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Tracing *Textual Poachers*: Reflections on the development of fan studies and digital fandom

ABSTRACT

In 1992 Henry Jenkins' influential work, Textual Poachers, *was published, which contributed towards igniting the establishment of the fan studies field of research and re-morphing previous restrictive depictions of media fans. This article traces the work's influence on my own steps as an early career researcher in the field and how it shaped my ideas and approach to scholarship. Speaking more broadly, it assesses the current state of the fan studies field, and how things have developed since Jenkins' text was released. I reflect on what general fluxes, concerns and dimensions are currently with us, through a lens of the themes raised in* Textual Poachers, *most especially surrounding the development of technology and social media, methods in the field and fans' relations with texts, assessing to what degree we have moved forward, or remained in stasis within fan studies scholarship. This study argues that technological advances have impacted on and shaped four key, often intercon-nected, areas of fandom and enquiry: (1) communication, (2) creativity, (3) knowledge and (4) organizational and civic power. Overall, this article shows how* Textual Poachers *is an invaluable source to measure the field and landscape of fandom, and determine the extent to which it has seemingly leaped forward.*

INTRODUCTION

> Fans are, in fact, the most visible and identifiable of audiences. How is it, then, that they have been overlooked or not taken seriously as research subjects by critics and scholars? And why are they maligned and sensationalized by the popular press, mistrusted by the public?
>
> (Lewis 1992: 1)

In 1992 Lisa A. Lewis opened her edited book collection *The Adoring Audience* with the above question, ruminating on the then current stereotypical depictions of fans, who were also not viewed as valid and serious research subjects within academia. In the same year, Henry Jenkins' *Textual Poachers* was published, alongside Camille Bacon-Smith's *Enterprising Women*, with all three texts similarly seeking to break the restrictive and erroneous perceptions surrounding media fans that were predominant at the time. As Jenkins explained in the introduction to *Textual Poachers*, 'fan culture is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon, inviting many forms of participation and levels of engagement' (1992: 2). In this sense, the influence of these three texts worked strongly towards beginning the establishment of the fan studies field of scholarship, the opening up of an avenue where fans were treated and viewed as active and creative individuals; the study of which potentially offers rich insights into media consumption, identity, textual engagement and communications. Reading *Textual Poachers* for the first time certainly proved influential to me – this seminal text is, as for many other fan studies scholars, one I credit for my interest in, and initial steps into, the field. Reflecting back to my first readings of the book, which occurred in 1997, during my undergraduate degree in journalism, film and broadcasting at JOMEC, Cardiff University, it was this text that started to foster the courage within me, being a media and popular culture fan, to explore fandom academically – a prospect that was also later enforced by the similarly dynamic and influential work of Matt Hills (2002), Nancy Baym (2000), Will Brooker (2002) and Daniel Cavicchi (1998). Thus, for me, as with Suzanne Scott, *Textual Poachers* was a 'transformative professional moment' (2013: viii).

Over twenty years later, the influence of the 1992 work on fandom still resonates, with a flourishing and dynamic field of fan studies currently exploring many aspects of fandom and fan culture, from areas such as politics (Sandvoss 2013), music (Anderson 2012, Duffett 2013), literature and comics (Costello 2013), games (Osborne 2012), television (Whiteman and Metiver 2013), sport (Carvell 2014, Sturm and McKinney 2013) and film (Proctor 2013), and theorizing different communications, relations and readings within. In this article, focusing specifically on *Textual Poachers*, I will trace the work's influence on my own steps as an early career researcher in the field and how it shaped my ideas and approach to scholarship. Speaking more broadly, I will also assess the current state of the fan studies field, and how things have developed since Jenkins' text was released. As Jenkins stated: 'there is nothing timeless and unchanging about this [fan] culture' as fandom manifests 'in response to specific historical conditions (not only specific configurations of television programming, but also the development of feminism, the development of new technologies, the atomization and alienation of contemporary American culture, etc.) and remains constantly in flux' (1992: 3). Thus, I will reflect on what general fluxes, concerns and dimensions are currently

with us now, in 2014 through a lens of the themes raised in *Textual Poachers*, most especially surrounding the development of technology and social media, methods in the field and fans' relations with texts, assessing to what degree we have moved forward, or remained in stasis within fan studies scholarship. These observations do not claim to be comprehensive and all-encompassing, but rather, how an early career scholar in 2014 views the field, in light of the 1992 text that began to define it.

DIGITAL FANDOM: THE ARRIVAL OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Since *Textual Poachers* was published, the most striking development within fan culture and fan studies has been the arrival and widespread adoption of digital technology, in the sense that it has worked to be 'empowering and disempowering, blurring the lines between producers and consumers, creating symbiotic relationships between powerful corporations and individual fans, and giving rise to new forms of cultural production' (Pearson 2010; see also Booth (2010) for an evaluation of fandom within digital technology). Jenkins has richly explored some of these areas of participatory culture and trans-media storytelling in his later work, for example, *Convergence Culture* (2006a) and *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers* (2006b). However, when *Textual Poachers* was published; it was a considerably different landscape. Although during 1992 the Internet was indeed functioning and fans were using newsgroups and e-mail to communicate and organize themselves (as observed in Jenkins' case study of online *Twin Peaks* (Lynch and Frost, 1990–1) fans in the book), it was not until a few years later, during the late 1990s, that Internet access became more widespread and online communities surrounding fan cultures became more defined, bounded and structured online, through the facilities of forums and bulletin boards. Fan studies scholarship likewise began investigating these communities and cultures and the dynamic relations surrounding them (Baym 2000; Bury 2005; Gatson and Zweerink 2004; Sandvoss 2005). Soon afterwards, with more advanced digital technology, participatory culture and transmedia practices also developed, with fans gaining stronger resources and integration within the digital media landscape. The arrival and adoption of social media in the late 2000s also worked to facilitate this further, allowing for widespread networks to form, and more instantaneous modes of communication to be maintained. However, although many 'off-line' practices were in operation and flourishing before the Internet and social media arrived, and some continue to still proceed as thus, I would argue that these technological advances have impacted on and shaped four key, often interconnected, areas of fandom and enquiry within the field: (1) communication, (2) creativity, (3) knowledge and (4) organizational and civic power, which will be briefly explored in turn.

(1) Communication

While communication and connection with other fans has always been, for some, a central tenet of fandom, (for example, through meeting at concerts or conventions, or reaching others through pen pal adverts in fanzines), the Internet and social media has allowed for the development, and fragmentation, of networks and communities comprised of fans even further. The arrival of social media had a strong impact on some online forums, with some members connecting via these platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr and Instagram, and communicating

and sharing news there in a more instantaneous manner. On Twitter, discussions surrounding hashtags have indeed facilitated new connections (although not all communication through this medium results in conversation), offering strong possibilities for mobilization around topics and fan interests (Deller 2011, Kalviknes Bore and Hickman 2013a, Highfield, Harrington and Bruns 2013). In fact, for some fans, to post and communicate with others in online forums alone is not enough if breaking news is to be captured – instead, to remain fully informed, many fans need to negotiate and straddle all the different media platforms that have a fan, object of fandom, or official channel, presence.

However, another major area that has developed robustly since 1992 is the possibility for more *seemingly* direct and instantaneous connections between the object of fandom, or media producer, and their fans. Whereas in previous years, fans could send messages to the object of fandom via a letter in the post, which may have been filtered by management, the possibility for a direct and more immediate connection has arisen, through social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. As I have argued and explored elsewhere (Bennett 2013a), through social media, public figures can now seemingly speak directly to their fanbase without news or management filters. Celebrities can reveal 'intimate' information through these platforms (Marwick and boyd 2011, Marshall 2010), conjuring a sense of authenticity (Beer 2008, Muntean and Peterson, 2009, Burns 2009, Ellcessor 2009) through frequent updates on their daily lives, with some directly responding to messages from fans (Baym 2011, 2012). For example, actor Orlando Jones engages with his fans dynamically through social media, encouraging the composition of fan fiction, live-tweeting episodes, and regularly responding to messages. My work is currently exploring the dynamics of this vista and the consequences of this within fan cultures, assessing how fans and the object of fandom situate themselves within these new platforms of communication.

(2) Creativity

A remarkable practice strongly highlighted within *Textual Poachers* is the richness of fan creativity, with fans composing and performing songs, creating artwork and writing fan fiction, processes that overall can operate on collective and individual levels. The Internet and social media has fostered the prospect of these activities within fandom to be circulated more easily and quickly than before, potentially reaching larger audiences, with fan studies scholarship similarly continuing a focus on these activities. Visual arts have especially been facilitated by new platforms: fans can create videos of themselves performing, compose fanvids, remixes and mashups and upload these to video platforms such as YouTube, circulating the links widely (Coppa 2008; Russo and Coppa 2012, Turk and Johnson 2012). Tumblr has also facilitated a strong visual creativity in fandom, with fans creating and sharing images on this platform. Likewise, Twitter has also permitted the practice of role playing in some fan cultures, where fans tweet performing as characters from the programmes, such as *The West Wing* (Kalviknes Bore and Hickman 2013b) and *Sherlock*, which has fused role playing and fan fiction through social media (McClellan 2013). The composition and collaborative nature of fan fiction has also flourished online, especially through Live Journal (Busse and Farley 2013, Busse and Hellekson 2006, Ellison 2013) and the Organization of Transformative Works' Archive of Our Own, which 'currently makes more than 380,000 works of fan fiction available for fans of any conceivable source to read online, download, comment on, share, and discuss' (Lothian 2013).

The connections between public figures and their fans are also currently facilitating some aspects of the creative process, with interactions taking place that surround the 'text integrity' (Milner 2010). For example, some popular music fans are now being invited through social media to take part in the creative process with their favourite musicians. British independent musician Imogen Heap's strategy of allowing her fans to participate in the creation of her album *Ellipse* (2010) and ongoing project *Heapsongs* (2011–) through social media platforms is a rich example of this practice, which I am currently examining. Exploring the relations between fans and the producers of television programmes and subsequent tensions that can arise surrounding the text, Jenkins had concluded that the 'relationship between fan and producer, then, is not always a happy or comfortable one and is often charged with mutual suspicion, if not open conflict' (1992: 32). How these complicated relations then translate to the Internet and social media platforms, despite the seemingly open and receptive communications between both parties, will be an area of intrigue and complication. While some of these relations can involve an 'illusion of reciprocity', which works to often hide 'an empty relationship that encourages fans to believe that they have an input when they actually have little impact on the TV industry or the texts it produces' (Williams 2010: 282), others have engaged in seemingly fruitful and powerful connections. For example, NBC's *Community* has been deemed to display the rich potential of technological practices in allowing fans to seemingly become part of the creative process. The show regularly features 'metadiscourse on media production and themes, responds to viewers' feedback and preferred narratives and shares the creation of meaning with the audience' with the result that 'viewers feel that their concerns are recognized and often directly addressed by the show's official creative team' (Sharma 2013: 185). Thus, this demonstrates that contemporary producer/fan relations can differ between communities, and are formulated by complex and complicated exchanges as both parties negotiate each other.

(3) Knowledge

As *Textual Poachers* demonstrates, shared knowledge and its exchange is a central facet of fan culture. As has been widely explored, the Internet has allowed for this knowledge to be distributed and catalogued meticulously, within forms such as archive websites and wikis where fans can work collectively and pool their resources through their 'collective intelligence' (Lévy 1997; Jenkins 2006a). Within this, the process of spoilers has also been explored (Brooker 2002; Baym 2000), in terms of fans negotiating and making sense of the abundance of news related knowledge that can be provided online, though social media has recently further complicated 'spoiler' knowledge. For example, how do fans avoid exposure to spoilers from their news feeds on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter? Currently, a circulated practice and discourse appearing on these sites when a season finale or final episode (such as *Breaking Bad*) is due to be broadcast, is the temporary withdrawal of the user from these platforms until exposure to the episode in question is secured. However, with different air dates, and for those who are behind on a series, this can become a difficult notion.

Quite recently, Hills has been examining the area of spoilers further, in terms of fans pursuing advance knowledge and skilfuly using technology in these efforts, to unveil 'information that producers would prefer to keep under PR control ahead of TV transmission' (2010: 120). Hills has termed these practices 'pre-textual poaching', which indicates, as he explains, that we should not

be completely devoid of 'previous ways of thinking about fans as "poachers" whose activities are opposed to the interests of producers, with empowered and disempowered modes of fandom instead uneasily coexisting' (2010: 120). This active pursuance of spoiler knowledge of the text before the air date, facilitated by social media, has seen some fans engage in the observance of set-watching and set-reporting, as their favourite TV programme is being filmed. Hills (2013b) suggests that these fans' anticipatory activities echoes citizen reporting, keeping their fellow individuals informed well in advance of production and official releases.

In contrast, in my own work within music fandom, I have explored how a sub-group of R.E.M. fans sought to evade music spoilers and information concerning the then forthcoming new album and pursue a pre-Internet experience of consumption and listening (Bennett 2012), thus demonstrating that the up-to-date flow of news and information offered by the Internet and social media is not embraced by all sectors of fan communities and cultures. Thus, how different fan communities approach, and grapple with, social media and the flow of the information and news it can facilitate, should be a source of further exploration within fan studies research.

(4) Organizational and civic power

Activism has long been a characteristic of some fan cultures, for example, the organization of letter writing campaigns to save a television programme, or to protest against representations within a text (Lopez 2012). In the years since 1992, fan activism has largely evaded widespread coverage, with Jenkins arguing in 2013 that 'the study of direct or explicit forms of fan activism, conducted as consumers and citizens, has historically taken a back seat to the study of cultural forms, such as resistant reading or fan writing' (Scott 2013: xix). However, this back seat is starting to be pushed forward, with more studies of fan activism beginning to emerge (no doubt, helped by a 2012 special issue of *Transformative Works and Cultures* guest edited by Jenkins and Sangita Shresthova) and the arrival of organizations such as the Harry Potter Alliance (Jenkins 2012) and Nerd Fighters, in addition to vibrant activism in pre-existing fan communities (for example, see Jones 2012 for a robust study of X-Files fan activist efforts). Within the fan activist landscape, the use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube has further heightened and facilitated the scope of fan cultures and networks to be drawn together in these active efforts, through self organization, working to achieve a shared goal that go beyond the actual fan text, into civically charged areas and concerns. Networks can potentially now communicate in a more instantaneous manner 'spreading' (Jenkins et al. 2013) their message and calls to action across the different media platforms.

In addition, for some celebrity objects of fandom, social media has provided them with a stronger ability than before to mobilize and direct their fan networks more quickly surrounding these efforts, and the skilled use of the platforms from some celebrities has resulted in active responses from their online fanbases – for example Ian Somerhalder's environmental and animal rights activism and Misha Collins' Random Acts initiative. Lady Gaga has engaged some of her fans strongly in activism, speaking to her fans as valued partners via Twitter, and subsequently securing the involvement of some in a video and phone campaign against Don't Ask, Don't Tell. As I have shown in my work in this area (Bennett 2013a), celebrity directed activism in this

manner can vitally empower those who are making their first steps in the activist or political realm, demonstrating to these fans the change they can potentially wield as civically connected citizens.

Moving on from such a focus in this area of digital technology, I want to turn the attention towards the execution of research within fan studies, namely, how method is currently formulated and approached, in terms of the articulation of fans themselves, and the notion of scholar, or aca-fandom.

METHOD: THE VOICE OF FANS AND SCHOLAR FANDOM

Considering the execution of fan studies scholarship from *Textual Poachers* until today, there are two key concerns within the field that continue to drive debates and considerations that I will briefly consider in turn: first, the existence and operation of scholar-fandom, and second, the input of fans under study into the research process.

The position of the scholar-fan, or aca-fan, where the researcher is simultaneously an academic and fan has been introduced and understood as a dual role that, although liminal, can offer complicated advantages from both perspectives (Zubernis and Larsen 2012). As Jenkins reflected at the time: 'I write both as an academic (who has access to certain theories of popular culture, certain bodies of critical and ethnographic literature) and as a fan (who has access to the particular knowledge and traditions of that community)' (1992: 5–6). In other words, this process worked through 'constant movement between these two levels of understanding which are not necessarily in conflict but are also not necessarily in perfect alignment' (1992: 5–6). However, Tom Phillips counters this with his experience that, for his research as a scholar-fan, an engagement in an 'overly confessional' approach has resulted in being 'integral to the fidelity of [the] research' (2010). Recent debates surrounding this balance between these two levels of understanding that operate within scholar (or aca)-fandom have questioned whether the term is still necessary, since it remains 'unclear how each half – the aca and the fan – is commenting on the other half' (Gray 2011). However, in opposition to this, Louisa Stein argues that maintaining a hold onto the term 'gives us a connective web through which we can hopefully access larger insights found in the messy overlap between objective and subjective knowledge' (2011). I would argue that while the debate concerning whether the term is still required may continue, considering the 'connective web' of scholar-fandom and how this liminal state can be fraught with dilemmas of accountability and loyalty towards fellow fans, continues to be of vital importance in terms of furthering our understanding and making sense of the position of the insider researcher within fan scholarship.

In *Textual Poachers*, Jenkins placed high value on the input of fellow fans into the work, viewing them as 'active collaborators in the research process' (1992: 7), inviting them to offer their thoughts on chapters as they were written, with their feedback then being integrated into the text – a method I was inspired to include in my own Ph.D. thesis. As Paul Booth has recently argued though, since the book's 1992 release, the fan studies discipline recently 'appears to be becoming more circumspect about its main object of study' (2013: 120), with scant ethnographic studies being published, in favour of a stronger focus on online fan discourse. He recommends that fan studies scholars should thus 'refocus attention back onto fans themselves through ethnographic work' (2013: 119), which would form a stronger dialogue and

'bring a fannish voice into scholarship on fans' (2013: 131). In this sense, this process would constitute a return to the research practices used by Jenkins in *Textual Poachers*.

However, the fragmentation of some fan cultures, with clusters communicating and interacting on different social media platforms, poses quite a challenge for scholars. In this sense, should research aim to focus intricately on one platform (e.g., Tumblr or Pinterest) and the particular practices within that, or does that leave us with a restrictive snapshot? In addition, some of these new platforms remain underexplored – Tumblr has not yet been widely examined, perhaps due to its newness as a research site. In line with this path of thought, M. Wood and L. Baughman, concluding their study of *Glee* fan practices on Twitter offer a caution that 'as social networking sites expand and are newly created… researchers will need to adapt and expand their methodologies to study how [the shifts in fandom] occur' (2013: 341). I will echo Booth's recommendation and suggest that the re-centring of ethnographical observations and the voice of fans within contemporary fan studies scholarship may be timely and useful – asking them to articulate their understandings of these different platforms, and how they negotiate digital technologies and relations with texts and producers, may move us towards a more comprehensive methodological approach more suited for today's media landscape and the uncharted research terrains.

ENGAGING WITH FAN TEXTS: POACHING AND READING IN THE 'RIGHT WAY'

In terms of the act of 'textual poaching', since its publication, the relevance of the practice has been extended, reapplied and questioned (Williamson 2005; BocciaArtieri 2012) to account for these changing technological and textual landscapes. Bertha Chin argued in 2010 that fan culture and practices of cultural production that currently exist within it reverberate 'the principles of the gift economy rather than the socially subordinated position of fans as textual poachers, which places fandom as an act of resistance' (2010: 1–2). For Chin, the concept of 'textual poaching', although still valuable, no longer adequately encapsulates contemporary fan practices and engagement with texts as 'fans collaborate with the commercial culture they allegedly poach from as much as they resist commercial culture's attempts at controlling them' (2010: 2).

R. McCulloch et al. (2013) also recently discussed the prospect of power and control between producers and 'poachers', debating the extent to which fandom could be considered as a negotiated form of brand ownership, exploring different contemporary cases such as alternate reality games, file sharing networks, Twitter hashtags, and football fandom. They concluded that 'there is a growing acceptance that [brand strategists] are no longer the ones in control; rather, they are participants in a "conversation"' (2013: 325). In other words, the premise of 'textual poaching' that fans work 'from a position of cultural marginality and social weakness… [lacking] direct access to the means of commercial cultural production' and possess 'only the most limited resources with which to influence entertainment industry's decisions' (Jenkins 1992: 26) does not remain a fully helpful lens with which to explore digital fandom. The notion of what constitutes a text is also changing – as Hills recently questioned, 'what is to be counted as a "text" in a world where comments, tweets and status updates can all potentially constitute forms of

fannish textual productivity?' (2013a). In addition, within the rigid framework of textual poaching, fans who have developed into producers are also not accounted for (Hills 2010), or, I would argue, is the prospect of crowdfunding, an emerging online practice that involves fans and other audience members becoming 'backers', funding projects for tiered rewards. In this sense, fans are becoming more integrated into the production process and subsequently positioned in an even more participatory culture than before. How funding impacts on a fans' reading and affective relationship towards the text and textual producers thus needs to be theorized and explored further, with an acknowledgement surrounding the powers and pleasures of agency that can occur within fan labour (Chin 2013; Jones 2013; Baym and Burnett 2009; Milner 2009), rather than rigidly casting it as widespread exploitation.

Within *Textual Poachers*, a tenet that proved influential towards my Ph.D. work was the concept of fans reading a text in the 'correct' way that is dependent on the relevant fan culture and community. Exploring the processes at work between fans and the fan text, Jenkins argued that this 'right way' of reading and approaching the text as a fan or object of fandom is determined and enforced by normative fan identity. He maintained that learning and understanding this 'right way' to read is part of the socialization process where fans learn 'how to employ and comprehend the community's particular interpretive conventions' (1992: 89). Other scholars have used Jenkins' model to identify legitimate forms of reading within fan communities and practices (Carruthers 2004; Bury 2005), which I also explored in my own Ph.D. thesis, a study of R.E.M. fans, which explored normativity within their online community, Murmurs. I undertook an ethnography on the community and analysed different sub-groups that did not fit into the accepted standards and readings within the forums. Jenkins suggests that there are correct ways of reading a fan text, and that fans are 'responsive' to 'expectations about what narratives are "appropriate" for fannish interest, what interpretations are "legitimate"' (1992: 88). He supports this view by declaring that interactions with normative fan readers 'further shape fans' perceptions toward close conformity to the community's own reading…' (1992: 88), a view shared by L. Bennett and J. Woollacott who had earlier argued that there existed a 'superintendence of reading' that presides over other interpretations (1987: 65). However, in my work on online R.E.M. fans (Bennett 2013b), I proposed that not all fans in the community demonstrated a responsive nature to its reading conventions, and in doing so, some displayed readings of the fan text that were not 'legitimate' and which failed to conform to the community's normative practices. I argued that this prospect was not adequately taken into consideration in *Textual Poachers*. Even so, there is a 'right way' of reading in a fan community that dictates how members should approach the object of fandom, and within this, what forms of interaction are deemed normative and acceptable. In addition, it is important to acknowledge that what is deemed as 'right' is a concept that can be under continuous negotiation, not only between fan and producer, but between fan and fan.

Taking this further, an area of interaction that has received some recent attention within fan studies is the expression of hate online and oppositional readings of the text, or what Jonathan Gray (2003) has termed 'anti-fandom'. As Gray argued:

> fan studies have taken us to one end of a spectrum of involvement with
> a text, but we should also look at the other end to those individuals

spinning around a text in its electron cloud, variously bothered, insulted or otherwise assaulted by its presence.

(2003: 70)

For these individuals and readings, 'hate or dislike of a text can be just as powerful as can a strong and admiring, affective relationship with a text' (Gray 2005: 841). Since Gray's argument for the value of studying anti-fandom, fan and audience scholars have begun to devote more attention to these individuals and their oppositional textual readings within research. For example, anti-fandom has been explored through a mass of different lenses and cases, such as its complicated position within fandom itself (Johnson 2007; Theodoropoulou 2007), how individuals negotiate categories (Click 2007) and its position within inter-fandom (Hills 2012; Williams 2013). Within this anti-fandom framework, the 'reading the right way' proposition within *Textual Poachers* has strong, but complicated relevance. As I will argue in a forthcoming case study of Lady Gaga anti-fandom, fans and anti-fans can express a conviction that they are reading the text in the correct way and these negotiations can subsequently enhance the strength and cultural identity of both, resulting in a collision of readings surrounding the (anti) fan object.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND QUESTIONS

In the conversation that introduces the twentieth anniversary issue of *Textual Poachers*, Jenkins suggests that we should view the book as a 'time capsule, which captures a particular moment of transition within fandom' (Scott 2013: xx). If then, we approach *Textual Poachers* in this light, as a capsule of fan culture in 1992, the text is an invaluable source which we can use to measure the field and landscape of fandom, and determine the extent to which it has changed and seemingly leaped forward since.

Fan cultures and its scholarship is a vibrant, rich and colourful discipline that is almost impossible to capture completely within one article, when considering all the different forms and areas that being a media fan, and a researcher, can encompass. In this sense, this perceived impossibility I have faced is a testament to the field and its current shape and flux. As such, I have tried to present a snapshot that is also personally driven, forged by not only my own research, but also my own understandings as a scholar fan.

Finally, then, rather than ending with some conclusions, I want to instead end with two important questions and considerations.

First, overall, as I have tried to show in this article, fan studies scholars, quite similarly to fans themselves, are trying to unravel and make sense of the new technological communication forms that are quite sharply impacting on, and shaping these key areas of interaction that rest at the core of fandom. Just as the theory of 'texual poaching' is embraced and reapplied by some scholars, it is rejected by others due to its rigidity and irrelevance in accounting for the new forms of powerful interactions within participatory culture. These paradoxes then, are quite similar to the field itself as it is operating right now. For example, whilst celebrity and fan interactions on Twitter are regarded by some as fostering more direct relations and communications, others view them as engendering illusory and 'fake' forms of interactions. Likewise, whilst producers of texts may be more seemingly accountable and open to hearing the opinions and demands from fans, others have offered reminders that these relationships can be fraught with conflict, and unrest, with fans having

ultimately little say in the direction and production of the text. Indeed, while some celebrities, such as Lady Gaga and Amanda Palmer speak of strong and genuinely 'close' connections with their fans through social media, others, such as Neil Tennant, lament the 'fake intimacy' that they view as conjured. When these differences of views occur, how do fans situate themselves? For example, how would a fan of both Lady Gaga and Neil Tennant negotiate these differences in how the platform is valued and used in terms of communications between artist and fan? Considering this proposition further, I will suggest that some of these instances very much differ between fan cultures, and are dependent on how interactions are framed, regarded and negotiated within each, reverberating the notion that 'that, collective, what we might call fandom, is itself not cohesive' (Busse and Hellekson 2006: 6). In this sense, it is important that, as fan studies scholars, we keep asking questions and trying to make sense of these new communications and platforms, for, in some instances, there are no clear cut answers or overarching theories that can encompass the quite different dynamics than can arise.

Second, and finally, where do 'offline' practices fit and relate to the online realm (if indeed there is such a separation anymore)? In what ways do fans continue to move 'in and out of the spaces' (Busse and Hellekson 2006: 16) that become available and how do they navigate these? Despite the richness of the Internet and social media in allowing for creativity and communication to flourish further in fan cultures, 'offline' activities are still evident. For example, cosplay is very much thriving, some fan clubs and their associated magazines have still been running (for instance, R.E.M's was launched in 1984 and regularly sent out newsletters and exclusive gifts until their split in 2011), conventions still widely take place, and within music fandom, there is still the ultimate emphasis on being there, physically present, at a concert (Bennett 2012). As argued by P. Booth and P. Kelly (2013) and R. Bury et al. (2013), there has been a tendency of late to focus on the online activities, at the expense of the offline. While some studies have been conducted recently that focus on the non-Internet related practices of fans (Duffett 2012; Lamerichs 2013, Geraghty 2014), and the practice of set-reporting is also currently being studied (Hills 2013b), there remains quite a vacuum in this area that would give a more rich, fruitful and encompassing dimension to contemporary fan studies if given more attention.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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SUGGESTED CITATION

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