

This article was downloaded by: 10.3.98.93

On: 23 Oct 2018

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



The Ashgate Research Companion to Fan Cultures

Linda Duits, Koos Zwaan, Stijn Reijnders

Returning to 'Becoming-a-Fan' Stories: Theorising Transformational Objects and the Emergence/Extension of Fandom

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315612959.ch1>

Matt Hills

Published online on: 18 Sep 2014

How to cite :- Matt Hills. 18 Sep 2014, *Returning to 'Becoming-a-Fan' Stories: Theorising Transformational Objects and the Emergence/Extension of Fandom* from: The Ashgate Research Companion to Fan Cultures Routledge

Accessed on: 23 Oct 2018

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315612959.ch1>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: <https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms>

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

PART I

Re-defining the Fan

This page has been left blank intentionally

Returning to 'Becoming-a-Fan' Stories: Theorising Transformational Objects and the Emergence/Extension of Fandom

Matt Hills

Introduction

Fan studies has had much to say about fan cultures and communities, but rather less to say about how people become fans in the first place. Indeed, in his textbook *Understanding Fandom* (2013: 124), Mark Duffett goes so far as to describe this issue as an 'elephant in the room'. In a sense, it is understandable that fandom has typically been theorised as communal, cultural and social: this means that it can be studied as a pre-existent, lived identity. However, by focusing on specific fan communities, the phenomenology of fandom has been somewhat downplayed and marginalised in much scholarship, as have accounts of how people become fans in the first place. Likewise, trajectories of fandom have been displaced by reified, fixed models of what it means to be a fan:

too often theorizations ... have been based on restrictive typologies, rather than considering the process, development and ... fluidity of being a contemporary ... fan. ... These also tend to present static models, which fail to recognise the ... temporality of individuals' locations within these communities. (Crawford 2004: 38)

Rather than media fandom being thought of as inherently intertextual, moving across the artefacts of popular culture and drawing them together into historicised, biographical networks of affect and meaning, fandom has instead typically been defined singularly. That is to say, fans are approached and defined as singular fans of 'X'; *Doctor Who* fans, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* fans, *Twilight* fans, and so on:

Very few studies address the origins of an individual's fandom; for many scholars 'fan' is a kind of consumer category into which someone simply falls or does not fall ... In such studies, there is no 'becoming a fan'; rather 'being a fan' simply appears as a mode of audience participation. (Cavicchi 1998: 41)

The difficulty is that by 'fixing' fans into rigid communities and object-based categories, academia frequently loses the capacity to consider how people can be fans of multiple texts at the same time, as well as how people might move through and between different fandoms over time. Contained by concepts of community and culture, fandom partially loses its lived connection with a 'narrative of the self' (Giddens 1991: 76).

'Becoming-a-fan' stories, by contrast, potentially enable scholarship to consider how the process of first experiencing fandom, and initially embracing a fan identity, can be lived as self-narrative, and how it might be discursively framed. In this chapter I therefore want to return to becoming-a-fan stories with two specific aims in mind. Firstly, I will theorise 'transformative' moments of becoming-a-fan, using the work of object-relations psychoanalyst and theorist Christopher Bollas (1987, 1989 and 1992; Minsky 1998; Hills 2005). As with my own prior work drawing on D.W. Winnicott's theories of play (Hills 2002), this cannot involve a wholesale application of Bollas' work as there are difficulties carried by reducing fandom to psychoanalytic accounts. Chiefly, there is the danger of rendering fandom interchangeable with other cultural experiences and artefacts, something that ultimately precludes thinking about the specificity of media fandom(s). Secondly, I want to consider how becoming-a-fan stories may not, in fact, always be presented by audiences as transformative, but may instead form a continuation of previous commitments to popular culture and 'narratives of self' already in play. In such cases, the knowledges, practices and discourses of fandom can be extended intertextually towards new fan objects. Where Cornel Sandvoss has written of fandom as an 'extension' of self (2005: 100), we may also encounter the 'extension of fandom' into new texts and brands when a prior self-narrative of fandom is transferred and transposed into new consumer/audience experiences. It is therefore important not to assume that becoming-a-fan *necessarily* means a life-changing, pivotal moment of self-transformation: empirically, it may just as well form part of a routinised, habituated way of interacting with pop culture. In the next section, then, I'll focus on fandom-as-transformative, before moving on to address the alternative modality of fandom-as-transference.

Transformational Objects: Conversion, Induction, Socialisation

Where fan studies have focused on becoming-a-fan stories, the concept of conversion has been important. Daniel Cavicchi's outstanding study of Bruce Springsteen fans offers one example:

a closer look at fans' accounts of their experiences shows that ... conversion serves as more than simply a metaphorical description of fans' degree of feeling; it actually describes in detail the process of becoming a fan. In particular, the descriptions of transformations found in narratives of becoming a fan are remarkably similar to those found in the conversion narratives of evangelical Christians in the modern United States. (1998: 43)

Daniel Cavicchi argues that people who become Springsteen fans initially experience this as a 'conversion' whereby their priorities in life, and their emotional connections, are reconfigured by the process of entering fandom: 'becoming a fan is, for most fans, a milestone in their lives in which "everything changed"; they tend to think of themselves in terms of being a fan and not being a fan' (1998: 153). Following Cavicchi's work, C. Lee Harrington and Denise Bielby define 'becoming-a-fan narratives' precisely as 'fans' accounts of encountering media texts that resonate so powerfully that they transform one's identity, daily activities, and life trajectories' (2010: online).

Classic, 'first-wave' studies of fandom (for example Jenkins 1992 and Bacon-Smith 1992) do not, in fact, approach fandom merely as a consumer category. Henry Jenkins considers the socialisation of fans: 'an individual's socialization into fandom often requires learning

"the right way" to read as a fan, learning how to employ and comprehend the community's particular interpretive conventions' (1992: 89), while Camille Bacon-Smith devotes a chapter to the topic of 'Training New Members' (1992: 81–114). But these accounts of emergent fandom, approaching it sociologically and culturally as a learned set of protocols and reading conventions, fail to adequately consider the affectively powerful moment of 'conversion' alluded to by Cavicchi:

Becoming a Springsteen fan ... entails a radical, enduring change in orientation. It is ... the development of a complex relationship with Bruce Springsteen through his work, a dramatic opening of oneself to another's experience. [Fans] dramatically portray the process of becoming a fan as ... a lasting and profound transition from an 'old' viewpoint ... to a 'new' one, filled with energy and insight. (Cavicchi 1998: 59)

Other theorists have also considered the importance of conversion in relation to becoming a fan. Steve Bailey's analysis of Kiss fans covers similar ground: '15 year old "Jon" ... claims that following his first [Kiss] concert, "ever since then I've been a different person"' (2005: 121). Bailey addresses a genre of fan testimony, the 'Kisstory', in which fans recount how they first discovered the group:

fans provide a ... description of the struggles that sometimes follow an initial conversion to Kiss fandom ... fans often describe resistance not only from family, but also from peers ... being a Kiss fan was perceived as requiring the ability to 'stand up' for yourself, 'even when it's not the popular thing to do' and 'everyone thinks you're nuts'. Other 'Kisstories' offer ... tales of adolescent persecution and tests of courage related to their status as a Kiss fan. (Bailey 2005: 122)

Bailey suggests that this struggle is partly linked to the low cultural status of Kiss, given that they are a rock group with a highly artificial image, rather than participating in dominant (sub)cultural norms of 'rock ideology' and authenticity (2005: 110). But he also reads fans' defensiveness as linked to the age at which they typically discovered Kiss:

Most of the fans I interviewed, as well as those ... offering their 'Kisstories' in various publications, gave ages between five and eleven for the onset of their love for the group, and even younger ages occasionally appear. Thus, the maintenance of Kiss fandom involves retaining what is often a pre-adolescent passion, a particularly unusual characteristic for music fans, a wider culture that tends to hold music beloved by children in extremely low regard. (Bailey 2005: 109–10)

Thus, this fandom is not merely 'enduring' (Kuhn 2002; Stevenson 2006), it is also adolescent, or even pre-adolescent, yet held onto through adulthood. The assumption might therefore be that this is somehow a regressive or 'childish' object choice; and this is a taint that Kiss fans evidently work to ward off via their identity management and self-presentation. But elsewhere – in a detailed case study of one Manic Street Preachers fan, Julia, rather than a fan community – Tania Zittoun has suggested that what looks like (religious) 'conversion' may in fact be psychoanalytically readable as 'generative'; that is, enabling the healthy expansion of self-experience, knowledge and use of symbolic resources. Zittoun poses the question, 'do the processes described ... not strongly resemble those of a conversion process?' (2006: 140), but her answer is that supposed fan 'conversion' is in fact a productive self-transformation rather than some kind of ideological capture: 'it is precisely the very generativity of Julia's use of symbolic resources that is to be highlighted: each step of that transformation has enabled

her to open new options' for self-development and growth (Zittoun 2006: 140–41). Similarly, the Kiss and Springsteen fans display developmental transitions via their becoming-a-fan stories, whether it is dramatising a newfound sense of autonomy (Kiss), or an openness to another's experience and artistic vision (Springsteen).

Becoming-a-fan as a part of developmental, maturational processes within pervasive media culture is not, of course, restricted to popular music fandom. Heather Meggers has recently considered how reading and writing fan fiction is understood via self-narratives of transformative personal development. In a survey of 485 online fans covering 140 different 'primary fandoms' (2012: 59), Meggers found that 55 per cent 'believed that participation in online fandom had played a role in changing their own attitudes about sexuality', with increased openness, tolerance and acceptance of others being one theme, along with increased acceptance of one's own sexuality, and increased knowledge more generally (2012: 60). Meggers argues that this 'media fandom helped many women discover their authentic sexual selves' via the provision of 'a perceived safe space for self-discovery' (2012: 66). However, as with Bailey's Kiss fans and Zittoun's Manic Street Preachers fan, these transformative fan experiences coincide with adolescence:

Fandom involvement might have influenced ... changes [in the self] ... or it might have been a simple covariate during important formative years in many fans' sexual and emotional maturation. Either way, it is important to acknowledge the perceptual association that exists. (Meggers 2012: 76)

Reading fandom as psychologically epiphenomenal is highly problematic, though, since this posits an essentialist notion of the 'authentic' self. It is an issue which persists in object-relations psychoanalysis such as Christopher Bollas' work, marked as it is by concepts of the individual's 'idiom of the true self' (1989: 42). For Bollas, the affective choice of objects that we make throughout life (not only in fandoms, presumably, but also in tastes, enthusiasms, passions and relationships) amounts to the generation of our 'personal effects':

In the course of a day, a week, a year, or a lifetime we are engaged in successive selections of objects, each of which suits us at the moment, 'provides' us with a certain kind of experience ... Sometimes we are conscious of why we choose what we do. More often than not, however, we choose our objects because we seek the experience potential of the choice ... And now and then we will be quite transformed by the uncanny wedding of our idiom and an object, meeting up at just the right time. (Bollas 1989: 48–9, my emphasis)

Bollas uses the term personal effects, borrowed from the 'ceremonial phrase' of one's possessions left behind after death, to think about the field of objects which act as a 'signature' of our idiom, hence becoming a sort of 'private culture' (1989: 49). Personal effects – the conscious and unconscious object-choices accumulated across a life-course – are '[i]n health' a way in which the self 'continuously establishes its idiom' (ibid.). But note that only some of these 'personal effects' are significantly transformative, where the 'true self' encounters an object that can be 'wedded' to it, 'meeting up at just the right time'. There is a dimension of chance to this; what is lived and experienced as powerfully transformative is often also experienced as *surprising*:

Objects ... often arrive by chance, and these aleatory objects evoke psychic textures which do not reflect the valorisations of desire. We have not, as it were, selected the aleatory object to express an idiom of self. Instead, we are played upon by the inspiring

arrival of the unselected, which often yields a very special type of pleasure – that of surprise. It opens us up, liberating an area like a key fitting a lock. In such moments we can say that objects use us. (Bollas 1992: 37)

Bollas' work does not directly theorise media fandom – an absence perhaps partly driven by the analyst's own forms of cultural capital – yet it seems especially evocative of fans' conversion narratives. The object that suddenly becomes so vital to the emergent fan, seeming to unexpectedly interlock with self-experience, indicates a 'duality of object arrival – by desire or by chance' (Bollas 1992: 27). And though fan objects might common-sensically be expected to arrive 'by desire', it appears that those which are markedly self-transformative and unconsciously generative are not, in fact, reducible to desiring selves.

Moving away from discussions of personal 'idiom' and the 'true self' – both of which import an unhelpful degree of mysticism into what would otherwise proceed as rationalist media/cultural studies – Bollas offers up a rather more useful concept: the 'transformational object' (1987: 28). Less clearly tied to a 'destiny drive' or 'true self' (Bollas 1989), the transformational object is any which re-evokes existential echoes of early, pre-verbal childhood experience. At this archaic phase of self-formation, it is the mother who has the capacity to transform the subject: 'in our analysis of certain features of culture, I think we can isolate the trace in the adult of the earliest experience of the object: the experience of an object that transforms the subject's internal and external world' (Bollas 1987: 28). Although many cultural objects can promise a transformation of the self, for example a new car, house, job, relationship (Minsky 1998: 199), these transformational objects also have an analogue not just in other promised signifiers and signifieds of change, but instead in aesthetics:

The aesthetic moment is a caesura in time when the subject feels held in symmetry and solitude by the spirit of the object ... Whether this moment occurs in a christian's conversion experience, a poet's reverie with his landscape, a listener's rapture with a symphony, or a reader's spell with his poem, such experiences crystallise time into a space where subject and object appear to achieve an intimate rendezvous. (Bollas 1987: 31)

Akin to the transformational object, psychically experienced as such, rather than ideologically consumed:

such moments ... are fundamentally wordless occasions, notable for the density of the subject's feeling and the fundamentally non-representational knowledge of being embraced by the aesthetic object. Once experienced, these occasions can sponsor a profound sense of gratitude in the subject that may lead him into a lifelong quest for some other reacquaintance with the aesthetic object. The Christian may go to church and there hope to find traces of his experience, the naturalist may look for another sighting of that rarest of birds that creates for him a moment of sudden awe. (Bollas 1987: 31)

On this account, emergent, transformative fandom might best be thought of as 'an aesthetic moment' which, via its initial aleatory quality, leads to a new and unexpected sense of self-recognition which then in turn potentially leads into a 'lifelong quest' to re-experience such traces of pre-verbal experience. Emergent fandom, if we extrapolate from Bollas, amounts to 'our induction by the object ... captured in an embrace that is an experience of being rather than mind ... [and] provides ... a generative illusion of fitting with an object' (1987: 32). However, this generative aesthetic moment is not identical to the 'transformational role of

consumer goods' such as holidays, cars or assorted products (Minsky 1998: 199). We need to keep in mind the 'structural integrity of an object ... so that when it is employed it affects us in a manner true to its character' (Bollas 1992: 34–5). Any general theory of 'transformational objects' hence amounts to a spurious categorisation of widely divergent cultural objects, leading to an interpretation of fandom which sees it as simply one consumer ideology among others, rather than as a specific set of lived experiences (linked to specific texts). Emergent fandom, representing a punctuating 'caesura' in the ongoing grammar of self-identity and self-narrative, is less a conscious, desiring 'request for transformation' (Minsky 1998: 199) and more an 'uncanny wedding' of self and other.

Anthony Elliott has sought to reread Bollas rather than merely applying his work; first in relation to postmodern media culture (Elliott 1996: 137), and then in relation to mobile, digital media (in Elliott and Urry 2010: 40). Again, though, the fact that Elliott's summaries and discussions of Bollas here are so word-for-word similar as to almost constitute self-plagiarism does indicate a problem: Bollas' work has a degree of suggestion, or poetic evocation, that enables it to be linked to widely divergent cultural artefacts/processes. We should thus be cautious of assuming that Bollas' transformational object, and the 'aesthetic moment', can specifically illuminate emergent media fandom:

The unlocking of the self through the storing of affects in the object world ... permits a multiplication of experience and a transformation in pleasure, creativity and fulfilment. The use of an object as transformational, whether we speak of an immersion in music, literature or football, can help open the self to the multiplicity and discontinuity of experience. (Elliott and Urry 2010: 40)

Though it may seem persuasive to theorise fan objects as "psychic keys" for particular individuals, in that they enable an opening out of unconscious experience, a symbolic context for the elaboration of selves' (Elliott and Urry 2010: 39), it still remains vital to consider the specificities of fan-text interactions: 'In light of the specific social, textual, and technological conditions of the fan text ... I believe that we cannot shift our attention fully from the object of fandom to the activity of fandom' (Sandvoss 2005: 93), whether this is play or aesthetic immersion. The 'conversions' of fan fiction writers clearly do not work, socially and psychically, in the same way as those of Kiss or Springsteen fans: self-transformations regarding sexuality are distinct from those concerning self-directedness *per se* or cultural awareness. The place of textual incitement remains significant.

Anthony Elliott takes some steps towards contextualising Bollas' object-relations theory by arguing that his approach needs to be modified 'in terms of current social and cultural contexts', before then going on to highlight how Bollas fails to engage with the role of contemporary media technologies and forms: 'the technical and cultural forms of postmodernity play a central role in the *generation and containment of intersubjective affective states*, rather than simply being a realm on the "outside" in which thoughts and fantasies are played out' (Elliott 1996: 137). For Elliott, within 'the intensification of our media-dominated world ... there is a certain parallel between the self-referentiality of postmodern cultural and technical forms on the one hand, and experience within and reflection upon these forms at the psychic and personal levels on the other' (1996: 132–3). However, if we read this 'parallel' as a thorough-going kind of mirroring (Sandvoss 2005) then we risk foreclosing the experiential surprises and aleatory vectors of emergent fandom, theorising fan experience only within its more habituated phases – the 'lifelong quest' alluded to by Bollas – rather than making sense of its transformative, aesthetic moments. What Elliott does usefully call attention to, however, is the need to modify Bollas' work via a greater awareness of media culture and how its objects can be used by the self, but how they might also interpenetrate with selves

more radically than Bollas allows. Any so-called 'true self' may, under the conditions of twenty-first-century techno-culture, always-already be prosthetically interlocked with media consumption and with the practices of producers (Lind 2012). As Steve Bailey reminds us, in the case of fandom 'the text is not simply an object of interpretative practices ... but also a resource for symbolic integration into a social [and I would add, psychical] self' (2005: 211). Yet 'integration' does not always mean a conscious or mirroring process. Nor might the fan's transformative conversion necessarily be rooted in simple gratification:

Transformation does not mean gratification. Growth is only partially promoted by gratification, and one of the mother's transformative functions must be to frustrate the infant. Likewise, aesthetic moments are not always beautiful or wonderful occasions – many are ugly and terrifying but nonetheless profoundly moving because of the existential memory tapped. (Bollas 1987: 29)

Fandom's emergence (Hills 2002: 160) can thus involve frustration as well as satisfaction, and hate as well as love. Indeed, it is striking that at least one of Steve Bailey's respondents recounted hating Kiss when he first heard them (Bailey 2005: 121), whilst the Manics fan studied by Tania Zittoun also spoke of hating the first Manics album she listened to (Zittoun 2006: 133). The psycho-social timing of fan-text encounters might sometimes go awry, but visceral hate or dislike can also be contained within the phenomenology of fan experience – something which specific theories of anti-fandom (Gray 2003) have tended to split into a conceptual polarity or distinction.

What Bollas' analysis of aleatory, transformational objects pushes us to usefully emphasise within research on fan cultures is the temporality of fandom – how it can affectively and psychically emerge, unexpectedly and without desire's ministrations, and how its 'aesthetic moments' can then be (re)lived across the life-course. Some prior theoretical approaches to fandom have stressed a 'diachronic continuum in the audience ... [and the fact that] this continuum may represent a possible career path under certain conditions' (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998: 141). Yet, perhaps surprisingly, 'the process of induction and progression ... along a (moral) career path' (Crawford 2004: 42) has typically been theorised sociologically rather than psychoanalytically, despite acknowledgement that for many of us 'this induction often occurs as a small child, and in our adult life the reasons and motivating factors behind this induction may not always be clear, and in many cases this process may seem almost predestined' (Crawford 2004: 43). Once more displacing 'conversion' with terms such as induction and socialisation, Garry Crawford observes that 'after the initial induction of a ... fan (whatever the influence for this may have been) this process of socialisation is never complete' (2004: 46). Perhaps the greatest strength of Crawford's work is that it allows for a consideration of how different yet connected fan 'career paths' can be followed (2012: 64). In the next section I will move on to consider this question of multiple fandoms, a topic which, like becoming-a-fan stories, has been marginalised due to an insistent academic focus on identifiable, established and habituated fan communities. If becoming-a-fan narratives push accounts of self-transformation (and unexpectedness) back into fan research, then thinking about multi-fannishness can challenge the idea that becoming-a-fan necessarily equals a life-changing, powerfully transformative event. Instead, it may be more about transferring fan-cultural skills and competencies between and across differing fan objects. If the 'life-changing' fan conversion can be thought of as a sort of 'paradigm shift' at the level of subjectivity, then transference from one fandom to another may, by contrast, represent fandom's 'business-as-usual' extension (Kuhn 2012), contained by desire rather than being aleatory or psychically 'unlocking'.

Transferring Objects: Access Points, Intertextualities and Predispositions

Despite scholarly accounts of fan conversion, becoming-a-fan can also involve the intertextual extension of fan affect from one 'old' or displaced fan object to another 'new' text. For example, Rebecca Williams gives the example of fans of *The West Wing*, who after its final season transferred their fandom to Aaron Sorkin's next show, *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip*:

When fans' relationships with objects end, they may suffer loveshock and need to cope with this period of mourning before refashioning their self-identity to deal with this rupture ... One of the key ways this can be achieved is by moving onto new fandoms or [by] recourse to other existing fandoms. Fans are rarely devoted to just one object at a time and often form links of similar fan objects, which have ... overlaps. (Williams 2011: 274)

Such trajectories are very much knowing, conscious enactments of shifting (but still relatively continuous) fan identity, where following an actor, writer or director from project to project prompts the migration/extension of fandom. The presence of specific 'access points' to the fan object (Harrington and Bielby 1995: 89) means that fandom can be pre-textually or paratextually incited; at least some fans of Russell T. Davies' *Doctor Who* were prompted to become *Torchwood* fans on the basis of his role as creator/executive producer, even before the series aired. Likewise, fans of *Buffy* and *Angel* for whom Joss Whedon's work has formed an access point are likely to anticipate, and become pre-textual fans of, Whedon's latter film and TV projects. The idea that fandom is a matter of 'textual singularity' is undermined and contested by such sequences of serial fandom (Hills and Luther 2007: 211). However, this mode of becoming-a-fan is very different to that which has been theorised as self 'conversion'. Whereas transformative, emergent fandom tends to involve the first subjective appearance of fan identity (typically in childhood or adolescence), this alternative modality of becoming-a-fan presupposes an established familiarity with fan culture. It is a shifting of fan affect, rather than its initial appearance. As such, it is not the *experience* of being a fan that is new here but rather the *particular fan object* that is novel, within an intertextual sequence of fandoms.

In the academic book series *Cultographies* – where each title explores one cult movie's production and reception – the format requires every writer to recount their relationship to the film under discussion. Although one might expect highly devoted scholar-fans to describe narratives of fan 'conversion', in fact this is rarely the case. Jim Barratt does provide one such account, of his *Bad Taste* fandom, suggesting that he discovered the film purely by surprise, and without any prefiguring or paratextual knowledge. This transformational discovery, which Barratt says came at just the right time for him to appreciate the movie (2008: 9), fits very much into the paradigm of the 'transformational object'. But other writers such as Kate Egan on *The Evil Dead*, and Glyn Davis on *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story*, draw on very different discourses of textual prefiguration and intertextuality rather than pure discovery. Davis' investment in *Superstar* is strongly prompted, he writes, 'by research into New Queer Cinema ... [This] had led me to [director Todd] Haynes' other works ... But I had been unable to track down his infamous early short' (Davis 2008: 1). It is therefore very much a conscious engagement with Haynes as an 'access point' which brings Davis to fall 'in love' with *Superstar* (Davis 2008: 1). Kate Egan also discusses the prehistory of her eventual viewing of *The Evil Dead*, and how the text had formed an object of ongoing fascination and fear for her, before she eventually decided to watch it:

The conventional end to this story would be for me to state that I saw the film and it changed my life. This was not, however, how things went ... I felt a sense of pride that I had overcome my fears and actually watched the film ... The film has thus come to function, for me, as a symbol of those mysterious films in the video shop that I was always aware of and secretly intrigued by, but which I could never quite bring myself to watch. My fear of those films, and the fact that The Evil Dead helped me to face this fear, means that it will always be a special film to me. (Egan 2011: 6–7)

In direct contradiction to 'conventional' narratives of fan transformation, Egan's viewing is again very much *not* one of 'discovery' and surprise, but discursively enacts a knowledgeable (almost affectively insulated) viewing. Her encounter with the cult text is prefigured and pre-textually consciously mediated, with awareness of *The Evil Dead's* marketing and status as a horror 'classic' furnishing 'access points', just as Joss Whedon, Russell T. Davies, Aaron Sorkin or Todd Haynes can pre-textually and intertextually lead knowing audiences to extend their fandom into new objects.

Furthermore, the importance of access points means that the process of becoming-a-fan can be a very slow, gradual one in some instances. In such cases, culturally shifting meanings of self and text eventually intersect, with an audience-text 'interdiscourse' being found and produced (Hills 2011: 21). My own account of personal *Blade Runner* fandom displays this discursive frame, with an interest in industrial design, developed through my 30s, eventually lending the movie 'a lived, felt relevance to me' (Hills 2011: 21) which it had lacked across many previous audience-text encounters, these being differently contextualised by teenage sociality and 20-something academia. Likewise, Ethan de Seife's *Cultographies* description of his engagement with *This Is Spinal Tap* also affirms how becoming-a-fan can emerge not in some transformational, life-changing moment, but through a slow accretion of social contexts. De Seife writes of how, in his 'eleventh year' he remembers

going with my mother to see This Is Spinal Tap in a large, near-empty theatre in Harrison, New York ... My high-school friend Jason was the first Tap fanatic I ever knew ... My second Tap midwife was surely my college friend Jonah, for whom the film is almost literally a religion: it provides a blueprint for living. (de Seife 2007: 1–2)

The prefiguration of fan interest hence lies not only in paratexts such as a striking, seemingly illicit movie poster (see Weinstock 2007: 3, 7 on *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*) but also in how texts are socially activated by other audience members, even other fans acting to promote the significance of their beloved cultural objects. In extremis, the gradual, socially mediated accumulation of affective significance can involve anti-fans wholly and radically revising their opinion. Ian Cooper argues that he failed to understand Sam Peckinpah's *Bring Me The Head of Alfredo Garcia* when he rejected it, after a first viewing, as 'terrible' and a crushing disappointment (2011: 2). Over time, the film 'seems to change and grow with every viewing' (2011: 106–7). This culminates in Cooper's move from anti-fandom to fandom: 'Jesus, was I wrong. It is not a film for a kid' with its 'sense of decay and disillusion' (Cooper 2011: 3) that older viewers might appreciate as an interdiscourse. This diachronic reorientation, produced out of changes in self-narrative and social context, means that identifying one definitive moment of fandom's emergence can be subjectively difficult, if not experientially impenetrable. Indeed, professionalised *Doctor Who* fan Gary Russell (in Berry 2012: 25) has suggested that "'I'm not sure exactly when I became a *Doctor Who* fan, but ..." is a commonly used term' among fans of the series, despite exempting himself from the discursive framing. Fixing audiences into static categories – being a 'fan' of X or an 'anti-fan' of Y – misses the variability in shifting audience-text relations. Returning to discourses

of becoming-a-fan enables a focus on transformational moments, as well as on the gradual mediations, reconfigurations and transfers of fandom.

Tackling the question of fandom's multi-textual trajectories and intertextual developments, Mark Duffett introduces the notion of being a 'fan without fandom' (2013: 126), whereby someone who has already developed fan-cultural competencies might then look to perform this fan identity (or predisposition) by casting around for a new object. Duffett draws on the self-narrative of Johanna Mead, a contributor to *Chicks Dig Time Lords* (Thomas and O'Shea 2010), an edited collection where female fans of *Doctor Who* autobiographically discuss their relationships with the show. Writing in the subgenre of the becoming-a-fan story, Mead notes:

Star Trek fandom lured me in for a time, mostly by simple fact that most of my friends were active in it ... But Trek palled – for which I'm relieved, given how it's all turned out – and I found myself in a rather strange position. I was a fan without fandom. Fortunately that didn't last long. PBS lured me back to Doctor Who with Sunday night reruns ... Then a friend convinced me to visit Gallifrey One, a Doctor Who convention in Los Angeles, whereupon I learned that the fandom still thrived ... It wasn't until the new show that I fell head-over-heels in love with it, again ... It was ... a contrast to the pedestrian circumstances of everyday life. (Mead 2010: 56)

A moment of falling 'head-over-heels' in love with *Doctor Who* – a transformational self-narrative – is present here, but alongside a discourse of prefigured fandom, where the 'fan without fandom' develops an awareness of, and engagement with, participatory culture whilst looking to interact with a new fan object. Mead's self-narrative is hence one of transference rather than pure transformation (more correctly, it's a narrative of transference, where a fannish disposition is transferred from *Star Trek* to *Doctor Who*, followed by a 'conventional' transformation narrative). Such becoming-a-fan processes do not represent a pure or initial entry into a fandom. They are not the outright emergence of fandom, but instead amount to a reorientation and rearticulation of fan competencies. In Paul Booth's terms, this is 'the reproduction of the fan community ... by applying the mores ... of fandom' (2010: 129) to new objects.

Other contributors to the *Cultographies* series proffer similar testimony, demonstrating how fannish predispositions can be consciously drawn on in engagements with new texts. Geoff King says of his *Donnie Darko* appreciation that the film 'repaid ... [a] kind of prior non-investment, something that requires more conscious effort than inadvertently imbibing the trailer or one of the written or broadcast reviews. It is the type of film that is better, first time around ... without the setting of too many prior expectations' (2007: 2). In this case, in order to deliberately prefigure a mode of fandom, King tries to block out and limit intertextuality and promotional 'access points'. In a highly 'meta' fashion, King's access point here precisely amounts to the careful self-management and reduction, if not negation, of conventional access points. To be sure, these represent 'culturally individualizing ... discourses of textual discovery' (Hills 2005: 817), but nonetheless this is a consciously and cognitively manipulated process of discovery, rather than being experientially or existentially transformative.

In effect, King moves from prior fandom into a 'new' fan object not via intertextual or fan-cultural coordinates, but via the transposition of a protocol for reflexively engineering the 'private culture' of personalised appreciation. This accords well with Anthony Elliott's rereading of Bolla, suggesting that pervasive media culture can sometimes be 'screened', that is, tuned out or consciously blocked, in order not to impinge on the fan self. The 'discursive logic that knits together interests across textual ... boundaries' (Jenkins 1992: 40) is hence not only one of 'cult' film; it can also be an intensely personalised discourse of individual

media consumption, cut adrift from publicity, reviews and other traditional, paratextual 'access points'. In place of transformation, fan predispositions – based on the reproduction of participatory culture or the reproduction of individualising discourse – are transferred from one moment of consumption to another, plotting a trajectory of iterated rather than wholly emergent fandom. Such a phenomenology of fandom does not entirely undermine the theoretical relevance of object-relations psychoanalysis, given Bollas' interest in the 'duality of object arrival' – sometimes by chance, sometimes by desire – but it should caution us against assuming that all becoming-a-fan stories will necessarily involve conversion and powerful self-transformation.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that work on fan cultures could benefit from further considering and researching becoming-a-fan stories in order to complicate accounts of fan communities based around singular texts. As Duffett (2013: 154) rightly argues, fan autobiographies have typically been neglected, usually in favour of theorising fan communities. And although some important work on fans' self-narratives has been carried out (for example Cavicchi 1998; Harrington and Bielby 2010), this has tended to implicitly or explicitly adopt a one-sided view of fandom as transformative and life-changing. Such a focus, while it valorises fandom as an important aspect of contemporary cultural identity, neglects how fandom can also be extended or transferred from object to object across the life-course (as well as cutting into and periodising self-narratives of 'before' and 'after'). The intertextual transference of fandom from object to object is based on discourses of self-continuity rather than upon the discontinuities of transformation. But such continuity relies upon pre-established fan identities and competencies, whereas transformative fandom – frequently an adolescent or pre-adolescent transition – appears more likely to demarcate the emergence of fandom for the very first time, experientially, rather than acting as part of a fan 'career' where fan-cultural identities are extended and iterated around new texts.

As Christopher Bollas notes, one 'important characteristic' of immersive, self-absorbed consumption 'is that the individual uses things while knowing that the aleatory vector is so prominent that he will also be played upon by the object' (1992: 37). Becoming-a-fan stories empirically mirror this 'ambiguity of being that constitutes the human, who experiences himself both as the arranger of his life and as the arranged' (Bollas 1992: 27). What Bollas' psychoanalytic work on aleatory and transformational objects therefore enables fan studies to theorise more fully is the somewhat occluded, temporal question of just how fan objects are selected or arrived at. Perhaps it is about time we thought more about the transformational, gradual and sequential temporalities of fandom.

References

- Abercrombie, N. and Longhurst, B. 1998. *Audiences*. London: Sage.
- Bacon-Smith, C. 1992. *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Bailey, S. 2005. *Media Audiences and Identity: Self-Construction in the Fan Experience*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave-Macmillan.
- Barratt, J. 2008. *Cultographies: Bad Taste*. London and New York: Wallflower.

- Berry, S. 2012. *Behind the Sofa: Celebrity Memories of Doctor Who*. Kibworth Beauchamp: Matador.
- Bollas, C. 1987. *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known*. London: Free Association Books.
- Bollas, C. 1989. *Forces of Destiny: Psychoanalysis and Human Idiom*. London: Free Association Books.
- Bollas, C. 1992. *Being A Character: Psychoanalysis and Self Experience*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Booth, P. 2010. *Digital Fandom: New Media Studies*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Cavicchi, D. 1998. *Tramps Like Us: Music and Meaning Among Springsteen Fans*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cooper, I. 2011. *Cultographies: Bring Me The Head of Alfredo Garcia*. London and New York: Wallflower.
- Crawford, G. 2004. *Consuming Sport: Fans, Sport and Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Crawford, G. 2012. *Video Gamers*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.
- Davis, G. 2008. *Cultographies: Superstar – The Karen Carpenter Story*. London and New York: Wallflower.
- de Seife, E. 2007. *Cultographies: This Is Spinal Tap*. London and New York: Wallflower.
- Duffett, M. 2013. *Understanding Fandom*. London and New York: Continuum.
- Egan, K. 2011. *Cultographies: Evil Dead*. London and New York: Wallflower.
- Elliott, A. 1996. *Subject to Ourselves: Social Theory, Psychoanalysis and Postmodernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Elliott, A. and Urry, J. 2010. *Mobile Lives*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.
- Giddens, A. 1991. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gray, J. 2003. New audiences, new textualities: Anti-fans and non-fans. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 6(1), 64–81.
- Harrington, C.L. and Bielby, D. 1995. *Soap Fans: Pursuing Pleasure and Making Meaning in Everyday Life*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Harrington, C.L. and Bielby, D. 2010. Autobiographical reasoning in long-term fandom. *Journal of Transformative Works and Cultures* [Online], 5. Available at: <http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/209/176> [accessed: 17 June 2013].
- Hills, M. 2002. *Fan Cultures*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Hills, M. 2005. Patterns of Surprise: The 'Aleatory Object' in Psychoanalytic Ethnography and Cyclical Fandom. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 48(7), 801–21.
- Hills, M. 2011. *Cultographies: Blade Runner*. London and New York: Wallflower.
- Hills, M. and Luther, A. 2007. Investigating 'CSI Television Fandom': Fans' Textual Paths Through the Franchise, in *Reading CSI: Crime TV Under the Microscope*, edited by M. Allen. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 208–21.
- Jenkins, H. 1992. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York and London: Routledge.
- King, G. 2007. *Cultographies: Donnie Darko*. London and New York: Wallflower.
- Kuhn, A. 2002. *An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris.
- Kuhn, T. 2012. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. 50th Anniversary Edition. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Lind, R.A. (ed.) 2012. *Producing Theory in a Digital World: The Intersection of Audiences and Production in Contemporary Theory*. New York: Peter Lang.

- Mead, J. 2010. Costuming: More Productive Than Drugs, But Just as Expensive, in *Chicks Dig Time Lords: A Celebration of Doctor Who by the Women Who Love It*, edited by L.M. Thomas and T. O'Shea. Illinois: Mad Norwegian Press, 55–61.
- Meggers, H. 2012. Discovering the Authentic Sexual Self: The Role of Fandom in the Transformation of Fans' Sexual Attitudes, in *Fan Culture: Theory/Practice*, edited by K. Larsen and L. Zubernis. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 57–80.
- Minsky, R. 1998. *Psychoanalysis and Culture: Contemporary States of Mind*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Sandvoss, C. 2005. *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Stevenson, N. 2006. *David Bowie: Fame, Sound and Vision*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Thomas, L.M. and O'Shea, T. (eds) 2010. *Chicks Dig Time Lords: A Celebration of Doctor Who by the Women Who Love It*. Illinois: Mad Norwegian Press.
- Weinstock, J. 2007. *Cultographies: The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. London and New York: Wallflower.
- Williams, R. 2011. 'This Is the Night TV Died': Television Post-Object Fandom and the Demise of *The West Wing*. *Popular Communication*, 9(4), 266–79.
- Zittoun, T. 2006. *Transitions: Development Through Symbolic Resources*. Greenwich: Information Age Publishing.

This page has been left blank intentionally