



Pleasure Dome

# Obsessive Pop Tendencies

Curated by Rea McNamara



Correct Answer :

What is IDOL?



I'm wearing red because red means passion



PD

Pleasure Dome

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[info@pdome.org](mailto:info@pdome.org)

[www.pdome.org](http://www.pdome.org)

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Cover Image Credit: ©Maya Ben David,  
*Harry Potter and the Unborn Child*,  
and *Harry Potter Summer*, 2019.  
Courtesy of the artist.

Image Credit: ©Jiwon Choi, *Parallel*, 2017.  
Courtesy of the artist.

## *Obsessive Pop Tendencies: Introduction*

Obsessive Pop Tendencies is an interactive viewing party exploring how fandom crosses over into contemporary art practices. Featuring recent moving image works, the programme is inspired by fandom's histories and methodologies; in particular, the collectively-driven desires of fan communities and texts, brimming with excessive attachments, pleasurable gestures, and rewrites.

This programme includes a commissioned work by Maya Ben David, a self-described Jewish-Iranian Anthropomorphic Airplane. The Toronto-based artist works in video, performance, and installation, frequently inhabiting alternate universes via cosplaying personas. In "Harry Potter and the Unborn Child", Ben David utilizes the popular yet still somewhat misunderstood fanfiction trope, male pregnancy (otherwise known as "mpreg"). Yet the Mpreg Harry Potter seen here, rubbing his swollen belly on a TTC streetcar-cum-Hogwarts-Express, is calm and beatific. By transgressing her nostalgia for the atmospheric qualities of the American Harry Potter audiobooks narrated by Jim Dale, Ben David engages in mpreg from a distinctive gender(queer) perspective as a means of normalizing the concept of male reproduction.

Accompanying the screening is this ode to print fanzines, an important historical document of pre-internet media fandom. Here, Daniella Sanader writes a love letter to a LiveJournal-era fan-friend, Owen G. Parry imagines a live art fandom, and Rea McNamara interviews Catherine Grant and Kate Random Love, co-editors of the forthcoming publication *Fandom as Methodology*.

## *Programme*

Hilda Rasula, *He's Got The Power*, 2004, digital video, 2:34 minutes (Canada)

Lorna Mills and Yoshi Sodeoka, *Money2*, 2012, digital video, 1:15 minutes (Canada/United States)

Owen G Parry, *Larry Shipping Ritual*, 2016, digital video, 8:01 minutes (United Kingdom)

Peter Kingstone, *Mr. Wint and Mr. Kidd on their Last Cruise*, 2010, digital video, 2:30 minutes (Canada)

Kalup Linzy, *Conversations wit de Churen V: As da Art World Might Turn*, 2006, digital video, 12:10 minutes (United States)

Georges Jacotey, *St Georgiana Del Pepe, Slayer of Dragons*, 2018, digital video, 7:28 minutes (Greece)

Maya Ben David, *Harry Potter and the Unborn Child*, 2019, digital video, 10:47 minutes (Canada)

twee whistler, *Sigmund Freud Diaries: in conversation with Sandra Rafman*, 2018, digital video, 4:35 minutes (Italy)

Jiwon Choi, *Parallel*, 2017, digital video, 29:51 minutes (South Korea)

## A Letter to R. by Daniella Sanader

R,

I was reminded recently that the word amateur comes from French etymological roots—from *amant/amour/aimer*, to be a lover of. To devote yourself to something despite your inexperience or your uncertainty; this is a massive kind of love, one that's often made to seem so impossibly small.

But maybe I'm getting ahead of myself, do you remember me? Think back to 2004, 2005; disconnected bedrooms in Ontario and Florida. Think back to [LiveJournal](#) and [MSN Messenger](#), to our shared fandom for a certain highly-popular police procedural airing on [CBS](#). I had dabbled in other more extensive fan worlds of the day—writing cutesy Harry Potter hetero romance fics, reading smuttier LOTR slash—but this niche RPG is where we met. Return to these settings: the laboratory, the crime scene,



Image Credit: ©Georges Jacotey, *St Georgiana Del Pepe, Slayer of Dragons*, 2018. Courtesy of the artist.

the interrogation room. The front steps of his apartment, late at night after a long shift chasing clues of a serial killer. Or, parquet floors and a bolt of chroma-key-green fabric pinned to the wall<sup>1</sup>. A bed with mussed sheets. A spritz of perfume<sup>2</sup> Two bedrooms for two teenage girls; two beige-grey desktop computers.

R, I keep confusing myself, I'm standing in many places at once. I'm meant to be writing for this screening, but I keep remembering how I felt as I sat down in math class, the day after our characters had sex for the first time. You and I had been co-writing slash together for a while on [LiveJournal](#), figuring out the boundaries of the ship we had devoted

ourselves to, building trust. Two teenage girls writing through our adult male bodies on the Internet; it was a negotiation. That day, I quietly buzzed with a new kind of largeness, perhaps simultaneously like a joyful shriek and abject tears and a blissful impulse be destroyed, dissolved, remade<sup>3</sup>—a frantic reaching-out over the threshold, coming close to contact. My edges made jagged and raw<sup>4</sup>. Affection would not make me feel this way again for (let's be honest) several years.

This love is a place. R, I'm struck by the world-building required of fandom (more etymology: the suffix *-dom* typically refers to a domain, a collectivity, a place made of shared interest). In fic writing, perhaps it's assumed that this work is already



Image Credit: ©Hilda Rasula, *He's Got The Power*, 2004. Courtesy of Vtape, Toronto.

done for you: that you're taking up residence in a house built by someone else. By my memory, this is only half-true. Fanfiction rearticulates the boundaries of somewhere familiar, it negotiates and restructures and generates somewhere else in its folds and blurs. It creates landscapes where a mpreg Harry Potter can tenderly clutch his pregnant belly on the [TTC](#)<sup>5</sup>, it transforms an iMessage chat into the uneasy dreamscape of contemporary art star's mother in a psychoanalyst's office<sup>6</sup>. It's a love constituted by

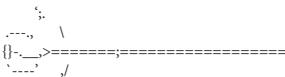
where, how (Louis and Harry at [Ikea](#), shopping for curtains)<sup>7</sup> just as much as who—perhaps even more so. It's a desire as expansive as the world that it constitutes.

We kept in touch for a while, after we both graduated high school. You got a job, a boyfriend—if I remember correctly. I entered university, becoming *serious* and *into contemporary art* and giving up all of this stuff. Thinking back, I'm still not sure how this all fits together, if it even should: you as my co-author, my ex-boyfriend, my ex-girlfriend, my fandom, my community, my language, my shared somewhere else.

Two fans, two amateurs, in two teenage bedrooms. I don't know where you're at these days, R, but I'd love to hear from you.



Image Credit: ©Lorna Mills and Yoshi Sodeoka, *Money2*, 2012. Courtesy of the artists.



1. Georges Jacotey, *St Georgiana Del Pepe, Slayer of Dragons*, 2018.
2. Peter Kingstone, *Mr. Wint and Mr. Kidd on their Last Cruise*, 2010.
3. Hilda Rasula, *He's Got The Power*, 2004.
4. Lorna Mills and Yoshi Sodeoka, *Money2*, 2012.
5. Maya Ben David, *Harry Potter and the Unborn Child*, 2019.
6. twee whistler, *edgy time with mom*, 2018.
7. Owen Parry, "MPREG versus Homonormcore," *The New Inquiry*, August 24, 2015.

## Fanformance by Owen G. Parry

It's 2009 at an East London warehouse cum performance space subsidized by public funding. A group of performance artists, mostly women, queers, working class people and people of colour (some of whom volunteer or work part-time at the venue) have organized a public salon to share "work-in-progress" performances, tributes, re-enactments and fictions of seminal performance artworks from the 60s and 70s. The event includes recreations of [Yoko Ono's Cut Piece](#) (1964), [Carolee Schneeman's Meat Joy](#) (1964), [Joseph Beuys's How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hair](#) (1965), Vito Acconci's "wank works" ([Seed Bed](#), 1972) and [Bruce Nauman's Walking in an Exaggerated Manor Around The Parameter of a Square](#) (1967). The audience is made up of mostly other performance artists, live art critics, arts educators, and club kids, as well as a few of the uninitiated. Each of the artists uses archival remnants of those earlier works including badly captured photos and video clips, leftover props, and much-rumored anecdotes as prompts for their very own recreations. In Fuck Peace Yoko is cos-played by a pregnant



Image Credit: ©Owen G. Parry, Larry!Monument, 2016. Photo Hydar Dwachi. Courtesy of the artist.

gay bear in flannelette superman pajamas; in Schneeman's Meat Joy an orgy of human and animal carcasses is replaced by a paddling pool filled with plastic Barbie Dolls and lard; in a recreation of Nauman's work, the square line is reformatted as a swastika and navigated by a thin, naked Eastern-European woman in red stilettos, corpse paint and holding a plastic gun; Acconci's work is taken from its original site where the artist lay masturbating under the gallery floor to a more visible public

version where the artist, wearing a beige mac, sits in the audience wanking throughout; and lest not forget, the heroic Beuys, scantily dressed as a Playboy Bunny Girl (with ears and tail intact) – nobody knows exactly what she is doing. At the back of the warehouse someone has set up shop selling zines and publications (some of which were written by or about others attending the event); someone announces their new Jewelrycollection of special Live Art pieces including Marina and Ulay 'Relations in Time' his and hers Cartiere watches; Pina Bausch 'two cigarettes in the dark' keyrings with green laser;

Orlan 'Sexy Devil Horns'; Robert Smithson 'Spiral Jetty' earrings; and a special edition Nauman 'walking in an exaggerated manner around the parameter of a monocle', monocle. As the evening wears on, bottles of wine are drunk, music is played and performance leads to conversation, critical response, dancing, and the creation of some new impromptu performances.<sup>1</sup>



1. This fic re-writes an inspiring description of media fandom in Henry Jenkins' influential essay "Scribbling in the Margins" from *Textual Poachers* (1994), which was also re-worked by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busses' in the introduction to their more recent book *Fanfiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet* (2006). I rewrite this anecdote in order to imagine a live art fandom.

Image Credit: ©Owen G. Parry, Larry Styrinson Performance AU, 2016. Photo Hydar Dewachi. Courtesy of the artist.



## *Fandom as a mode of attachment: Rea McNamara in conversation with Catherine Grant and Kate Random Love*

Art historians Catherine Grant and Kate Random Love first met during their doctoral work at [The Courtauld Institute of Art](#) in the 2000s. “[We] were both very interested in adolescence, which is already a denigrated position, like traditionally that of fans,” says Grant.

Now Senior Lecturer in the Art and Visual Cultures departments at [Goldsmiths](#), Catherine Grant currently investigates the re-enactment of feminist histories in contemporary art. In 2011, she authored the essay “Fans of Feminism: re-writing histories of second-wave feminism” using the fan as a means of navigating the resurgence of second-wave feminist art and politics.

Kate Random Love completed her PhD at [The Courtauld](#) in 2011, exploring adolescence in contemporary art in New York. Previously a lecturer at the [Glasgow School of Art](#) and [Manchester School of Art](#), her interest in fandom and adolescence is a means, in her own words, of navigating “difficult feelings about straight white dead boys.”

Grant and Love recently co-edited the forthcoming [Goldsmiths Press](#) anthology, *Fandom As Methodology*, due to be published in Fall 2019. In an interview with curator Rea McNamara, they discuss below how contemporary artists are engaging in fannish activities and identities, especially in relation to the archives of other artists, and marginalized histories.

Rea McNamara (RM): What drew you to fandom?

Catherine Grant (CG): I started thinking about fandom initially through appropriation. I was interested in how there can be emotional attachments in appropriation rather than a cool, postmodern take on existing material. And then that led to writing the article “Fans of Feminism”, which tried to make sense of how feminism, particularly second-wave feminism, had come back into view around 2007-2008, and what it meant for a younger generation of feminists to pick up on those histories. For me, the fan metaphor worked better than a generational metaphor of being rebellious or dutiful daughters or granddaughters. It also allowed for a queer community to be framed through this idea of being a fan of feminism. The way in which Henry Jenkins<sup>1</sup> theorizes fandom as forming creative communities that might exist outside of academia was also important. I found that was a really useful way of thinking about how I approach my own writing, and also the people around me, like Kate.

Kate Random Love (KRL): Same as Catherine, really, in my PhD, I was interested in all these artists who were making works about adolescence in New York in the late 90s/early 2000s.

Adolescent fandom is this place where you experience really intense emotions and intense experiences with death or with love. But you often experience them in relation to an image. So I was trying to think about the ways that reaching back to that adolescent mode or space, and explore how that might relate to broader issues around

what it meant to live in that moment in history where we are trying to find meaning and authenticity in a world that is so mediated.

RM: In the introduction to *Fandom as Methodology*, you cite the “excessive attachment” of fans that a lot of fan scholars like Henry Jenkins and Kristina Busse<sup>2</sup> have talked about. How does this methodology counteract the “accepted” mode of scholarship? What are the possibilities of this excessiveness, as it relates to queer and feminist perspectives?

CG: I’m interested in Eve Sedgwick’s<sup>3</sup> idea of a queer child who may not know that she is queer yet, but she’s searching for herself in the things that she reads. That for me very much resonates with the kind of queer and feminist perspectives that we’re approaching fandom from. For both of us, being an autodidact is very important. We both ended up in art history without necessarily realizing that would be our profession. I guess for me, in relation to feminism, it’s about having this intense engagement, and often in a very sort of nerdy way. Kate has more of that music groupie-style fandom, and I go for more the nerdy-in-the-bedroom-because-you-can’t-talk-to-other-people.

Neither of us are anti-theory or anti-rigour or anti-research. But we’re interested in how you account for all the passions and the intuitions that often drive scholarship, but we’re often trained to edit out.

KRL: The first time I ever really knew about what a fan was watching the Elvis Presley biopic with Kurt Russell.

And I said to my mom, “why is she crying?” And my mom said, “she’s overwhelmed.” I’d never heard that word before and she talked about what that meant. I just thought that sounded like the pinnacle of life, to be overwhelmed. I think that maps onto the sort of obsessive aggression and love in scholarship, you know, if you’re an art historian rather than art maker, you’re going to focus on your object, and you’re going to try and destroy it in a way.

It’s something about doing something too much, both ways, and letting whatever that is, let that do to you in the same way. That happens in scholarship.

RM: Some years back, I went to a talk by Claire Bishop<sup>4</sup>, who expressed a fatigue for art practices “sublimated with research”. Any thoughts on that?

CG: One of the reasons for doing this book is that both Kate and I have worked in art departments. So we’ve been teaching artists, and for me it’s been interesting thinking about what practice-based research is, and how I recognize a lot of the artists I write could be seen to do that.

I guess we thought that fandom as methodology would be a way of kind of taking seriously the kind of attachments to objects and actually analyzing what that means rather than just kind of saying like, “oh, you know, I’m an artist, so I don’t have to explain why I’m interested.” But looking at it as a mode of attachment and breaking it down in some way. The book title *Fandom as Methodology* actually comes out of a seminar that Kate did at the [Slade School of Art](#) in London.

KRL: This seminar was maybe eight practice-based PhD students at [The Slade](#). I wanted to sort of offer them fandom, really. [Laughter]

So it was asking this question: how might you think of your work in relation to fandom? And they all really just came alive to it in the way that they do their research. The fact that it is very emotional and that they will fall in love with an idea or an object for months and become quite obsessive.

CG: In the book we have edited, the relationships with fandom are very diverse. It ranges from artists who pick up on celebrity figures like, Owen G. Parry or Dawn Mellor, as well as artists who engage with marginal histories and figures from art or popular culture. It includes [The Women of Colour Index Reading Group](#)<sup>5</sup> that's been going on at [Goldsmiths](#) in London for the last few years, set up by three artists (Samia Malik, Michelle Williams Gamaker and Rehana Zaman). The group looks at a collection of material on women of colour artists that was set up in the late 1980s, and is held at the [Women's Art Library](#) at [Goldsmiths](#), London. There hasn't really been scholarship on it until this artist-run group started to engage with the material and brought it to a contemporary audience, often through communal readings from the material, circulating photocopies in a very fannish way.

So we're kind of interested in how modes of fan production and community-formation that within popular culture might focus on Harry Potter or One Direction, and how they might operate on other kinds of histories within art or political histories, and seeing how different people have approached this idea of fandom as it relates to writing about art and art practice.

RM: Maya Ben David has a commissioned work in the Obsessive Pop Tendencies programme exploring "Harry Potter and the Unborn Child". Across fandoms, subversive fannish tropes like MPREG<sup>6</sup> (male pregnancy) become these frameworks for fan authors and artists to explore gender and sexuality form an embodied, intertextual approach. Can you reflect on this in tandem with contemporary art production?

CG: I still think some of the early scholarship on slash is really informative on this, and that was one of the areas that I really connected with when I first was researching fan studies. It's this creation of female-dominated communities who are exploring desires and identities that really fuck with the hetero-normative and conventions of male and female identity, femininity and masculinity, and basically take the script of things like Harry Potter or Star Trek or One Direction and utilize as the raw material for what is not there in the original material.

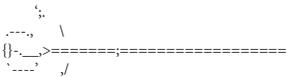
It's there from Joanna Russ's 1985 essay "Pornography by Women, for Women, with Love", but slash is doing other things alongside that. So, I guess it's a return to thinking about these creative spaces that are identified with women or have an association with teenage girls because both Kate and I were interested in adolescence as a flexible, psychic space as Julia Kristeva has described and how the conventions of heterosexuality, homosexuality and gender identity are not fixed. Fandom allows that flexibility to continue forward.

KRL: Until I read Owen's work, I wasn't familiar with MPREG, Harry Potter, and One Direction. But when I was not working and on maternity, I was just at home with the kids. I used to go on [MumsNet](#), which is an online forum for mums. There was

a huge community on [MumsNet](#) called [Tw-Sluts Anonymous](#). They were mums at home with their kids writing really, really explicit slash fiction<sup>7</sup> about the Twilight characters.

And I was just like, this is unexpected. Because it's a very middle-class, you know, quite a conventional space. People talking about SATs results and things like that, but then there was just this little place that I found on it. This is amazing that this exists!

I was really excited that women are finding these ways to find each other as well. Why that? What are they exploring that is so outside — just the fact that they have these fantasies. It's exciting to me, because girls have always had these fantasies about pop stars or whatever. But the fact that now you can find each other and share them without joining the fan club. You can just go on [MumsNet](#) or go online and find all these. I think it's really exciting that women do this and find each other.



1. Henry Jenkins is the Provost Professor of Communication, Journalism, Cinematic Arts and Education at the [University of Southern California](#), and was previously the Director of the [MIT Comparative Media Studies Program](#). Recognized as a leading “acafan” in the field of fan studies — an academic who self-identifies as a fan — Jenkins has authored numerous books on media fandom, including *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (Routledge, 1992).
2. Kristina Busse is co-editor with Karen Hellekson of the peer-reviewed academic journal *Transformative Works and Culture*, and is on the Board of Directors for the [Organization of Transformative Works](#). Currently teaching in the [Department of Philosophy](#) and the [Gender Studies Program](#) at the [University of South Alabama](#), Busse recently authored the essay collection *Literary and Social Practices in Fan Fiction Communities* (U of Iowa Press, 2017).
3. Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. "How to Bring Your Kids up Gay." *Social Text*, no. 29 (1991): 18-27. doi:10.2307/466296.
4. McNamara, Rea. "Is Claire Bishop Mired in Citational Modernism?" *Art F City*, November 5, 2015. <http://artfcity.com/2015/11/05/is-claire-bishop-mired-in-citational-modernism/>.
5. "WOMEN OF COLOUR INDEX READING GROUP?" Accessed March 13, 2019. <https://wo-cireadinggroup.wordpress.com/>.
6. "Mpreg". Accessed March 13, 2019. <https://fanlore.org/wiki/Mpreg>
7. Slash is a fanfiction genre focusing on the romantic attraction or sexual relationship between two or more characters of the same sex or gender. Slash typically refers to male/male relationships; stories focused on female/female relationships are referred to as “femmeslash”. (For more information on the genre and its history, visit its entry on [Fanlore](#), a wiki preserving the histories of fanworks and fan communities: <https://fanlore.org/wiki/Slash>.)

## Contributors:

**Rea McNamara** is a Toronto-based artist, writer, and curator, and has developed an expanded practice that includes image making, performance, and critical engagement with networked publics. She founded the limited-run art party series [Sheroes](#) (2011-2012), which engaged with the collaborative processes of fandom.

**Owen G. Parry** is an artist and researcher working across performance cultures, exploring subjects including trash, queer performance, fandoms, fascism, and Yoko Ono. He is currently an associate lecturer in Fine Art at [Goldsmiths, University of London](#), and [Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts](#).

**Daniella Sanader** is a writer and reader who lives in Toronto. Her reviews, essays, speculations, and oblique texts have been commissioned by a variety of publications, galleries, and artist-run spaces across Canada. [desanader.com](http://desanader.com)



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