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“Shipping” (as) Fandom and Art Practice

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This chapter draws a relationship between fandom and contemporary art by turning to fandom as a site of inspiration and motivation in my own art practice. In 2015 I initiated the *Fan Riot* project, an expansive art project exploring an increased resonance between art and fandom since the Internet.¹ Re-imagining the canonical tropes of relational aesthetics and the archival turn in contemporary art, *Fan Riot* explores the figure of the adoring fan as an unassuming model for collectivity, mobilisation and revolt. *Fan Riot* includes a fan club series with contributing fans and artists working with fan-like tendencies; publications exploring the relationship between critical art writing and fanfiction; and a series of artworks and performances, including two works commissioned by Jerwood Visual Arts, London in 2016 that I will discuss here: *Larry!Monument* a multimedia installation and fictional monument to the Larry Stylinson fandom, focused on the romantic relationship between One Direction boy band members Louis Tomlinson and Harry Styles as imagined-into-being by their adoring fans; and *Larry Stylinson Performance AU*, a role-play performance staged at the monument and performed by two Larry lookalikes.

More specifically this chapter turns to “shipping”: a speculative method in fanfiction of creating new erotic relationships between characters or celebrities un-substantiated in the official narratives or source texts, and characterised through fan-authored processes of imagining, re-writing and “fictioning.”² Shipping, initially derived from the word “relationship,” “is the desire by fans for two or more people,

either real-life-people or fictional characters (in film, literature, television, etc.) to be in a relationship, romantic or otherwise.”³ Shipping manifests through practice in the formation of transformative works including fanfictions, vids, illustrations and memes self-published on Internet platforms like tumblr, YouTube, fanfiction.net and archive of our own and includes an infinity of possible narratives: fans of, for example, *Harry Potter* or boy band One Direction create transformative works by using those official, usually commercially driven texts and narratives to create their very own versions, whether that be a “curtain fic” (or domestic fic) in which an enamoured Snape and Harry go shopping for curtains; a hurt/comfort fic (or death fic) where one band member, Louis, cares for the other band member, Harry, who has a terminal illness; or a One Direction/*Harry Potter* crossover in which Harry Potter is a performance artist and Harry Styles an art critic who “bodyswap” to help each other out of “sticky” situations.

An exclamation mark (sometimes called a “bang”) between two words in fandom, for instance “Married!Larry,” denotes a *trait!character* relationship between a character and a trait of that character. There are infinite possibilities for re-working popular texts, but fanfiction mostly focuses on relationships between characters, or celebrities in real-person fiction (RPF). The romance genre is thus the most popular, and includes specialist tropes like shipping; “one true pairing” (OTP – a fan’s favourite romantic pairing or “ship”); and slash or femme slash, focused on a same-sex relationship or narrative, “usually one imposed by the author and based on perceived homoerotic subtext.”⁴ Shipping becomes a method through which fans, often minority communities including women, queers and people of colour, can re-imagine a narrative and create their own minor narratives out of the major source material for their own pleasures.

While shipping has been generally considered specific only to fandom, and slash fiction as a predominantly female-authored genre based on boy-on-boy romance, this chapter explores ways in which shipping might be employed as a creative and critical methodology in art practice and writing about art, without diminishing its value as a minor literature. In doing so it literally “ships” art and fandom – two

as yet-un-officiated bedfellows (or kitchen floor, or ...) to understand how they overlap as performative, archival, speculative world-making practices. Shipping is discussed here as not only an "escapist" past-time for "stalkers," "crazies" and "kooks," but as an expressive and critical mode that might have traction upon the "real," especially the *realities* of the minority communities that form around these works.

Analysing fanfiction through the lens of Richard Schechner's performance theory, fan studies scholar Francesca Coppa argues that fanfiction develops in relation to performative rather than literary modes of response. Describing how fans "direct a living theatre in the mind,"⁵ Coppa writes:

The existence of fan fiction postulates that characters are able to "Walk" not only from one artwork into another, but from one genre into another; fan fiction articulates that characters are neither constructed or owned, but have, to use Schechner's phrase, a life of their own not dependent on any original "truth" or "source."⁶

In order to ship my characters "Art" and "Fandom," this writing also requires a "walking out" of traditional roles. This could be through the postulation of the author as fan, or the adoption of author as character or avatar (owko69),⁷ or where the writing itself enters a mode of "fanfictioning." Imbued in all writing is an author playing an author. In this case I am also "theatricalising" and analysing that role in order to produce what Simon O'Sullivan calls "a fiction about Fiction."⁸ Rather than only talking about fanfiction in theoretical terms, which would strip away its rich erotic and affective potentialities, this writing also wants to occupy fanfiction as a method through which to assess and think through the relationship between art practice and fandom. It does this through six interconnected prompts for fanfictions that draw together art, fandom and theory, with reference to my ongoing investigations into art and fandom.

Prompts 1-3 explore shipping through the genre of slash fiction (boy-on-boy narratives) created by girls, which I argue is successful in undermining both heteronormative and homonormative strategies;⁹ Prompts 4-5 build on the prior by turning to two artworks



Figure 6.1 Illustration by Karukara, 2016 (courtesy of the artist).

I created: *Larry!Monument* (2016) and *Larry Stylinson Performance AU* (2016), expanding upon the ways shipping is employed as a methodology through and beyond these artworks; Prompt 6 calls for a shift in thinking about art and fandom as distinct sites of knowledge production to think instead about their shared relations and potential as sites of “worthless knowledge.”¹⁰ Ultimately, this chapter explores how shipping takes place both explicitly within, and potentially (but not always) against capitalism, and proposes this indeterminacy or ability to undermine hegemonic power and dream up new realities as its potential as a cultural practice.

Prompt 1:

The desiring fangirl reproduces heteronormative ideals through the creation of fluffy, cutesy, day-in-the-life-of fictions of boy-on-boy romance, domesticity and male pregnancy. But while appearing to uphold norms à la homonormativity, some fanfictions “open

possibilities for resignifying the terms of violation against their violating aims."¹¹ On reproducing and *accelerating* what is given to be "norm," the fangirl envisions a post-homonormative life, or so this story goes.

"Welcome to a new world order! Coming soon to a mainstream near you." This is where Lisa Duggan leaves us in her 2002 essay "The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism," which examines an emerging politics after "gay liberation."¹² Instead of contesting dominant heteronormative ideologies and institutions, this new homonormativity upholds and sustains them. Duggan's examples include the work of lesbian and gay organisations in the 1990s such as the Independent Gay Forum (IGF) and writers like Andrew Sullivan, author of *Virtually Normal*, who argued that marriage is "the highest form of human happiness," "a profoundly humanising, traditionalising step" and "ultimately the only reform that truly matters."¹³ Duggan's discourse focuses on showing how homonormativity abandons earlier political commitments to economic redistribution and protection of sexual freedoms by marginalising those who challenge serial monogamy and those who feel oppressed by a binary gender or sex system including transgender, bisexual, pansexual and intersex people.

Since then, much of the discussion on homonormativity surveys the ways in which it intersects with white privilege, capitalism, sexism, transmisogyny and cissexism by veering for acceptance within economic and political systems in its quest for equality. Now, well over a decade after this "new world order" and since legal endorsements of gay marriage in the mainstream, the normative and family-oriented political agendas of the IGF are easily reinforced in domestic partnerships, adoption and gender-normative social roles. And while homonormativity is reproduced and consumed through a growing number of commercial television series from *Modern Family* to *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, its incorporation (by mostly teenage girls) into the sub-genres of fanart and fanfiction might offer opportunities for its simultaneous assimilation and sublimation.

In the 2015 UK elections, it was teen girls who showed that there is more to politics than the usual humourless campaigning.

Seventeen-year-old Abby Tomlinson's instigation of Milifandom (and the tactical sexualisation of Labour candidate Ed Miliband through declarations of love, tweets, fanfictions and flower crown fanart) spoke back to the endless effluence directed towards Miliband by the rightwing press, while also demonstrating to campaigners – including Miliband's own – the importance of young voices, not to mention their capacity for getting a successful press campaign together.¹⁴ Milifandom is one example of a publicly visible subversive movement surrounding the 2015 elections, instigated by an unassuming fangirl. While it has been argued that teen girls have used fandom as a way to experiment with their sexuality in unthreatening ways by say practising their first kiss on a poster of [insert heartthrob here],¹⁵ other fan scholars have discussed the endless potentials of fan production – fanart and fanfiction – for re-working normative narratives.¹⁶

Slash fiction, the popular (usually same-sex) narrative fiction produced by a female-identifying majority, has been mostly celebrated for its subversive reworking of popular texts by introducing queer characterisations.¹⁷ Such re-workings are not always necessarily subversive, however, and with an increasing abundance of queer representation in popular culture, fanworks can also function as a normative conservative force. Berit Åstrom, who has written extensively on fanfiction, notes that “slash may ... rewrite dominant scripts and subvert heteronormative tropes, but it should not be assumed that the genre automatically produces resisting narratives.”¹⁸ While sexually explicit slash and subgenres of smut such as “knotting” fic can exemplify more subversive re-workings of popular texts;¹⁹ the more cutesy domestic subgenres such as “curtain fic” – in which the romantic leads go shopping for curtains – offer a counter-narrative to the subversive resistant strategies of gay liberation and the normalising strategies of IGF and others.

The depictions of fluffy domestic lifestyles authored by fanartists like Karukara and fanfiction authors like sunshineamaryllis hold the potential to exceed the marginalising force of homonormativity through a non-productive desiring relation – a desire that does not contribute to homonormativity nor work against it, but undermines its very production and consumption.²⁰ Corporate boy band producers know very well

that the effeminate, non-threatening boy image sells, but in evolving from consumers of pop culture to producers of fanworks, fangirls create their own AUs (alternative universes) where there is no such thing as the "norm," and thus no "homonormativity" that imitates or reproduces the so-called "norm."

Prompt 2:

Mpreg married!Larry are grocery shopping with their precious toddler and Louis is pregnant again. He's practically glowing and looks like a total angel. Someone hits on Louis and Harry goes all possessive alpha caveman over his babies because damn it, Louis, the baby he carries in his womb and the one he carries in his arms are all his, and no one is gonna take them away from him!²¹

Fanartist Karukara is a well-known "doodler" in Larry fandom – a subset of One Direction fandom designated specifically to the shipping (romantic coupling) of boy band members Louis and Harry. Larry is her OTP (one true pairing). In an interview Karukara tells me it is not that she is in love with the two boys so much as she is "in love with their love," and that this is commonplace among fans.²² Larry fans put boy band members Harry and Louis into a relationship that is real and accumulate an abundance of evidence to prove so (#larryisreal). They create romantic scenes of domestic bliss in homes in middle-class suburbia and debate over who is the active and who is the passive sexual role (Louis!bottom), they get Louis pregnant (mpreg), they create family portraits of the lesbian "boys" (whose own siblings look about five years younger than their fathers), among many other domestic scenarios that can be found in fics on sites like archiveofourown.org and fanfiction.net (Figure 6.1).

Neither working towards "gay liberation," nor a moralistic recuperation of gay identities exemplified in groups like IGF, fangirls who create fluffy domestic slash may at first seem to be doing nothing but projecting heteronorms on to gay relationships – but the relationship of the fangirl to these fictions is made of a non-productive desire – of being "in love with their love" – in lieu of any normalising agenda. Through depicted

scenes of home improvements and marriage proposals, the fluffy slash produced isn't necessarily imitative of heteronormativity, but conjures images of an ultimate equality where biological difference does not exist, and where sameness is produced through homonormativity without subversion. Welcome to the post-gender AU in which One Direction are mpreg, where there are no women and no men, and where there is no "norm," or rather, where identities are not fixed, but inconsistent, as in real life. The depoliticised gay culture "anchored in domesticity and consumption" that Duggan warned us against, despite perhaps at first appearing so, is thus not necessarily projected into slash fiction. What looks like homonormativity in slash is a representation without imitation and subversion of the "norm," or an accelerated or abstracted sameness we might, for the sake of this story, call homonormcore.

Normcore, a term brought into use by self-defined "trend-forecasting" group K-Hole, looks at the revolutionary potentials of sameness in a time when resistance strategies that rely on difference are increasingly coopted by neoliberalism's make-over regime.²³ Instead of difference, normcore moves into a post-authenticity that opts for sameness. So, if normcore is the understanding that "normality" doesn't exist, and finds "liberation in being nothing special" (following K-Hole), then homonormcore is the understanding that there is no such thing as homonormativity – at least for the teen girls who create slash fiction. This, of course, does not mean that every gay marriage proposal and gay adoption is a revolution, but raises the issue that if individuality is now very much a regulating capitalist desire, then perhaps one way out of this conundrum is through a sameness that is not imitative and exclusive, but adaptable and expansive.

In slash fic the hetero/homo binary becomes an inconsistent non-binary like mpreg/homonormcore, and reality and fantasy collapse into one another. In these fluffy fics, equality is conjured through a queer similarity – which is not the blankness of "normcore" but the strangeness and abstraction of a domestic sameness. Homonormativity upholds distinctions between the "normal and abnormal," "reality and fiction" – while homonormcore breaks down such distinctions until all such binaries are unreconcilable. #homonormcore.

Unlike the obvious subversions of smut fic, fluffy domestic slash can question both queer resistance strategies and the submission and absorption of queer into neoliberalism. Rather than leaving us in a productive critique of homonormativity it imagines something through and beyond homonormativity. As such, the homonormcore becomes not only a concern for identifying LGBTQs, but for everyone. So, as Duggan's story of "we get marriage and the military then we go home and cook dinner, forever"²⁴ becomes increasingly real, the celebratory fictions of the fangirl become increasingly mpreg with possibility. And this may not be a new phenomenon: it may even tell us that some of the avant-garde's biggest radicals were themselves practitioners of the homonormcore.

Prompt 3:

"I do the cooking and Merce does the dishes." (John Cage) Harry is the conceptual composer John Cage and Louis is the minimalist choreographer Merce Cunningham.

Tags: #JohnCage #MereCunningham #Cagingham
#YvonneRainer #Curtainfic #Mpreg #Domestic #Fluff #Crossover
#Avant-garde #minimalism #homonormcore.

Cagingham (John Cage and Merce Cunningham), pioneers of homonormcore (the new "minimalism") are redecorating their downtown New York rent-controlled loft. John prepares lunch, boiling three white duck eggs for three minutes: one for him, one for Merce and one for Jérôme, their sweet little boy. Merce, balancing without effort on a ladder in white Dickies overalls, announces he is pregnant again, and that the curtains they bought from Ikea are too short. After the eggs, Merce does the dishes, and they both take the subway to Ikea to exchange the curtains for a larger pair. On arrival, Yvonne, their friend the customer service representative with "the eyes of the Mona Lisa" warns them that "this is the new world order of curtains," and that all curtains only come in one size. Cagingham decide to keep the curtains. They go home, re-hang the curtains, give birth and get used to their friends from the other lofts watching them eat boiled eggs through the gap in the curtain.



Figure 6.2 Owen G. Parry, *Larry!Monument*, 2016. Dimensions variable. Photograph by Hydar Dewachi (courtesy of the artist).

Prompt 4: *Larry!Monument*

A multimedia installation and fictional monument to the Larry Stylinson fandom. Commissioned by Jerwood Visual Arts for *Jerwood Encounters: Common Property*, 2016, “a group exhibition curated by Hannah Pierce bringing together six artists who are challenging the limitations of copyright through their practice,”²⁵ including Edwin Burdis, Hannah Knox, Rob Myers, Owen G. Parry, Antonio Roberts and SUPERFLEX.

Larry!Monument (2016) consists of a scaffold structure, which gallery visitors can walk through, connecting a series of elements (Figure 6.2). There is a transparent “passion flower violet” acrylic wall (*Larry!Hieroglyphics*) with the prompt “Ship Everything!” etched on to it. Clipped to the frame and lit from below, etchings of the boys in intimate moments of under-the-radar contact or tender embrace faintly glow; the brush of Harry’s hand against Louis’, a loving glance into one another’s

eyes, a piggy back, a boyish flirt, all salvaged from YouTube videos of interviews and backstage antics of the band, re-captured and archived as evidence of their love. The videos were paused at specific moments and delicately traced by my hand, scanned into a digital vector file and then machine-etched into perspex – forever!

There is also a digital video with sound (*Larry Shipping Ritual*) exploring the overlapping concepts of "shipping memes" in fandom, collaging in art practice and performance in sacred rituals. The animated diagrams also form a scaffold structure as coloured lines appear between different characters and objects (potential ships!) including Yoko Ono, Rihanna, Michel Foucault, a hand saw, Justin Bieber, a precious crystal, Marina Abramović, Nicki Minaj, Henry Jenkins, April from *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and others. Shipping diagrams are usually based around a single fandom, band or television series and go viral on social networks like tumblr. These diagrams offer a visual aid for understanding shipping as a re-writing strategy and well-honed expert method in fandom but also, as this work proposes, art and theoretical practices. The diagrams become prompts for a series of new narratives formed by putting characters and "things" into new, often clashing or erotic relations. Interspersed between potential ships like Darth Vader from *Star Wars* and Patsy from *Absolutely Fabulous* are terms used by fans to describe fanfiction genres specific to fandom: "OT7, boypussy, deathfic, hurt/comfort, ATG, bodyswap, xenokink." The result – a "living theatre in the mind" to re-quote Coppia – which might be a Darth Vader/ Patsy deathfic – a crossover narrative combining two unlikely characters, all set to a dark, anticipatory, bassy soundscape. Bookending the five-minute video is the title "Larry Shipping Ritual." Rituals are sacred ceremonies involving gestures, words and objects according to a specific sequence, often at a symbolic site (the Internet), and conducted by a community or group (a fandom). Richard Schechner "ships" the concept of ritual and performance (that is he draws a relationship between two subjects as-yet-unidentified as a pairing) when he writes: "Rituals are performative: they denote acts done, and performances are ritualised: they are codified, repeatable actions."²⁶ This form of theorising or shipping of concepts parallels the shipping of art and fandom in this chapter, which

produces the sacred in George Bataille's sense that a sacrifice binds a people, and entails a wasteful expenditure.²⁷ Fan activity here becomes a site of "wasteful expenditure" – of time obsessing over Harry Styles, of reading, re-writing, fantasising, daydreaming and debating top or bottom, smutty or fluffy fanfics; it forms as a counter time to the monumental, archival, imperialistic, heteronormative and moral projects of late capitalism, taking place *within* and at best *undermining* capitalism's biggest exports – boybands, TV shows and celebrities. Another element in the installation is the pairing of two white identical self-assembled net laundry baskets with pink rim edging (*Larry!Domestic*), dangling from a screw in the wall, their bottoms a few centimetres from the floor, each springy structure balancing and supporting the other. There are also two masks that look like they have been chunked into the laundry baskets, one of Louis and one of Harry's face printed on to a stretchy synthetic sheath. Inside one basket is a silicone pregnant belly with Harry Styles' tattoos drawn on with black biro, and a yellow post-it note reading "Oops! Hi." This is expert knowledge – or as Henry Jenkins puts it "worthless knowledge" – in that fans are seen to "place inappropriate importance on devalued cultural material."²⁸ "Oops! Hi." is a major reference in the Larry fandom – considered as the first words the boys ever said to each other when meeting for the first time at the toilet urinals backstage at the *X Factor*. Louis accidentally splashes Harry with his piss and says, "Oops!" Harry turns with a smarmy smile and says "Hi." This was before the band had formed. This is "worthless knowledge." Another element in the installation is a large silk print of Louis and Harry kissing underwater (*Larry Underwater Kiss*); a photo "manip" of the boys, an orphan image, a low-res jpeg printed on silk, pinned loosely to the wall, allowing sags and pleats to form upon the luxury fabric.

Larry!Monument is not a monument in that it is a fictional monument. By which I don't mean to say that it is a monument *about* fiction or a fictional character (#LarryIsReal) in the same way that there are monuments to character like Alice in Wonderland, Sherlock Holmes, James Bond and Mickey Mouse; rather I mean to say that it *uses* fiction as a process of simultaneous tribute and abstraction of the source material (One Direction) but also an abstraction of form (sculpture/monuments)

to create something new. In this case just as the official narrative of One Direction becomes the minor narrative of Larry Stylinson, so does the traditional authoritative monument become a minor, non-centralised, mixed media installation, hosting the possibility of multiple narratives, relations and "ships."

Monuments are usually hugely expensive public artworks made of stone or iron or bronze, dedicated to important people; great charismatic figures, politicians, celebrities, heroes or even philosophers as is the case of a series of monuments dedicated to Gilles Deleuze (2000), George Bataille (2002) and Antonio Gramsci (2013), created by the prolific Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn. His monument series are assemblages often including a figurative sculpture depicting the philosopher, an archive of literature, and a series of public "events," lectures and workshops. These monuments are also deliberately housed temporarily at sites where people, who supposedly would not normally have access to philosophy, can engage, participate and learn. This is art as "immaterial labour" – that is a "labour that produces an immaterial good, such as a service, a cultural product, knowledge or communication."²⁹ Immaterial labour is one of the defining principles of art under neoliberal capitalism, but also perhaps one of its limiting characteristics – there has to be a (moral) profit! *Larry!Monument* shares similarities with the titles of Hirschhorn's monuments, but by turning to fandom as a site of "worthless knowledge," lacks (for want of a better word) in generating the profit. The dominating force of the white male philosopher as re-iterated through Hirschhorn's work is replaced by the imaginative unbridled fantasies of the unassuming fangirl, who this installation monumentalises if it does anyone.

The idea that fanfiction is an expansive rather than derivative literature has been crucial to my thinking and practice around art and fandom. I instigated the *Fan Riot* project out of a new-found fascination with the possibilities of amateur online content such as fanvids and fanfictions, with a curiosity for those fan-made productions that seemed to be "upstaging" the "official" works they were apparently in debt to. While fanfiction has been mostly considered "unoriginal" and subordinate to official works, what is most fascinating about Larry Stylinson is the

ways that the fandom becomes so involved in creating their own minor narratives and image-worlds, that the official band One Direction end up completely out of the picture. As such it begs the question whether we can only think of fan works as derivative?

Fan studies scholar Abigail Derecho addresses this question when she asks what “if we are to think seriously about fanfiction as art”?³⁰ In response Derecho draws a line between fanfiction and archontic literature as discussed by Jacques Derrida in his book *Archive Fever*.³¹ Derecho writes, “Archontic relates to the word archive any and every archive remains forever open to new entries, new artefacts, new contents; No archive is ever final, complete, closed.”³² Derecho draws a clear relationship between fanfiction and archontic literature (she ships them!) in the way they both re-write and expand upon an extant archive or text. Derecho advances her discussion on fanfiction and writes, “I prefer to call the genre ‘archontic’ literature because the word *archontic* is not laden with references to property rights or judgments about the relative merits of the antecedent and descendant works.”³³ As archontic literature, fanfiction in Derecho’s terms, is “impelled by the same archontic principle: that tendency toward enlargement and accretion that all archives possess.”³⁴ Derecho maintains that while not being a derivative literature, fanfiction as a form of archontic literature is still formed by what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu terms “cultures of the subordinate,” in this case by fans.

While Derecho’s notion of fanfiction as archontic literature is useful for understanding the archival principles of fanfiction in the ways it can accrue knowledge, which is itself a form of profit; I will propose here, that on paying heed always to profit, we keep fanfiction subservient to hegemonic narratives of success, desire and morality as they are formed in neoliberal capitalism. Instead, what if we embrace fandom and art practice as a site of “worthless knowledge” (Jenkins), which is when art and fanfiction stops operating under conditions of “immaterial labour” or as “a service” and becomes something else: let’s call it an “affective knowledge”; a textural knowledge felt and sensed by individuals and communities over knowledge inscribed by institutions of power.



Figure 6.3 Owen G. Parry, *Larry Shipping Ritual*, 2015. Digital video still (courtesy of the artist).

Rather than a parodic doubling, the rhizomatic structure of *Larry!Monument* is deliberate in de-centralising all the elements to form a network of relations to include Hirschhorn, but also many other things, as the video "Larry Shipping Ritual" demonstrates (Figure 6.3). As an expansion of One Direction and Larry Stylinson *Larry!Monument* is archival, but it cannot be considered as solely archival in that it does not necessarily accrue any useful "knowledge" about Larry Stylinson.³⁵ While *Larry!Monument* opens up a relationship between art and fan practice, it functions as a site of both "useful" and "worthless knowledge": useful in Derecho's sense of fanfiction as archival; but also "worthless" in that the work does not propose to teach gallery goers anything new about Larry Stylinson. Instead, it celebrates shipping as a practice of unproductive fantasy, of conjuring, of fictioning, which might have traction upon the "real world."

In his essay "The Aesthetics of Affect," artist and theorist Simon O'Sullivan writes: "art is precisely antithetical to knowledge; it works against what Lyotard once called the 'fantasies of realism.'"³⁶ Following Lyotard, O'Sullivan claims that art is "part of the world (after all it is a made thing), but at the same time it is apart from the world."³⁷ He considers this "apartness," this "excess" as art's intrinsic importance. Thus while

critique and theory may be useful for extending the principles of work, as perhaps this writing does here, art always escapes such apparatus. In a way it also undermines theory as much as it values theory as a form of extension. O'Sullivan writes, "You cannot read affects, you can only experience them."³⁸

Fans have spent decades harbouring shame over their exploits because "[f]ans are seen as devoting too much time to obtaining useless knowledge and place too much importance on 'devalued cultural material.'"³⁹ Spending excessive amounts of time reading or writing fanfictions about boy-on-boy romance, fans are not at work doing something more productive like contributing to capitalism's productive regime.⁴⁰ Just as when female fans are fantasising about boy-on-boy romance, they are not participating in heterosexuality's reproductive regime. This is not to say that fandom operates outside of capitalism or heteronorms or is not in danger of recuperation by corporate endeavour – quite the opposite – fanfiction could be considered a site of what performance theorist Giulia Paladini terms "foreplay" in that it is a rehearsal for the "real," by which I mean neoliberal capitalism.⁴¹ This particularly relates to fandom as a practice of amateur experimentation, open-ended and unfinished work. On accounting for performances of the 1960s New York avant-garde sustained by a labour of pleasure before ejaculate, before profit, Palladini writes: foreplay "cannot be considered as existing purely outside of a trajectory towards evaluation in dominant capitalist regimes."⁴² Palladini's foreplay is useful here as a metaphor for fan labour as amateur, unproductive labour or work in process, however the scene of foreplay cannot always account for the diversity of sexual practices and identities in fandom, including a-sexual fans and older fans with perhaps the worst reputation. As Tonya Anderson points out in her article "Still Kissing the Poster Goodnight": "dominant cultural politics characterise such female fan behaviour in adulthood as pathological."⁴³ In such instances fans are operating in "excess" and at best – in counter-to-knowledge.

From here, art and fandom might be better understood as affective communities that form around a shared feeling, that might not only be defined by our social or biological identities or by knowledge, but by an



Figure 6.4 Owen G. Parry, *Larry Stylinson Performance AU*, 2016. Performance. Photograph by Hydar Dewachi (courtesy of the artist).

unproductive pleasure that undermines our productive desires, or to put it simply: by “being in love with their love” (Karukara). Even if that pleasure involves in part *undoing* or *undermining* one’s own aspirational theoretical project.

Prompt 5: *Larry Stylinson Performance AU*

Louis and Harry have thirty minutes to meet their fans at *Larry!Monument*, but they can’t keep their hands off each other. Management allows them to do this under two conditions: that they never lose eye contact and that at some point they body swap. There is constant petting throughout.

Bonus: Harry serenades Louis. Bonus Bonus: Louis is obsessed with Harry’s armpits.

Tags: #Harry!Top #Louis!Bottom #Harry!controlling
#Harry!Possessive #Fluff #Bodyswap #Performance AU
#FanRiot!Management.

This is a prompt for a performance I staged with real-life Louis and Harry impersonators at Jerwood Visual Arts, in London in January 2016 (Figure 6.4). The performance took place at *Larry!Monument* in conjunction with *Fan Club 3: Shipfic Bodyswap Copyriot Partylife*, the third in a series of fan clubs I have organised as part of the *Fan Riot* project. Rather than account for the performance, which was well documented and photos of which went viral in the fandom online; this writing accounts instead for the “backstage” rehearsal, the homoerotic subtext upon which much fanfiction is written, or “the foreplay” that happened leading up to the performance. On doing so, it accounts for and lingers around the first time the Louis and Harry impersonators ever met.

The gallery was closed. I invited the boys to arrive one after the other, so that I could orchestrate the perfect meeting at the monument. Louis, a design student, was early and nervous. He had never performed before and was anxious about meeting Harry for the first time. Harry in contrast was a real-life Harry Styles impersonator and part of a touring One Direction tribute band, as well as being an emerging performance artist. I blindfolded Louis and led him to the back room in the gallery to wait, and as soon as Harry arrived I blindfolded him and took him straight to *Larry!Monument*. I then led Louis firmly by the arm across the gallery to stand opposite Harry. I could feel him trembling. There they stood, with only the transparent perspex wall with etchings (*Larry!Hieroglyphics*) between them. The tension! I connected speakers to the *Larry Shipping Ritual* video, so that the sound could be relayed in the gallery, creating a sound bath for this improvised fiction to unfold. As I read the prompt aloud I could see Louis’ chest rising and falling. I told the boys to remove their blindfold whenever they were ready.

After a pause they each removed their blindfold, looking at each other, they smiled through the glass etchings, Louis’ nervousness receding by the second, Harry’s excitement growing without intention. They liked each other. Across the course of thirty minutes they flirted and caressed, they role-played power dynamics, top/bottom. At one point Louis got really serious and tried to dominate Harry who laid on the floor with his legs hunched up to his belly. Louis leaned over, balancing his body on Harry’s knees, he stared down into Harry’s eyes, producing a

silvery string of saliva, which he passed gently from his mouth to Harry's open mouth. It felt intense, awkward, embarrassing, tender, funny, boring. At one point they removed and exchanged their clothes, one slowly transforming into the other: a body swap.

In *Larry Stylinson Performance AU* two existing characters Louis and Harry from One Direction are recontextualised in an archival "fiction about fiction." While doing so the performance also recounts two performances I created previously: *Listus* (2004) with Rebecca Collins, a friend and collaborator, which involves a staged meeting in our underwear for the first time in a number of months; the second *Oceans Apart* (2011), an intimate performance created with friend and collaborator Andrew Mitchelson as Mitch and Parry, an action-based performance formed around a slow exchange of saliva. The prompt for *Larry Stylinson Performance AU* was deliberate in re-mixing works from my own archive with the repertoire of One Direction and Larry Stylinson, riffing, as those works always already do, off a history of intimate artist pairings. In another essay titled "Yoko Ono Fanfiction" (2018), I have written, "Across art history, artist pairings and collectives become sites for domestic or romantic subtext and spectator intervention, and fantasy becomes an opportunity for re-working the source material."⁴⁴ Perhaps this is more palpable in artworks where live bodies are the material. *Larry Stylinson Performance AU* stages the spectator (the fan) as the ultimate collaborator, who through their own desires and fantasies become intrinsic to the world-building, future-orientated narratives of any performance.

Prompt 6: Ship Everything!

This chapter has approached fandom as not only a source of inspiration in my practice and research, but as a potentially viable methodology in art practice and writing about art more broadly. In particular it has turned to shipping, a method of juxtaposing or "marrying" two or more characters, objects or things to form something new. "Ship Everything!," the commanding words etched into *Larry!Monument* is a call for an erotics; an aesthetic speculative mode too often missing from art's social projects including relational aesthetics. "Ship Everything!" is an imperative to speculate and to imagine without restrictions; to call into being

that which is not yet legible or accounted for, or that does not yet-exist – something that fans and fanfiction authors do so well. In this instance the conceptual shipping of fandom and art as two usually distinct cultural practices, allows for a consideration of their intrinsic value and increased overlapping relationship across current networked cultures. While paying heed to fandom's potential for re-productivity through its performative, iterative and archival potentialities, it has also uncovered ways that fandom also opens space for unproductivity and “worthless knowledge.” Only through such unproductivity and escapism can fans (and artist, academics, writers, historians and mystics) open recourse for imagining something beyond the given neoliberal and heteronormative present: whether that be through fictions about male pregnancy and boys with wombs, or as an unproductive “in love with their love,” which undermines both heteronormativity and homonormativity as explored in prompts 1–3; or where fandom becomes a site of both productivity (or knowledge production) and non-productivity (or “worthless knowledge”) as discussed in prompts 4–5. On shipping fandom and art practice, this chapter points not only to potential ways of re-writing art history to account for all the minor narratives unsubstantiated in any official canon, but also points to the value of relinquishing such profitable endeavours for the purpose of embracing the excessive, intangible, affective pleasures of art and fandom, as experienced and shared by communities who care about such things, but perhaps most significantly – the imagining of communities to come.