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Special Section

An introduction: The Fan Studies Network – new connections, new research

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As early career researchers (relatively) fresh from the doctoral experience, we remember the emphasis frequently placed on networking as beneficial to the academic career. Training programs with tips on proper conference etiquette are frequent across campuses, highlighting the potential benefits to making connections with those with similar research interests. Yet at times such situations can be difficult to navigate – the social conventions of conferences often dictate discussion on papers directly at hand – and new avenues of research may be restricted by conference delegates' individual schedules, social obligations, and moods.

In March 2012, we sought to cultivate a space where such concerns are minimal, and it was with that in mind that the Fan Studies Network was launched. Keen for scholars of all levels to interact, we have actively fostered a communal sensibility that encourages informal, yet fruitful, discussion of topics within the field. Having attracted close to 300 members, the network is already fostering a sense of community and engendering fruitful debate. In honour of the network's first anniversary, we intended to capture this dynamic intersection of scholars working in the field, and present it in this special section of *Participations*.

During the 2012 event "Popular Media Cultures: Writing in the Margins and Reading Between the Lines", Henry Jenkins presented his paper 'Beyond Poaching: From Resistant Audiences to Fan Activism'. Jenkins made reference to the "1992 moment" in fandom scholarship, when a number of significant works in the field were published that 'set the stage for more than a decade of fan ... studies' (Hellekson and Busse 2006: 19). Since that time, citing Jenkins' *Textual Poachers*, Camille Bacon-Smith's *Enterprising Women*, and/or Lisa Lewis' collection *The Adoring Audience* has seemingly been a matter of course in academic practice, as these works have collectively (albeit justly) shaped the nature of fan

studies scholarship. The importance of the “1992 moment” means that frequently studies of fandom open with an account of their relation to these texts – *Textual Poachers* in particular (Hills 2002; Sandvoss 2005; Hellekson and Busse 2006; Booth 2010) – and the irony of doing the same here is not lost. The title of Jenkins’ 2012 work – ‘*Beyond Poaching*’ – suggests that a re-evaluation, or at the very least a re-contextualisation, of the “1992 moment” is perhaps warranted.

So although fandom has been, to a degree, widely studied, the influence of the Internet and social media on fandom is now resulting in scholars questioning and ruminating on how these platforms are presenting new challenges and how their influence can be understood. In this section we are presenting a snapshot of the current state of the field and the topical themes that are presently being debated within this. In addition, this issue is providing a platform for new scholarly collaborations between FSN members, demonstrating the possibilities for new modes of research. These new collaborations between network members, in addition to individual submissions, were particularly encouraged in order to reflect the FSN’s aims at strengthening the way in which knowledge is shared across the field. This issue also demonstrates the rich, vibrant and wide ranging areas of fan studies that are investigated by members in the network. The articles within cover themes such as film and television fandom, cosplay and anime, politics, research ethics and methods, sports fandom, branding and brand ownership, comics, social media, fan advertising, transcultural fandom, online communities, gendering in fandom, and fan fiction.

The first overarching theme apparent within these articles is the prominence and use of online platforms within fan cultures. **William Proctor** explores how the announcement of a new *Star Wars* trilogy and the merging of Lucasfilm with Disney were received by online fans. He argues that a complex and complicated process of emotion and affect was apparent in their reactions, which was reported by some media outlets in over-simplified and reductive terms. **Cornel Sandvoss** also examines online fandom, however from the political perspective. By analysing posts by users on the political blog *Daily Kos*, he argues that political enthusiasm can be conceptualised as a form of media fandom, with the posts from users being motivated by the affective bond between citizens and politicians, as fans and fan objects. **Natasha Whiteman and Joanne Metivier** similarly explore the nature of online interactions between fans. However, they examine the processes that occur when online fan communities rupture and end. By analysing the ‘deaths’ of two online fan communities: *City of Angel* and the *Sugar Quill*, they argue that they could be viewed as constituting a zombie state, and show some of the different ways that fans come to terms with these losses. **Hannah Ellison** examines the practices of a particular subset of *Glee* fan fiction authors, exploring how “canonical” textual knowledge is transferred between media platforms, from the televisual to the online space.

In contrast to this, another strong theme amongst the work presented here is an emphasis on the importance of examining and devoting attention to offline practices. As a great amount of attention is currently being focused on online platforms of fandom, these

scholars argue that offline practices are still very much vibrant, and also deserve attention. **Paul Booth and Peter Kelly**, in their study of Doctor Who fans, discovered that very little about fan identity had been changed or altered, despite the rich expansion of social media and internet platforms into fan cultures. They argue that instead of transferring or moving offline practices, online platforms instead augment them. **Emma Pett** similarly examines offline fandom, in the form of nostalgia based repeat viewings of the 1980s film *Back to the Future*. Employing a small scale survey at a showing in Wales, UK, she demonstrates the ways in which a continued affection for the film is expressed by its fans. Pett emphasises how nostalgic value works to produced varied and distinctive patterns of response from viewers. **Nicolle Lamerichs** also explores this area of offline investigation, yet through examining Doujinshi and Cosplay, practices within anime fandom, and how they are performed within local fan conventions in Japan, USA and Europe. Lamerichs discovers that although manga culture seems homogeneous, different local practices were evident in the sites she examined.

Another theme rising within the works included here is the theorisation of fans and their practices. **Bertha Chin and Lori Morimoto** consider an “alternative” approach to their case study – offering an examination of transcultural fandoms that is concerned less with nations than with fans themselves, placing a stronger emphasis on a more personal set of contexts that has thus far been ignored. Similar to the above invocation of Jenkins’ “1992 moment”, **Matt Hills** returns to John Fiske’s definitions of fan productivities, offering a reconsideration of their appropriateness given their frequent use within contemporary scholarly accounts. Considering a broader issue, **Kristina Busse**, explores the manner in which the increasingly “popularisation” of fan culture often reveals representation that is highly gendered. Busse unpacks this bias with her own critique of mainstream “geek” culture.

In order to fully utilise the connectivity of the network, this issue also includes a Forum section, which features six, shorter, dialogue style pieces. These are based around one topic, with scholars debating and discussing disparate fan studies themes such as user generated content, research ethics, brand ownership, the role of social media, and sports fandom. Rounding off the section is an interview with FSN member Will Brooker, who reflects on his scholarly work so far, his new innovative comic *My So-Called Secret Identity*, and also ruminates on the current state of the fan studies field. What is perhaps most notable about the Forum pieces, however, is that they have facilitated brand new research relationships. Before the writing process, some co-authors were unaware of the others’ work, but have now expressed an interest in working together in the future. That such new relationships have been established is one of the major outcomes of this issue. Whilst not wanting to suggest that this section is a generation-defining “2013 Moment”, we hope these articles will at least inspire further debates.

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You can find and join the Fan Studies Network online at <http://fanstudies.wordpress.com>, on Twitter at @FanStudies, on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/#!/groups/507241072647146/> and on the discussion list at <http://iiscmail.ac.uk/fanstudies>.

Biographical notes:

Lucy Bennett is the co-founder of the Fan Studies Network. She graduated with a PhD in online fandom at JOMEC, Cardiff University, with a thesis focusing on online R.E.M. fans. Her research examines audiences and their use of the internet, with particular focuses on fandom, music and social media. Her work has been published in the journals *New Media & Society*, *Transformative Works and Cultures*, *Participations*, *Social Semiotics* and *Continuum*. Contact: bennettlucyk@gmail.com.

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