

***Intensities* interviews Henry Jenkins @Console-ing Passions, University of Bristol, July 7th, 2001**

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Matt Hills: I'm interested in the move from the moment of *Textual Poachers* (1992) to work on 'media fandom' that is being done now; I'm thinking specifically of recent work done by myself (*Fan Cultures*, 2002), Kurt Lancaster (*Interacting with Babylon 5*, 2001) and Sara Gwenllian Jones (*Cult TV*, 2002). And I'm wondering if there's been a shift in terms of how we are addressing the text-reader model in general, philosophical terms.

For example, in *Fan Cultures* I try to get away from the idea that there is the 'text' and then there is the 'reader', detached from the text and somehow negotiating with it. That's why I do stuff like thinking about cult geography and affect. It's almost as if you can't find the 'distance' between text and reader that is required to think about them in the conventional cultural studies way. Sara's work deals with similar issues; she's particularly interested in analysing the metatext in certain ways, and Kurt Lancaster's work, although he's drawing on performance studies, seems to be making a related point – again, he's exploring where the 'boundaries' are around this thing called 'the text'.

Do you think that the text-reader model was already breaking down in particular ways in *Textual Poachers*, or does De Certeau's theoretical approach still tend to imply a certain distinction between 'reader' and 'text'?

Henry Jenkins: It's an interesting question. It seems to me that you're right that De Certeau's model, which implies something like a land-owner and a poacher and a space that's fought over, does maintain some clear notion of a boundary or a separation of those roles, and so paints you into certain quarters, theoretically.

One of the critics who responded to *Textual Poachers*, Ilsa Bick, has written a piece that seems to be determined to prove that *Textual Poachers* is wrong because she can demonstrate that certain ideals in slash originated within the text and not within the audience. That's representative of an either/or zero-sum game, in which if you can prove that material 'in' the text has made its way into fan readings, then you can argue that fans haven't appropriated or transformed the text in any way. I thought what I did in the stuff about how to reread a television show was to show, in fact, how fan genres grew out of openings or excesses within the text that were built on and stretched, and that it was not as if fans and texts were autonomous from each another; fans created their own, new

texts, but elements within the originating text defined, to some degree, what they could do.

Now, the later work that you're talking about, it seems to me, grows out of a shift in how texts are produced, circulated and consumed in an age of media convergence. Over the last decade we've seen more commercial production of intertexts, more commercial attempts to create programme history, character background, and embed it in a series, more serialisation of television, more ancillary products that are not simply secondary products but are central to the experience of the text, and more commercially created openings for participation and performance (which is essentially what I see Kurt Lancaster writing about). There is a degree to which what *Babylon 5* has produced is a space for performance. It's part of this dynamic of change that is taking place. It's also, of course, as you move online, a space where the boundaries change. Look at a situation like J. Michael Straczynski going online talking regularly to fans, and getting involved in flame-wars with fans; there the 'clear line' between producers and fans starts to look rather different. Or consider *The Sims*, where perhaps something like 60% of the content in the end will be generated by the audience; well, at that point, what happens to the notion of a 'text' that is commercially produced and 'resisted' by the audience? Instead, we have a situation where the audience has generated the 'text' through its direct participation.

MH: You're talking about a shift in terms of production, in terms of a proliferation of commercial intertexts. But could you not argue that if you tracked this back ten or twenty years, then there wouldn't have been quite so much in the way of commercially produced intertextual, secondary and tertiary material, but there *still* would have been media fandoms that were premised on fans creating their own texts around a set of 'originating' texts? So, where is the difference located – is it a difference of degree or scale, or are we actually talking about the commercial co-optation of fan practices, which is something that we might view in a negative light.

HJ: I don't see it as inherently negative. I think to some degree what's happening is a media industry being forced by an interactive age to become more accountable and more responsive to its audience than previously. We could read this as a case of audience resistance being co-opted into the commercial economy, or we could say the commercial economy is making certain adjustments to negotiate a space for an audience it wants to hold on to, at the risk of losing it altogether into the audience-produced text. I would tend to be more optimistic, as always – always an optimist! – so I tend to say that really some of what's happening is new kinds of accountability or responsiveness of the commercial text to the fans. Having said that, I think it still matters what is in the commercial product and what is in the grass roots or fan-produced product. It's important to hold on to some distinction because I think most fans operate with a distinction between the authority granted a textual producer and the tentativeness with which fan interpretation or fan fiction is greeted. There are occasions where that tentativeness gives way to moral outrage, in which fans will position their own views over that of the commercial producer. Those are interesting ruptures in the relationship, but I would say that much of the time there is a tendency to say 'it may be true if it's in a fan text, it *is* true if it's in a commercial text'.

That makes those moments where commercial producers pull viewer-generated meanings or products into the commercial text all the more important, because they are mucking about with the cultural hierarchies within the fan community, elevating some fans at the expense of others, authorising some meanings and

silencing others. This plays a role in authorising meanings that's very different to when fan productions are totally autonomous.

MH: That authorisation process is certainly played out in relation to *Star Trek*; Camille Bacon-Smith talks about this in her recent book *Science Fiction Culture* (2000), where she notes that Paramount would view the televised, canonical *Star Trek* as 'real', but as soon as you're talking about fiction, about original novels which might overlap with fan fiction (and where some professional writers will have come out of fandom) then those fictions are not assumed to be 'real'. If there is a contradiction between televised canon and the original novels then there's just no contest: what's on TV is what counts. So that cultural hierarchy based around 'authorisation' plays out quite well in relation to some franchises, but it works less clearly if you think about other cases.

Take *Doctor Who* for example (since it's something that I'm very familiar with). You have a situation now where certain fans have become infamous figures within the fan culture because they are the ones producing the new material. But this isn't fan fiction: it's officially-licensed books and licensed-by-the-BBC audio dramas available on CD (Big Finish audios). These commercial producers are the fans who have written for or edited *Doctor Who Magazine*, they are the fans that John Tulloch would describe as "executive fans", they are the people who ran the Doctor Who Appreciation Society.

There's a question here about what happens when the textual poachers turn textual gamekeepers. Yes, you could say that although these fans are producing a commercial product, that product has moved out into the peripheries in a way, and in fact it's moved into a niche fan market. But in making that move, it is still the fans who *are* the commercial producers. Would you see that as challenging the model of *Textual Poachers*, or is it a question of scale and of where fans can be located within different forms of media and commercial production?

HJ: I think it fundamentally asks us to rethink the relations between consumers, producers and texts.

I don't think late eighties, early nineties audience research that posits resistance as the dominant way of understanding how audiences relate to texts makes any sense at the current moment of media production and consumption. In fact those categories, the moral labels that are attached to the language of resistance, break down in a fundamental way as you get the ability of audiences not simply to appropriate texts in some marginalised space, but through a technology that allows you to post a website that comes up alongside the commercial site, or to talk back in a day-to-day dialogue with the media producer, or indeed to be recruited regularly into the ranks of the commercial.

It's interesting if we go back to the history of science fiction fandom, and we think about literary science fiction fandom, that that relationship was always there, in the sense that almost every major literary science fiction writer came from the ranks of fandom. That was the training and recruitment ground for the commercial industry. I would suggest the early phase of *Star Trek* fandom grew out of a misapprehension about how television was going to work, as if fans expected more responsiveness and accountability from the producer because they were used to a closeness that had come from literary science fiction fandom. And it's as if the fans continued to operate in a different commercial space but along the same principles. What's interesting is that over time the fans have actually won: they have created a media culture that is in some degree more responsive to their interests than it was previously and where the walls between the amateur and the commercial are more permeable than they were before.

Producers are becoming very savvy about this. Lucasfilm, in one of its many attempts to reformulate its fan relations policy, created a space where fans could post fan fiction, but the fan fiction became automatically the intellectual property of Lucasfilm. And fans resisted this in part because they wanted to hold onto their own intellectual property. Since so many fan writers went on to become commercial writers, trading their work for free could affect their ability to move into the commercial space.

MH: Was there dissent among fans about this Lucasfilm policy? Presumably some fans might have viewed the imprimature of Lucasfilms as somehow lending an authenticity and authorisation to their work, and they might have welcomed that status?

HJ: There were a whole range of positions. If you believe that Lucasfilms has absolute control over *Star Wars* intellectual property then in some sense it was unprecedented for them to reach out and bring these fans into the official text. It seemed a fair trade off to many fans to say 'well now I can no longer be prosecuted by Lucasfilms because I've been authorised. I have a new cultural authority because I've been authorised'. Whereas for others, it meant either sacrificing an argument they'd long made that their work was legal fair use of intellectual property, or giving up future revenue from stories that could otherwise move into the commercial economy to the commercial gain of the fan. So it's a very interesting debate, but it's one that suggests a current moment of real instability in the relations between the amateur and the commercial.

MH: There is the question of what this does to any stable sense of fan status, competence and knowledge within the eyes of the fan community. If I was a *Star Wars* fan who said 'yes, I'm happy for my work to be signed over to Lucasfilms', thinking that this would give my work authority and link me to the authorial 'source' in some way, then I might assume this would give me a greater status within the fandom. But then there's going to be a very vocal section of fandom who would view my actions as 'selling out'. This problematises the sense of a coherent set of fan skills or knowledges, or a definite sense of what fans are likely to valorise.

HJ: There's always been a division in fandom between those fans who value their proximity to the official producers and stars and those fans who value their distance. Both sides are there. If what your fandom is about is saying 'I know Gene Roddenberry or J. Michael Straczynski personally', which is a zero-sum - you can be closer or further away than someone else - then your fandom means one thing. If your fandom is 'I can create my own fantasies without regard to what the producers or stars want me to think', then this depends on distancing yourself from the official. You're staking a claim for the meaning of the text, but with no certainty over the authority that will be granted to you or whether your work will be taken seriously.

MH: Empirically, do you think that distinction corresponds to two actual, different groups of fans, or do you think any given, individual fan would draw upon both of those aspects, and might have to negotiate a sense of 'I want proximity but I want to pull back and have distance as well'?

HJ: I think there's a continuum; it's not an either/or. Many fans do feel drawn towards at least seeing the person in the flesh; there are some fans whose total interest is in access, and there are some fans who have total disdain for this, who won't go to a commercially run con and who couldn't care less about getting an autograph from a performer. And most fans probably fall somewhere in between,

where it's nice if you see the celebrity, but that's not what their life hinges on. Their own creative fantasies generated by the text, and in reaction to the text, are more important to them.

MH: If we're talking about a continuum, then we haven't got a sense of a single fan cultural hierarchy, have we?

HJ: Within that continuum there are often heated battles, so that someone who's more on the 'poacher' extreme might use the term 'Meegat' to refer to the people on the other extreme. Meegat was a character in *Blake's 7* who discovered the mythology that Blake and his crew had created and who worshipped Kerr Avon. Kerr Avon encounters this person who just sucks up to him constantly and treats him as a God and he is so turned off and repulsed by this figure... so that term got picked up in the *Blake's 7* fandom, and a Meegat was someone who just wanted to have access to Paul Darrow or Terry Nation. Each fandom has its own way of talking about that kind of person. But the division is an intensely felt one within the fan community, and I think it's having to renegotiate itself during this age of more participatory culture generated from the commercial sector.

The other thing we should talk about in terms of a blurring line is the degree to which commercial media is now producing its own fan fiction. The example I would point to is DC comics where they consciously rewrite the mythology of Batman or Superman in what we would call 'alternative universe' stories or 'genre-shifting stories' to use the language of *Textual Poachers*. DC had felt so strait-jacketed by existing continuity that they needed a way to create an alternative space to explore; this past month they released a Bizarro anthology where they hired 12 or 15 of the top, alternative, underground comics artists to write their versions of the Legion of Justice characters, and they're framed as if the character Bizarro-Superman, who is a character from the core mythology, is trying to create his own superhero comic but doesn't know what superhero comics are about. So these are famous fictions within continuity, but underground comics artists working for DC are able to tell radically different versions of the superhero mythologies.

This very elaborate framing is used to justify significant changes in the personalities of the superheroes. It creates its own space of the non-authoritative version of the story, which does some of what fans find pleasure in with fan fiction; in a sense it pluralises the text.

MH: That has been going on in recent *Trek* franchises, where you have a sense of particular characters being pluralised through different versions, or in *DS9* having a series of episodes based on the same mirror universe

HJ: Yes, you have moral reversals in the various 'Mirror, Mirror' alternative universe episodes of *Star Trek*, and you have the opportunity for genre-shifting in the Holodeck episodes. I think in fact that as *Trek* producers became more aware of fan fiction, and the existence of those genres within fan fiction, they brought that back into the series, so there's the episode in *DS9*, for example, where they go back and revisit the *Star Trek* episode 'Troubles with Tribbles'

MH: Yes, 'Trials and Tribble-ations'

HJ: So that that episode is a rewriting of 'Troubles with Tribbles' framed as an intervention by characters from another fictional universe; it's a cross-universe story...

MH: And it was marked and publicised as an anniversary episode, so it's given that sense of textual aura, of somehow being out of the ordinary.

HJ: When you see things like that it's very hard to look on fans as a 'powerless elite', to use John Tulloch's term, because they have actually created models for alternative story-telling that have fed back in a variety of ways to the commercially available text which has had to respond to their fantasies in order to stay on the air. So *Xena*, for example, pulls toward a slash reading of Xena and Gabrielle and makes it virtually explicit in the text. You can't watch the series without thinking of the producers playing this elaborate game in which they provide material they know will become raw material for slash stories on the web or the resources for fan debate and interpretation. And that is built in. And to some degree, the play with programme history and character back-story on these shows assumes an informational infrastructure that's provided by fans creating websites to talk about this stuff, such as web-based episode guides that are more thorough than the commercially-available ones. Independently, people are archiving the episodes, watching them more than once, being able to refer back to earlier moments, and informing each other about what the back-story is at any given moment of the text. The result is a televisual text much denser in narrative opportunities for fans than before; it has been designed to accommodate fan-fiction reading, not treat fan-fiction reading as some sort of opposition imposed on the text from the outside.

MH: Indeed; Sara Gwenllian Jones has written about many of these issues in relation to *Xena*. Do you not think there's an important difference between something being a parallel universe and something being subtextual? Interestingly, you're linking the science-fictional trope of parallel universes with *Xena's* subtext, but aren't there significant differences between the two? I'm assuming, of course, that you're prepared to accept the notion of 'subtext'.

HJ: Alex Doty is right in some sense that 'subtext' is a kind of patronising way to think about what's going on there, but there is a difference between something that is hinted at as being within the 'reality' of continuity versus something that is clearly framed as an alternative or 'fictive' version of that world. That's a distinction that is legitimate. *Xena* hints that there may really be some sexual relationship between Gabrielle and Xena, so it is actually part of the continuity or reality of *Xena*; DC's Bizarro work says this is clearly not the truth as we know it, but it's a fun way of thinking about the text. In the *Xena* example, subtext is maybe the wrong word, but it encourages fans to push to the next level and to read material in without rendering it explicit. It's a play with connotation, and hints at things that it daren't say yet.

Buffy's interesting because it goes all the way and says these things; it's taken Willow and instead of subtexting her, as it did in the earlier episode when she's a vampire-Willow and seems a little queer... the *doppelganger* thing gives way to her coming out, rendering explicit Willow's sexuality within the world of the text. This is something the text is still, to some degree, determining; it still has an authority to decide is this an explicit part of the text, is this a play with connotation, is this an alternative reality. Those choices are made by textual producers, and fans have to react, then, to the labelling of those moments to one degree or another, and they are always aware that they're reacting to explicit labelling of what those things mean.

MH: So it's a question of what the balance of power is, in a sense, or of what opportunities are given to the fans. You can complicate this further and further; *DS9* parallel universe stories were set in an alternative universe that, if you like, fans didn't have to believe in. But because that alternative universe was iterated

across a particular story-arc, it developed its own continuity; characters from the 'real' narrative universe would return to the mirror universe and events there would follow on from previous 'mirror universe' stories. So you start to develop something like a 'shadow continuity' which is somewhere in between 'fictive' universes and subtexts -

HJ: - Or the *Next Gen* business with Moriarty breaking out of the holodeck altogether and taking on a reality not in a fictive, alternative realm but in the world of the 'actual' Enterprise. You see, that's a whole lot of dynamism that's taking place within popular culture and some of it is brought about, as you said, from the recruitment of fans into the production of it, as well as through the emergence of someone like J. Michael Straczynski, who really was knowledgeable about fandom and its history and its practices, before he even began thinking about *Babylon 5*, and who courts the audience for *Babylon 5* aggressively at the concept level for two or three years before the programme even reaches the air. The fan community provides allies to help him get the programme approved, and to demonstrate that there's a market for a product that hasn't reached production yet.

MH: We were talking about the blurring of the lines between fans and producers in particular ways. The example you gave was about the roots of *Trek* fandom, and how *Trek* fandom had come out of literary sf fandom where fans had the expectation of interplay between fans and writers. While I can see how that particular development might have worked, I wonder if, as a narrative, it underplays something I would see as another real tension within fandom, which is the tension between literary and media sf fans.

HJ: Oh, absolutely.

MH: There's a real problem there in terms of a cultural hierarchy being established; certain forms of sf don't count as 'real' sf, or they are very much devalued, so I wonder to what extent we could say that *Star Trek* fandom took something from literary fandom, but at the same time ended up being opposed by literary sf fandom...

HJ: *Star Trek* fandom was born out of a traumatic break in the ranks of sf fandom. Literary sf fandom could not deal with the gender shift in its own population, and *Trek* fandom was born. If you look at it historically, it's at the moment that women writing literary sf are gaining critical mass and visibility; they're starting to go to science fiction cons and they're not comfortable there because it's been a boy's club for thirty or forty years. There's a lot of hostility to those women, a lot of argument that Joanna Russ and Ursula Le Guin aren't writing real science fiction. The 'hard/soft' sf split takes place, and it's at that moment that *Star Trek* emerges as a series that offers a foothold for female fans to insert themselves into the science fiction realm, because there are at least professional women in the series. However flawed it may seem to us today, there was an assertion of professional competency there that women gravitated to. If you look at the early organisers of the *Star Trek* letter-writing campaign they're always women, like Bjo Trimble, who themselves had been literary science fiction fans but felt in some sense expelled from that realm.

There are terminology wars that still rage today; the term 'Trekkie' did not originate in the *Star Trek* fan community, it was a term applied by literary sf fans to these women who were now attracted to television, and it was an exercise in cultural hierarchy. A Trekkie is like a 'groupie' – the idea of the 'Trekkie' is someone who wanted to tear clothes off Leonard Nimoy like female fans wanted to tear clothes off The Beatles. But the female *Trek* fans immediately said 'no,

we don't want to do that, we're interested in a fictional universe and we want to be part of Trek culture, and so we're Trekkers *not* Trekkies.' So that battle erupted in terminology, and the journalistic community gravitated toward the more derogatory term that could be traced back to the literary sf fans. That's why that term took root, and only recently has a more active vision of fandom displaced it – now we see fewer and fewer articles that use the term 'Trekkie', and more and more of them using the word 'Trekker'.

MH: Routledge almost used the word 'Trekkie' in the catalogue copy for *Fan Cultures*; in the first draft written by the publishers they referred to 'Trekkies'.

HJ: That keeps on coming back. The original publicity fliers for *Textual Poachers*, which were released without my looking at them, included a line about William Shatner telling *Trekkies* to 'get a life'. I was so angry I called up Routledge and left this blistering message in which I said, 'if this was a book in African-American studies would you promote it by saying 'George Wallace tells niggers to 'get a life'?... [laughs] The answer to that, by the way, is clearly 'no'! Trekkie is such a negative, inflaming word to my generation of fans; I see fire every time it's used in relation to my work. Despite the fact that I break it down systematically, multiple times, in my writing, still, about the half the time writers who write about *Textual Poachers* use the word 'Trekkie', and the rest of them describe the book as being about *Trek* fans despite the fact that it's about all sorts of media fans.

MH: Isn't that partially the fault of the book's cover? Isn't it the cover that cues that reading?

HJ: That, and the fact that the first thing I wrote was '*Star Trek* Rerun, Reread, Rewritten'. In *Science Fiction Audiences* (1995) I tried to clarify the situation by saying, look, there are multiple fan communities around *Trek*. *Poachers* is neither an adequate account of all *Trek* fans, nor is it about *Trek* fans to the exclusion of other kinds of fans. It's about a particular fan culture that's nomadic and cuts across media. It was never intended as a unified theory of fandom to begin with, even though it was read in that way. So it's kind of an odd little position between a unified theory of fandom and an account of *Trek* fans. It's neither of those; it's an account of a specific set of subcultural practices that straddle multiple texts. I don't think I've read more than a couple of accounts of the book that come anywhere close to getting right what the book is actually talking about. And the 'Trekkie' term keeps returning, despite the fact that I swat it all over the map in the book!

MH: In terms of cultural context, you could consider what structures or pre-structures academic 'misreadings' of *Textual Poachers*. Perhaps there are different sets of readers who would read it as '*the* theory of fandom', or people who would read it as being about *Trek* fans – there are at least two specific misreadings that you could try to track... Or maybe these aren't 'misreadings', and instead they are other academics 'poaching' from the text?

HJ: I accept that people will read the book for their own purposes and in their own ways. It's when they apply terms that I find actively offensive, and have said so, that it becomes an act of rudeness rather than an act of appropriation. It's also, I think, part of a larger problem where we are invested, for a variety of ideological reasons, in the notion of consumers as passive. And it keeps coming back in multiple, disguised ways even if we're discussing participation and interactivity. So for example, if we talk about interactive new technologies in contrast to old 'passive' media technologies then television is reinscribed as having passive consumers in order to celebrate the computer as more

participatory or interactive. There's an anxiety here. Manuel Castells talks about, in the future, there being two audiences: the interacting and the interacted. One of them is passive and the other is participatory. He still holds onto the notion of the passive spectator even when he's theorising an active spectator or an interactive culture.

It's a problem, I think, for the field: we need, to some degree, an audience that shuts up so that we can tell them what a text means! [both laugh] This is the academic privilege: we assert ourselves in the middle of this relationship between texts, producers and audiences, and in order to define our own role we have a need, I think, to keep silencing the audience in some way, or to marginalise it, trivialise it, even when we're talking about it as active.

On the politics of fan studies...

MH: The next topic that I want to raise involves a quote from *Perverse Spectators*, by Janet Staiger:

"While most studies of fans emphasise the positive features of exchange and empowerment deriving from interests in often marginal objects of pleasure, I would point out that scholars may need to shift their presumptions even here – although not back to the days when fans were considered pathological spectators. Without going that far, I would argue that some fans and fan communities might benefit from more critical social theory... Fandom... cannot be easily bifurcated into good and bad; the historian's responsibility is adequate description and thoughtful evaluation." (Staiger 2000:54)

This is a quote that really struck me. I suppose it speaks to what I'm trying to do in *Fan Cultures*. I find Staiger's statement rather contradictory, but perhaps that's also why I find it so compelling: she seems to argue that fandom can't be divided up into the 'good object' and the 'bad object', into 'good' fan appropriation and 'bad' fan complicity, but at the same time as challenging this moral dualism, there is an investment in the 'critical' which seems to be completely *about* reinstating the authority to divide fandom into aspects to be applauded and aspects to be criticised. Can we, or should we, be 'critical'? And if so, what fan practices and fan communities are we going to be critical of?

HJ: This is a tricky space that I think we're all struggling with right now. When I write – having come out of a certain generation of academics – I still feel an enormous pressure to somehow say 'is this progressive or is this reactionary?' There's an anxiety over saying 'this *is...*', this is the reality we're living in. It's probably both progressive and reactionary in some ways, both good and bad, but the need to declare yourself definitively at some point in the text is something that you have in the back of your mind when you write within a discipline like cultural studies, which was born out of political resistance at a particular historical moment and which has been shaped by Marxist discourse, which is itself a moral discourse as much as a political and economic one. One always has a fear of not being sufficiently political when you operate within cultural studies. It defined itself as a field around a category of 'the political'...

MH: But a highly moralised sense of 'the political'; so to be 'political' was inherently good, almost, whereas if something 'lacked' politics... well, 'apolitical' is always going to be an insult.

HJ: I think it was Lawrence Grossberg who said 'if writing about popular culture isn't political then what good is it?' My answer is that there are plenty of things you can say about popular culture that aren't motivated purely from a political or moralistic stance...

For example, I think fan studies hasn't sufficiently acknowledged divisions within fan culture itself. A couple of recent writers, yourself included, have started to push on the notion of fandom as one big happy family, and really look at disputes, disagreements, factions, and hierarchies within fandom – whatever its ideals of itself, which I think are a legitimate thing that I talked about in *Textual Poachers*. The 'weekend-only' sort of notion that I talk about in *Poachers* is a very real set of ideals, and to some degree fan culture lives up to those ideals. But to ignore the degree to which there are internal disputes or exercises of power within fandom is not to do justice to fandom as a living community, but to turn it instead into some sort of myth for our own utopian imagination. So I think that's a problem that comes out of writing about popular culture from a political or moralistic stance.

MH: But I suppose you could say that was a necessary or inevitable problem, given where cultural studies had come from. And I think some of the readings of *Textual Poachers* testify to that inevitability, in terms of there being certain academic 'interpretative communities' in play. Even though you accept that you are not just celebrating fandom, especially in *Science Fiction Audiences*, but also in *Textual Poachers*, if you look at textbook coverage of your work, you are constantly being accused of being too celebratory.

HJ: Well, you know, it's because I don't call fans 'twits' and 'anoraks' that for some people...

MH: - you must be being too celebratory!

HJ: One of the reviewers early on said '*Textual Poachers* exaggerates the amount of power that fans actually have'. And I kept rereading the book and thinking, well, I've said that letter-writing campaigns don't work, I've said that these fans are marginalised and dismissed by the producers, and I've said that fans have the ability to shape their own fantasies and create their own texts – is that too much power to ascribe to fans? But because it was acknowledging *any* power it was read as acknowledging too much power.

Fan studies: The Next Generation?

HJ: I think we need to consider different generations of scholars within fandom, and moments within which those scholars are working. I think there are at least three moments of fan studies that get conflated together as if they are a unified body of theory. There is a body of work that began to stress active audiences and the use of ethnographic methods, derived in part from sociological methods, and I would put early John Tulloch, John Fiske and Janice Radway in this body of work – they come from different places and so I don't want to lump them together as representing one totally unified body of work.

But it was important for these writers to be outside what they were writing about, to be free of any direct implication in their subject matter. They begin to acknowledge that audiences have an active role, but their prose is very depersonalised, there's often no acknowledgement of any affection they feel for the objects of study, or if there is, it's a token gesture. And there's sometimes an attempt to pull back from the fan community at the end of such writing and say, right, now we can arrive at the truth that the fans don't yet recognise about their own political activity. I've taken Radway to task for the closing chapter of *Reading the Romance* for that kind of gesture. That's the first generation.

I see myself and others writing at the same time, Camille [Bacon-Smith] to some degree, as a second generation that comes to a discourse already formulated around these axes of active/passive, resistance/co-opted. We're trying to find a way to alter that perception based on insider knowledge of what it is to be a fan, and struggling to find a language to articulate a different perspective that comes out of lived experience and situated knowledge. And it proves very difficult – there's a lot of resistance because the first generation are the readers responding to our manuscripts, the editors deciding whether they get published or not, the faculty deciding whether we get hired. So you end up struggling to negotiate between what you want to say, and what it's possible to say at a particular point in time, in order to get your work out at all. And there is a level of defensiveness there. When I was writing *Poachers* I was so frustrated by how badly fans had been written about. As a fan I felt implicated in that writing and I wanted to challenge it; there are passages in the book that are just out-and-out defences of fandom, and others that are trying to pull back and describe, analyse, critique. By the time of *Science Fiction Audiences* (1995) the need to defend is no longer present. At that point you can write securely and you can then begin to look at fandom in a different way.

Now, I think all of that work paved the way for a whole generation of aca-fen, as I like to call them; that is, people who are both academics and fans, for whom those identities are not problematic to mix and combine, and who are able then to write in a more open way about their experience of fandom without the 'obligation of defensiveness', without the need to defend the community. Therefore they can take up things like contradictions within it, disputes within it, re-raise awkward subjects that we papered over in our earlier accounts, and now there's a freedom to have real debate among ourselves about some of these core issues.

And so something like *Intensities* to my mind represents the establishment of a generation that is now arriving - that I think you represent very well - that has taken for granted for your entire academic career that it's legitimate to write sympathetically about fans, and now can ask a different set of questions, including going back and batting us around a bit for the things we didn't say. But you've got to recognise that these things weren't said in a historical context, or rather there was a historical context that made it difficult to say certain things. As it was, *Lingua Franca* took Constance Penley and I to task for even saying that we were fans at all, and said we had to be lying, said that this was a typical example of academics slumming it and wanting to be 'one of the people'. Well, it wasn't slumming it; I'd lived my entire life as a fan. I could be accused of putting on airs by becoming an academic, but I scarcely could be accused of slumming it.

MH: Constance Penley is equally taken to task in a piece by Richard Burt that I cite in *Fan Cultures*. Burt accuses her work of displaying a particular fantasy, the fantasy of being able to 'have it all', which is that the academic-fan can somehow occupy, without tensions or power relations, the position of being their own

object of study. That kind of critique still lingers in a particular way, and perhaps it still has some force too.

HJ: Your own focus on fans-as-intellectuals in *Fan Cultures* points to one way out of that problem, which is to recognise that a lot of fans carry a large amount of intellectual capital around with them. They are very good critics; they are very good theorists. Thomas McLaughlin's notion of 'vernacular theory' which says theory-production doesn't just reside in the academy, it takes place in all these other sites, is a helpful way into that, although it still tends to hold onto an 'academic' versus 'vernacular' theory separation, whereas I would say that academic theory-production is simply one subcultural or institutional practice among many. It doesn't need to be separated out from those other kinds of theory, it has its own language, its own goals, its own systems of circulation, and fans are inevitably locked out of that, but many of them are trained academics, librarians or teachers, many of them decided consciously not to become academics having had some exposure to academic knowledge, and many of them are professionals in other sectors. To say that they don't have intellectual capital is a bizarre statement. And I think your stuff talks really nicely about fans as critics or fans as intellectuals, and we need to pay more attention to that.

MH: I'm hoping that we might start a few Ph.D. projects at Cardiff based around exploring the role of fan-intellectuals. There's a real need to find those people who would have access to fan and academic cultural spaces, and to get the histories of fan-scholarship written; let's treat fan scholarship with the same respect and close reading that we would give to 'official' academic work. One of my hopes is that the generation I might be linked to - although I'm not sure that I would represent it in any way - will be able to re-open work on fandom that remains undone. Admittedly fan-scholars represent one fraction of fan culture, and possibly a marginalised fraction of fan culture, but even this would pose interesting questions for the fact that we tend to assume that academic knowledge is 'superior' knowledge, yet within fan cultures it may well be devalued, or even sneered at, which would challenge our own sense of centrality or cultural hierarchy.

HJ: That was something that I tried to get at in an essay that I did with Shoshanna Green and Cynthia Jenkins, 'Normal Female Interest in Men Bonking' (1998). We tried to reproduce slash fans' theorising of their own practice, which met with some resistance with its readers [pre-publication academic reviewers of the chapter – MH]. They couldn't accept the idea that there was any legitimacy in seeing how fans actually theorise their own practice, even though we would take for granted the fact that an avant-garde artist's manifesto is a way of at least partially understanding the work that they produce. But the web particularly seems to call attention to the role of fan-academics in publications like *Whoosh!* in *Xena* fandom or *Slayage* in *Buffy* fandom. And individual fan sites have side-by-side postings of works of academic theory and criticism, journalistic accounts, and the writings of fan intellectuals. There may or may not be a labelling of levels of knowledge-production when fans bring these together on their sites. This is all part of a larger conversation about the nature of the different knowledges involved.

Turning to the gaming world, some place like Joystick 101 has proven to be a collaboration between industry people, gamers and academics who are interested in the development of game studies. Their agendas co-exist in the same site, and they are working together to build a site that critiques and examines the emergence of game culture.

MH: If there is a particular cohesiveness there, and a particular coalition, then do you think that that could be produced out of a shared sense of the particular cultural artefact – the video game – being widely culturally devalued? It's as if the fact that the video game is so culturally marked pushes otherwise disparate groups defensively together. Perhaps something similar could have happened at a certain moment in relation to work on fandom – but it didn't. It hasn't happened there.

HJ: We could have had it, but the problem was that institutionally the academy wasn't ready to accept a non-academic intellectual, and technologically we didn't have the same level of resources to provoke and support dialogue between communities as we have in the web environment. When I wrote *Poachers* I did, to some degree, seek fan feedback: I mailed copies of every chapter out to fans and got their feedback, and I have a huge folder of letters filled with often very detailed critiques of *Poachers*, but there was no public space where that debate could take place. It might happen at a fan club meeting that I wasn't invited to, but there was otherwise no way, because of the technologies available at the time...

MH: In what sense did you feel you were able to really address various fan critiques?

HJ: I tried. I did my best. A lot of revisions took place. There was a significant amount of change between a first draft and a second draft as I wrote through and responded to those critiques. What I regret now is that I rendered a lot of that invisible. It would have been much more interesting to integrate the back-and-forth dialogue within the text itself, but there are only a couple of places where I acknowledge that process. Since then I've really looked at how to create a dialogic text that reflects a plurality of voices, and 'Normal Female Interest in Men Bonking' (1998) was a model of a dialogic text, and yes, I do have a piece in there because I was part of the fan community that I was drawing on, but I don't label it as somehow distinct from the other fan voices there.

MH: I refer to that essay in *Fan Cultures*, and I think it's very strong. For me, it's one of the pieces that really starts to open up the question of 'fan' versus 'academic' knowledge.

HJ: It's not auto-ethnography, in a sense it's simply an outing, an exposure of myself in my normal fan activity, since I never wrote that piece with the intent of it seeing academic publication. It had existed in fandom as a part of my intervention in fan debates. The other two editors of the piece agreed that each of us should include passages of our own fan discourse, and I let them choose among the things I had written. So I gave up a certain degree of control over my own discourse in order for that to work out.

Now, that's not without problems. One of the responses to that piece in fandom was that fans wanted me to adjudicate disputes between fans, because I introduce a lot of fan disputes in the piece but I don't comment on them, and I don't take sides. And almost all the fans wanted me to side with them over the other side, and they assumed that if I had presented a more authoritative version of the debate, and it wasn't dialogic, then I would have sided with them! By being dialogic and open then somehow I was seen as giving too much space to the opposed view in the dispute...

MH: So there's some desire there, within the fan community, for an 'authoritative' position that can close down particularly contentious or fierce debates? That implies that it's not only within academia that open debate may

be difficult, and also that academic 'authority' may continue to have a certain cachet outside the academy.

HJ: As an academic you speak with a certain degree of authority. I can't be a normal fan anymore, not because I've somehow distanced myself from fandom, but because I'll walk in the room and the response is different. When passages of your book are used as signature lines on peoples' emails, and when fan websites describe Henry Jenkins as 'the guy who dignified fandom' then these sorts of statements make it very hard for me to speak without it in some sense carrying a level of authority that I'm uncomfortable with. It's not what I want the relationship to be between fans and academics, but because the press calls on me as a spokesman for the fan community week-in, week-out, my role gets communally reinscribed in journalistic practices, and because *Textual Poachers* has now been passed from generation to generation of fans, it's one of the things you read when you want to be integrated into the fan community. They say, 'you want to be a fan? Read this...' It's become a sort of 'how to' book.

MH: So now it has become of the 'initiation process' that you actually describe in *Textual Poachers*!

HJ: That's really tricky to know what to do with. There are T-shirts which have the cover of *Textual Poachers* on them which circulate in the fan economy, and the work of that artist, Jean Kluge, went up in value within the art hierarchy of fandom because it was associated with the book. She became a more valuable fan artist as a result of that. So you can't go in and totally shed academic authority, which is so ironic to me; I'd been involved in the fan community for a long time, and I was just leaving graduate school when I wrote *Textual Poachers*. In the academic world I was truly puny; I was not yet a heavy-weight by any stretch of the imagination, so that this book carried the authority it did was a little disarming.

I saw myself as an agent of dialogue. But it's not just academics who police this dialogue. The fan community has an investment in academic authority on one level, and yet, as you suggest, other fans say 'sod off, don't bring this language into our space, you making too much of things that don't matter', and there's a resistance, an anti-intellectualism in some fan circles that equally makes it hard to create that kind of dialogue. We all bring our own baggage to that conversation, which is to say that the identities of the fan-academic or the academic-fan are always problematic ones that have to be sorted through, even though I think there's more freedom to shed that issue today.

MH: There's no utopian solution to that problem; there are still cultural contexts that work to constrain and enable dialogue and fan-academic hybridity, with 'constrain' being a key part of that process.

HJ: For example, we're having this discussion at 'Console-ing Passions', and I would say that two thirds of the papers at the conference were delivered by fans of the medium they were discussing. Many of them were actively involved with fan communities, and very few of them felt the need to overtly declare that allegiance because it was taken for granted in the tone of the language, the types of information they mobilised, and the way they dressed and embodied themselves. A generation of academic-fans have taken over the academy, and so there's certainly not the problematic relationship between fandom and the academy that there was when Constance Penley and I first outed ourselves as fans within the academy, and when most of the other academic-fans were closeted, and many of them had gone from being buffs to being movie scholars and had sought to shed the baggage of buffery in order to gain academic

authority and dignity. What our generation did was dismantle some of that to create a space of comfort between fan and academic.

I've tried in some recent academic gatherings to integrate fan speakers into the programme. This includes inviting film-makers to speak at a digital cinema conference at MIT. I'm about to organise a screening of fan cinema at the Walker Art Museum in Minneapolis and hopefully have some of the film-makers there to speak about their work. I'm interested in finding ways to bring these communities together, but it's tricky.

MH: At those events, do you get a sense of the different interpretive positions, and the different investments that people are bringing to bear?

HJ: You can. It works nicely *if* you can make it work. I think I'm probably well situated to create a tone that's not exoticising, but I always worry about people coming to gawk at the fans 'on display' as they perform fandom for an audience of non-fan outsiders. One of the things I worry about with the Walker screening is whether fans will simply be absorbed into an avant-garde artists discourse which will do damage to the fan culture.

MH: So that is a very specific way in which you're getting fandom 'inside' the academy...

HJ: Yes, it assimilates them to a different space altogether; the fans may look a lot like avant-garde artists, especially postmodernist avant-garde artists who appropriate and transform, and play with cultural imagery – there's a blurring of the line there in the art world. But we still need to hold on to the specificity of what fandom is, because often avant-garde appropriations of culture are distanced, ironic, you know, they don't have the passion and the melodrama that shapes fan appropriations of those same things.

Consider Mark Dery's piece on culture-jammers; it takes slash and reads it as an antagonistic relationship of consumers to mass media, and folds it into culture-jamming and ad-busting as a series of oppositional practices, without having any knowledge of the very different economies of desire and passion that shape an ad-buster and a slash fan. That's what happens when fandom gets totally pulled to the avant-garde side. I think one of the problems for postmodern theory in general is that postmodern theory started with artists who saw pop culture as kitsch and then this was read onto pop culture and pop culture consumers who don't necessarily experience those same formal practices with that same overall agenda. In some ways, postmodern theory is also talking about the implosion of meaning and the flattening of affect and so forth when it is describing works that have dense grids of meaning and where to speak of affect being flattened just makes no sense. The level at which people engage with *Blade Runner*, for example, is about anything other than a flattening of affect.

MH: And yet that Frederic Jameson quote has been very influential; if you wanted a key soundbite to characterise that particular moment of postmodern thought, that would be one of them.

HJ: And that comes from taking high cultural categories and imposing them on popular culture, and assuming the same affective economy surrounds each. So the problem I worry about if I'm turning fans into artists in an art museum, is that to some degree that is a troubling blurring. There are important distinctions to make between those categories.

It's almost as if I need fans still to be a scandalous category, although I don't think fans are a scandalous category anymore. In order to force the art world or the academy to think outside of their normal patterns you need scandal – you need scandal to shake things up, to destabilise existing modes of thought and force them to see something different here that represents an alternative to our own practices. And following your arguments in *Fan Cultures*, you may describe that as 'using fandom'; I see it as expanding the influence of fandom by forcing other institutions to respond to the alternative model represented by the fan community. But I think you need a scandal to shake things up.

The other side to that is that a lot of time I have to deal with processes of normalisation, because I'm dealing with studios now, and I'm getting consulted by legal departments that think about fan relationships, and I have to explain and naturalise fan relationships in terms of larger trends in the information economy that require the studios to be more responsive to their consumers rather than seeing them as weirdos that it wants to shut up. And at that point you want fans *not* to be scandalous category, you want them to represent a routine way in which people, in an age of interactive media, relate to the media content that comes into their world.

MH: So the naturalisation *and* the making-scandalous of fans for different cultural groups, or for different audiences?

HJ: I don't mean to ascribe to myself the power to decide that, but to some degree through the discourse you use, and how you present it, you play different roles at different moments in terms of negotiating a cultural space. A larger goal is the recognition of fan accomplishments, a desire to create an industry that is more responsive to consumers and more open to the diversity represented by grass roots reception. How you achieve those goals differs depending on particular institutional moments and tactical choices you make at particular points in time. I guess I'm being De Certeauian, to think always in terms of tactics, you know, and making choices on a local level based on the context in which the choice is being made, and mobilising what you need to in order to achieve the result you need. Now that's not about, ultimately, a search for truth in any larger sense, because truth implies somehow a removal from those contexts. 'Truth' is a strategy, it's not a tactic. Truth is a totalising claim. And I'm not sure anything that I've ever written about fandom arrives at 'the Truth'.

MH: But can't truth with a small 't' be used itself as part of a tactic, in terms of generating authority or challenging practices?

HJ: You want to feel authenticity, for example, which is a variation of 'the truth'. You want to say 'I am a fan and I know this, or this is what fans do', and that's a claim about the authentic. But for me that's always a provisional claim. I want to be responsible to the community and accurate in what I observe, but I'm never under any illusion that any given statement sums up the totality of truth for that particular community.

MH: Do you think that the appeal to authenticity has a similar affective charge to the need for scandal within academic subcultures? It's almost as if we need the scandalous side of things to shake thought up, but we need to bid for authenticity somehow as well, even while we'll happily critique other subcultures for their belief in particular forms of authenticity! A lot of subcultural theory states that one of the 'problems' with subcultures is their construction of authenticity. It suggests that we, as academics, can deconstruct that, but somehow we're not above the argument – don't we have a sense of academic subcultural authenticity locked into our own bids to open up spaces?

HJ: When I first starting saying at academics gatherings, 'I'm a fan', I felt a bit like Davy Crockett waltzing into the US senate dressed in buckskin [laughs] - "I'm a real frontiersman". There's a sense in which I'm embodying this community that I'm writing about, but it's nevertheless the case that it becomes a myth the minute you assert it in a particular space; it's a mythic identity as well as a lived identity, and its shock value comes from the assertion of something that was unspeakable at a certain point in time.

MH: So at a certain moment authenticity and scandal interlock, and that's a productive, tactical exercise?

HJ: Yes, and I think that *Textual Poachers* was written at a moment when those two things were interwoven. That is, to be true to my experience of the fans was to produce at least a small-scale scandal.

The result was that most of the early reviews projected onto me whatever remaining stereotypes of fandom I'd not successfully dismantled. So I was described as 'blowing it out of proportion', 'not separating myth from reality', 'being preoccupied with trivia'. All of these things that are *cliches* about fans got projected onto the book. Having asserted that I was a fan, reviewers could either say that I was wrong about fans, or they could assert that I was exactly what *they* thought a fan was!

MH: To me, that is an example of 'good sense' not operating within academic discourse; it's a case of pure 'common sense'. Those critiques were not based on the mobilising of any kind of academic identity. They may have been enacted through academic discourse and its systems of circulation, but they were effectively about academics drawing on their common sense ideas of fandom.

HJ: Right. They were an emotional reaction that had little to do with academic expertise and everything to do with the common sense circulation of stereotypes.

Fandom and/as religion? The power of the metaphor...

MH: I've come armed with another quote that I use in *Fan Cultures*. I thought it might initiate discussion. It's from David Giles's *Illusions of Immortality* (2000), which has a chapter on fans and stalkers; 'fans and stalkers' as a chapter title, perhaps that's a problem in terms of fan stereotypes! Anyway, Giles says:

"Henry Jenkins reports some research conducted by Jewett and Lawrence on what was then a recent emergence of *Star Trek* fans. The researchers concluded that this was 'a strange electronic religion in the making', and that the publications of the group were 'written in the spirit of... religious devotion'. For Jenkins this is a typically 'pathologizing' and 'absurdly literal' account of fandom by academics, but... [t]here is nothing intrinsically pathologizing about comparing media fans to religious devotees, since in both instances the roots of devotion are remarkably similar, and the texts produced by *Star Trek* fans... are not unlike the religious texts of the Middle Ages, which had a similar degree of reinterpretation (of, say, the Gospels) and turned the authors and translators into famous figures" (Giles 2000: 135)

Giles basically revisits your critique of the Jewett and Lawrence *American Monomyth* piece and although his work seems to dehistoricise or ahistoricise fandom, he asks a useful question: how can we assume that it is *intrinsically* pathologizing to compare media fans to religious devotees?

HJ: We have somewhat different views about the value of the religion analogy, although I notice that you back off from it a bit in the book –

MH: [laughing] Oh, you noticed that!

HJ: - which I have to say is salutary [laughs], but my reservations about it are, I guess, rooted in the word 'fan' itself. It goes back to 'fanaticus', that is, from the very beginning it referred to false and excessive worship.

MH: Although have you noted that there is a variant etymology? It's put forward in Daniel Cavicchi's excellent book on Bruce Springsteen fans. Cavicchi suggests that 'fan' comes from 'fancy' which was to do with people who were interested in boxing if I remember rightly...

HJ: I think the meaning of 'fanaticus' surrounded fans as a scandalous category from the very beginning, so whether 'fan' came from 'fanaticus' or 'fancy' doesn't really matter because the connotation of excessive worship is still stuck to 'fan' in a certain way. It's very hard, as an academic, to make a religious analogy that doesn't invoke that notion of false worship. For me it's particularly troubling because to my mind the defining basis of religion is belief or faith. And to some degree that has to be grounded in some literalisation, so for me the difference between a religion and a mythology is that a mythology can articulate a set of ethical or moral values through stories, and people are deeply invested in those stories. They retell them, they recirculate them, they see them as revealing some deeper truth about human experience. But they don't necessarily believe them to be true. They believe them to be fabricated as an encapsulation of certain sets of values. And I believe cult texts can function as a mythology in that sense. As a religion you bring back in this notion of literal belief, and it implies that fans are unable to separate fiction from reality, or that they supposedly act on the text as if it were literally true. That's what I find troubling in the use of the word 'religion'. I respect religions as exercises of faith and belief, and I wouldn't elevate fandom to the level of a religion. Nor would I denigrate fans for having false beliefs, because it's not about belief, it's about ethics and about narrative that encapsulates shared values.

MH: I absolutely see the distinction that you're making there. I have two initial responses to it. One would be that you talk about 'faith' and 'literal belief', but it's the 'literal belief' that is actually the marker of difference between a religion and a mythology. Fans could still have some kind of faith in a particular version of the narrative universe that they're invested in, or the characters that they're invested in. There is still some kind of relationship there that implies a significant 'faith'...

HJ: But to be part of a mythology you are expressing a faith that these values are good, these stories contain something of value, but that's different from saying these stories are true. That's the distinction I'm getting at. To some degree it depends on where your model of religion comes from. The fact that I was raised a Southern Baptist and so was brought up with fundamentalism leaves me with the sense that religion is about a literal truth. If I was born in a different faith that saw biblical stories as human attempts to grasp God and as always inadequate to the divine truth, say – a different theological model – then *Star Trek* might start to feel more like a religion to me, although I still don't think that

fans elevate the truths there to that level. There is still not the notion of a hierarchy of the divine or the numinous that's part of religious practice.

MH: This leads into my second point. You're talking about a faith in values, and the values are in the stories. What's so important about fandom, surely, is that, yes, we can believe in certain values, but we could find those values in any number of different stories in our culture. What's important to fans, however, is that these values are found in a *very* specific set of texts, which implies in a sense that these texts are elevated, that they *are* numinous. These texts hold the fans' attention in a certain way; they compel fan attention, and therefore the faith that the fan would feel in a certain narrative universe is very much fixed on that universe.

HJ: Except that it's not an exclusive relationship. Insofar as fans are nomadic and can share multiple texts as deeply meaningful to them, there is a flexibility to mix-and-match those universes that religions don't enjoy. I can't be a Muslim and a Jew at the same time; there is an exclusiveness about the commitment of a religion, but I can be a *Blake's 7* fan and a *Babylon 5* fan and a *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* fan and a *Survivor* fan all at the same moment. I'm not being disloyal to one in order to express a commitment to the others.

MH: Although we could both be fans of multiple texts, if you were pushed, would you not still say that one of those texts you would elevate above the others, or hold in higher esteem?

HJ: No; I'm a total media slut! [laughs] I'm absolutely promiscuous, and I don't rate my lays; I have passions and commitments to different works and they satisfy me deeply in the moment that I'm engaged with them, but I don't have any hierarchical or 'monogamous' relationship to texts. I'm not ranking *Babylon 5* in relation to *Buffy*. At any given time I may feel slightly more passionate about one or the other –

MH: I'm not saying that you would rank them, I'm saying that you'd have a sense of one text being more significant to your fan identity, and mattering more to you, to use Grossberg's idea of a 'mattering map'...

HJ: Certainly I could map these texts mattering to me, in your terms, but it would not be an exclusive mapping, it would be a cluster of things that I really got deeply involved with, another that I watched regularly, another that I was curious about and watched when I thought of it; there would be layers like that, but there would not be, at the top, a single true faith in the sense that one would feel an allegiance to a religion. So there, again, I think the analogy breaks down.

The other problem is that people use religion as a metaphor to refer to the social practices to fandom; this is a community that people belong to and which articulates shared values and beliefs. In that sense I don't see why the metaphor should be a religion any more than it could be a union or a political party or a social club or a fraternity, any number of which serve that same social function of being a community that articulates values and shared affect. None of those are adequate to what fandom is, but fandom is simply one form of social affiliation alongside others. And in order to make the religion analogy you erase all those other kinds of social affiliations from the map and say 'let's look at religion, let's look at fandom; they have this in common, that people meet their partners there, both are passed from generation to generation, there's an emotional bond there' –

MH: There are a number of overlaps then.

HJ: There are overlaps, but only when you render all these other potential categories invisible can you say 'oh, that's an absolute fit'. There are more differences between fandom and religion than there are similarities, and the similarities extend to any social organisation that serves multiple functions in the lives of its members, and becomes a site of meaning and emotion.

MH: It's worth pointing out that in my own work I don't use the term 'religion'; I try to mark a distinction between 'religion' as an organised social group and 'religiosity' as an impulse toward meaning and affect. So yes, I do back off from making that absolutely literal connection between fandom and religion. One of the phrases that I seem to have arrived at is that fandom is about religiosity and not religion. There is some kind of impulse which might be about a kind of individualised search for meaning – which doesn't mean that we're taking the individual as a starting point or a final point in analysis, since we are individualised within culture in certain ways. I'm suggesting that there is a culturally-contextualised individual search for some kind of authenticity, connection, and meaning beyond the purely semiotic. This shift to religiosity rather than religion is discussed in the sociology of religion, and this might allow us to think about the voluntaristic ways in which fandom emerges but then forms very tightly-knit communities around something. It's only following on from that emergence that there are 'initiation rites' or 'scriptures', or whatever the metaphors would be.

So, there are two points here: do you see the same problems you've already carefully elaborated around 'religion' still holding for 'religiosity'? And what sense could you make of fans who *themselves* draw on religious discourses to try to make sense of the notion that fandom is about more than just words, and about more than the semiotic? Because if we're in such an affective space then perhaps we look around for discourses to try to validate that experience. Otherwise how do you communicate to somebody that you're not mad? Using discourses of religiosity within fandom might actually be part of a fan's performance of an appropriate fan identity that says 'I know you can't understand the intensity of my interest in this text, so think of it as this', assuming that religiosity and religion could be viewed as having some kind of cultural validity. How would you approach either fan religiosity or the fan appropriation of discourses of religiosity and religion?

HJ: I think the two questions are closely bound up with each other. I get your point about the distinction between religion and religiosity, and I like religiosity better, but I still fret over it because of its strong connections back to religion. I might hold onto it to make some distinctions within different kinds of fan relationships to texts. I think lots of times fans, you're right, use metaphors from religion, or sometimes from addiction, to refer to intense emotional experiences of texts that our culture doesn't give them an adequate vocabulary to talk about. And it is when our sense-making framings break down that we fall on other things that we do blindly, or that are about a loss of control or a respect for a higher authority, or a compulsion or so forth.

The language is there. The question is, how would we read it? I think it has to be situated; in many cases it's used with laughter following it, or with people consciously putting quotes around it; it's framed as hyperbole; it's framed as excess; it's framed as an inadequate way of describing what's going on, but the best available word at the time.

Other times there is some level at which the fan feels like it bleeds over; that there is a spiritual relationship to a text or a spiritual relationship to a character,

and there are spiritual truths revealed to them. And I take that very seriously as a description of what that person is experiencing. Now what happens when ethnographers who are not in fandom discuss this language is that they just collapse together those two very different uses of religious language, and it becomes a very literalising interpretation. So even a fan talking about a 'programme bible' – which isn't a fan term at all, but a media industry term – is read as 'look, they think the series is a scriptural authority'.

Whereas I would want a nuanced account that saw a continuum between playful, self-conscious invoking of those categories and those moments which I would then hold onto religiosity to describe, when the fan is saying 'I was moved spiritually by, say, an episode of *Beauty and the Beast*, and out of that I became a better person, a more charitable person'. At that point they are describing something that's closer to an experience of religion, in which a religious conversion changes one's ethical or moral behaviours. That's a useful connection to make, but in a very, very narrow sense, and only applied to very specific kinds of fan experiences that I think are not the majority of what people talk about when they are talking about a religious analogy.

MH: In what you've just said you link the experience of religiosity to behaviour and ethics, and you place 'religiosity' as a very specific experience. But this makes me think of fans' 'becoming-a-fan' stories, where fans use the languages and discourses of religious conversion, and where in a sense they are talking about something that really moved them that they can't quite explain; now this would be quite a common experience for a lot of fans rather than a highly narrow or specific experience. And it doesn't imply your 'ethical' dimension –

HJ: No, but it does –

MH: Well it doesn't say 'I became a better person'; it says 'I became a *fan*'.

HJ: But for many fans those things are not easily separable. The conversion metaphor also works for political radicalisation, right; these people tell the same 'coming out' stories about signing up as a Marxist, or about coming out as gay, or whatever: there's a variety of conversion narratives within our culture that could act as middle terms and separate fandom from religion. So to link those two terms together is still a problem because it neglects the whole continuity of a level of emotional experiences that we have and that we can't really articulate. And these experiences change how we see ourselves or how we see the world, or the values we operate on; these things are woven together when we use the language of conversion. Religious conversion, to my mind, is only a subset of a whole range of conversion experiences in culture.

MH: In *Fan Cultures* I focus on two languages that are available to fans to rationalise or defend their sense of fan experience; religiosity is one, and the other is aesthetics – being transformed by one's experience of an art-form. Now it might take more empirical work to develop this, but it's interesting to me that discourses of religious transformation and discourses of aesthetic transformation seem to be quite prevalent within fandom, whereas some of the other possible languages you've mentioned – the social club, the union, or politics – don't seem to be drawn on as widely.

HJ: Actually female fans often talk about fandom as a sorority if they're talking in a predominantly female space. To some degree fans jokingly call themselves a 'consumer advocate' group, which is another way of framing what it is that they're involved with, and which pulls you toward 'union' or 'political party', but there's often resistance to political labels altogether within fandom, and I think

it's legitimate to say that fans themselves are more likely to use, you're right, aesthetic or religious analogies rather than political analogies.

MH: And that's about a subcultural context in which certain terms just seem too loaded.

HJ: Exactly. And I think they are still drawing on the reservoir of meanings that surround the term 'fan' from its very inception. What's interesting about the language of aesthetics that you're talking about is that it is exactly those moments where the language of aesthetics allows fans to talk about feeling or emotion or the personal that breaks down Bourdieu's notion of aesthetic distance as being bound up in high art. That is, when you see that look of sublime pleasure on the face of someone listening to classical music, which is not about holding it at a distance, it's about being awash in it, being affected by it, that's when that classical music consumption is connected to fandom in a very real way. Fandom is not about Bourdieu's notion of holding art at a distance, it's not that high art discourse at all; it's about having control and mastery over art by pulling it close and integrating it into your sense of self. And that is an aesthetic transformation, but it's not the way that discourses of high art usually operate, although it is a way individuals talk about their relationship to high art. But you never really see an art critic talk about that moment of passionate transcendence in which they couldn't articulate why they were responding to the music or the painting...

MH: I wonder if, in certain fandoms, moments of affective transformation are written out as well: I'm thinking of horror fandom where there's a sense in which it's the (imagined) non-fans who are affected or scared or shocked, whereas the fans are all stoically and heroically able to endure horror films as well as displaying their fan cultural capital – may be to an extent this is about gendered reading positions...

HJ: It could also be about a language of aesthetic appreciation, with fans saying 'man, that was beautiful' about a gore scene, or drawing on Clive Barker's notion of "glistening, blood-covered bodies" as aesthetic artefacts – that language of aesthetic appreciation becomes a way of holding the emotion at a distance whilst still acknowledging that you were touched or moved by the text, but not in a pathologising way.

MH: And another alternative discourse that works in a similar way occurs when horror fans focus on special effects, and on the techniques of horror film production.

HJ: Which is to say that different kinds of fandom create different notions about what is the right way to explain that moment of transcendence. When I talked about religiosity I used the example of *Beauty and the Beast* – that was a fandom that was built around notions of romance but also around a sort of spiritual, New Age community. So the language of that fan community was much more a language of religiosity than, say, *Star Trek* fandom which often embraces a political category of celebrating 'difference'.

MH: Doesn't something like *DS9* confuse that? Because there you have a text that is marked by discourses of religion in particular ways but to an extent is being read by a fandom that has links back to Gene Roddenberry's anti-religion viewpoint. So there you could have a situation where certain fractions of *Trek* fandom are likely to be reading from a humanist perspective whilst the text might be authorising new fans, and other fractions of fans, to read via the discourses of religiosity.

HJ: There are generations of fandoms just as there are generations of academics, and for my generation in *Trek* fandom we always approached the text as being about Vulcan rationalism, about a philosophy that was infinitely rational – so it was about emotion, but that was framed as a larger, abstract category. The fact that as fans we thought about a Vulcan *philosophy* of IDIC [Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations - MH] rather than a Vulcan *religion* of IDIC may have shaped the way in which I think about the issue of fandom and religiosity: IDIC was, for the Vulcans, an ethical structure of belief and not a spiritual structure of belief, as least as my generation of *Trek* fans fleshed it out. And so for me, I'm much more comfortable with talking about the ethics that would arise from the text than an aspect of religion. Again, let me go back to my upbringing as a fundamentalist and my breaking with that; that means I'm not keen to be a fundamentalist about anything else.

MH: So part of the argument here would have to be about the situatedness of fan readings. In my case, I'm not sure how I would explain my own academic interest in the term religiosity: may be it arises from the fact that I'm an atheist and that I've never been part of any organised religion, although I suppose I've had a very attenuated or nominal Church of England upbringing. So for me 'religiosity' isn't linked to a sense of organised religion or to a set of rules of conduct, or to any sense of fundamentalism; it's about the individual reaching for something.

HJ: Which takes us back to the point that what you think of as 'religion' in your schema makes an enormous amount of difference when you use the analogy in relation to media fandom. Part of what I was reacting to in Jewett and Lawrence was that they clearly had a fundamentalist view of religion in mind in the language they were using, and having come from that, I had a very vivid, physical, emotional and intellectual picture of what a fundamentalist religion is like. And *Star Trek* fandom doesn't look a thing like that, it just doesn't feel that way. The 'structures of feeling' of fundamentalism and *Star Trek* fandom are radically different. But if you were using Church of England religion as a metaphor, or Hassidic Jewish religion as a metaphor, then things might not work in that exact way.

MH: This leads us to an almost Bakhtinian view: there is a particular term – religion or religiosity here - that can carry all manner of different resonances, a word that is 'alien' in the way that it draw on all these resonances, so that if we use the word we have to try to restrict its meanings and be very clear about how we are using it. But in this dialogism we can never totally purify our terms; we're always moving toward an imagined dialogic space that renders invisible other connotations.

HJ: For me the category of religion can't be policed to cut off those fundamentalist resonances, or the notion of false belief that surrounds the word 'fan', and so it is too dangerous a word to use analytically to talk about fandom. The connotations that I'm critiquing can't be shed. So choose another word; choose a word that more adequately expresses what you want to say through the religion analogy but doesn't bring all of that other baggage along with it.

MH: Although I would want to argue that we'll never be able to change those sedimented connotations or the link between 'fan' and false belief unless we try to take them on directly.

HJ: I just found that they would always get in the way of what I wanted to say.

Moving towards an 'affective semiotics'...

HJ: Part of what we're talking about here is a difference I've noticed in our work about affect and meaning. You talk a lot in *Fan Cultures* about what you call a cognitive or cognitivist preoccupation with fan interpretation and meaning at the expense of discussing affect. And that seems to me a very odd way of understanding what I mean by 'meaning', which is that meaning is always bound up with affect on multiple levels: meaning is not data, trivia or information. Meaning is contextualised. It grows out of an affective set of experiences, and is the vehicle for creating social connections with other people. So it's not purely an intellectual or abstract, cognitive category for me: it's embedded and embodied in all kinds of affect. When I talk about meaning and investment, those are both words that, to my mind, are already talking about affect.

MH: 'Investment' is certainly a term that's important to writers who directly talk about affect, and so it's central to Lawrence Grossberg's work, for example. 'Meaning', I think, is again a matter of how words are 'loaded' and a matter of what connotations they carry. Even if you mean 'meaning' to mean this particular thing, the term is so loaded - in terms of a bias around the cognitive, or around matters of interpretation, or as being about disembodied thought - that it plays out within a kind of modernist mind/body dualism in popular culture and in much academic writing. These connotations and their links to 'meaning' are tested in some academic spaces, I'm thinking of certain feminist writing, but this struggle against how 'meaning' is thought about culturally is still a battle that needs to be fought.

HJ: I guess we come back to where we were on religion, but I'm on the opposite side here! To me, words like 'knowledge' and 'meaning' are words worth fighting for. And yes, we need to enlarge what they mean. I've been driven by that feminist critique of 'knowledge' and 'meaning' because I think fandom itself understands 'meaning' in that affective, saturated way. So when you say 'that was a very meaningful experience for me', for example, you're using the word 'meaning' to refer to an emotional experience that had consequences in the way in which you thought about the world.

MH: I agree with you that a certain discourse of 'meaning' would be used in fandom to say 'I had some transformative experience'. But I suppose the problem for me is that 'meaning' has also been used academically within certain forms of cultural theory in a way that does *not* speak to 'the meaningful'. In forms of work indebted to semiotics - I'm thinking of the work of John Fiske, Stuart Hall and David Morley - the term 'meaning' has been restricted to matters of cognitive interpretation and 'decoding', so to say that was 'meaningful' in the sense of 'I was emotionally invested in that' wouldn't actually make sense in terms of the model of audience activity and interpretation that these writers put forward. You struggle with this kind of model in *Poachers*, but I think it structures what you're able to say to an extent even while, at the same time, you are trying to rework it.

HJ: There's an argument in semiotics that seems to imply that meaning can be derived from a text and then you throw the text away. The difference is fans don't throw the text away, that there's an emotional connection to the text that survives any generation of meaning from it.

Now, we get back to what I was struggling with at the moment when I was writing *Poachers*, which was negotiating the transition from one generation of fan studies to another. *Poachers* contains a long chapter on fan criticism that explicitly invokes the feminist model of subjective investment as a way of understanding how fan critics derive meaning from a text, while struggling to bring that feminist critique of 'knowledge-as-abstracted' in line with the old cultural studies' notion of meaning production, via semiotics, that belonged to the previous generation. I saw the work as creating an affective semiotics that focused on how meaning was derived, but it was also written in a language saturated with emotion which tried to evoke the fans' quality of feeling through description and prose style rather than using the objectifying, distanced prose of that earlier generation of cultural scholars. Insofar as my writing and John Tulloch's feel very different, I would say mine pulled toward the affective and the ways in which I see meaning as tied to emotion, including my own. Whereas I think there is always an objectification or a distancing rhetoric in Tulloch's work so that he ends up struggling with his own fandom, and has to bury it or kill it in order to put the words on the page -

MH: I think he kills his fandom rather less in *Watching Television Audiences* (2000).

HJ: He's getting closer to capturing his fandom there. But there's a generational struggle that I see in his writing that comes out of his prose style as much as what he says about fans. I think that I had a different struggle, which was as a transitional figure I had to use a language that connected to that generation but which I also thought was pulling in a very different direction. So I would say that my entire work has been about intensity and emotional engagement, but what I lack, and still do - I haven't seen anyone later introduce one - is an adequate language to describe emotion or affect in theoretical terms that would be acceptable within academic discourse. You can gesture towards it, or like Susan Clerc you can use fan-talk about 'drool'. That language is very evocative but it doesn't connect in the academy. The minute academics hear that something is 'drool' they think 'get me away from it!' What I want to see is some finer-grained language to talk about the relationship of meaning to affect, and an affective notion of meaning that can circulate in a wider academic community and help them understand what we're talking about.

MH: You're discussing a tension that runs through *Textual Poachers*, which for me is a very powerful tension between using the generational theoretical frameworks that were available to you, and trying to bring in a sense of fan affect. Given that tension, you could argue that there is a movement *towards* a kind of affective semiotics in *Poachers*. But something that we could call a developed 'affective semiotics' would require such a vast theoretical and conceptual armoury...

HJ: I don't think I adequately achieved what I set out to do, but to expect a newly minted Ph.D. to quite pull it off, in the absence of other discursive resources, is probably a bit unfair! [laughs]

MH: We can set high standards! [laughing]

HJ: I set high standards for myself, and I still look with pride at a lot of what *Textual Poachers* pulled off, but it was an immature work in the fullest sense of the word. I'm still not sure I'm adequate to dealing with what it set out to do - it is *still* a really difficult problem to address.

MH: I'm not sure that anyone has fully 'dealt' with the problem of an affective semiotics. It's something that I suppose my work continues to focus on, and it's something that I will probably also fail to achieve, although hopefully I'll fail in an interesting way.

HJ: It's a worthy goal. I think we've all got to struggle towards it, and we may be closer to it now insofar as there are more people in the academy who share that structure of feeling and know what an affective semiotics would be even if they can't articulate it yet. There's a potential for communication that we're gesturing toward, even if we can't bring it out in the full light of day. It seems to me that the very structures of academia make it hard to express, while the structures of fandom make this same thing ridiculously easy to express. And it's those of us who straddle those two categories who are very aware of those differences. It's probably the most profound difference between being a fan and being an academic, how to bring the affective in. We used to be taught about the affective fallacy as one of a couple of fallacies. Fans commit all of the fallacies that we were taught to avoid in literature classes.

MH: On a regular basis.

HJ: But the affective fallacy may be one of their greatest heresies from the point of view of traditional literature teaching.

MH: When I first started thinking about affect, and having partially come out of an English Lit. background, the affective fallacy was one of the first things that sprang to mind. One of the problems is that we're talking about 'affect' and not 'love' or 'emotion' or a more colloquial term, which as Rebecca Farley has pointed out to me, is rather ironic. If I want to argue that academics should focus more on emotion – their own and others' emotions – then why do I have to call this 'a theory of affect'?

HJ: Just call it fucking and get on with it! [laughs]

MH: Otherwise perhaps you've lost the battle already, and you're doing a Vulcan version of philosophies of emotion. That's one of the more pressing problems with an 'affective semiotics', that the very tension between fan and academic situations is already over-written by this as a concept. It speaks too singularly to an academic way of doing things. But if that's what we have to do to get the subject on to the agenda then I suppose we're back to the idea of tactical interventions.

HJ: I wonder if fan studies should learn from, say, a pro-sex politics. Both in and outside the academy, there are people who have had to own up to their own sexuality and their own erotic feelings and experiences in order to break down hierarchies and categories for thinking about good and bad sex. Pat Califia would be an interesting role model for the fan-academic to think about what it is to articulate pleasure or desire or emotion in terms of fandom because she doesn't cut herself off from the implications of her own writing about sex and sexuality. She incorporates her own sexual experience and her own knowledge of the body into a larger theoretical project which gets articulated both in an academic language and in a vernacular language and everything in between. Pat Califia moves between writing an advice columnist for the *Advocate*, telling people how to do sex and how to have pleasurable sex, to presenting as an academic theorist at an academic conference. So the language of sex may in fact, ironically, be more developed around this than the language of fan culture which is potentially less scandalous ultimately.

MH: The problem I can see there is to do with intersubjectivity. You can perhaps try to communicate to another how to do sex in a certain way – there is some kind of assumption that sex can be done in the same or similar ways by other people, and with the same or similar pleasures being involved. But I don't know how, in the same way intersubjectively, you could explain to somebody how to 'do' fandom, because there isn't automatically that same space for assumed intersubjectivity.

HJ: When Califia moves into talking about S&M, for example, and the ways in which pleasure and pain relate to each other within the particular structure of feeling around sadomasochism, that is not something that is automatically going to be read intersubjectively by everyone who reads that essay. There's a shock, a discomfort, a resistance, an anxiety or whatever, that circulates around that part of her argument, but I think she's very effective at conveying, inside-out, what the pleasures of S&M feel like, even to readers who may never directly experience those sets of sexual practices. And that's not unlike the challenge confronting the fan-academic, but I don't want to push fandom and sex too far as an analogy. We'll get into the whole fandom and religion problem again. It's inadequate, but what I'm getting at, is where else in the academy are we articulating emotion and our own direct personal experience of emotion through theoretical language? And it seems to me that the area of studying sex is one of those areas where there's starting to be a way of working through those problems, and it's a way that may be more advanced than where fan studies has got to at the moment.

Uneasy relations? Fan studies, psychoanalysis, and theories of popular culture...

MH: Here's a controversy waiting to happen then: we're looking for an area where emotion might be talked about in ways that are ahead of fan studies, and where affect might have been thought through, theorised and dealt with.

Surely one area where all this has happened extensively is psychoanalytic theory, or psychoanalysis as it is used in clinical practice rather than in the meta-narratives of an academic version. Psychoanalytic practice and certain forms of theory might also offer a space that we could view as being ahead of fan studies in certain ways.

HJ: Except that the clinician divorces themselves from the field that they're diagnosing and describing. That is, they are supposed to remove themselves from that situation in order to talk about somebody else's feelings in a certain way. I don't see this objectification in psychoanalytic discourse as really being very far advanced. It's always an othering discourse, it's not a discourse of the self.

MH: May be like our discussion of religion this is going to come down to what our schema of 'psychoanalysis' would be. I was struck recently by a piece written by Ian Craib – a Professor of sociology who is also a practising psychotherapist – who talks about the distinctions between 'clinical' and 'academic' psychoanalysis in *Psychoanalysis: A Critical Introduction* (2001). I was hugely struck by this because it sounded so much like the fan/academic dualism. Clinicians invest in experience and devalue grand theory, saying 'we work with individuals and try to help them and work respectfully with their experience', whereas academics are 'brainboxes on sticks' who are full of disembodied terminologies and theories and who seemingly have no respectful sense of their own experiences let alone

anybody else's. It's absolutely an 'affect versus the cognitive', or a 'body versus mind' dualism, but in this case played out across different versions of psychoanalysis.

HJ: I see what you're getting at, and I think there's some truth to that as an analogy. It would be enriched if we could look at those moments in the founding texts of psychoanalysis where Freud or Jung put their own dreams into their writing and began to analyse what they meant, because those are moments that are not unlike the problem of the academic-fan analysing his or her own pleasure. They are involved in a process not only of interpretation and analysis, but also involving a decision about how much of yourself you reveal through analysis or theory. In their theories Freud and Jung are constructing themselves as they analyse their dreams. And there may have been things that they saw in their dreams that they chose not to include in their writings because of the risk of exposure, or anxiety about revealing too much and so forth. And those might be really interesting moments to go back and look at in psychoanalytic texts, to see how they dealt with that problem, not of the clinician as an objective observer, but as self-examining. The psychoanalytic founders saw themselves as implicated in their theories, but psychoanalysis as a body of thought seems to be removed from that.

MH: What I'm interested in as well is the idea that psychoanalysis can be thought about *not* as providing us with a universalist or true-for-all-time theory, but as being historically situated in the same way that we've discussed your work as being historically situated in cultural studies. You can track particular moments in, and generations of, psychoanalytic theory. And one of the textbook distinctions that's been made in relation to post-Freudian or 'object-relations' psychoanalysis is that this work more often focuses not only on 'transference' but also on 'counter-transference'. Transference is concerned with how the patient or analysand treats the analyst as a version of their mother or father in terms of an unconscious model. The development of work on counter-transference does exactly what you're valuing in the founding texts: it focuses on the analyst as involved and implicated in an encounter. The analyst projects something back onto the analysand; they may be bored by them, irritated by them, so there is some sense of a dialogue, although this leaves the analyst in a position of power as they are supposedly more aware of what they and the patient are doing. Work on countertransference has pushed psychoanalytic thinking back towards an engaged, implicated model. The psychoanalyst may have invested in certain identities, or may be attached to certain ways of thinking. The idea of objectifying experience starts to break down, perhaps it's not entirely challenged, but it is struggled with, through a set of tensions, just as you've discussed how your work involved a struggle with certain generational tensions. So I wonder if fan studies would benefit from drawing more extensively on the implicatedness of forms of psychoanalytic theory that also think about affect.

HJ: It would be a very interesting direction to pursue. I've not read deeply enough in that area to go there myself yet, but I maintain an agnostic interest in that. I think there could be merit to it, but I would hold that to some degree the history of psychoanalysis is a history of the pathologisation of the patient. Some writers, like Sherry Turkle - whose work I admire tremendously - have broken through that suspicion or pathologisation to come up with a way of understanding the psychology of Internet use.

MH: She draws on the same type of psychoanalysis that I'm talking about and that I've used in *Fan Cultures*.

HJ: I have very productive conversations with Sherry about methodology and about self-positioning and so forth, and her work demonstrates to me that such work can be done well. Constance Penley approaches psychoanalysis in a slightly different way, but is nevertheless willing to implicate herself in what she's writing about and I respect that. So even if I'm uncomfortable with psychoanalysis I can point to specific examples where it's been a very productive discourse and it's been used well. I just think in general it has a lot to answer for as a theoretical paradigm to talk about fandom.

As with the religion analogy you have to be very careful how you approach it, and you really have to be critical of psychoanalysis as you're bringing it over into fan studies. Someone like Ilsa Bick is a beautiful example of someone who just applies psychoanalysis in a way that totally pathologises whatever she wants to talk about, and almost blindly pathologises it, because if you talk to her - and I've seen her deal with all sorts of subcultural communities - she is shocked and surprised that fan communities feel pathologised by what she's written. I don't think it's intentional in her case, it's almost an inadvertent effect of the unilateral application of a certain type of psychoanalytic discourse that hasn't separated itself out from a tendency to label and treat forms of cultural practice rather than trying to understand and interpret them.

MH: There are other psychoanalytic thinkers whose work is likely to become more influential in cultural theory. I'm thinking particularly of Jean Laplanche, who has developed his own distinctive vision of psychoanalytic theory, and who has criticised the overly literal application of psychoanalytic theory, or what he calls in *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis* (1989) 'export psychoanalysis'. When you just grab psychoanalytic ideas and stamp them onto a cultural artefact then, according to Laplanche, this is a ridiculous thing to do. You lose a sense of working with and on psychoanalytic theory when you say 'oh look, here's a ready-formed metanarrative that I can find everywhere, over and over again'. For Laplanche that type of psychoanalytic interpretation is an act of repression itself; it does violence to the object of study, and it represses those objects and the person who is wielding such theoretical weaponry. This type of abstracting psychoanalytic work has been very prevalent in our field, with notable exceptions, but the criticism is coming from someone interested in revamping psychoanalysis rather than burying it.

There's a great book by Peter Osborne called *Philosophy in Cultural Theory* (2001), and his closing chapter is on Laplanche's work. Osborne draws on Laplanche's work on different levels of theory: level 1 theory is where we auto-theorise and level 2 belongs to general theory. Osborne points out that level 2 theory really only comes out of level 1 theory; we're doing this other type of theory whether we want to make a song and dance about it in the academy or not - we're either fans of the material we're analysing in the academy, or we're viewers of this material in our everyday lives and, again, outside the academy. We're both level 1 readers and level 2 analysts, but we all pretend that there's a complete split between these two different levels of intertwined theory and experience.

So there's another line of psychoanalytic thinking there that's about criticising psychoanalysis, and Osborne is absolutely critical of writers like Žižek. Žižek combines vastly grand theory with very quick cod analyses of popular cultural artefacts. And you end up thinking 'he's read lots of Lacan and Hegel, I respect him for that', but he doesn't seem to care about the popular culture that he's analysing. One particular example that I often return to, is where he analyses *Star Wars* - you'll really hate this - and tells us that it was directed by Steven

Spielberg. This is in *The Plague of Fantasies* (1997), and if you look in the index under 'Spielberg, Steven' you'll find the reference to *Star Wars* there too.

The author didn't care about a very, very basic fact. Even if he knows lots about Lacan and Hegel, and is very impressive on that, he still doesn't know who directed *Star Wars*. Equally, nobody proof-reading or indexing that book possessed that knowledge either. If that had happened in relation to any of the theoretical sources he was using then there would have been an outcry.

HJ: There are two problems that are symptomatic there. One is the total disdain that certain types of theorists have for the particularities of popular culture, and the other is the institutional indifference to that specificity. So on *Textual Poachers* I fought hard and got a fan proof-reader who would get the details right, whereas either books I've done, like *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat*, where we didn't have a gamer as a proof-reader, some mistakes crept in and the fan community immediately picked up on them. You have to respect fan expertise. Many proof-readers are fans, it's not hard to get a fan proof-reader, but you're not automatically assigned one in the way that you might be assigned a Shakespeare expert to proof-read a book on Shakespeare. Equally, you wouldn't assign a manuscript that had many references in a foreign language to someone who didn't know that language. So I think publishers help to exaggerate problems by belittling popular culture and popular cultural knowledge in the way that they process manuscripts.

MH: And how are you going to persuade publishers that they need to take popular culture more seriously, and that the marketability and value of their product could otherwise be damaged?

HJ: Take a look at the amazon.com website descriptions of *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat*. Sales of the book through amazon went down as the top-rated critiques all stressed a couple of factual mistakes. Lara Croft's name was spelt incorrectly in one place, and this was blown out of all proportion; the fact that the publisher put an image on the cover of the book that was from *Ultima Fighter* not from *Mortal Kombat* also managed to discredit the book as a whole. No-one could get past the cover in their response to the book. If you're wanting to be read by a cross-over fan audience and not just an academic audience then you've got to take the fan audience seriously. There's a pitch in every academic book on fan culture that says 'and there's this huge potential fan readership just waiting for this book on *The X-Files* or *Buffy* or whatever it is. It's part of the sales pitch that we all use to sell our manuscripts. But if we believe it on any level then the manuscript's got to be looked at with a fan's attention to detail.

MH: That's similar to the Trekkie/Trekker thing, where if that was a different form of difference – your example being around race - then it would count, and publishers wouldn't make mistakes, and they'd respect communal norms. So obviously there are still many battles to be fought, because fandom somehow doesn't quite count as a form of difference. And may be this is to do with fans' reticence about using political terms and languages: may be if fandom was seen as being politicised then it would be viewed more seriously as carrying moral significance.

HJ: If fans put themselves forward as a political category, a sexual category or even a cultural category, like ethnicity is a cultural category, then fandom would carry a different level of sensitivity. But categories of cultural preference, as I sometimes call fans, don't carry that same sort of weight. In fact, quite the reverse – they are stigmatised.

I objected to the cover of *Science Fiction Audiences* (1995), which John Tulloch describes in some detail in *Watching Television Audiences* (2000), and Routledge was saying to me 'well, our research department looked at the cover and we couldn't find any way that it could be offensive to fans'. And I was saying to Routledge, 'you've paid me to write two books as an expert on fandom, and I'm telling you it could be offensive; why did you pay me – why don't you get your research department to write a book on fans if they know all about it?' But they weren't going to give away their right of control over the cover image. Sure enough, many fan reviews of the book did find the cover offensive, and that damaged sales of the book to fans, especially compared to *Poachers*, which had a much more fan-friendly cover.

MH: I've expressed concerns about the cover for *Fan Cultures*. It seems to gender fandom as masculine, and it includes a 'Beam Me Up Scotty' badge or pin that will be viewed as inauthentic by *Trek* fans. The trade-off, I suppose, is that the cover image has to make immediate sense to a non-fan audience, but hopefully without clearly reinforcing negative fan stereotypes. On the plus side, I'm pleased that the cover isn't tied into a single fandom; it represents an individual fan and their multiple fandoms.

Fan ethnographies: Encountering the 'real' or decentring academic expertise?

MH: OK, another point that I'd like to raise concerns ethnography and the doing of empirical research. A criticism of *Fan Cultures* that you've raised is that it never quite gets to the fan cultures; in other words, there isn't really much in the way of what we'd call 'empirical' work in the book. And I suppose that comes out a sense of hesitancy on my part about doing empirical work. I'm concerned with the intensely problematic nature of doing that kind of work.

I know that ethnography is typically discussed in terms of academic power, and who has the right to speak for whom, but my particular concern is with what counts as 'the real' in the doing of empirical research. And that's why I've been holding back. If you're going to go out 'into the field' to 'talk to real people' – so that there's a moral language about an encounter with the real – then what is going to be counted as the real? There seems to have been a curious splitting in cultural studies between 'theory' which has been viewed as a set of abstractions, and 'empirical work' which has been viewed as getting access to the real. I've examined this split in a piece for *Diegesis* on the 'common sense' of cultural studies. And I think that one symptom of this split is Paul Willis's emphasis on 'surprise' as part of the value of ethnography, although actually he's talking about participant-observation; so there's a famous quote from Willis that Dave Morley has used, that Shaun Moores has used, that Len Ang has used...

HJ: I've used it on occasions, although I'm not sure I buy it anymore.

MH: So this quote's been used endlessly to justify ethnography as *the* method in cultural studies, but what Willis effectively goes on to say is that he's a Marxist, and so nothing he finds in the field will persuade him that he shouldn't be a Marxist. So he says 'it's important to be surprised, but I'm a Marxist and so I'm going to interpret in this way', and the second part of his statement tends to disappear in the cultural studies celebration of 'surprise'. Don't get me wrong, this emphasis has certainly allowed good work to be done, and people like

Morley, Moores and Ang have done some of that excellent work, but what tends to drop out of the picture is the extent to which their empirical 'surprises' hinge on a theorised version of what counts as 'the real'. Their 'surprises' depend on a certain version of Marxism or on a certain version of sociology or on a certain version of feminism, all of which precede and structure what they are able to account for, describe and analyse.

My basic point is that if you use different theoretical frameworks, say, certain kinds of psychoanalysis, in empirical work then what counts as the real will be different. What counts as the real for Sherry Turkle is different to what counts as the real for Dave Morley. Hypothetically they could go and talk to the same respondents, and have the same conversations, but then they'd go away and write these interviews up using different discourses. And they would see different things: that person twitched then, or they held their body in that way, or they spoke in that way, they were excited about this, anxious about that, they got that word muddled up ... these things might matter to a psychoanalytic 'empiricist' but not to a certain type of 'empirical' sociologist.

HJ: Let me give you a practical illustration of this. In the research methods class that I teach, I play this videotape of an interview I did while researching *Textual Poachers* with a particular fan music video producer. I asked how she had begun as a fan writer and her first response was 'it had to do with the death of my father'. As I play the tape I see Camille Bacon-Smith's analysis grabbing that and talking about her using fan fiction to work through the death of her father and the emotions that were bound up with it. As the interview goes on, she talks in a very analytic and crafts-oriented way about how she writes in different ways for different audiences, and about how she sees herself as responding to the community's traditions and genres; there's a whole analytical level. What I used in *Poachers* was that second piece of the interview, and the problem I present to my students is how do you decide which part of that interview you use to explain what's going on. In some sense you need both –

MH: That would be my point.

HJ: - and so to some degree the blindness of both of those earlier accounts was that they only mobilised one part of a problematic and overstated it in a way because of the different traditions that Camille and I came out of. And it's precisely what you're saying: different interpretive grids map onto bits of the 'real' – and that's not a word that I use very much – in different ways and produce very different interpretations, which is why that notion of a 'surprise' or discovery seems less and less valid to me.

To my mind the value of ethnography is not ultimately that it allows you to talk to 'the real' but that it introduces notions of dialogue and accountability. And different ethnographic methods arrive at dialogue and accountability in different ways. So you could look at say David Morley's *Family Television* as a work that is very invested in the real; it strips out psychoanalysis altogether and it produces transcripts and data points and so on, but it's never clear what accountability he had to the research subjects he talks about. Did they read a draft of the book? Were they allowed to comment on his interpretation and theorising? To what degree did their own analysis of their experience impinge on his account? None of that is addressed in Morley's work.

I saw *Poachers* as responding to that, and building a different relationship between theory and the real by introducing a kind of dialogic element, by allowing fans to comment on the manuscript and to have this woven back into the work –

MH: Although as you've said, it is perhaps a shame that that process isn't more clearly highlighted in the work.

HJ: But the goal was there to do that, and there was an actual accountability which meant that I changed things that the community critiqued or commented on. It wasn't just pure theory that was removed from anyone's life experience, it was written as a dialogue with something that's out there. The type of ethnography that I do is responsive to the researched community and therefore there's a check on its assertions.

MH: There's a sense of 'checks and balances' in how you're presenting the process. Was there ever an occasion where you had a criticism from the fan community, but you thought 'well, no, I'm going to stick with my original assertion'? In other words, yes, it's important to have that sense of obligation to respondents, but some reviewers have accused you of 'going native' or selling academia down the river in some way; I'm thinking of John Hartley's comments in *Popular Reality* (1996). How far does your obligation to respondents stretch?

HJ: There is a divided loyalty between fandom and the academy that you're always negotiating. I would say that the *Beauty and the Beast* chapter in *Textual Poachers*, which almost no-one looks at probably because the series itself didn't resonate within an academic community, is where that crisis came to bear for me. I was writing about how fans fell out of love with the text and developed their own alternative to the direction the programme had taken. But clearly not all fans fell out of love with the text, and so there was a violent backlash when I circulated that chapter from fans who said 'no, we love those new developments'. Ironically, I loved those new developments too on a certain level, they actually resembled my fan pleasures more than the resistant reading that I was mapping, so there was a different thing that I papered over.

But what I acknowledged was a divergence between the story I wanted to tell and the response from the community to certain aspects of the story, with the result that I indicated that this was a partial truth, it was not a whole account. It was part of an account, and it dealt with certain issues that were academically important to the argument I wanted to make, and were true and valid as part of a situated intervention, or "intervention analysis" to use Hartley's term, which I guess I understand differently than John does. So I saw that work as an intervention-analysis for some segments of the fan community, while I had to acknowledge that I was not responding to claims made by another section. That's where the text becomes most blurred around those divided loyalties, and I could have written a whole book on issues around that chapter.

There are arguments in the fan community that you just won't agree with, so you have to say 'look, this is a section of the community that will fundamentally disagree with what I am saying, and this is their rationale and why, but this is why I'm still saying what I'm saying'. The choice that I made was not to bow to the fan community's critique, but still to foreground it as a dispute that put into brackets, to some degree, the truth claims being made in that particular chapter.

Getting back to the notion of intervention analysis, I took that category from Hartley when he said that academics needed, at certain points, to take the side of the audience in their disputes with producers, because we had access to discourses of power and authority which enabled our voices to be heard more loudly. Intervention analysis, as I see Hartley spelling it out, means that we act as an amplifier for an existing community's dispute, and as an intermediary between that community and other powerful institutions. So it's ironic to me that

several of my essays – particularly one on the Gaylaxians - address John Hartley's idea of intervention analysis and yet he wrote that passage where he seemed to think I'd 'gone native'. I'm not sure how he would then understand what he means by intervention analysis.

MH: He presumably means intervening on behalf of an audience in such a way as to ultimately conserve academic authority and expertise. When he makes the accusation that you've 'gone native' he's talking about how we can find a balance between listening to the audience but still recognising our own academic expertise. You could call it a matter of balance or you could describe it as contradictory, since the argument ends up saying that academics...

HJ: ...have more knowledge and authority! He's responding to moments where I turn the lens of fandom not on industry but on academia, and that's what makes him uncomfortable, the degree to which I'm saying that may be there are things that academics could learn from fan interpretive practices.

MH: But that's exactly the rhetoric he uses as well, which is what's so curious about his reading of your work. He says we need to learn from fans and audiences.

HJ: Including thinking about our own interpretive practices and thinking critically about the way knowledge is produced in the academy, from the point of view of the fan. You realise that there are interpretive moves or theoretical terms that fans have developed that might enlarge or enrich the academy's vocabulary for talking about popular culture.

MH: There's a question of whether the academic self is either recentred or decentred at the end of this intervention. Part of what you're arguing for, and it's absolutely what I would argue for too, is that the intervention has to turn back on the academic subculture - which itself is another subculture - so that there is some kind of decentring there, some kind of challenge to our own sense of expertise. Whereas perhaps for John Hartley, the issue is to intervene as an academic expert, with that expertise remaining securely in place before and after any intervention.

One of the other people who has read the manuscript of *Fan Cultures*, Una McCormack, says that I seem to be challenging academic expertise in the book. There's a point where I discuss the possibility that there may be a gap between academic accounts of academic practice and what academics actually do, just as there may be gaps in other subcultures between self-accounts and practices of the self. I argue that it's perfectly acceptable for academics to perceive fan accounts as 'deficient' in certain ways provided that they acknowledge that their own self-accounts possess an equal capacity to be 'deficient'. And Una's question is, well, what is the politics of this? If I want to say, as an academic, that we should give away or puncture a certain model of academic expertise, then at a time when the academy isn't well-funded, is that not a very dangerous argument to make? Shouldn't I be saying 'yes, I'm an expert, recognise my expertise, recognise that I'm culturally valuable and give me lots of research funding'? So there is a problem there, undoubtedly.

HJ: Surely the academy does have valuable kinds of expertise that are needed in a variety of conversations at the present moment, but in order for that expertise to be mobilised it has to adopt a language which doesn't just play to other academics, it has to play to a wider public. This means rethinking academic rhetoric. And it means recognising that there are other kinds of expertise that also bring something to the table in that conversation. For example, I find myself

more and more engaged in dialogues with industry, or artists, or policy-makers or educators as well as fans, and as I move into those dialogues I start from a respect for what they might know and what I might learn from them that would enrich academic expertise as well as holding on to the status of academic knowledge. I can't devalue my own knowledge, but on the other hand I shouldn't *overvalue* it. The problem is that the academy has cut itself off from dialogues that it should be part of.

So it's not that I totally devalue academic knowledge; when I turn to fans and say that we could learn something from them, I'm not saying that we know nothing. Somehow people see this as a zero-sum either/or game where either we as academics have all the power or we have no power.

MH: I've mentioned Ian Craib's work before, and there's a hilarious chapter in the book *Experiencing Identity* – I really love this book – where he talks about 'the psychodynamics of theory'. And he analyses theoretical manoeuvres that are supposedly about logic, but he says that actually they're not about rationality at all, they're about affect and emotional attachments. He talks about 'logical hatchet work', which is the need to get rid of a threatening argument or position that is too complex, that doesn't fit into the cultural categories that people are comfortable with. These complex conjunctions have to be done away with, and how this happens is that you find one logical flaw or one problem and you then through that you dismiss the entire thing.

And this seems to be something that happens when you try to move beyond a position where fans are powerless and academics are powerful; if you transgress these comfortable associations, and suggest that fans aren't entirely powerless and academics aren't entirely powerful, then this position has to be expelled as too threatening. When you challenge fan stereotypes in *Textual Poachers* then you are also challenging a sense of the academic self that defines itself against that stereotype, and the same thing happens if you suggest that academics should give up some of their expertise; again, this is a threat to how we imagine ourselves versus the other who doesn't have our expertise.

HJ: I think that some of the changes that I'm advocating are not about giving up power, they are about accepting power and responsibility and enlarging the sphere of action by getting rid of those negative traits in the academy that block us from actually exercising power that legitimately should be ours.

MH: OK, we've talked about situatedness and different generations of scholar-fans, so I feel that I can ask this question: could it not be suggested that it is precisely *because* you are at a particular stage in an academic career, and at a particular institution, MIT, that you are placed culturally as having access to industry people, fan-artists, and all sorts of people? An academic placed differently in the academic field wouldn't automatically have that access or those possibilities for dialogue.

HJ: I think that's a legitimate question. There's some truth to that – I am speaking from a position at an elite institution. On the other hand, I also think I've created those connections: there are many professors at elite institutions with well-developed careers who have no dialogue with any of those sectors, and who have defensively cut themselves off from those connections. So it's partially a matter of status and career point, but it's also a matter of style, agenda and seeking opportunities to form bridges.

What I try to do in my own work is form bridges that other people can travel, creating a space for other people to do work and form their own sets of

connections. And I believe that every academic has the ability, whatever level of a career they are at, to connect with something beyond the university and to have some kind of meaningful conversation. We've got to keep that connection there in our work or otherwise we engage ourselves in narcissistic theory-building that has nothing to do with anything beyond our own career advancement.

'Generational' may be the right way to think about it as well. When I began my career I had enormous ambivalence about being an academic, because I felt this enormous tension between the academic world and the fan world, and I felt uncomfortable with speaking from the position of an academic because it was such an antagonistic space. As the academy has made its peace with fandom, to some degree, and as we've closed the gap between those identities then I've come to feel much more settled in what I think an academic is, as well as beginning to redefine what the role of the academic is in response to other sectors of knowledge-production.

MH: Your work has enabled later writers to 'come out' as fans and to work on things that they are passionate about. The work that you've done has certainly been part of a shift within sections of the academy, so people now probably don't feel the same tension that you would have felt around the question 'what does it mean to be a fan and an academic?'

HJ: That was a burning question for me. It seems less crucial to me now than it once did. But we still need to hold on to fandom as an at least partially scandalous category so that it continually disrupts and destabilises academic language and discourse and prevents it from becoming altogether self-congratulatory and comfortable.

Textbook versions of 'fan studies'...

MH: I've been thinking about representations of work on fandom in textbooks recently as I have come across a number of books that contain sections on 'fans and subcultures' or some similar heading. Mikko Lehtonen's *The Cultural Analysis of Texts* (2000) does this, as does Gill Branston's *Cinema and Cultural Modernity* (2000), Andy Ruddock's *Understanding Audiences* (2001), and Lisa Taylor and Andrew Willis's *Media Studies: Texts, Institutions and Audiences* (1999). I wonder if something we would refer to as 'fan studies', and see as very important, is misrepresented when it is reduced to a few paragraphs or a couple of pages. Isn't there a danger that the figure of the fan, that we agree needs to remain scandalous in certain ways in order to provoke new thought and challenge academic subcultural practices, has become part of a settled or canonical moment in a narrative history of cultural studies?

HJ: Yes, there are real dangers there. On the other hand, the alternative is even worse: fan studies could be written out of these histories, which is by and large what has happened until very recently. It's as if the history of cultural studies ended with John Fiske and Larry Grossberg, with Janice Radway and David Morley, and nothing after that has had any consequence at all. Or there are attacks on cultural populism that read later work through the lens provided by the earlier work. But for the most part there seems to be an assumption that nothing important was written after about 1990. It's only in the last year or two that you start to see textbooks acknowledging that there was a pretty profound shift in the way cultural studies operated around the early nineties as a different generation

entered the field of cultural studies. My work, and that of people like Alex Doty, Lynn Spigel and others, deserves a niche somewhere in the history of international cultural studies because of the way it changed the language, the approach, and the subject matter of cultural studies. Usually that function gets subsumed by shifting cultural studies to postmodernism and leaving out the whole chapter that we embodied in the generational politics of cultural studies. So I'm unhappy to see this work reduced to a paragraph, stabilised and contained, but I'd still like it to be there! This work wasn't simply a footnote in the careers of our mentors: it made a difference. Along the same lines, you wouldn't want your work to eventually be viewed as a footnote to a discussion of *Textual Poachers*; you want to carve out a new space. You're presenting some new questions and some new paradigms, and you deserve, down the line, to get recognition for whatever comes of that.

MH: Not that I've got any idea at this point in time what, if anything, will come out of my work.

HJ: In 1991 when *Poachers* came out I never imagined that it would still be in print a decade later, let alone still being actively taught. That's not something as junior faculty that you can see for yourself or imagine. I saw *Poachers* as provisional work, as tentative work. But as we said earlier, there's a scriptural economy that we get pulled into and now I get people quoting my words as if they were biblical and as if they had this enormous authority and certainty behind them, as if things that I tentatively put forward were well-established and proved once and for all: all you have to do is turn to Jenkins and quote it, and that's the end of the story. I'm horrified by that; I want to shake those people when I hear it. This was the work of some guy one year out of grad school; yeah, it opened up the field and asked some important questions, but it wasn't set in stone.

I've written tons about audiences since then, but people almost always go back to the moment of *Poachers*, which is historically specific in the development of the field, the history of fandom, and it's on the eve of the Internet explosion in fandom which changed almost everything I talk about, one way or another. To go back to that work, as if that was the right tool to unlock the present moment without regard to the fan community, the text, the historical moment, the medium of expression... that's my worst nightmare. And that scares me a whole lot more than those guys who want to just summarise it in a paragraph and stick it in a textbook. Save me from my friends as much as my enemies! Ask some new questions, push in new directions, challenge what I said, as you do in your book. Don't just accept it at face value, because it's *not* a biblical text.

MH: So we need more disruption of the scriptural economy, more poaching...

HJ: In other words, folks, 'get a life'! [laughs]