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Learning from *kaijū* fans: genrifying, cultural value, and the ethics of citing fan-scholarship

Kaijū movies have been sniffily received by academia. As I was working on my own book about giant monster movies that explores transnational connectivity across Asian, Pacific and European borders (Rawle, 2022), I explained the project to a senior (former) manager at my institution. Without defining the complexities of the term *kaijū* as a loanword in English, I explained the book was about Godzilla movies and global cultural politics. They asked me why I was doing that, perplexed (still) that trash movies could have a place in academia. At the time, I had published several articles around cult movies and questions of global marketing and the reception of ‘national’ films (see Rawle, 2009; Rawle, 2011; Rawle, 2014; Rawle, 2015), but this was the first time I had to justify the existence of my scholarship. Nearly a decade after the publication of his book *Godzilla on my Mind* (2004), William Tsutsui, reflected upon his own experiences of assumptions of cultural value in ‘Godzilla vs. the Egghead: Negotiating the Cultures of Fandom and Academe’ (2013). Tsutsui describes how a noted scholar of economics and environmental history took a sojourn into popular culture to write as an aca/fan, to use Henry Jenkins’ (2006) term, about Godzilla. He discusses how the book was an attempt to reach a wider audience beyond ‘relatives with a sense of familial obligation and a few dozen professors and graduate students’ (2013: 349). When the book bridged the gap between academic and general publishing, Tsutsui found himself between the passive scorn of colleagues who viewed the book as being lightweight and lacking intellectual rigour, and fans who accused him of being disrespectful of their favourite monsters. The criticism that Tsutsui outlines is striking from a methodological position upon which this article will reflect.

Tsutsui highlights a reviewer who accused him of his ‘biggest offence’, the dismissal of fan scholarship. As Tsutsui quotes:

he also comes off as an intellectual snob, ...since he constantly sites [sic] the work of David Kalat, Steve Ryfle, Stuart Galbraith, J.D. Lees, Ed Godziszewski and many other fans throughout his entire book but refuses to give them any credit for their work because they don't have advanced degrees. Meaning that you can find their names in the footnotes but never in the text of the book itself. (Tsutsui, 2013: 358)

While Tsutsui also discusses many positive interactions with fans, this is one that stands out, not least because it speaks to some of the issues of intellectual snobbery that Tsutsui himself claims to have been victim to. My own experience of fan-scholars, as Matt Hills (2002) refers to these figures, is quite different from that of Tsutsui, but this also begs a methodological question about the legitimacy of fan scholarship and its place within academic work. The people mentioned in the criticism above are also cited throughout my book.

Embedded within the criticism of Tsutsui for side-lining the voices (and associated labour) of fan-scholars is the question of ethical citation. The accusations against Tsutsui that he neglected the work of fan-scholars in his book is part of this – as we often tell students, citations must be ‘good quality’, peer reviewed and of the right academic standing. Under these terms, how could Tsutsui use such work as citations? However, to me, it seems unthinkable to exclude such voices from the conversation, as well as a source of epistemic injustice. As a *kaijū* scholar, it would be impossible to produce a cultural critique of the *kaijū* film without their work, as well as pointless to replicate the very diligent and detailed research of such fan-scholars.

Learning from fans is a necessary activity in the process of working within fields with defined fandoms, just as those fandoms’ subjectivities, actions and ideological judgements

are also subject to critique. Epistemic injustice refers to the marginalisation of voices within discussion and knowledge production. Fricker's *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (2007) explores the ways in which 'identity power' plays a role in shaping how testimonial or hermeneutic understanding is problematised in everyday discourse. At its most basic, epistemic injustice occurs when marginalised voices are mistrusted or misunderstood in the everyday acts of 'conveying knowledge to others by telling them' (2). Voices that are *othered* – for reasons of ethnicity, class, gender or due to social and economic roles – are subject to what Fricker refers to as 'spontaneous, non-inferential judgements' (2003: 159). Learners' reception of testimony from such speakers may be clouded by perceptions derived from social stereotypes: 'stereotypes are fertile ground for prejudice, so it is easy to see how a testimonial sensibility may come to embody the prejudices of the day' (162). This means the voices of some are 'turned up' while others are 'turned down' and therefore subject to absences, gaps and distrust. Some of these are down to social power, in terms of aspects of identity (the disbelieving of 'irrational' women is one of Fricker's examples) or down to material power, in which economic roles, such as academics, medical professionals or those in power, take precedence in the conversation: 'prejudice results in the speaker's receiving more credibility than she otherwise would have—a *credibility excess*—or it results in her receiving less credibility than she otherwise would have—a *credibility deficit* (2007: 18). Fans can occupy an *othered* space as members of a niche community, but here we are discussing a group that is largely white (mostly American *kaijū* fans) and predominantly male. Questions of harm are relevant – what harm results from the epistemic devaluing of fans' work?

As Sandra Annett has discussed in relation to *anime* fan communities: 'To paraphrase postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha (1994), understanding transcultural [...] fan communit[ies] is not about "adding up" all of these texts and arguments into a single holistic vision, but a process of "adding to" a conversation that is continually ongoing' (2014: 206). Throughout the course of this article therefore, I will examine both the nature and ethics of this conversation, and how fan scholarship can, or must, contribute to scholarly conversations beyond the formal workings of the academy. Knowledge production is contingent on gaps and privileged inclusions. The critic that Tsutsui quotes above implies such as ethics of knowledge production – the culturally (and economically) privileged (through identity power) are more likely to be celebrated than those excluded from such power (the ones the critic perceives to have done the *real* work). This can emphasise relative levels of credibility excess or deficit, which ultimately can become threatening when others who are seen to occupy culturally validated positions of identity power make excursions into an area of fandom.

Returning to fan-scholar/scholar-fan binaries

Tsutsui draws from Hills' work in his reflection on his own scholarly fandom and the surprising reaction of fans towards his own work. Hills' *Fan Cultures* (2002) is cited in passing as Tsutsui draws a distinction between the 'casual fans' who embraced his work 'generously' and the more hardcore (here, he refers to them as 'fan-scholars' in reference to Hills) enthusiasts who reacted less favourably to *Godzilla on my Mind*: 'decidedly negative and sometimes downright vituperative' in Tsutsui's terms (Tsutsui, 2013: 355). He cites one review that perhaps most succinctly captures the binary oppositions of academic and fan subjectivities addressed in Hills' work: "I think the problem with Tsutsui's book is that he is a

fan trying not to write like one” (355). Part of the issue for Tsutsui’s detractors is not his academic distance in the text, but the pejoratives used to dismiss the quality of the films that *kaijū* fans so love, as ‘cinematic cheese’ (Tsutsui, 2004: 204), even though, for Tsutsui, ‘Godzilla is a state of mind’ (213). This fairly un-academic subjectivity (the book is a seriously intellectual memoir rather than discipline-specific theorising) becomes problematic for the fan readers and reviewers that Tsutsui quotes: his work is distancing itself from what might represent a ‘bad object’ for criticism but also from the fan-scholars whose research on *kaijū* movies is a key reference point for the fans who became an important audience for a crossover academic text. In this respect, Tsutsui transgresses both fan and academic subjectivities in addressing the cult films at the core of his book. It steps outside the ‘operative framework’ developed by Cécile Cristofari and Matthieu Guitton (2017) that shifts a binary of proximate amateur fan and professional distant academic to a ‘nodal position’ occupied by the aca-fan hierarchised away from fan communities, but in a privileged place within structures of knowledge. Cristofari and Guitton posit a ‘growing hybridisation’ of academic and fan communities, although the experiences discussed so far continue to highlight how some older binary tensions still bubble away underneath.

Long before this, Hills had emphasised the hybrid nature of the scholar-fan. His discussion of fan and academic subjectivities in *Fan Cultures* is foundational for the then-emerging field of fan studies. Fannish attachments to *Doctor Who* and *Toto* are unashamedly significant in shaping his thinking as an active fan and academic, much like Tsutsui, although Hills approaches the fan-scholar through a theoretical lens. Drawing on Thomas McLaughlin’s exploration of vernacular theory, Hill discusses the ‘elite fans’ whose scholarship of their object of worship positions them in a quasi-academic position that is ‘not systematic or sustained enough, being only capable of flashes of theory’ (17). The subsequent distinction between fan-scholars, ‘*not quite* academic scholars’ (17, italics in original), and scholar-fans, the institutionally validated academic working in culturally legitimated ways on their passions, is not necessarily ‘mutually antagonistic’ (19), despite the evidence presented by Tsutsui. Fan-scholars and scholar-fans ‘are necessarily liminal in their identities’ for Hills. As he notes, they occupy in-between spaces, partly explaining the ‘defensiveness and anxiety of both groups, since both are marginalised within their respective communities’ (19-20). Most significantly, however, Hills argues that these are ‘imagined subjectivities’ that fail to meet their implied realities. Fans do not always conform to stereotypes of uncritical, adoring empiricists, and academics do not always produce ‘knowledge [that] is [...] meaningfully “testable”’ (21). But, this underlines the test cases in this discussion, that some forms of knowledge are illegitimate from a scholarly perspective whereas other forms of knowledge are dismissed for the same (perceived) lack of rigour, their language lacking the theoretical method of academia. As Tsutsui concluded, ‘writing for popular audiences and embracing the scholar-fan subject position could be gratifying and valuable intellectually’ (2013: 351). In some sense though, this implies that the fan-scholar and scholar-fan are both tied together in some regard – they both write for specialised audiences. Tsutsui’s appeal to ‘popular audiences’ would mean stepping outside the defined language of his discipline, while writing for fandoms also means addressing a narrow audience, the ones who were perhaps most dismissive of Tsutsui’s work. Both are liminally ‘outsiders’. Tsutsui’s own study of *kaijū* fandoms, while it mentions *kaijū* fans ‘are not all isolated, inveterate loners’ (2004: 153) also reflects the forbidden nature of enjoying, and even idolising, figures (including action figures) often discovered in childhood and retained into adulthood (frequently shared with their next generation), but that is either mocked or hidden from others (157-62).

Not all fans are fan-scholars, while perhaps a higher number of academics, especially those working in the Humanities, are scholar-fans. Such fandom is often more culturally

valued than monster movies from Japan, aligned with more reputable cultural capital, such as music, Classics or centuries-old literature. *Kaijū* films often have little cultural standing, a consequence of their Othering as (relatively) low-budget genre films from Japan, as films often intended for children (hence Barr's association of adult pursuits with re-capturing childhood) and the localisation of such films that made them laughable. Michael and Harry Medved gave Japanese monster films a special place in their pantheon of bad movies, since 'no book on the worst films could be complete without [...] a Japanese horror epic' (Medved & Medved, 1979: 11). Jeffrey Sconce included 'Japanese monster movies' in the list of quintessentially paracinematic genres making them perfect objects of subcultural capital (Sconce, 1995). For Mathijs and Sexton, they are perfect cult movies, transgressive through their difference (Mathijs & Sexton, 2011), outside what Sconce calls 'the parent taste culture' (Sconce, 1995: 376). The disreputable nature of such work, and the fannish connect to it, has been too subcultural, even though cult film studies have been long enshrined within the academy. However, the adherence to discipline specific norms – theorisation, the 'mythic' academic subjectivity that Hills critiques – leaves the *kaijū* scholar at the fringe of their discipline.

As Hills discusses, 'fan culture and its form of knowledge and competence' (40) produce divergent patterns of value and cultural capital: fans can expect to be pathologised in media representations, meaning that the academics' critique of 'bad' fan subjectivity also carries cultural weight outside this specific community' whereas fans may reject the impenetrable academic language of critiques of their subjects (43-4). Tsutsui's exploration of his experiences of *kaijū* fandom certainly speaks to these diverging forms of cultural value, one authentic and 'insider', one objectifying and 'outside looking in'. The notion of dialectical value that Hills applies from Adorno to his understanding of fans who straddle the commercialisation of their fandom, between the 'use-value' and 'exchange-value' of their object of fascination and activity (44), can exploit both the personal expertise of the resistant fan and the exploited dupe who consumes the products of their fandom.

In his critique of *kaijū* fans' toy collecting, Jason Barr (2017) sees nostalgia as a key motivating factor. For high-end (predominantly American) *kaijū* toy collectors, their fandom is expensive. As Barr discusses, niche collectors spend significant sums importing rare Japanese toys, and derive status from their sharing of such purchases. Barr, who reveals his own Godzilla toy collecting in the process of the chapter, sees nostalgia as the core motivation, not the hope of bragging online, since the community to which they can brag is so small and niche that it brings little by way of sublimation. Instead, he sees the impulse to return to a 'first time' emotion of experiences from childhood, of the 'vivid color' of the toy and their childhood memories (200). Barr too sees aspects of 'authenticity' in this process (201), but in his psychoanalytical take on the subject, nostalgia and a return to childhood feelings drive the collector. Barr's chapter is more personal than derived from a systematic empirical study of similar collectors, but he presents a clear picture of the *kaijū* fan within the commerce of fandom; a merging of the 'use-value', the personal recollections of the adult collector revisiting their favourite childhood characters and films, and the 'exchange-value', the often very high sums paid for quality collectibles that help express the 'use-value' of such a fandom. The analysis by Barr also seeks to bridge this divide, as Tsutsui does, through personal memoir as a way of situating their own investment in the object of analysis. In that, it must come from some close personal connection, otherwise who would ever write about such things?

The scholar-fan is thus revealed to bridge the gap between fan subjectivity and academic objectivity. Hence, the scholar-fan and fan-scholar become one and the same in

some of the cases explored thus far, and in some sense explain the liminal inbetweenness of the fan-scholar as they enter one area through another identity. This partly accounts for how fan-scholars can be rebuffed by their own institutions while never being fully accepted by fandom as personal and professional identities diverge. Distinctions of cultural capital and cultural power emphasise insider/outsider binaries. As the experiences of both Tsutsui and myself have suggested, the *kaijū* scholar might be seen as having too little cultural capital for the academy and too much cultural (*identity*) power, as a critic and ideologue, for fan communities. Relatively speaking, these are credibility excesses or deficits; excesses derived from identity power within the academy, or deficits for outsiders, both in terms of fandom and academia. They sit in a liminal space in relation to elite scholar-fans and fan-scholars, but, as Arnett suggests, both add to conversations about the *kaijū* movie.

Thus, ethically, the scholar (or scholar-fan) is required to learn from and engage with scholar-fans. This is more widely accepted as the field of *kaijū* studies (if there is one) has developed, as scholar-fans such as Tsutsui and Barr (see Barr, 2016) have published, whereas others, including Sean Rhoads, Brooke McCorkle (see Rhoads & McCorkle, 2018) and Steve Ryfle (see Ryfle, 1998; Ryfle, 2005; Ryfle, 2014; Ryfle & Godziszewski, 2017) occupy spaces bridging the two, publishing both for academic presses and in fanzines such as *G-FAN*. Fan-scholars such as Kevin Derendorf (2018) and John LeMay (including LeMay, 2017 & LeMay, 2019) have translated material from Japanese for detailed reference works. Rhoads, Ryfle, and fan-scholars, including Stuart Galbraith (see Galbraith, 1998; Galbraith, 2008), and August Ragone (see Ragone, 2014), have also more widely contributed documentaries, writing or commentaries for Arrow and Criterion Collection releases of *kaijū* movies. However, we're concerned more here with the academic production of knowledge (upon which the academy does not have a monopoly) and this methodological question of how such knowledge is valued or referenced in ways that engage with fandom. However, some of the nature of that labour requires conceptualising to demonstrate its contribution to knowledge production around this genre.

***Kaijū* fandoms' genrifying labour**

Kaijū fans' online activity plays an important role in defining the subject of what constitutes the *kaijū eiga*. Fan gatekeeping helps to articulate the processes of generic knowledge production in virtual spaces. They are areas in which fans articulate their own identity power. Some fans can position themselves as elite, while others contribute anonymously. Thus, they help shape relative credibility excesses and deficits for those fans who occupy elite positions, through citation or reference. Nevertheless, their combined labour defines the significant role played by Anglophone fans in shaping the discourses around a genre. Since the *kaijū* film is so linked to Japanese cinema, there is a tendency for the form to be essentialised in how it relates to nation (Maser Patrol, 2017; Ryfle, 2014; Solomon, 2017; Tsutsui, 2014). The tendency is mirrored by academics who argue that *kaijū* films, even though most definitions of national cinema that align with discourses of European art cinema, constitute an essentially national form of communication (Anderson, 2006; Blouin, 2013; Deamer, 2014; Noriega, 1987; Yomota, 2007). Bertha Chin and Lori Morimoto have noted that when analyses of border crossing fandoms occur there is a tendency to over-determine nation within those explorations, making them limit their ability to comprehend cross-border fans and fandoms (Chin & Morimoto, 2013). However, when fandoms are less border-crossing – we are mostly discussing North American *kaijū* fans here – the objects of their fandom tend to be more transnational in nature and therefore nation can become an object of that fandom. Since *kaijū* films take cross-border relations of one of their most prevalent talking points (initially the

legacy of the Nagasaki and Hiroshima bombings), the politics of nation are constructed as part of that discussion. As mentioned above though, that is often also the object of most scholarship about these films. Few texts have discussed global developments in the *kaijū* film outside Japan or as culture moves across borders (Lerner, 2006; Barr, 2016), nor have *kaijū* fans been the subject of systemic study.

The labour of *kaijū* fans is a crucial aspect of the gatekeeping and manufacturing of *kaijū* in themselves. While there is a significant push toward an essentially *Japanese* identity for these monsters and their films, a great deal of fan, and fan-scholar, activity, helps imagine these monster movies as thoroughly transnational. The construction of a transnational genre, or a transnational *kaijū* sub-genre (it is perhaps too closely associated with science fiction and horror films to constitute a genre of its own, although it does have a stable semantics, to use Altman's term, in the presence of a giant anthropomorphised monster) is not an isolated case here. As Elena Oliete-Aldea, Beatriz Oria, and Juan A. Tarancón argue in the introduction to their collection *Global Genres, Local Films*, genres are often subject to supranational development, but grounded in specifically local social contexts (2016). The construction of genres continues to conform with Altman's (1999) model of blueprint-structure-label-contract. Genre production assumes producers are working to pre-existing blueprints and structures that are subsequently marketed using particular labels to constitute a contract for audience expectations. Such a model doesn't account for how fans might contribute to the labelling of work however. Scholar-fans help contribute to generic labelling, just as fan-scholars do. In fact, publicly, it is the work of the scholar-fans that is most highly valued. When distributors such as Arrow and the Criterion Collection have produced collections of *kaijū* films, including Criterion's *Shōwa* era Godzilla series and Arrow's set of complete Gamera films, it is to scholar-fans or identifiably inbetween aca/fans to which they turn for written or spoken commentary. Such work therefore helps the *kaijū* film derive cultural value from prestigious cult film distributors. This labour is more in keeping with traditional forms of commercial value, since it contributes to commercially available work.

The labour of Western *kaijū* fans is a transnational process in this regard that helps define the shape and key characters (the *kaijū*) of the genre. While many fan memories of the *kaijū eiga* are connected with nostalgia typical of forms of the exploitation film, often from television and video in America (Church, 2016), the work of fans is crucial in constructing the genre in ways that transcend and connect national cultures, from sharing examples of dubbing, comic retitling of films, or home video artwork, to discussing the pantheon of *kaijū* in ways that promote the genre as a wholly transnational one. Such fan 'work' is less formal than that of the scholars previously referenced. It is more in keeping with notions of a gift economy but helps constitute and shape the widely accepted format of the global *kaijū eiga*, since it goes beyond the limits of the genre as essentially Japanese. However, it does posit Japan as central to its understanding and adopts Japanese terminology to determine the timeline of the form's development.

We might refer to this as genrifying fandom. Fan labour plays a key role in helping to create an archive of material and understanding. For *kaijū* films, this function is one that is often nostalgic, but also very present in its devotion to the genre, as we might expect with the current wave of monster films, both in Japan and across transnational production. Genrification is a process through which genres become constituted as such. As genres take on the form of the production blueprint with identifiable structures and labels, they are pulled together from hybrid understandings as new genres are formed or off-shoots are crystallised as more than short lived cycles. The *kaijū eiga* is such a sub-genre following the production of *Gojira* (Honda Ishirō) in 1954, influenced by a re-release of *King Kong* (Edgar Wallace and

Merian C. Cooper, 1933) and *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (Eugène Lourié, 1953). Giant monster movies, a type of “Creature Feature”, thus initially become something of a cycle. Globally, producers then began to imitate and innovate in the form, developing a wider cycle of films that take shape at least as a sub-genre. The understanding is that producers begin to set out to produce giant monster films – whether they use the term *kaijū* or not – and therefore this becomes a contract with audiences who want to see such films, thereby ensuring the cycle is complete and it becomes attractive to produce further entries in the field. The word *kaijū* eventually enters the lexicon for reception of the films – in their titles¹ and through criticism (see Crandol, 2019).

Fans can therefore contribute to the labelling and constitution of a genre or canon of *kaijū*. As evidence of this are the fan-produced Wikizilla and Gojipedia. The wikis are largely devoted to the documentation of monsters from Tōhō Studios’ films, TV series, books and comics, as well as those produced by other global producers. Also included are the Rhedosaurus from *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* and Kong. The inclusion of King Kong isn’t surprising, given the ape’s appearance in two Tōhō films, *King Kong vs. Godzilla* (*Kingu Kongu Tai Gojira*, Honda Ishirō, 1962) and *King Kong Escapes* (*Kingu Kongu no Gyakushū*, Honda, 1967), in which Kong fights Mechani-Kong, the creation of quasi-Bond villain Dr. Who. There is also the more recent US-Chinese produced *Godzilla Vs. Kong* (Adam Wingard, 2021) and its forthcoming sequel (2024) to account for such inclusion. In addition, the site includes entries for creatures from *Kong* films from the RKO era, such as the generic dinosaurs Kong fights on Skull Island in *King Kong*, but also the little Kong from the sequel *Son of Kong* (Ernest Schoedsack, 1933), named Kiko (although the name is never used in the film). The site also collates entries for *kaijū* from films around the world, from American films such as *Pacific Rim* (Guillermo del Toro, 2013), which co-opted the term *kaijū*, or films from South and North Korea, Denmark or Britain. The loanword *kaijū* is used to refer to all of these monsters. Their national origins are irrelevant to the use of such words. Fans are manufacturing a genre as transnational through their labour to gift knowledge of the *kaijū eiga*.

Gojipedia is slightly different in its address. Whereas Wikizilla has created a chronological timeline of global *kaijū* movies, Gojipedia presents this timeline in terms of the classification of Japanese periods. *Kaijū* films have long been categorised during Japanese imperial eras. The *Shōwa* Era of Emperor Hirohito’s reign ran between 1926 and 1989. The *Shōwa* period covers the first monster boom, from *Gojira* to around 1980. The reign of the *Heisei* Emperor (Akihito) span 1989 to his abdication in April 2019, although the *Heisei kaijū* era is generally considered to begin with 1984’s *Gojira* (Hashimoto Koji). The third period of *kaijū* films was the Millennium era, signalling the break from the *Heisei* Godzilla series after Roland Emmerich’s Hollywood version (1998). Subsequent entries are known as the *Reiwa* series. The *Reiwa* period follows the *Heisei* from 2019, but begins earlier, after Tōhō’s *Shin Gojira* (Anno Hideaki & Higuchi Shinji) was released in 2016. Gojipedia classifies all monsters under these headings, unlike Wikizilla, which only classifies Japanese films in relation to their Imperial periods. So, while the *Shōwa* listings cover many monsters from Godzilla films or *tokusatsu*² television programmes, such as the original *Ultraman* series (1966-present), it also includes the giant Chimpanzee from British film *Konga* (John Lemont, 1961) and the Rhedosaurus. Under the listings for *Heisei* monsters can be found the title character of low budget American production *Zarkorr! The Invader* (Michael Deak and Aaron Osborne, 1996). Through the labour of fans we can observe the ‘supranational

¹ *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* was the first film to have the word *kaijū* in its title in Japan.

² The Japanese word for special effects, another loanword for giant monster fans.

exchange' that enables the categorisation of a genre (Oliete-Aldea, et al., 2016: 3). Such exchanges usually take place at levels of development and production though, as tropes are adopted, co-opted or exploited.

While the discourse surrounding the makeup of the *kaijū* pantheon is in the process of genrification by fan labour, there is also evidence of what Paul Booth terms 'narrativity' in *Digital Fandom 2.0* (2017). Narrativity is an extension of Booth's consideration of the Web Commons model of fandom. With socialisation at the core of his thinking about how digital fandom is transformed by the internet, 'narrative databases' perform a key function in shaping the understanding of the objects of their fandom. Although Booth is discussing fan fiction archives, such principles can help us understand how *kaijū* wikis contribute to the genrifying function discussed above. Through similar databases, Booth discusses, 'fans assimilate individual units of narrative knowledge and, as a community, [...] reform them in new ways within the database through [...] communal interactive action' (2017: 85). Wikis, Booth argues, produce 'new conceptions of readership and interpretation' (p. 87). These aspects of narrativity are visible in the language and timelines created by *kaijū* wikis. Terms such as *Shōwa*, *Heisei* and *Reiwa* are highly contingent on their national meaning – they refer only to Japanese Imperial eras through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Their co-optation as stabilising referents for fans to discuss their favourite films and monsters transplants the terminology more widely to how the *kaijū* film is interpreted, in relation to national and global politics, given this is the frame in which *kaijū* films tend to be understood (Luckhurst, 2020). But the Japanese terminology through which fans discuss *kaijū* films (from the word *kaijū* onwards) is spread and normalised through sources of narrativity, and find their ways into other discourses, such as home cinema releases (the previously mentioned Criterion and Arrow releases – Arrow's *Gamera* release was also broken down to *Shōwa* and *Heisei* collections). This helps to determine the terminology through which the genre is discussed by fans, but also helps to essentialise the Japaneseness of the *kaijū* movie and has contributed to further focus on how US variants and remakes have 'whitewashed' the genre (Ryfle, 2014; Sargent, 2013; Wong, 2016; Yam, 2020).

Such understandings also emphasise aspects of what Hills has described as 'techno-occidentalism'. Hills observed how fans of Japanese films discussed their reception of those films (particularly *Ringu* [Nakata Hideo, 1998]) and their remakes in terms that tended to strongly disparage the imitations, just as remakes or reworkings of Japanese *kaijū* have been accused of whitewashing. Hills describes techno-occidentalism as 'a strategy of reading-for-cultural-difference and how these viewers and their reading positions outside the mainstream are based on their identification with, and of, Japanese cultural identities and aesthetics (2005: 171). In this way, fans will often position themselves in opposition to the norms of Hollywood cinema and beyond mainstream tastes. The remake is often held up as wholly representative of Hollywood conventions and cultural assumptions, while the original becomes a metonym for the Other culture. Hills quotes one fan: 'The remake is more westernised and to make money it has to be more mainstream, and as such has to give more answers'. For Hills, this is a 'focus on differences between western rationalism and what is construed as a broader acceptance of the supernatural in Japanese culture' (p. 168). While we do see *kaijū* fans and commentators, including both fans and scholars of the films, tending to see the remakes or appropriations in similar terms, often through the ways in which American culpability for the bombings 1945 is downplayed or overlooked.³ Such techno-occidental

³ In 1998's *Godzilla*, French nuclear testing is at fault for raising the monster, while in 2014's *Godzilla* (Gareth Edwards), the creature's existence isn't fully explained. In *Kong: Skull Island* (Jordan Vogt-Roberts, 2017) it's suggested that the Bikini Atoll Castle Bravo nuclear tests were a cover to try to kill Godzilla, not that they gave

reasoning essentialises the Japaneseness of the text, but, instead of separating many *kaijū* film out of the genre canon, that Japaneseness subsumes many East Asian and Western *kaijū* films in the wider thinking about giant monster movies brought into the *kaijū* pantheon. As an example of techno-occidental narrativity it helps us see the language used by fans to create a snapshot of the *kaijū* film. Their work is essential in helping us see how this genre is shaped, understood and the terms used to discuss it. This is something that flows into the scholarship of the *kaijū* film, by fan-scholars and scholar-fans.

Like Hills, Jamie Sexton has also discussed the assumptions of cultural difference in the work of fans. He argues that

there still exists around many academic scholars a rather suspicious tone towards the activities of global cult fans, which includes downplaying the hard work that many fans have put into discovering and sharing knowledge about cinematic artefacts that have been little understood within Western contexts. (2016: 16)

This is an especially significant comment when we consider the activities of fans and their labour to produce an all-inclusive encyclopaedia of monsters, robots, heroes, characters, actors, and directors that constitute the production of a global or transnational *kaijū eiga*. Sexton also returns us to the initial point raised at the beginning of this article: criticism aimed at Tsutsui for neglecting (‘downplaying’) the importance of the work of fan-scholars. Their discovery, sharing and discussion of artefacts outside the Western canon is highly significant, not just for further scholarly work in understanding those films, their reception, and the ancillary markets around them (particular toy collecting), but in acknowledging the significance of contributions of fan-scholars to the discourse around global cinema and how those are shared. Therefore, as an ethical approach to citation and the inclusion of fan-scholars in, returning to Annet’s terms, ‘adding to conversations’ that give insight into the formation of a genre that sits outside Hollywood traditions.

Gift and Market Economies vs. The Academic Lurker

Mel Stanfill and Megan Condis argue that understanding fan labour is key to comprehending how fans’ activity generates value. In a Marxist sense, this can help us see how fans contribute to the overall value of any particular intellectual property (IP). The value previously discussed can be more individualised in its contribution to status and the creation of identity power for fans and critics. Notions of gift and market economies of fandom can help some fans develop identity power within their community. Some fans, through their own production, become celebrities within their fandoms. This is another way in which elite fans derive identity power, the very kind understood to be disrespected by academia’s perceived ownership of knowledge production and the credibility excess derived from that cultural capital. In a neoliberal context, however, they occupy relative market positions that draw economic value from identity power.

As we’ve already seen, fans engage with their fandom, its core objects and the works that they generate (including books, video reviews and explainers, special effects videos and reproductions, podcasts, as well as creating an ongoing archive of material) add to both the cultural and economic value of that IP:

birth to it. The Castle Bravo tests and its impact on a Japanese fishing boat was the motivating point for the original film and its reasoning for the coming of monsters.

one trajectory locates fan work as generating surplus value that is ultimately extracted and exploited by industry, a second would focus on the proliferation of value generated by fans for fans. Fandom runs on fan labor, and this work produces enjoyment, collectivity, and various material and immaterial goods that give fandom shape as a practice, community, or culture. Calling attention to this action as labor stakes an important claim to that production precisely as a production of value. (Condis & Stanfill, 2014)

This has been characterised as a gift economy in which fans trade and share materials for free in ways that circumvent copyright and protect fans from legal action by producers whose work they are at once exploiting and exploited by. Hence, as Suzanne Scott (2009) argues, the ‘strategic definition of fandom as a gift economy serves as a defensive front to impede encroaching industrial factions.’ The commercialisation of fan labour by producers is sidestepped by gift economies, which Scott sees as traditionally ‘feminine’. She subsequently observes attempts by producers to co-opt fan labour and ‘regift’ their own work through ancillary markets. Yet, this is largely through male gatekeepers:

male audiences are more valued and courted, but as media producers shape their definition of an ideal fandom, it is increasingly one that is defined as fanboy specific, or one that teaches its users to consume and create in a fanboyish manner by acknowledging some genres of fan production and obscuring others. (Scott, 2009)

Such a fandom is consistent with *kaijū* fans outside East Asia: their fandom is predominantly male, but not exclusively so, and majority white, although, again, not exclusively so. What is perhaps most striking about *kaijū* fandom at an American convention such as G-FEST is the wide range of ages, included many very young fans and families (echoing the generational passing-on of the *kaijū* movie). Yet, the address of media industries to *kaijū* fans fits with conventional notions of the ‘ideal’ fandom mentioned by Scott. In addition to the collecting discussing by Barr, the production of films by Legendary Entertainment has taken on aspects shared with the Marvel and DC Cinematic Universes, with linked texts promoting what Jason Mittell (2009) refers to as ‘forensic fandom’. Easter Eggs in trailers and post-credits sequences encourage the films to be received as ‘drillable texts’, to be dissected, discussed and argued over. Such fan labour therefore creates value for producers by creating shares and further production online, something that Scott sees as an attempt to ‘regulate participatory culture en masse’ (2017: 1051).

Thus, as Tisha Turk has argued, fandom's ‘gift economy is therefore fundamentally asymmetrical’ (2014). The ‘long tradition of lurkers’ encourages inequality, some fans more invested and gifts often not fully reciprocated. Turk sees fan labour as participatory, but not all fans are fully participatory in their production of gifts, with more the receivers of gifts. One of the central tenets of the gift economy, its *gratis* nature, is not shared by all fans, and the labour of fans can often be monetised. Fans produce YouTube videos and podcasts that, if successful enough, can be a source of income. As Meicheng Sun argues in relation to K-Pop fans:

fans are those who engage in specialized, managerial, or unskilled labor as well as collaborations in the translocal and transnational fan networks. These fans actively practice fan labor because they believe it is one way of distinguishing themselves from ordinary audience members and the self-proclaimed fans who do not expend money, time, or energy on their idols. While some fans who have found ways of informally earning money from their labor, they are still consumers and labors [sic] devoting money, time, and energy to fandom. (2020: 402)

It is therefore not simply a gift economy, but a mash-up economy: ‘the market economy of industrial production and the gift economy of shared exchange’, Booth notes, ‘mark two separate, but unified, areas of economic research’ (2017: 36-7). What Booth discusses as a ‘Digi-gratis’ economy is a hybrid one, a mixture of gift and market economies. It is both top-down and bottom-up, with commercial industries making use of free gifts leading to commercial transactions, as well as fans both contributing free material but also making financial gain. The fans Sun discusses – several years after Booth’s discussion of fan fiction and crowdfunding as examples of fan activity – provide more evidence of the growing financialisation of fandom, particularly through YouTube or Patreon that enable fans to commercialise and commodify their specialised labour in monetised ways. YouTube, as the most established form of participatory online culture, enables the blending of economies – fans can access content for free, whilst producer-fans can benefit from their labour financially. Hence, as Booth discusses, ‘commodities and gift forms’ can coexist. The Web Commons thrives on the production of knowledge rather than purely through the creation of physical products. Thus, this ‘form of information ownership helps make visible the Digi-gratis economy, a gift economy that deals less with monetary exchanges and more with the socialization of information’ (39).

Hence, our original example, the criticism of Tsutsui’s use of information without sufficient citation or credit to scholar-fans relates much less to monetary exchange and more to the perception of ownership or social standing in terms of the use of that knowledge. There are also perceptions at play in terms of the hierarchies of a knowledge economy and cultural capital (the reference to the lack of ‘advanced degrees’). The hybrid economy is much more at play in these regards, however. Fan-scholars haven’t offered their knowledge as a gift – their texts are generally published books, and therefore commercialised by publishers (even if they are small publishers) or self-published. In many regards, such texts have also fallen out of print and thus only available second hand, through libraries (thus with no additional financial reward to the author) or illegally through file sharing sites. Therefore, at some remove from the original publication, the reward for citations of such knowledge is intangible. As Booth discusses, it is more about social and cultural distinctions. Tsutsui’s encounter with *kaijū* fandom suggests fan-scholar citation becomes a means of differentiating between academic and fan communities. The position of Tsutsui, the scholar-fan, is that of the outsider who benefits from fan labour without reciprocating, an unethical position that emphasises Hill’s differentiation between the myths of fan and aca-subjectivities, but where such distinctions are also replayed within academia and outside, where academic work is perceived to simultaneously dismiss and exploit fan labour without granting it sufficiently serious cultural capital. To cite such work however is still to remain ‘outside’ a network of fans, while reimagining fan-scholars’ energy and labour as contributions to a scholarly conversation in which both remain Other. Nevertheless, they are part of the same cultural debate.

In Booth’s Digi-gratis economy, the socialisation of knowledge is equivalent to the gift brought to a social gathering. It isn’t necessary to bring it, but is expected, and the polite acceptance of the gift is also expected. Meanwhile, the social expectation of such rules leads to the creation of robust relationships, through affective acts of communication, but it also speaks to the manifestation of social rank and power. Gift receivers are often indebted to givers, failure to reciprocate leading to social embarrassment, as gift giving conveys respect for the receiver. Yet, there is a consistent labour in fan contributions, as Sun discusses, that some fans can monetise. This can be through a range of print and digital publishing methods. This contributes to the creation of social rank, as Hills discusses, in reference to elite fans who occupy a hierarchical position within fandoms (our previous examples have referenced

fans whose narrativity is anonymous). Deference should therefore be paid to such fans, whether they produce a podcast, edit a fanzine or publish scholarly work on the subjects of their fandom, the production of films or the histories of practitioners within that sphere. The outsiders to those communities must therefore pay similar deference or they risk being forever outside, as well as disrespectful to those fandoms. There is no monopoly on scholarship for the academy – scholar-fans are as attached to their subjects as fan-scholars – and therefore fan-related scholarship or academic work on subjects with defined fandoms relies in part of fan labour (the collecting, sharing, and gifting of fans) to build a picture of the subject, even where such work needs to be verified, analysed and subject to theoretical and methodological rigour. Something is generally at stake however, socially and culturally, perhaps sometimes financially, but the relationships are always unequal (in both directions). Where the academic is an outsider, they become a lurker – without engaging with the discussion, they benefit from the conversation without contributing anything the other way. Hence, the ethical question of the value of fan-scholarship, to fan communities and to academic work on pop culture subjects, must be addressed in how academics attribute value to such work while paying attention to the hierarchies at play within gift and monetised economies that attribute different value to that work.

Conclusion: The ethics of fan-scholarship citation What is perhaps most relevant here is the distinction of credibility excess and deficit. This maps onto Hills' notion of the distinctions between fan-scholar and scholar-fan subjectivities: one more rational, one more idolatry in their attachment to their subject of knowledge. The scholar-fan experiences a credibility excess, while the fan-scholar can be subject to a deficit. However, as the evidence already suggests, such credibility is context-specific and this can be reversed. Whereas scholar-fans can, and are, well received in fan contexts, including in *kaijū* fan spaces such as G-FEST, their contributions to knowledge can be marginalised in more academic contexts, despite their clear contributions to knowledge production in those areas. This is an ethical quandary for the fan-scholar. Academic labour requires theoretical and methodological rigour, whereas there is no such requirement for fan-scholars. Nevertheless, in *kaijū* fandoms, the work of many fan-scholars displays journalistic rigour, often involves translation from Japanese (the learning of which is sometimes a by-product of their immersion in their subject or a secondary consequence of their professional lives). Despite accusations levelled at Tsutsui, his work does draw significantly on the work of David Kalat (1997), JD Lees,⁴ Steve Ryfle, Stuart Galbraith, all significant fan-scholars of *kaijū* films, especially of their production and reception, whose work has generally helped bring Japan-specific knowledge to Anglophone audiences. However, partly because Tsutsui's work is intended for a broader popular audience, the work engages in less discursive analysis of their work, and therefore doesn't treat the work as scholarly, more as reference works. This places fan-scholars in a marginalised position discursively (although not socially, given their makeup). Thus, their marginalisation can be considered 'a moral-political one indicating subordination and exclusion from some practice that would have value for the participant' (Fricker, 2007:154). As Hills suggests, such fans are excluded from a practice that might have 'value' in terms of cultural and actual capital, given the work is not subject to the gift economy, but of actual 'exchange-value'. This may not produce significant harm, but can lead to assumptions may be social (Tsutsui's offhand comment that 'not all' *kaijū* fans are pathetic implies some are) or economic (revenues from publishing, views, clicks, listens). Fan scholarship may therefore experience *credibility deficit* in relation to academia, yet, the 'hermeneutical resource', as

⁴ Lees has been the managing editor of the *G-FAN* fanzine since its launch in 1992.

Frickers refers to such knowledge repositories, is impoverished without reference to such work.

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