## A Review by Neil Perryman

'Hello. My name is Henry. I am a fan.' (p.1)

*Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers* is a collection of essays and articles by the prolific aca-fan Henry Jenkins. Unashamedly pitched at a popular audience, with a mixture of short, journalistic pieces interspersed with longer, more analytic essays, this book styles itself as a bridge between fandom and academia, and you are just as likely to find a copy displayed in your local comic book store as a University library. The collection is best viewed as a companion piece to Jenkins' latest work: *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006), as it conveniently spans the gap between his early groundbreaking research on fan cultures that first saw print in *Textual Poachers* in 1992, and the author's more recent output. By employing a largely chronological structure, complete with new introductions that help to contextualise the essays, this collection of previously published work successfully maps the development of Jenkins' treatment of fan culture, from his early theories of resistance and appropriation, when fans were regarded as a marginalised and ridiculed underground subculture, to new theories of participation and collective intelligence, where audiences are currently described as being actively involved in how popular culture operates.

The book is divided into three sections. The first of these - 'Inside Fandom' - deals with the politics of fan cultural production via three lengthy self-contained essays originally published between 1988 and 1998. The first of these, 'Star Trek Rerun, Reread, Rewritten' (1988), eventually formed the basis for a rough draft of *Textual Poachers* and it remains one of Jenkins' most reproduced pieces of work. It introduced readers to the concept of fans as 'rogue readers' and in doing so it offered a powerful counterimage to the prevailing stereotypes that stigmatised fandom at the time. Interestingly, this essay also introduces readers to the concept of a 'moral economy' that fans use to justify and regulate their appropriation of media content (a concept later dropped for *Textual Poachers*). 'Normal Female Interest in Men Bonking', an essay that examines fan forums dedicated to the discussion of slash fiction, and which originally appeared in *Theorising Fandom: Fans, Subculture and Identity* (1998), follows. This is one of Jenkins' first attempts at forging a dialogue with the fan community, growing as it did out of the author's frustration with 'academics who had little or no exposure to the fan community

itself (who were) writing increasingly inaccurate descriptions of fan practices and perspectives' (p.61). Rounding off the first section is a condensed version of an essay that originally appeared in *Science Fiction Audiences: Watching Doctor Who and Star Trek*, which Jenkins co-authored with John Tulloch in 1995. 'Out of the Closet and into the Universe' is an attempt by Jenkins to shed light on how different groups make sense of popular culture (in this case focusing on the Gaylaxian fan group's struggle to lobby for positive gay representation in the *Star Trek* universe*)*, and, using John Hartley's theory of 'intervention analysis', this is Jenkins attempt at creating a 'context where fan politics (could) be acknowledged and accepted as a valid contribution to the debates about mass culture' (p.92).

These essays provide a (albeit admittedly dated) view of pre-digital fandom, long before the internet changed the landscape, and they are introduced with excerpts taken from an interview conducted by fan cultures researcher Matt Hills, where Jenkins reflects on the state of the fan studies in 2001 and the impact *Textual Poachers* had on both the fan and academic communities, as well as suggesting where his research might take him next.

The second section of the book, entitled 'Going Digital', includes a series of essays that trace of the impact of digital media on everyday life by examining the ways in which fandom has appropriated new technologies and media resources in order to 'increase their visibility and expand their influence over popular culture' (p.5). 'Do You Enjoy Making the Rest of Us Feel Stupid?' was originally published in 1995 and is one of the first ethnographies to be carried out on an online fan community (the Usenet group alt.tv.twinpeaks), while 'Interactive Audiences?' (2002), is Jenkins' first public attempt at reconceptualising fandom as a 'collective intelligence', a concept that would eventually shape his most recent work on media convergence. Meanwhile, 'Pop Cosmopolitan' (2004), is Jenkins' attempt to situate his work on participatory culture and media convergence in a global context. Rounding off this section are three short journalistic articles that originally appeared in editions of *Technology Review* between 2001-2, and which examine the subtle complexities of online relationships (focusing on his own son's experiences, no less) and the then-novel view of bloggers as journalistic interventionists. The section concludes with a moving, yet celebratory, piece about how the Internet, and the social networks that populated it, reacted to the events of 9/11.

The final section, 'Columbine and Beyond', is devoted to Jenkins' engagement with many of the public policy debates that emerged out of the events that took place in Littleton, Colorado in 1999, and it is in this section of the book where Jenkins' writing settles into a popular journalistic style. It includes essays originally published in *Harpers* magazine, the popular Internet webzine *Salon* and *Technology Review*, and here we find Jenkins talking directly to the American public (especially its teachers, parents and youth). By returning once more to John Hartley's concept of 'intervention analysis' - 'a mode of scholarship that seeks to mobilise and amplify the perspectives of media consumers in order to ensure they get a fair hearing by people in power' (p.6) Jenkins makes a compelling case for scholars taking a more direct role in shaping and guiding the media environment. This

section includes a report on Jenkins being called to testify at Senate hearing about youth and media violence, while his darkly humourous take on being 'ambushed' on the confrontational American talk show *Donahue*, where he struggles to defend *Grand Theft Auto 3* from an audience clamouring for his liberal blood, is a definite highlight. The collection concludes with a previously unpublished dialogue between Jenkins and his son about *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, moral panics and generational differences, a piece that not only reinforces the intergenerational dialogue that Jenkins repeatedly advocates in this section, it also highlights Jenkins' contention fact that the book is ultimately a collection of 'deeply personal' work.

To summarise, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers* is an eclectic and entertaining collection that clearly illustrates how Jenkins has continued to formulate and reformulate his own ideas about the interplay between the media industries and their consumers over the last twenty years. While it is occasionally uneven in tone - hardly surprising given the fact that the essays originally surfaced in a wide variety of contexts - it is always engaging. While Jenkins' own 'fans' will find little here that is new, this book is a welcome compendium that provides an interesting journey through the history of fandom, digital media, and Jenkins' theories, and is essential for anyone interested in fan cultures or media convergence. Its accessible style will almost certainly be popular with undergraduates, too.

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**Biographical note**

Neil Perryman is based at the University of Sunderland

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