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(1992),

Lancaster's performance studies paradigm as applied to fandom reveals the generation of meaning through fan play and participation outside of the primary media text. By investigating and analyzing the way that fans used games, fan fiction, computer programs, and other paratextual elements "to 'visit' and perform [moments] from [and around] episodes of *Babylon 5*," Lancaster developed a comprehensive view of how fans can "immerse themselves in this universe" (67). In this interview with Lancaster, we discuss how a performance

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particular identity, activity, or custom. Performance is always something that we *do*. Fandom is a type of performance, as fans actively perform their identity in a variety of ways. At the same time, particular activities within fandom—playing games, writing fan fiction, vidding—reveal the performances at the heart of media viewership as well.

[1.5] These fan performances can take many directions. Some fans revel in dressing up as their favorite characters (cosplay), play board games based on

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Babylon 5 fandom as I do with *Star Wars* (1977–2005) or *Star Trek* (1966–69).

[2.3] **Q:** You published *Interacting with "Babylon 5"* in 2001 at the burgeoning stages of social media. In the book you talk about Web sites and fans' online textual poaching. In what ways do you think social media has developed, or even countered, some of the threads you develop in this analysis, including performance of character through fan fiction or through MUSH [multiuser shared hallucination, or fic based on multiplayer online games] fiction?

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[2.7] **Q:** Obviously *Interacting with "Babylon 5"* is very much centered on Straczynski's show and draws from your own experiences with it and with its fandom, as well as with the games you cover. Does one have to draw from their own experiences (regarding acafandom) in order to discuss these themes of fandom, performance, and immersion in a fictional world? How would such a work look if it were more observational and less affective?

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computer game that brings you realistic simulation, you're sold miniatures and engage in fighter combat. Back in the 1980s, the Avalon Hill Game Company introduced fighter combat simulation, as well as other types of war-based board games. They never revolved around existing fantasy universes. The new ones, such as Fantasy Flight Games, tap into a variety of universes, including *Conan*, *Game of Thrones*, *Battlestar Galactica*, and *The Hobbit*, to name a few. They build online community forums. For example, the Game of Thrones Living Card Game forum contains over 9,200 topics and nearly 71,000 replies. That's

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them at a parade or actually fighting a fire on the news, provides all the cultural codes needed for us to understand that this is a fireman. That's his performance. He's not taking on a role like an actor; he's taking on a sociocultural role that we associate as a fireman. In effect, his costume—as soon as he puts it on—is embedded with these media associations and from our living memories. That's the performance that gets enacted or is associated in our minds with the fireman. In many ways, the observer is performing the man's role by associating media memories onto him from their own imagination. The fireman, too, may perform

based on what he thinks is how a fireman should behave (perform) from his own media associations and lived memories. Understanding fan performance in this way helps us understand that they're not playing traditional acting roles but rather sociocultural roles. That's what performance studies can bring to the table.

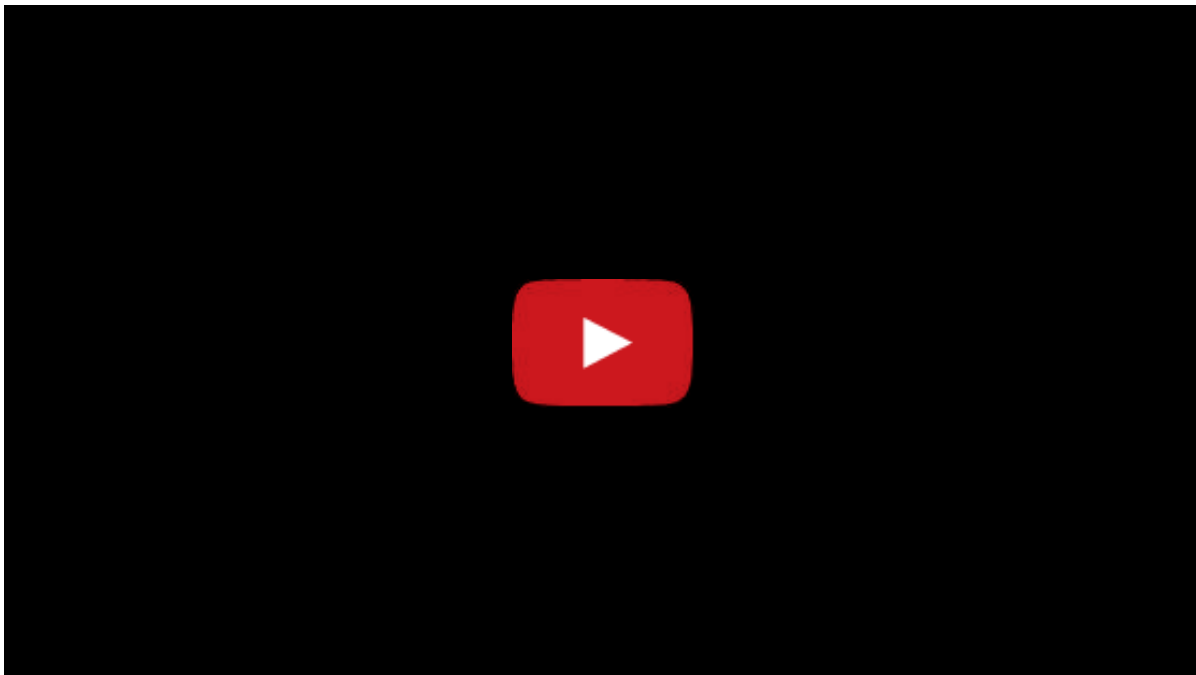
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1, based on the computer game *Assassin's Creed* (Ubisoft, 2007), reveals the nature of game movement actualized through film and the enactment of character through costume and his actions.



Video 1. *"Assassin's Creed Meets Parkour in Real Life" by devinsupertramp (2012).*

[2.16] Fandom is really about the need for adolescents to help find a purpose or a moral center in a postindustrial, postentertainment world that no longer

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experience or fans watching the film, making comments about it, attempting to mimic it—which is already an extended text from the computer game—helps create this short film to act as a living document. By this I mean that the fans make it come alive through their critique, praise, and other community-building experiences. It makes the universe of the game shift from the console of a living room computer game (73 million copies sold inclusive of its sequels) into a performance environment as people build online communities and create movies about the game. (There's a variety of story-based fan films, comic books, novels,

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THIS OCCURS THROUGH ALL KINDS OF MEDIA, NOT JUST SCIENCE FICTION SHOWS.

[2.23] **Q:** You focus in the book on media producer interaction with fans and provide the example of Straczynski being challenged by fan critics. How do you think, in this current climate, media producer and fan interactions are unfolding? Are we seeing a performance on this platform from both parties?

[2.24] **A:** Straczynski was the first to do it online at a consistent level. It takes dedication and time. (His online critics were few, with a lot more positive

comments about the series than negative.) It's a strong historical record of how a television series was produced at the time. I think we see similar interactions on a small, haphazard scale; I don't see anyone else posting as much as Straczynski. This is a much larger phenomenon as the television industry has moved from pure-film funding because of the high cost of production (around \$7 million with a \$2 million budget) to a more viable product. The fan base of the series has grown, and the production went forward.

[2.25] This is a result of producers creating fan films that are the result of loyal fans being connected to the story that its still a viable storytel re film for release by raising money.

(<http://www.startrekaxanar.com/>), which includes cast members from both *Battlestar Galactica* series (1978–79, 2003–10) and *Star Trek* television series as a way to build the fan base (video 2). Without this community of fans, such projects wouldn't get made.



Video 2. "Star Trek: Axanar" Kickstarter video (2014).

[2.26] **Q:** In the preface to the book, you touch on how nonfans sometimes

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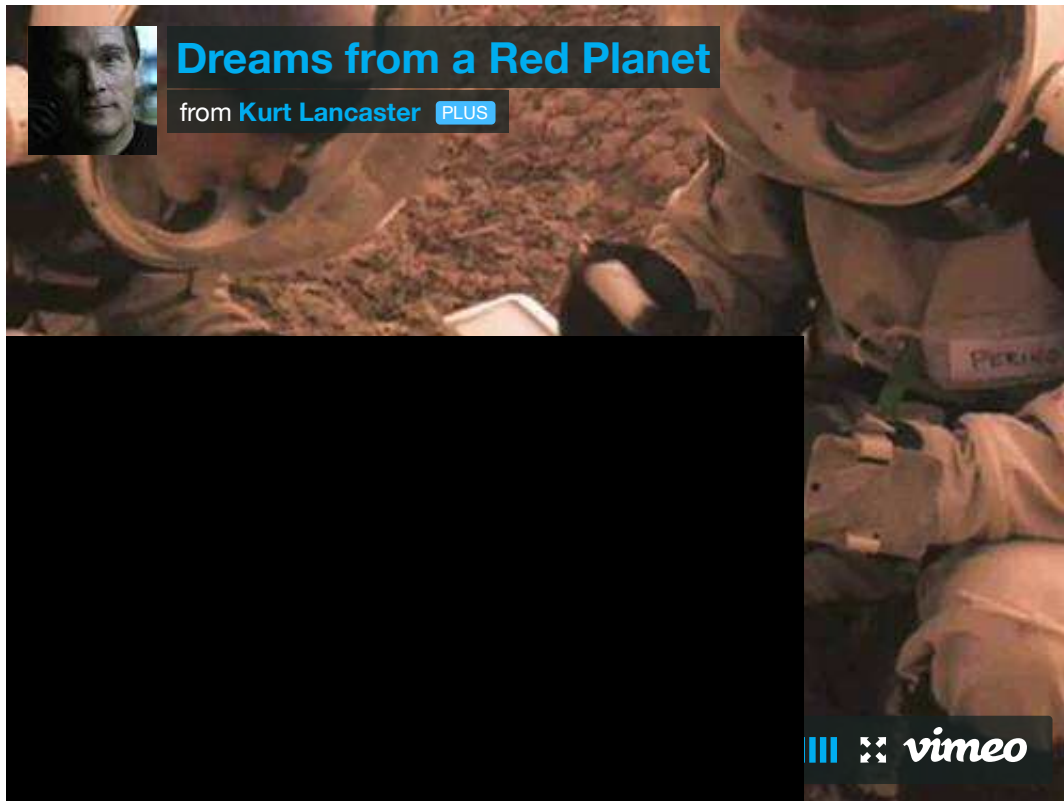
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traditional science fiction convention (set around novelists, as opposed to media-centered conventions). Conventions were listed in the SF trade magazine, *Locus*. Even though you would find a group of fellow fans it was still considered a bit strange to go to such conventions. Now it's considered cool. I remember attending a convention in the early 2000s, and Neil Gaiman was the guest author. Due to the widespread popularity of his Sandman series a lot of young people attended the convention. His fan base helped make conventions cool again.

[2.32] More recently, with the popularity of genre films, such as Spider-Man and large action films, Comic-Con becomes the default media-centered/saturated convention where it is the mainstream. You attend that con, and you're not considered to be on the fringe. My documentary about people wanting to go to Mars, *Dreams from a Red Planet*, was screened there in 2006.



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'2006).

[2.33] I have students in some of my classes who consider it cool to attend the Phoenix Comic-Con. The popularity of such shows as *Big Bang Theory* (2007–) and other types of the promotion of nerd culture—perhaps the coolness of Apple's Steve Jobs and the rise of new media technologies and the coolness of owning and operating new technologies birthed this notion of coolness—has led to a shift in the social consciousness about science fiction conventions over the past 20 to 30 years.

[2.34] **Q:** Have you any other work planned in the future focusing on fan studies?

[2.35] **A:** No. In many ways I've said all that I need to say in my books (with chapters on *Warlocks & Wardrive*, and in my published dissertation, *Interacting*

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card games, tabletop role-playing and war games, computer games, and fan
fiction. Each one provides a different way for fans to enter that universe and
become part of its collective story. If *Babylon 5* as a television series is the myth
text, then all of these other forms become the way people perform in the myth,
similar in many ways to ancient Greek playwrights writing stories about their
central myths. If I were to do it over, I would look at *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, and
The Lord of the Rings as models since these are mainstream and it would have

generated a wider readership. But I'll leave that for others to do.

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