

Fiske's 'textual productivity' and digital fandom: Web 2.0 democratization versus fan distinction?

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Abstract:

Partly in response to debates surrounding participatory culture and what's been dubbed 'web 2.0', writers in fan studies have recently made use of John Fiske's classic (1992) tripartite model of semiotic, enunciative and textual production to theorise online fandom's creativity (e.g. Crawford 2012; Sandvoss 2011; Scott 2008). In this article, I consider the difficulties with using Fiske's (pre-Internet) model to think through alleged democratisations of web 2.0 fan productivity. Firstly, what is to be counted as a 'text' in a world where comments, tweets and status updates can all potentially constitute forms of fannish textual productivity, and where Fiske's three categories can be rapidly cycled through, and readily hybridized, thanks to social media? And secondly, to what extent does Fiske's refusal to distinguish between 'fan' and 'official' production lead to a situation where fan-cultural distinctions and evaluations regarding the 'quality' of fan creations are downplayed? I identify a tension in web 2.0 scholarship between those who follow Fiske's populist cultural politics, problematically positing fan creativity-without-expertise (e.g. Gauntlett 2011; Shirky 2010), and those who – equally problematically – seek to recuperate an amateur/professional binary (e.g. Keen 2008; Lanier 2011). Drawing on a series of case studies, I argue that questions of expertise and distinction remain highly relevant to fans' productivity, thereby challenging both the cultural-political heirs to Fiske's 'active audience' position, and their opponents who have taken a derogatory stance in relation to fan creativity. Ultimately, I suggest that digital fandom's affordances and activities indicate a fluidity of semiotic, enunciative, and textual productivity, returning us to Fiske's own hesitancy surrounding these terms, and cautioning us against simply applying fixed categories to digital fandom. However, I argue that a 'return to Fiske' can usefully highlight varying relationships between fan expertise and web 2.0's democratisation of production. Rather than this being a dialectic or paradox, it is managed via differing fan-cultural 'moral economies' (Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013).

Keywords: textual productivity; John Fiske; fandom; expertise; Web 2.0; creativity; moral economies.

Introduction

Published the same year as Henry Jenkins's *Textual Poachers* and Camille Bacon-Smith's *Enterprising Women*, Lisa A. Lewis's edited collection *The Adoring Audience* has also made an enduring contribution to fan studies. In fact, C. Lee Harrington and Denise Bielby's (2007) survey of 65 fan studies' academics working in 20 different countries identifies *The Adoring Audience* as the second most important publication in the area, after *Textual Poachers* (Harrington and Bielby 2007:188). Lewis's volume includes John Fiske's chapter 'The Cultural Economy of Fandom' where Fiske defines three kinds of audience productivity, linking two of these specifically to fan practices (1992:37). In this article I want to return to Fiske's definitions of fan productivity in the light of their continued use within contemporary fan studies (see Sandvoss 2011 and Crawford 2012, building on Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998 and Longhurst 2007). But I also want to consider how Fiske's work on fan productivity can be developed (Jenkins 1992; Scott 2008 and 2013) in relation to the participatory cultures of web 2.0. Is Fiske's pre-Internet analysis still relevant to the cultural worlds of today's digital fandom? And if so, how might we need to adapt Fiske's work in order to avoid simply celebrating the supposed '*democratization of productivity*' (Hartley 2012: 131; Salkowitz 2012: 238) indicated by the rise of user-generated content? Although Fiske was writing in a very different technological, cultural and media context, it has been suggested that '[i]n a way, the Web 2.0 discussion is just a continuation of the active audience debate of earlier decades... equipped with ...partially new terminology' (Bolin 2011:70). I will argue that 'textual productivity', and its Fiskean lineage, have fed into a situation where digital populists applaud fans' web 2.0 creativity by marginalizing issues of skill, competence and (fan-)cultural distinction, whilst digital elitists seek to emphasize questions of skill and competence in order to bolster a reactionary re-installation of professional/amateur. What's needed, I suggest, is an approach to fans' web 2.0 textual productivity which is sensitive to different types of textuality, focusing on issues of (fan-)cultural distinction without tipping back into *a priori* denigration of fan creativity.

It should be noted from the outset that 'web 2.0' is itself a contested and somewhat problematic term. In *Digital Fandom*, Paul Booth argues that the distinction between 'web 1.0' and '2.0' – supposedly marking a move from 'static' online consumption to 'dynamic' interaction, where user-generated content becomes an everyday, ordinary practice – doesn't empirically engage with how the web is *actually* used (Booth 2010:87). Furthermore, an emphasis on user-generated content as something newly technologically-enabled also downplays 'a history of user-made websites, many of them fan-based, since the early days of the Internet' (ibid.) as well as a longer pre-Internet history of fan-generated material. However, I will continue to use 'web 2.0' here for two reasons: for one thing, the term has become widely used, and furthermore it has a specific currency in the

debates and the scholarship I will be considering here (e.g. Keen 2008; Shirky 2010) where ‘a paradigm shift in technology via technology’ (Booth 2010:87) is assumed to democratize creativity, and to challenge the symbolic and cultural power of media professionals.

I will begin by revisiting Fiske’s tripartite model of audience/fan productivity in more detail, arguing that this work has been reified and distorted over time in fan studies. Attempting to combat such reifications, and restoring a sense of Fiske’s own analytical hesitancy, means re-opening the question of what might constitute ‘textual productivity’ as well as exploring questions of expertise in relation to user-generated content. Fiske’s work has taken on a newfound appeal for writers in fan studies precisely because of debates surrounding web 2.0, seeming to offer a way into theorizing user-generated content, as well as potentially championing democratizations of media/textual production. One can view celebratory arguments regarding web 2.0’s ‘everyday creativity’ (Gauntlett 2011) as very much following in the tradition of Fiskean cultural politics and populism.

Bringing Fiskean Concepts of Fan Productivity into the Digital Age

Suggesting that fans ‘are particularly productive’, John Fiske proposes the use of specific analytical categories to illuminate this:

while recognizing that any example of fan productivity may well span all categories and refuse any clear distinctions among them. Categories are produced by the analyst for analytical purposes and do not exist in the world being analyzed but they do have analytical value. The ones I propose to use may be called semiotic ..., enunciative ...and textual productivity (1992:37).

Fiske immediately notes that his first term, semiotic productivity, ‘is characteristic of popular culture as a whole rather than... fan culture specifically ...we need not spend any longer on it here’ (ibid.). The reason that this form of productivity is generalized, if not essential to media reception, is that it is ‘essentially interior’, being concerned with how audience members understand media texts. Moving on to forms of productivity that Fiske sees as more characteristic of media fandom, he defines enunciative productivity as characterising meanings that are shared or spoken in face-to-face culture:

Fan talk is the generation and circulation of certain meanings of the object of fandom within a local community... But important though talk is, it is not the only means of enunciation available. The styling of hair or make-up, the choice of clothes or accessories are ways of constructing a social identity and therefore of asserting one’s membership of a particular fan community (Fiske 1992:38).

For Fiske, the point of enunciative productivity is that it can ‘occur only within immediate social relationships’ (Fiske 1992:39). As a result, it ‘exists only for its moment of speaking,

and the popular cultural capital it generates is thus limited to a restricted circulation, a very localized economy' (ibid.). By contrast,

another category of fan productivity ... approximates much more closely [to] the artistic productions validated by the official culture, that of textual productivity. Fans produce and circulate among themselves texts which are often crafted with production values as high as any in the official culture. The key differences between the two are economic rather than ones of competence, for fans do not write or produce their texts for money (Fiske 1992:39).

It is arguably this third term, textual productivity, which has received the greatest attention within fan studies, since it has historically functioned to distinguish sectors of fandom from non-fan audiences. On Fiske's account, it would be perfectly possible for non-fans and casual audiences to talk about media texts, thus participating in the production of enunciative productivity. But in the pre-web 2.0 era, textual productivity – the creation of fan fiction, fan art, filk songs and fan videos – appeared to demarcate fan communities and identities since non-fan audiences would be far less likely to engage in these practices of textual production.

Given these historical, conceptual links between fandom and textual productivity, it is perhaps unsurprising that this Fiskean term has continued to possess currency in contemporary fan studies. In *Video Gamers*, Garry Crawford suggests that aspects of gamer activity are strongly akin to fans' textual productivity: 'The consideration of ... textual productivity ... aligns the analysis of video gamers with previous research on media audiences and fan cultures' (2012: 120). Under the banner of textual productivity, Crawford considers such diverse activities as 'the production of websites, mods and hacks, private servers, game guides, walkthroughs and FAQs, fan fiction and forms of fan art' (ibid.), distinguishing between gamers' textual productivity which predominantly focuses on game mechanisms (walkthroughs, hacks, modifications) and video game narratives (fan fiction, fan art). Though this line may be somewhat blurred (Crawford 2012:129 and 132), it is nevertheless apparent that writing fan fiction or creating fan art draws on a rather different skillset, and different forms of competence, compared to 'modding' (or modifying) the code of a game. By contrast, Fiske's concept of 'textual productivity' downplays questions of fan skillfulness and competence by arguing that there is no significant, necessary difference between fans' textual productivity and official media texts with regards either to production values or skill. For Fiske, differences 'are economic rather than ones of competence', i.e. official texts are created to generate profit (where Fiske assumes a purely commercial media culture).

Although Garry Crawford notes that 'there will inevitably be a great deal of crossover between forms of audience productivity' (2012:120), he typically treats semiotic, enunciative and textual productivity as three distinct categories, thus tending to lose sight

of Fiske's initial warning that 'any example of fan productivity may well span all categories and refuse any clear distinctions among them' (1992:37). But such a reification of analytical categories into supposedly substantive, separable terms is even more clearly marked in Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst's (1998) *Audiences*.

Abercrombie and Longhurst link enunciative/textual productivity to points on their continuum of audience positions: 'our argument is that textual production increases in importance as one moves across the continuum' (1998:148) of consumer-fan-cultist-enthusiast-petty producer (diagrammatically represented incorrectly in Sullivan 2013:194). Consumers, Abercrombie and Longhurst say, are involved in productivity 'through talk... [which is] fleeting and not written down' (1998: 149), aligning this audience type with enunciative productivity. Fans' 'textual activities ... tend to be generated from within the pre-existing concerns of everyday life', e.g. children playing games based on media texts and their characters, whereas for cultists – or what most other scholars would term communal fandom – 'production of texts becomes a central aspect of the cult activity' (1998:149). Abercrombie and Longhurst go on to differentiate enthusiasts by virtue of the fact that 'enthusiasm tends to revolve around the production of things, from railway models to plays to ... dresses. There may be textual productivity as well, but this is subordinated to ... material production' (1998:150).

Thus, Abercrombie and Longhurst differentiate consumers from fans via the substantive separation of enunciative/textual productivity, and further distinguish cultists from enthusiasts via the presumed fact that the former engage in textual productivity whereas the latter's production is first and foremost 'material', hence raising the question of where boundaries are to be drawn around 'the text', a matter also implied by Fiske's analytical separation of enunciative and textual productivity. However, this intriguing separation of 'textual' and 'material' productivity is displaced in Brian Longhurst's later *Cultural Change and Ordinary Life*, where the author instead simply aligns cultists with 'social interaction' and enthusiasts with 'production of artefacts connected to their ... activities ... writing ... stories and ... making ... videos and paintings' (Longhurst 2007: 43). It is this later re-orientation of the initial audience continuum that seemingly prompts Cornel Sandvoss to conclude that Fiske's 'three types of productivity in turn correspond with the three groups of fan audience Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) suggest: fans, cultists and enthusiasts' (2011: 50). In fact, any such conclusion cannot be drawn from Abercrombie and Longhurst's (1998) account, since it is the consumer rather than the fan who is linked to enunciative productivity there, whilst cultists are linked to textual productivity and enthusiasts to material/textual productivity. It is Longhurst's extension of 'enthusing' (2007: 104) which appears to give rise to the far neater tripartite schema where semiotic, enunciative and textual productivity map on to fans, cultists and enthusiasts, respectively. Yet one outcome of Abercrombie and Longhurst's (1998) articulation of Fiske's model of productivity with an audience continuum – only heightened by Longhurst (2007) – has been the reification of semiotic, enunciative and textual productivity into substantive and distinct things, rather than fan activities potentially spanning all categories and refusing clear

distinctions among them, as Fiske originally cautioned. In essence, while Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) and Longhurst (2007) appear to apply Fiske's model, their use of these terms doesn't clearly map on to Fiske's initial schema, and in fact tends to reduce and simplify the Fiskean approach.

Set against such categorical splitting, a number of writers have sought to complicate Fiske's model in relation to online fandom. Cornel Sandvoss argues that 'types of ... productivity (semiotic, enunciative and textual) ... inform fans' participation in and appropriation of online spaces in the production and consumption of popular culture' (2011: 51), while Suzanne Scott has similarly argued that 'the multifaceted definition of fan productivity outlined by John Fiske could and should be addressed in a convergence context' (2008:212). Both Sandvoss and Scott, *contra* Abercrombie and Longhurst, challenge the boundaries between Fiske's types of productivity in the context of web 2.0.

For example, Sandvoss suggests that the 'boundaries between textual and enunciative productivity are... on occasion ambiguous' (2011: 59-60), since some fan-created texts can both 'follow the stylistic and genre conventions of the original fan object/text ... [and] take the conversational form of everyday life talk, providing a commentary and evaluation of the fan object as forms of paratext' (Sandvoss 2011:60). Some fan videos or fanvids may work in this way, seeming to combine the commentary of enunciative productivity with emulation and re-editing characteristic of textual productivity. However, Sandvoss's point seems to partly misread Fiske, since we should note that in 'The Cultural Economy of Fandom' the crucial distinction between enunciative and textual productivity is *not* 'primarily one of form' (Sandvoss 2011:60), but rather one of mediation. Enunciative productivity remains locked into its immediate social context since it concerns spoken or embodied meanings which are not otherwise mediated, whereas the textual productivity of 'fan culture makes no attempt to circulate its texts outside its own community. They are 'narrowcast', not broadcast, texts' (Fiske 1992:39). Hence, regardless of whether or not digital fandom's user-generated paratexts – e.g. fanvids – constitute forms of commentary, in Fiske's terms if they are uploaded and made available to a communal audience then they become clear instances of (mediated) textual productivity. On the other hand, a fanvid made especially to be screened at a specific social event would be readable as both textual productivity *and* as space/time-bounded enunciative productivity, whilst a video shot for a fan convention and only then subsequently uploaded to YouTube and circulated by fans as time-sensitive 'spreadable media' (Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013) would in fact move from hybrid textual-enunciative to pure textual productivity across the different phases of its convention/web 2.0 sharing.

One example of this online shift from textual-enunciative to textual productivity concerns a Steven Moffat interview filmed exclusively by Ed Stradling for US convention Gallifrey One 24 in 2013, but subsequently posted online, shared by the wider fan community and reported upon by digitalspy (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h7VQrnMzjrU&feature=youtu.be>). Other examples of textual-enunciative productivity – bound to its spatio-temporal context – being digitally

transformed into 'narrowcast' textual productivity involve uploaded pictures and videos of TV filming (as on the 'Doctor Who Filming' Facebook group or via the Twitter hashtag #dwsr for Doctor Who Set Report), along with fans' tweets reporting Convention news (see Williams forthcoming). In one sense, then, digital fandom has radically multiplied the possibility (and opportunity) for fans to shift textual-enunciative productivity into textual productivity, pretty much in real time.

Furthermore, Suzanne Scott has noted that Fiske's definition of enunciative productivity doesn't quite hold up in relation to online fandom: 'We clearly must amend Fiske's description of the "restricted" circulation of analog fan talk to incorporate the online forum/message board, and accordingly consider how enunciative productivity by fans is increasingly serving a widespread economic/promotional function' (2008:212). But despite observing how digital 'talk' can circulate widely, and promotionally, to generate buzz around a TV show, Scott continues to view this as 'enunciative' rather than 'textual' productivity, reserving the latter term for fan creations which can be 'loosely defined as fan-produced narratives that aim to engage directly with the unfolding canonical narrative' (Scott 2008:212). Yet by shifting from a 'restricted' to a distributed, mediated context, I would argue that online postings, reviews or commentaries themselves become textual in the sense of being digitally reproduced and reproducible. Even though they may not be diegetic affirmations or transformations, these fan productions are no longer embodied or spoken in a precise spatiotemporal moment, they are instead mediated to indeterminate or unknown others (a forum/Twitter followers who may re-tweet/YouTube viewers etc). Again, these may be better thought of as textual-enunciative productivity, recalling Fiske's warning that his categories should be viewed as analytical rather than water-tight divisions.

This possibility of shifting from one category of Fiskean productivity to another, or hybridising categories, is actually offered up as a critique in *Textual Poachers*. Henry Jenkins suggests that Fiske's distinction

between semiotic productivity (the popular construction of meanings at the moment of reception) and enunciative productivity (the articulation of meaning through dress, display, and gossip) ... breaks down since the moment of reception [for the fan] is often also the moment of enunciation ... [this] is literally true within ... group viewing situations (1992:278).

But Jenkins is, of course, thinking of an embodied, co-present group context. In the context of web 2.0, 'group viewing' can extend to all those who are watching a broadcast and live-tweeting it via hashtags. Here, Fiske's categories break down altogether or, rather, are recomposed as a rapidly switching circuit in place of a taxonomy. As fan audiences watch TV and then live-tweet along, they shift 'interior' semiotic productivity into socially-shared enunciative productivity that's bound up with a particular moment of broadcast, and immediately switch that into the textual productivity of 'narrowcast' (if not actually broadcast) digital mediation. The narrowcast/broadcast distinction drawn on by Fiske to

separate fan from official textual productivity is itself partly eroded since although live-tweets may only be directed at a number of Twitter followers, if a consensual or common-sense hashtag is used then these tweets become findable by a far wider/imagined audience wholly unknown to the tweeter. As Sandvoss and Scott start to consider – while ultimately leaving enunciative/textual categories in play – digital fandom contributes to a breaking down of semiotic, enunciative and textual productivity, with the former two categories being readily expressed via, or transformed into, textual productivity.

However, it could be counter-argued that I have installed an overly expansive notion of textual productivity here, and that a fan tweet, say, should not be considered as a ‘text’ in the same way as a fan video or piece of fan fiction: the latter are ‘artistic productions’ (Fiske 1992:39) whereas a tweet or a forum posting are not. But online fans work in a wide range of forms, genres and modes: considering textual productivity in the digital age therefore means considering *different types of textual productivity* rather than using one blanket term for a diverse set of fan creations:

- a) I have already started to raise the issue of ‘textual productivity’ around video games, following Crawford (2012) who considers whether there might, structurally, be different kinds of game-oriented and narrative-oriented productivity involved, e.g. one focused on computer coding or hacking/modding and one focused on practices of art and writing. Another related differentiation of fan textual productivity involves ‘old’ aesthetics of purely hand-drawn fan art versus a ‘new aesthetic of photo-manipulation, which remains controversial among some fans’ (Jenkins 2012:329). In each case, there are divisions and distinctions played out between ‘natively digital’ and ‘remediated analogue’ textual productivities (see Thomas 2010). This is not at all a straightforward binary of analogue/digital textual productivity, but rather a question of how textual productivity may be aligned with different aesthetic values (and communities of practice).
- b) Is a replica prop an example of material productivity rather than ‘textual productivity’, despite the fact that screen grabs and possibly even plans or design information – alongside online feedback and crowd-sourced, networked fan participation – may have been used in its fabrication? Rather than arguing that such material culture and fan creativity deserves an alternative concept altogether (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998), it may again make more sense to theorise these ‘networked re-enactments’ (King 2011) as a type of strongly mimetic textual productivity drawing on particular craft skills. Such mimetic textual productivity may also include practices of cosplay and action figure customisation, whereas forms of fan fiction are more likely to be transformative in terms of reworking the source text rather than directly emulating it.

- c) Fiskean textual productivity is solely aligned with the ‘cultural economy’ of fandom rather than with the economy-proper of official media. But as Lobato, Thomas and Hunter (2013:6–8) have argued, user-generated content can shift between ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ economies, for example moving closer to fandom on some occasions and closer to official media on others, e.g. a fan’s letter published in a commercial fan magazine. Fans’ web 2.0 textual productivity may also be ‘a software feature ... ultimately related to revenue streams of ... service providers who invite us to speak out at – but not so much speak to – others. Users are well aware of this underlying economic principle, and their often cynical contributions reflect the knowledge that their comments are features contributing to ... the popularity of that specific topic or thread’ (Lovink 2011:52).
- d) In relation to web 2.0 we therefore probably need to distinguish between ‘explicit’ and ‘implicit’ participatory culture. These terms are drawn from the work of Mirko Schafer, who argues that work on media fandom led by Henry Jenkins has in effect championed one form of textual productivity: ‘Jenkins’s understanding of participation primarily deals with intrinsically motivated actions exercised in social formations which share a high degree of interaction, common objectives, and interests’ (Schafer 2011: 44). Schafer terms this ‘form of production ... explicit participation’, noting that ‘explicit action’ is needed to participate in a fan community and consciously produce media texts and artefacts (ibid.). Set against this, Schafer suggests ‘new information management systems, as employed in popular web 2.0 applications, reveal an implicit participation, which exists below the threshold of explicit participation and goes beyond ... participation in a surrounding culture’ (ibid.). In this case, user productivity is assumed and channeled by software and interface design (see Murray 2012), and calls for no fan-communal setting.

One example of ‘implicit’ textual productivity could be an individual uploading a Facebook profile or cover picture based on their fandom (Sarachan 2010:59-60). For instance, my own Facebook profile picture was recently a Dalek, taken from filming of the 2013 *Doctor Who* docudrama *An Adventure in Space and Time*. This user-generated content is an individualised performance of fan identity occurring outside fan community, and facilitated – if not interpellated – by Facebook’s design. But to what extent is this ‘textual productivity’? Unlike enunciative productivity it is not tied into a ‘restricted’ spatio-temporal circulation or social moment, and it is also more than merely functional or representational. Despite these concerns, explicitly creating fan art or fan fiction surely calls for a very different set of skills and levels of expertise when compared to the ‘art’ of ‘implicit’ textual productivity which is involved in selecting, cropping/manipulating and uploading a Facebook profile picture.

As I will go on to address in the next section, Fiske's idealization of 'textual productivity' as a singular, monolithic entity refuses to make this an issue 'of competence' (1992:39), thus rendering it difficult to sustain any judgement as to how the precise (aesthetic) parameters of a 'text' might be located, as well as how textual productivity may span many different modes and forms of skillfulness. If we are to differentiate between texts and non-texts on the basis of an artistic/non-artistic discrimination then at the very least an aesthetics of fan fiction and fan productivity would appear to be called for, itself implying a form of evaluative expertise (Thomas 2011, 'What is Fanfiction'). But as I will now demonstrate, Fiske's pre-Internet downplaying of textual productivity's 'competence' – emerging out of structuralism and cultural studies – prefigures celebratory web 2.0 commentators' wholesale rejection of validating 'expertise'.

From Fiske to Shirky, Gauntlett and Others: The Disappearance of Textual Productivity's Skillfulness?

'The Cultural Economy of Fandom' makes no attempt to differentiate among and between fans' textual productivity. Instead, Fiske aligns the term with the 'production values' of official media texts (1992:39): his key concern is that fans should not be viewed as inferior or secondary creators. Hence professional and amateur productivity are rapidly equated. But by assuming that fans' textual productivity is 'crafted' in an equivalent manner to 'artistic productions validated by the official culture' (ibid.), Fiske displaces any more detailed theorization either of the aesthetics of fan productivity, or of the competence and relative skillfulness of such fan work. Textual productivity, we might hazard, does not empirically correspond with Fiskean idealization: if Fiske's pre-Internet framework doesn't quite allow us to engage with the *differentiated variety of fan textual productivity*, then a further weakness with its approach is that fans themselves are frequently involved in *the hierarchical evaluation of fannish textual productivity* via feedback, recommendations, beta reading and mentoring (Jenkins 2006: 178-9), as well as through fine-grained fan distinctions whereby reputation/status accrues to certain fan creators but not others (Thomas 2011, 'What is Fanfiction'; Ito 2012). As well as offering a blanket theorisation of textual productivity, Fiske also obstructs any analysis of fan hierarchies and reputations that are based on the communally-recognised excellence of certain textual productivity.

However, Fiske is far from alone in this problematic. His cultural studies' work, aimed at taking fandom seriously and refuting common-sense pathologies (prevalent in the early 1990s) errs on the side of idealizing fans' productivity. By contrast, we should admit that some textual productivity may well be adjudged incompetent, unconvincing and poorly executed within a fan culture, even while other fan productivity may be evaluated as more impressive than 'official' texts, e.g. the colourisation work of *Doctor Who* fans such as BabelColour available via YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/user/BabelColour>). Indeed, BabelColour ultimately contributed to the official colour restoration of a black-and-white archive copy of *Doctor Who* story 'Mind of Evil', indicating that state-of-the-art, highly

skillful fan productivity can, under certain circumstances, be co-opted and embraced by official producers.

The idealization of fan/audience productivity evident in Fiske's formulations prefigures a major strand of work on web 2.0's textual productivity or user-generated content. Here, the enhanced ease of access and lower web 2.0 (cost/skill) barriers to participation are celebrated as a democratization of productivity. While some in media and cultural studies have embraced this discourse of web 2.0 democratization, e.g. separating 'the *representative mode* of broadcasting from the *productivity mode* of broadband' (Hartley 2012: 125), others in media sociology and critical media studies have sounded a far more cautious note (Couldry 2012:96—8; Andrejevic 2008 and 2009; Miller 2009). A group of writers have become emblematic of post-Fiske idealization, however, similarly downplaying and marginalizing questions of fan/audience skill. Foremost amongst these has probably been Clay Shirky, who argues that even the minimal example of making a lolcat picture should be taken seriously as a creative instance of web 2.0 textual productivity:

Let's nominate the process of making a lolcat as the stupidest possible creative act ... Yet anyone seeing a lolcat gets a second, related message: *You can play this game too.* ... On the spectrum of creative work, the difference between the mediocre and the good is vast. Mediocrity is, however, still on the spectrum; you can move from mediocre to good in increments. *The real gap is between doing nothing and doing something, and someone making lolcats has bridged that gap* (Shirky 2010:18—19, my italics).

While conceding that there is a 'spectrum of creative work', Shirky immediately downplays and dematerializes this by arguing that the 'real gap is between doing nothing and doing something', as if the difference between 'mediocre' and 'good' textual productivity is somehow unreal or unimportant. Shirky's default position here implies and celebrates a scenario of *digital creativity without expertise*. But as Graham Mickle and Sherman Young point out by considering the 'loltheorists' riff on the lolcats genre, 'the lolcat concept has spread to many variations' including those which trade 'in in-jokes which actively work to restrict the audience... by narrowing the scope of who might get the joke. ... From one perspective, a community built around ... specialist references could be seen as one built around exclusion' (2012:117). This might be true of loltheorists, such as the Henry Jenkins example shown below (<http://www.tamaleaver.net/2007/05/29/lol-theorists/>) which draws not only on knowledge of lolcats as a genre, but also on an awareness of Jenkins' work on fandom and convergence culture:



Yet Meikle and Young strenuously reject any exclusionary conclusion, countering that 'successful performance in such a forum is also a way of building recognition' (2012:117). Yet this hardly seems to be a plausible either/or: recognition and exclusivity can, after all, operate as part and parcel of the self-same cultural processes of distinction with regard to creating and sharing loltheorists.

David Gauntlett's *Making is Connecting* travels further down the route of celebrating digital creativity without expertise by defining everyday creativity, of the sort displayed via web 2.0, in a highly specific manner: 'Creativity is something that is *felt*, not something that needs external expert verification' (2011:79). In his expanded definition, Gauntlett writes:

Everyday creativity refers to a process which brings together at least one active human mind, and the material or digital world, in the activity of making something. The activity has not been done in this way by this person (or these people) before. The process may arouse various emotions, such as excitement and frustration, but most especially a feeling of joy. When witnessing and appreciating the output, people may sense the presence of the maker, and recognize those feelings (2011:76 italics throughout in original).

Gauntlett seeks to rule out 'expert verification', which he sees as linked to 'the standard definition of creativity ... identified by its *outcomes*: things or ideas which haven't been seen before, and which make a *difference* in the context in which they appear' (2011:73). To this end, Gauntlett ultimately caricatures any concept of cultural validation as implying 'a God-like overview of the history of previous innovations in that sphere' (2011:221). But it isn't God-like omniscience that is called for by processes of verification, merely a degree of expert knowledge in the relevant field of (fan) cultural practice. Such knowledge is called upon when fan fiction is moderated by other fans and checked for correct tagging etc before being uploaded to an archive (Hadas 2009), and it is called upon when 'experienced' fanvid

editors mentor novices in a community, advising them to avoid using common material (Ito 2012). As such, Gauntlett's attempt to wholly purge any notion of verification from web 2.0, in favour of the sensations and feelings of 'everyday creativity', ends up falsifying the processes and practices of fan communities that both retain and perform concepts of 'good' fan work. As Keith Negus and Michael Pickering have argued, there is a danger that an 'expanded conception' of creativity 'motivated by a democratic impulse against forms of elitism ... slips too easily into ... embracing and celebrating as creative all manner of routine discursive practices' (2004:15). Gauntlett's anti-elitist approach seemingly has no way of distinguishing meaningfully between 'routine' textual productivity where users generate material that is akin or closely similar to that being produced by many others, and user-generated content which is innovative, transformative or outstanding within a communal, fan-cultural (or even industrial) context. Ironically, the example of fannish textual productivity which Gauntlett (2011:73-8) uses to back up his arguments, *Star Wars Uncut*, has attracted academic and audience attention precisely as a result of its 'external verification', since 'the project went on to win an Emmy for 'outstanding creative achievement in interactive media'' (Meikle and Young 2012:120).

Barbara Klinger refers to this fact in her useful study of fan video re-enactments: '*Star Wars Uncut* ... makes an interesting entry here. Beyond representing the re-enactment of an entire film, it demonstrates how such a feat can gain a place in movie history and critical acclaim, thereby passing from ephemera to durable good' (2011:211n2). Klinger's overall argument is that individual fan re-enactments 'might not matter' culturally, and are likely to be 'dispensable' (2011:207 and 209), seemingly playing into Gauntlett's view of the standard definition of creativity:

surely a low-quality, homemade shot-for-shot remake of an *existing* hit movie can't count as an especially 'creative' act, can it? This is the derivative work of fans – which would be nothing if it were not for the original *genuinely* creative effort of George Lucas and his colleagues. ... Nevertheless, the work of the 473 *Star Wars Uncut* contributors does seem to be a remarkable array of creativity ... This brings us back to the problem with the standard definition of creativity (Gauntlett 2011:73).

But while Gauntlett reclaims *Star Wars Uncut* against such rhetoric, and against a strict separation of professional 'creativity' versus amateur/fan 'derivative' work, Klinger doesn't quite occupy this position after all. As she goes on to argue:

Lest I overly minimise the significance of individual re-enactments, it is important to note that each is not without effects. For DIY re-enactments and other productions, *digital circulation enables access, potential longevity and life as a text* ... This reminds us that, once ephemeral productions are given exposure through mediatization, *their status as texts with some endurance*

amplifies their capacity to signify (Klinger 2011:210, my italics; see also Gray 2010:143).

Note that Klinger links digital circulation to 'life as a text', further reinforcing my argument here that web 2.0 shifts semiotic and enunciative productivity into textual productivity in a series of (hybridised) ways. But Klinger also marks a further distinction: between 'ephemeral' fan media and 'durable', semiotically amplified texts. This distinction is not so much one of technological affordances, but rather one of wider cultural and critical verification. *Star Wars Uncut* moves out of the 'dispensable' terrain of fan re-enactment as 'support' to a film franchise's 'aura of omnipresence' (2011: 207 and 209) and becomes a text in its own right (2011:210) via 'critical acclaim' as an award-winning, publicized production. External verification is also encapsulated in the film's form as well as via its reception: at the level of composition it was stitched together as 'a continuous sequence of the highest-rated versions of each tiny scene' (Meikle and Young 2012:120), ranked and voted on by visitors to the starwarsuncut.com site.

The 'amplification' of *Star Wars Uncut* as a production suggests that attempts to essentialize fan/audience productivity – either as always competent (Fiske 1992) or always beyond external verification (Gauntlett 2011) – fail to address the processual and evaluated cultural lives of web 2.0 productivity. For example, following the success of *A New Hope Uncut*, starwarsuncut.com is now hosting *The Empire Strikes Back Uncut*. As its FAQ tells hopeful contributors:

Will my scene be in the official Star Wars Uncut+Lucasfilm cut? As with *A New Hope Uncut*, all completed scenes are posted online for the world to see, that way everyone can watch *The Empire Strikes Back Uncut* an infinite number of ways. Users will also be able to 'like' your favorite scenes and download your own Fan Cuts of the movie. As long as your scene **completely** follows the project rules your scene has a chance to make the Director's Cut. (<http://www.starwarsuncut.com/faq>, accessed 16/2/2013)

Contra Gauntlett's lessons drawn from *Star Wars Uncut* (2011:78), the follow-up features a '+Lucasfilm cut' stamped by the external verification of the corporate rights-owners, along with a 'Talent Release' form:

Without limitation, the grant of rights made above includes the right of the Producer and the Copyright Owner to use, re-use, publish, and re-publish My Work in connection with the ESB Uncut Project or other projects and/or productions, and in connection with the advertising, publicizing, exhibiting and exploiting of the ESB Uncut Project, in whole or in part, in any language (subtitled, dubbed, or otherwise), by any and all means, media, devices,

processes and technology, whether now or hereafter known or devised, in perpetuity, throughout the universe.

(http://www.starwarsuncut.com/talent_release, accessed 16/2/2013)

As Nick Couldry has argued, 'social networking-based recommendation and evaluation are likely to reinforce, not challenge, ... entertainment-based norms' (2012: 107), and the case of *ESB Uncut* certainly seems to bear this out via corporate validation of fans' user-generated content and the legalistic protection of commercial IP rights. Relatedly, a leading theorist of *Digital Fandom* (2010) Paul Booth has suggested that the 'contemporary mainstreaming of fandom ... has created a new type of fan – one that may identify the dominant ideologies of the media, but also supports them' (2012:69). In fact, this type of fan may not so much be new as newly visible, given the expansion in access to, and cultural normalization of, web 2.0 textual productivity (Bennett, Kendall and McDougall 2011:158; Sandvoss 2011: 51).

If one strand in previous theorisations of fan/audience textual productivity from Fiske onwards, and very much into the contemporary digital age, has essentialized creativity without expertise (either by *a priori* positing fannish competence, defining any judgement of this out of the equation, or marking evaluation as inconsequential), then what of the alternative tack? I want to move on now to consider how and whether fan expertise and fan-cultural practices of distinction and discrimination can be restored to the scene, without slipping from exaggeratedly anti-elitist arguments – which falsify empirical fandom by assuming its constant merit – into elitist arguments treating fan productivity as wholly lacking in merit.

From Fiske to Keen, Lanier and Others: Does Re-introducing Skillfulness Lead to an Elitist View of Fans' Textual Productivity?

If Fiskean 'textual productivity' assumes the value of fan works, and David Gauntlett similarly defines web 2.0 creativity so as to rule out any notion of external verification, then it should be noted that an alternative school of thought exists in relation to digital fandom. Abigail De Kosnick points out that despite the fact that '[f]an productions permeate the Internet' this 'flow of audio, visual and textual material from fans... has not greatly altered some cultural critics' negative assessment of fandom' (2013:98). In particular, De Kosnick refers to Andrew Keen's *The Cult of the Amateur*, an argument which seeks to define media professionalism against 'fans as prolific amateurs who make nothing of importance or value' (De Kosnick 2013:98). Keen, quite unlike Fiske's levelling impulse, wishes to reinstate and reinforce the cultural divide between professional textual production and amateur work, suggesting that:

in our Web 2.0 world, the typewriters aren't quite typewriters, but rather networked personal computers, and the monkeys aren't quite monkeys, but

rather Internet users. And instead of creating masterpieces, these millions and millions of exuberant monkeys – many with no more talent in the creative arts than our primate cousins – are creating an endless digital forest of mediocrity (2008: 2–3).

In fact, Keen's diatribe isn't specifically aimed at fandom, but nonetheless places it within a general anti-amateur stance. This is the inverted mirror image of Fiske's cultural studies and cultural politics: where Fiske sought to align fans with 'official' media culture, denying any issue of (or difference in) competence, Keen asserts – again *a priori* – an absolute difference between skilled media producers and unskilled, untalented Internet users. Oddly, each mode of argument – the populist and the elitist – shows a similar lack of interest in empirically exploring the hierarchies and evaluations that go on within fan cultures. Where Fiske elevates 'textual productivity', Keen aims to bury it. And he's not alone in this reactionary approach to digital productivity either. In *You Are Not a Gadget*, Jaron Lanier proposes a mystical, ineffable concept of 'quality' just as he attacks derivative or 'second-order' fan works:

First-order expression is when someone presents a whole, a work that integrates its own worldview and aesthetic. It is something genuinely new in the world. Second-order expression is made of fragmentary reactions to first-order expression. A movie like *Blade Runner* is first-order expression, as was the novel that inspired it, but a mashup in which a scene from the movie is accompanied by the masher's favorite song is not in the same league (2011:122).

Lanier qualifies this stark binary by saying 'I don't claim I can build a meter to detect precisely where the boundary between first- and second-order experience lies' whilst professing astonishment at 'how much of the chatter online is driven by fan responses to expression... originally created within the sphere of old media', e.g. film and TV (2011:122). For Lanier, the likes of Clay Shirky and 'the culture of web 2.0 enthusiasts' display 'disdain for the idea of quality' (2011:49) and talent. By contrast, Lanier asserts that either 'there's something ineffable going on within the human mind' which corresponds to talent – and the ability to create first-order expression – or 'we just don't understand what quality in a mind is yet, even though we might someday'. To reject any notion of quality/talent is, in Lanier's terms, to 'recoil from even the hint of a potential zone of mystery ... in one's worldview' (Lanier 2011:50).

This is an astonishingly weak and specious argument: first-order and second-order expression can't be separated out, and nor can any basis be offered for the distinction beyond 'potential ... mystery'. In fact, Lanier's discussion amounts to little more than an ideology seeking to redraw lines between professionals and amateurs, producers and consumers. Similar efforts have occurred in what Derek Johnson calls 'fan-tagonism', where

official media producers use their control over media texts to depict and discipline fan practices (Johnson 2007:287 and 298). Attempts at reinscribing professional/amateur or producer/fan binaries also crop up in official paratexts such as transmedia storytelling (Hills 2012, *'Torchwood'*) and DVD commentaries (Hills 2012, *'Sherlock'*). Although web 2.0 creativity may not meaningfully amount to 'democratization' (Couldry 2012:96-8; Schafer 2011: 45) since this would arguably require the wholesale dismantling of mainstream media institutions, nonetheless there are 'demonstrable shifts in media power, expanding the capacity of various subcultures and communities to access the means of media production and circulation' (Jenkins 2012:xxiii). In response to such shifts, media professionals appear keen to mobilise notions of 'talent' versus 'unskilled' fan labour. Here, for instance, is the response of *Doctor Who* showrunner Steven Moffat to fan-circulated spoilers which had threatened the publicity regime surrounding *Who* as a brand:

And hello the internet forums ... some ghastly little show-off, who was lucky enough to be at our press night, has typed up the entire plot of Episodes 1 and 2 in the most bungling, ham-fisted English you can imagine, and put it where everyone can see it ... All our months of work and effort, flattened and smeared and smudged into a dreary page of badly-chosen words (Moffat cited in Hills, *'Psychoanalysis'*, 2012:116).

As I've argued elsewhere, Moffat seeks to naturalise his authority and symbolic power by 'defending... properly tutored, skillful expert creativity against fans' unskilled, illiterate and improper amateurism. What's at stake is precisely ... a concept of creativity as requiring skill and expertise' (Hills, *'Psychoanalysis'*, 2012: 118). In terms which unwittingly echo Keen and Lanier, Moffat effectively positions fan spoilers as 'mere reproductions; feeble shadows of the text's professional creativity and aesthetics. They spoil because they lack skill, and craft, and good judgement' (ibid.). Thus, in mainstream media practice as much as in anti-amateur philosophies a concept of skill/talent is restored to the debate, but *only in order to ideologically put fandom in its place*, attempting to shore up the symbolic power of media professionalism at the very moment it is decentred, or at least contested, by specific practices of digital fandom.

This populist/elitist stand-off is unhelpful to fan studies: Lanier criticizes Shirky, while Gauntlett in turn critiques Lanier (2011:194-210), but the populists, prefigured by Fiske, celebrate creativity without expertise whilst the elitists (and those whose standing depends on professional status) assume that creativity cannot meaningfully exist outside expert cultures. What each side in the web 2.0 debate surprisingly fails to engage with is any fine-grained sense of fan distinctions – that is, *how fan cultures actually evaluate and judge 'textual productivity'* rather than *a priori* positing fandom's professional-level competence, or assuming its secondary/'second-order' derivativeness. It is this empirical and fan-cultural question that I'll now go on to address in the final section.

‘Moral Economies’ of Democratization/Distinction: Tensions in Fan Practice

Online fan practices ranging across the likes of vidding, fanfic, and forum posting are all often subjected to fan evaluation and communal ‘verification’. There is an element of expertise here, but it is typically ‘collaborative creativity’ (Condry 2013) rather than being housed within the individual mind (Hellekson and Busse 2006). And although individual fan creators can become pre-eminent in specific fan cultures, they typically achieve this by articulating communal, cultural norms and value systems. Mizuko Ito has examined these processes of distinction in relation to fans’ production of anime music videos (AMVs), arguing that even

as popular video remixes get millions of views on YouTube, there continue to be resilient subcultural niche groups that traffic in more exclusive and inaccessible forms of fan videos. Fan production is still deeply implicated in discourses and infrastructures that differentiate it from ‘mainstream’ sensibilities of cultural production and consumption (2012:278-9).

The removal of cost-based or technological barriers to textual productivity does not automatically result in democratization here because ‘subcultural sensibilities are maintained in the context of an increasingly accessible and participatory digital media scene’ (Ito 2012:280). Instead, there is a hierarchy of textual production in the AMV scene: ‘fan cultures are *simultaneously* becoming more accessible and more exclusive, and ... these two dynamics are integrally dependent on one another’ (Ito 2012:281). A wide participatory base draws new video editors into the scene, but an ‘inner’ circle of ‘more established editors ... support and recognize quality work’ (Ito 2012:286) at the same time. The subculture is thus sustained by this interplay between accessibility and ‘expert verification’ occurring internally within the fan culture. As Ito puts it: ‘Today, the AMV scene is characterized by a finer set of internal distinctions that enable the scene to welcome new participants and maintain subcultural capital that is out of reach of the casual fan’ (2012:287).

Ito’s study, based partly on interviews with editors, suggests that the populist/elitist debate surrounding web 2.0 textual productivity finds its own tensions microcosmically played out within fandom, where ‘‘common’ and ‘elite’ forms of participation ... are integrally related and synergistic’ (2012:295) rather than logically opposed in a zero-sum academic binary. Ito also generalizes from the case study of AMV, suggesting that

As more and more creative and hobby communities become digitally networked, the *productive tension between open and populist tendencies and processes of subcultural distinction will be a persistent feature of the cultural landscape* ... The value people get out of participation is a complex alchemy of

community participation, recognition, and the pleasures of creation and connoisseurship (2012:296).

Rather than championing fans' 'democratized' productivity, or attacking it as amateur 'mediocrity', we can instead view fan practices as internalizing and incorporating these tensions. Fan-cultural evaluations of fannish textual productivity can exclude or even censure subordinated, mediocre exemplars almost as hawkishly as Andrew Keen (Williamson 2005:180—2). As Bronwen Thomas has pointed out, 'the fanfiction community itself displays no scruples about hunting down and exposing examples of 'badfic,' with sites such as *Fandom Wank* and *Crack Van ...* reveling in the worst excesses of the 'bad'" ('What is Fanfiction', 2011:14—5). At the same time, fan cultures typically elevate fan textual productions that skillfully encapsulate fan cultural capital (Baym 2010:86). Aesthetic evaluation is hence enacted by and within networked fandoms: 'There is certainly a great deal of poor writing ... on the Net, but also some work which is ambitious and interesting by anyone's standards' (Pugh 2005:11). Indeed, Ito suggests that 'star' editors take on an almost 'professorial' standing, with their textual productions being communally recognized as outstanding:

While this professorial status can be viewed as elitist by those outside the core [subcultural membership], it is a source of status ... that becomes a magnet for viewers and aspiring editors. AbsoluteDestiny, a well-known editor, says that 'I think it's the point in which any community becomes a real community ... when a selection of that community gets accused of being elitist' (2012:290).

Although Mizuko Ito focuses on a fan community which has 'successfully weathered a transition to a digital ... age' (2012:294), other scholars of fandom have focused on transformations within specific digital fan practices. Leora Hadas, for example, has analysed the *Doctor Who* fan fiction archive, 'A Teaspoon and an Open Mind', reporting findings which resonate with Ito's AMV case study:

the cultural logics of fandom and of participatory culture might be more separate than they initially appear. Some fans wholly embrace the ideals of Web 2.0 and argue for the archive as a nonhierarchical, communal space where all content is equal regardless of what standards it might not meet. Yet ... other, more veteran fans ... instead ... [use] the discourse of private enterprise and property rights ... to argue for the rights of site moderators to regulate content (2009: para 0.1.).

Again, the 'open nature of participatory culture as idealized in the Web 2.0 model' is shown to empirically clash with fans' subcultural capital, and with a fan-cultural upholding of

aesthetic standards (Hadas 2009: para 1.2). This tension, which Hadas figures as more openly conflictual than Ito, emerges when the archive changes management and implements a new moderation policy: fanfic starts to be checked before being approved for uploading, a development which a number of the archive's users express strong opposition to.

Examining fan discourses which are pro- and anti- fanfic moderation, Hadas suggests that a rhetoric of community – 'we writers' (para 5.16) – is contrasted with 'an authoritative position of experience' stressing that 'senior members ... understand how fandom works. Users on this side [of the struggle] tend to cite their experience in other fandoms, with other archives, to demonstrate that the ... situation is normal, indeed lenient as compared to other archives' (5.18). While Ito's AMV subculture appears to have integrated 'common' and 'elite' textual productivity into an overarching but stratified community, the 'Teaspoon and an Open Mind' debate suggests that fan textual productivity can be fan-culturally assessed through variant 'moral economies' (Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013) indicating what counts as acceptable practices of fannish production and textual circulation. Rather than viewing the 'moral economy' as a value system which structures how official media texts are appropriated and used by fans, fans evidently also evaluate what constitutes 'good' fannish textual productivity according not only to aesthetic standards, but also moral codes. For the pro-moderation users of T&OM, their opponents displayed a sense of *false entitlement*. T&OM's defenders use this term to reject any claim to an equal say in archive management' (5.14). The alternative, anti-moderation moral economy was, in turn, marked by reference to *fellow fans*' (5.16), stressing moral virtues of fellowship and non-hierarchy.

Writing of viewer-generated paratexts – a concept possessing some continuity with Fiske's textual productivity – Jonathan Gray notes that we must avoid viewing these 'as necessarily of equal presence and power' when compared to corporate paratexts (2010:162-3). But to return to Klinger's argument that certain fan re-enactments may become amplified texts, we must also avoid assuming that all fans' textual productivity is inherently equal. Systems of fan recommendation, feedback and ranking can all contribute to the hierarchizing of fan productions, as can a moral economy of moderation or aesthetic evaluation (see Benkler 2006:75 on peer-produced relevance and accreditation). As Geert Lovink has asked, 'What limitations does Web 2.0 lay on textual exchange? The facilitating ideology of participatory culture, with its claims of all-inclusivity, is blurring out ... editorializing selection mechanisms' (2011:59-60). Lovink considers this question as part of a general, abstract argument, whereas Hadas (2009), Ito (2012), and Thomas (2011, 'Update Soon!') have all explored the detailed 'editorializing ... mechanisms' of vidding and fanfic. Bronwen Thomas has further argued that fan forum postings can be assessed by 'established members' in terms of 'quality and value... sort[ing] the wheat from the chaff' ('Trickster authors', 2011:94), implying that it is not only 'artistic' productions which are evaluated by fans via a hierarchical 'moral economy' of fannish textuality.

In this essay I've sought to relate John Fiske's pioneering work on types of fan productivity to analyses of web 2.0 'democratization' and participatory culture. I've

suggested that digital fandom collapses semiotic and enunciative productivity into hybridized or generalized textual productivity, whilst also calling for subsets of textual productivity to be theorized, e.g. natively-digital/remediated analogue; mimetic/transformative; informal/formal; explicit/implicit. In terms of the scholarly interpretation of web 2.0 textual productivity I've argued that two broad positions are discernible. Firstly, populist celebrations of 'everyday creativity' (indebted to Fiske's side-stepping of the question of fan-textual 'competence') aim to do away with any notion of expertise. And secondly, elitist condemnations of amateur textual productivity (inverting a Fiskean cultural politics) aim to recuperate the producer/fan binary. Rather than exploring some dialectical synthesis of these essentializing positions, I have concluded by drawing on empirical case studies of fan practice. These suggest that *populist/elitist tensions around fan creativity play out within media fandoms themselves*. Differing 'moral economies' of textual productivity indicate what a given fan culture, or faction, will count as an acceptable configuration of populist/elitist understandings – in some instances these can co-exist, whilst in others they come into direct competition. Fiske's work thus continues to be relevant to web 2.0 (see Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013: 200-202). Indeed, one of its key strengths lies in emphasising how semiotic, enunciative and textual productivity are increasingly fluid terms here, rather than fixed, reified categories.

Given such fluidity, though, it might be suggested that Fiske's tripartite schema is itself outdated, and hence that digital fandom needs to be understood via new models and concepts. Ironically, this idea seems to replay the problematic notion of 'web 1.0' versus '2.0' (Booth 2010:86-7) – albeit within the sphere of media/cultural theory – by assuming that what we might dub 'fan studies 1.0' should be fully superseded by an entirely new 'fan studies 2.0' paradigm. By contrast, I've argued here that Fiske's work can productively illuminate (dis)continuities across technological and cultural developments in fan creativity, as well as highlighting how narratives of web 2.0 democratization typically fail to address fan-cultural distinctions (partly pre-dating digital fandom), and the variant moral economies through which tensions between democratization/distinction are managed.

Biographical Note

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