at, favorite characters and narratives. Understanding slash fanfiction in this manner provides a better explanation of the fanfiction community in the contemporary media environment, as well as providing one of the core reasons for *footballslash*'s existence.

It also suggests something important about football. If slash is a way for fans to interact with and interpret their favorite media narratives, and there is slash written about football, than football, too, is considered a media narrative. It is this perspective that I explore in the first chapter. By historicizing the influence of media on football, I bypass the nostalgic view of football's past as a time without media influence and instead offer a much broader perspective of how football can be seen this way. I do this by utilizing the concept of "mediatization," (Schulz 2004, Hjarvard 2008, Strömbäck 2008, Lundby 2009), the process by which non-media institutions become submitted to media logic, as a framework from which to investigate football's changes. I trace this process from football's earliest days as a spectator sport, through newsreel, radio, and the first decades of television, into the current regime of pay television, satellite broadcasts, and the Internet. This provides a longer-term perspective, and shows that the understanding that *footballslash* participants have of football, that of a media object, is not so strange. Rather, it is inherent to football, the intensification of a process that began in its origin.

Taken as a whole, however, this thesis is a description of fan cultures in an age of convergence. While media convergence has been well explored (Jenkins 2008,

Dwyer 2010, Meilke and Young 2012), this thesis presents a slightly different take on the phenomenon. It shows how not only media forms, but fan cultures themselves, converge in this environment. The culture of football fandom and the culture of fanfiction, before the mass domestication of the Internet, were kept separate. They had separate spaces, separate practices, and separate identities, and the study of these cultures has generally followed suit. (Schimmel et al, 2007). As both moved online, the lines between these cultures blurred, producing a hybrid form. This study of *footballslash* is therefore also a study in "convergence fandom," an in-depth exploration of what happens as previously distinct fan cultures become present in the same space. As more and more of all fan practices occur in online space, we should expect to see more such convergence fandoms.

This thesis, therefore, is about football slash fanfiction, but not only. It is also about football itself, and fanfiction itself. It is about fan practices in the contemporary media environment and the history of spectator sport. It is about how football is transformed by a group of fans in order to better suit them, and about how the Internet brings football fans into contact. It is, broadly, about adaptation and change. Football slash fanfiction, and *footballslash*, are at the center of these changes. Therefore, understanding it is a way in which to understand broader processes. It is such an understanding that is presented here.

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