

Displeasure, star-chasing and the transcultural networking fandom

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Abstract:

Pleasure and its politics have been overemphasised in audience studies for many years. To delineate a more well-balanced picture of everyday-life consumption practices by fans, this paper aims to directly study the experiences of displeasure using a case study of star-chasing fans of Hong Kong television stars in Mainland China. In this paper, displeasure is defined and analysed culturally rather than psychoanalytically. Seven years of auto-ethnographic experience and seventeen in-depth interviews are the sources used in this qualitative study. Drawing on Castells' 'network society' thesis, displeasure is identified by mapping out the power relations within transcultural fan communities, in which the traditional industry/fan dichotomy is replaced by multiple social players. Displeasure occurs in tandem with pleasure; thus, the fan identities in this case are constantly negotiated, reshaped and even discarded.

Keywords: displeasure, star-chasing, networking, transcultural.

Introduction

Popular culture studies appear to be inextricably intertwined with the politics of pleasure. This type of research can be roughly categorised into two traditions. The first is 'Pleasure is bad; it makes people passive and dull'. Cultural scholars who subscribed to this belief looked down on mass culture and often treated audiences as 'cultural dopes' because they indulge in the consumption of pleasure; most of the Frankfurt School theorists are exemplars of this tradition. The spectatorship studies of the British *Screen* journal also generally degraded popular pleasure. For instance, Mulvey (1975) proposed the 'destruction of pleasure as a radical weapon' in criticising mainstream Hollywood narrative movies. Postman (1985) even titled his book 'Amusing Ourselves to Death', condemning the deleterious influence of entertainment pleasure. However, in the second tradition, a great number of scholars – especially in cultural studies – have participated in research on the media and cultural

consumption with an ethnographic focus. By going into the 'field' and studying audiences directly, these scholars have challenged the first tradition by suggesting that 'pleasure is good; it makes (at least) some people (at some times) empowered and 'resistant'. Although these studies cannot be reduced to one sentence, they have all demonstrated serious interest in the pleasures of everyday media consumption among audiences and fans in a non-pejorative manner (Radway, 1984; Ang, 1985; Buckingham, 1987; Penley, 1992; Stacey, 1993; Brown, 1994; Cicioni, 1998; Bury, 2005). Within this second tradition, the often-quoted works of Fiske (1989; 1990; 1992) and Jenkins (1992) have laid the foundation for fan studies by radically politicising the resistant pleasures of self-empowered, sub-cultural fans against mainstream ideologies, which have been labelled the first wave of fan studies, with the slogan 'Fandom is beautiful' (Gary, Sandvoss & Harrington, 2007: 3). Though fan studies is constantly undergoing redefinition, many later scholars, such as Dell (1998), Mason and Meyers (2001), Thorn (2004), Kelly (2004), and Spence (2005), have highlighted the positive relationships between pleasure, fan identities, and anti-hegemonic resistance. Pleasure thus seems to be a predominant theme in the study of popular culture:

If the last 20 years or so of media and cultural studies have been dominated by studies of pleasure and enjoyment, it is through the perhaps *dark passage* of studying *hate, dislike, anger, disaffection*, and so forth that our field may broaden its scope and relevance yet more. As much as almost everyone has media and popular culture pleasures, we all have many displeasures, too. (Gray, 2010: 816, *my emphases*)

The neglected concept of 'displeasure' within entertainment consumption is an appropriate starting point for this essay. Given that the first tradition is criticised as being so patronising as to ignore audiences themselves (overemphasising 'structure') and the second tradition is evidently too celebratory (glorifying 'agency'), studies of 'displeasure within entertainment' could provide a useful balance. Pleasure is only one side of the coin of cultural consumption; the flip side is displeasure, which has been studied far less often. An effective popular culture study is well advised to investigate the tensions and dynamics between pleasure and displeasure. However, to maintain its focus, this essay will present only a study of displeasure. If we shift the focus to fan studies, two directions related to the unpleasant side of fan experiences require illumination.

The first direction addresses conflicts within fan communities, which are situated within the second wave of fan studies (Gary, Sandvoss & Harrington, 2007: 5-6). Fans can no longer go against the dominant ideologies with resistant pleasures; in sharp contrast, they reproduce and maintain social hierarchies, and the illusion of a united fan community as a subculture collapses. Terms have been coined to reflect this disharmony, such as 'interpretive schism' (Lindlof, Coyle & Grodin, 1998), 'subcultural ideologies' (Jancovich 2002), 'fan-tagonism' (Johnson, 2007), and 'a minefield of identities' (Hadas, 2013). Internal conflict is just one dimension of fan displeasures explored in this essay. Some scholars have

taken a broader position, to interrogate issues of unhappiness beyond the fan-versus-fan factions (Mikulak, 1998; Nash & Lahti, 1999; Tsai, 2007). However, these studies show no interest in further theorising 'hate, dislike, anger, disaffection' into 'displeasure and its politics', thereby limiting their critical vigour and failing to dialogue with the predominant legacy of the 'resistance/pleasure rhetoric' in popular culture studies.

The second direction is anti-fan studies, suggested by Gray (2003), which divide the media audience into three general types: fans, anti-fans, and non-fans. Although anti-fans share emotional intensity with fans and studies of anti-fans may also shed light on fan studies in a convoluted way, as the term suggests, they are not fans. Gray had become tired of the predominant status of fan studies within audience studies, and called for research that investigated alternative types of text-audience relationships. Gray (2005), Theodoropoulou (2007), and Alters (2007) responded to this speculative suggestion with empirical studies of anti-fans, addressing the 'dark passage' of fan experiences directly and systematically. However, the boundary between an 'unpleasant fan' (who is still a fan) and an 'anti-fan' (who is not a fan) is difficult to draw (Gray, 2005: 847), and it is questionable whether a new type of subjectivity, such as the anti-fan, is warranted and tenable. We should ask whether these new buzzwords tend to mystify rather than to clarify the emotional dimensions and their politics in fan studies and popular culture studies.

Consequently, this essay builds on the perspective of fan studies, and attempts to theorise displeasure in fan experiences and to identify its politics in response to previous popular culture studies. Displeasure, in an inclusive sense, can be understood as involving all types of contradictions, ruptures, disjunctures, and deconstructive moments in the processes of fan practices. In an effort to spearhead a direction for the project of 'displeasure studies', I endeavour to take early empirical steps towards realising this new research agenda through a case study of the cultural consumption practices of a special group of entertainment audiences: star-chasing fans¹ of Hong Kong TV stars in Mainland China. As a transcultural case, this study provides an opportunity to articulate micro-consumption in everyday life onto macro-geographic, social, and historical contexts. Therefore, the following research questions are proposed: What are the various types of displeasure experienced by transcultural fans? How do fans cope with these types of displeasure? What are the power relationships that construct and are constructed by displeasure and its management? How can we identify the new structures and possibilities for agency among these fans?

Methodology

The differing methodological concerns of the above-mentioned two traditions have produced divergent viewpoints regarding the politics of pleasure. This essay uses the audience ethnographic approach associated with the second tradition; thus, displeasure is approached culturally, rather than psychoanalytically. More specifically, within the area of fan studies, I would identify myself as a 'third generation aca-fan' (Jenkins, 2006: 12), as I am able to comfortably declare my identity as a fan and as a research student at the same

time. For individuals with this stance, the burden of out-and-out defences must be developed in the direction of exploring other, more diverse topics in fan cultures. In this paper, the topic is displeasure.

Overall, qualitative methods are used here, which can be understood as combining my seven years of experience with 'auto-ethnography' (Hills, 2002: 71-81) and a series of in-depth interviews. Above all, I must clarify my positions in both fan communities and academic fields, which are inter-related but distinctive. The year 2010 was a turning point for me; before that time, I was a highly active fan of Hong Kong popular culture, having grown up in the Sichuan province and having lived in Shanghai and Beijing for four years and three years, respectively. It was when I moved to these mega-cities that I began to chase stars with other fans and unconsciously accumulated first-hand experience and insider knowledge. In 2010 I moved to Hong Kong to pursue a PhD and planned to transform these rich, interesting and special experiences into a research topic. Thus, I deliberately moved vertically within the hierarchy of fan communities from leader and administrator to an ordinary fan, travelling horizontally from Mainland China to Hong Kong and to overseas Chinese-ethnic areas to chase stars. This project is not secret, and I usually admit my identity as a research student when other fans ask; otherwise, I behave like an ordinary fan and neither flaunt nor hide my research goals. I 'go back into the field' with self-conscious research questions and have conducted intentional participatory observation during these years. These steps comprise the basic trajectory of my auto-ethnographic methodology as an 'aca-fan'. My unconscious immersion before 2010 and my subsequent conscious distancing generated my positions within fan communities, and I made this distinction upon confirming my identity as a research student in 2010.

In addition, I have designed and conducted eighteen one-on-one in-depth interviews based on this project's research questions². My intention is not for this research to produce representative findings; rather, in-depth qualitative methodology is used here. The interview format that I have used includes both offline and online components: I conducted eleven face-to-face interviews, four QQ [similar to Skype] interviews, three telephone interviews and one email interview, while my recruiting methods included snowballing and balanced contacting: some interviewees have been my fan friends for many years and introduced other fan friends to me. Because most fans are female, I deliberately contacted two male fans³; likewise, Shanghai is the economic centre of China, and fan cultures are highly prosperous there, so I travelled there for one week, but I also interviewed one fan from inner China. Furthermore, I remained in Hong Kong and spoke with several fans who had come there to meet their idols. To obtain a comparison, I then interviewed two Hong Kong fans.

Sino-Hong Kong Transcultural Media Context

The reception context in Mainland China can be described as follows. The 1.3 billion Mainland Chinese audiences constitute a substantial fan base for global popular cultures. Since 1979, 'popular culture from Hong Kong and Taiwan has swept the Mainland China, the

extent and multifariousness of this imported culture is striking' (Gold, 1993: 909). The surprising one-way communication from Hong Kong and Taiwan to Mainland China is so strong that it slowed only in the late 1990s. However, after Hong Kong's handover to China in 1997 and because of multiple circumstances, Hong Kong TV dramas, as well as Cantopop music and Hong Kong cinema, have gradually lost their appeal (although they still exert some influence on the Chinese media market, especially at the heart of fan groups). Today, American and Japanese TV dramas, Korean Wave, Taiwan and Thailand TV dramas, and even Mainland Chinese TV dramas compete with each other in this large market. Currently, no competitor(s) could claim overall ascendancy in Mainland China. Media consumption in China is multi-dimensional, and a globalised Mediascape (Appadurai, 1996) is developing.

The Hong Kong television industry, the main producer of Hong Kong popular culture, is essentially a commercial system and has been virtually monopolised by one private wireless terrestrial station, Television Broadcasts Limited (commonly known as TVB). Founded in 1967, TVB defeated two other wireless terrestrial TV stations in the 1970s, survived the heated competition with satellite television and paid television in the 1990s, and has monopolised the Hong Kong TV market since that time.⁴ Mentions of Hong Kong TV stars usually refer only to TVB stars, although there are other TV stations and other TV stars. Although it is based on local revenues, TVB never stops inventing ways to maximise profits in Mainland China, the largest market in the world. The beginning of Chinese Mainland Hong Kong TVB fandom dates back to the 1980s. However, star-chasing, the most well-developed fan practice, is the result of the proliferation of the Internet at the turn of the millennium.

The TVB star system is a duplication of the Hollywood star system prior to the 1950s. Generally speaking, the TVB system inherited a 'studio system' from the former Hong Kong film company 'the Shaw Brothers'. The system resembles the Big 5 model that was prevalent during the Hollywood golden age. Vertical integration from production to distribution and exhibition is combined with systematic control of the fully contracted artists who are recruited, trained, packaged and marketed by this media conglomerate. In addition to these 'biological sons and daughters', a few partially contracted artists and out-sourced artists, 'stepchildren', also work for TVB. Thus, the term 'TVB stars' refers to all of the stars working at TVB. There are 189 male and 198 female contracted artists who are listed on the official webpage of TVB at this moment. Not all of them might be recognised as stars, nor is their number fixed, but the number itself indicates the scale and ambition of this star-making factory in Hong Kong.⁵ The focus of the star-chasing addressed here could be described as a star-cluster; these stars are highly similar in terms of background, star image and acting style, and most of them rose to stardom primarily through TV dramas. The homogeneity of these individuals can be interpreted as an outcome of the strong manipulation of these monopolistic culture industries (Adorno, 1991). For the period from 2000 to the present day, Louis Koo, Jessica Hsuan, Kevin Cheng, Charmaine Sheh, Raymond Lam, and Kate Tsui are some representative stars, and their fan cultures in Mainland China are some of the richest and most vigorous.

The Networking Society

Displeasure, according to my own fan experiences and the interviewees who participated in this study, can be understood as the most impressive experience that occurs in star-chasing fan practices, though their ultimate goal may be pursuing pleasure. The most frequently mentioned reason for displeasure is translocality itself. Whereas the earlier classic fan studies primarily focused on local fan cultures (or did not pay sufficient attention to translocality *per se*), today's expanding, complicated trans-cultural Mediascape renders the consumption map much more disorganised. More importantly, as TVB is still testing various methods of actualising its Mainland Chinese market, a mature and effective commercial relationship between TVB and Mainland fans has not been established. In this experimental stage, everything is tentative and uncertain. The risks associated with the process of bridging the two main parties (fans and the culture industry) in star-chasing experiences will be scrutinised later in the essay. With regard to theories of risk in modern society (Beck, 1992), we can note that risks in a complexly structured environment are more pronounced than they are in a relatively simple context. Displeasure, even in tandem with pleasure, may be experienced in these amplified moments of risk. To study displeasure in context and to use it as the vantage point from which to more directly explore the power relationships involved in star-chasing, a new theoretical perspective is needed.

The 'network society' (Castells, 2010a; Barney, 2004) and 'the power of identity' theses (Castells, 2010b) are useful theoretical perspectives that can help us to understand displeasing fan experiences more systematically and clearly. This thesis extends beyond the traditional 'industries-fans/media-audience/text-reader dichotomy' by subdividing the two antagonistic elements into various players and actors, and by simultaneously emphasising the importance of consolidating various identities as the counterforce to these fragmented structures. This messy picture is sufficiently complicated to outweigh the simplified binaries:

Our exploration of emergent social structures across domains of human activity and experiences leads to an over-arching conclusion: as a historical trend, dominant functions and processes in the Information Age are increasingly organized around networks. (Castells, 2010a: 500)

The logic of decentralised, proliferating connectivity is at the core of a network, which is a structure in which distinct points (often called 'nodes') are related to one another by connections (often called 'ties') that are typically multiple and intersecting and that are often redundant (Barney, 2004: 2). Although networks are an old form of organisation in human experience, 'the network society' here is a new form based on digital technologies and can unprecedentedly manage complexity beyond a certain network size (Castells, 2010a: xvii).

The Sino-Hong Kong Transcultural Media Context should be considered in this decentred and multi-dimensional way. However, I suggest here that the terms 'networked' and 'network' be replaced by 'networking'. Placing Castells' term in the present progressive

tense, I contend that there are two reasons for using this form of the word: first, our world has not been truly decentred, as there are different stages of development and some types of organising structures would never embrace this type of logic; second, the 'nodes' are simply temporary articulations (Hall, 1985) within specific social-historical contexts and would be de-articulated and/or re-articulated under different conditions. As a result, temporarily centring, decentring and recentring moments always occur under plural power relations, so a networking society is more open, dynamic and changing in its imagination.

In this conceptualisation, the fans and the industry cannot be understood without considering the subdivisions within these groups. First, the fans themselves are not monolithic; they can be subdivided into various groups using different methods. For instance, if we divide them based on geographic differences, we find that there are local Hong Kong fans, Mainland Chinese fan and overseas fans. The latter can be divided into more specific fan groups: there are online chasers, un-organised and de-organised fans, official fan clubs and unofficial and informal fan groups, which will be discussed later. Based on their fanning styles as star-chasing fans, there are numerous individual fans who could not be researched individually or within several groups. Second, culture industries function according to the same logic: 'Celebrity making is clearly... made up of highly developed and institutionally linked professions and subindustries.' (Gamson, 1994: 64) In Hong Kong, TVB as a company must persuade, cajole and fight with other social actors horizontally, and when this dynamic extends to the north, the situation is complicated by a continually increasing number of actors and players. TVB must then cooperate with and compete with local Chinese TV stations, distribution companies and celebrity agencies. When the map includes multiple players with multiple interests, although they might temporarily share some benefits on some occasions, the chances of displeasure increase greatly. Therefore, dualistic thinking as an analytic tool effectively captures the main conflicts, but the analytic tool must be changed to reflect the full landscape. Essentially, the 'fans and industries dichotomy' should be transformed using networking thinking in trans-cultural and globalised fan studies. Based on this theoretical perspective, the displeasure in this case will be understood more thoroughly and effectively using a cultural and social approach.

Tracing the Displeasures

To introduce a detailed analysis of fan displeasure, a rough list of possible organising structures in fan communities is presented as follows. According to networking society theory, these subtitles do not serve as a taxonomy or as categorisations; rather, they are temporary 'nodes' in networking fan communities and can be decentred, recentred or restructured according to the changing context. In this paper, the listed subtitles are organised based on their hierarchical position (their nodes) in the networking fan communities. Types of displeasure will not be categorised into several abstract groups but, rather, will be more systematically traced using these structural nodes.

Online Chaser

The 'Online Chaser' is a fan who is only involved in fan practices online. Kelly (2004:1) defined fandom around the concept of pleasure, and all of the interviewees told me that they indulge in star-chasing just for fun. However, once they chase stars online, they enter the 'Uncertain Utopia' (MacDonald, 1998: 131), where the old rules and hierarchy still exist.

I commented on the news of my star Ah-Fung (Raymond Lam) on my own Weibo, and many fans rushed here and cursed at me; I'm angry with them; it is none of their business! (Emma, female, Shanghai)

I miss the old days of our forum, and I remember the everyday posts amounted to more than 9000. However, now we all use Weibo, 'cause we can follow and talk to SS (Charmaine Sheh's nickname among her fans) directly. However, I miss the old days, the feeling of a home, the happy days of chatting with each other in the forum 'til midnight... I know we cannot go back. Now, SS has 5,000,000 fans in Weibo, but the number of everyday posts in the forum is no more than 10. What a pity! (Mira, female, Fujiang)

In fact, the organisation of online fan communities in Mainland China has undergone a major transition from 'the era of forum' to 'the era of Weibo'. Fans who used to gather together on a specific forum dedicated to one star are gradually moving to Weibo to interact with multiple stars simultaneously. As the Chinese version of Twitter, Weibo is popular among star-chasers not only because of its entertainment-oriented atmosphere but also because of its structure, which centres on the individual fan rather than on the self-contained fan group. Raymond Lam refuses to open a public account on Weibo, but this cannot stop his fans from using Weibo to gather information about him quickly and effectively. This situation demonstrates that communicating with stars online on Weibo is not the only factor that attracts fans. In this context, Emma is puzzled by the unprecedented openness of Weibo because the fans are no longer limited to peer-members of the previous forum. Mira tried to romanticise the old heyday to address the negative feeling of losing a 'home'. Emma and Mira may enjoy the pleasures of the new media, but both of them tend to emphasise the displeasures of online star-chasing activities to describe their maladjustment in the process of this transition. If star-chasing offline is an activity of people who are present in the chasing location, then its online counterpart is another practice involving numerous unpredictable subjects who can search and track keywords easily, especially in 'the era of Weibo'. These risks nurture insecurities and the possibility for displeasure.

Un-Organised Fans

Un-organised fans are those who unconsciously chase stars alone or with several friends without investing their attention in fan community organisations. Making up their minds to participate in star-chasing, green and inexperienced fans begin walking on the ropes of desire. The process of transformation from a casual online fan to a star-chasing fan is representatively described by Grace:

One day, I got Ada (Ada Choi)'s function schedule online and decided to chase her. I don't know how to say why I want to go chasing...I was just really eager to see the 'true' her, whether she is as beautiful as she is in the Hong Kong TV dramas, a far-away figure in the flesh! [laughs]. There, I saw the star and met with her other fans. I just talked directly with her for a while, took pictures and got autographs; I was so excited and wanted to share my feelings with more fans, so I posted my feelings and pictures online. You know what happened? My idol forwarded my post! But I was delighted for just one minute and then very anxious because the Hong Kong fan club leader openly accused me of chasing more than one star; she probably found pictures of and writing about other stars on my blog. That is just an excuse! She's afraid that I posed a threat to her position in her idol's heart. (Grace, female, Shanghai)

This fan found it difficult to justify her star-chasing motivations, but she drew on the discourse of star authenticity (Dyer, 1991; Meyers, 2009) to defend her intentions. Star-chasing, often stigmatised as celebrity-stalking or at least as childish and feminine, generates both the thrills of meeting one's idols in person and the embarrassment of acknowledging the practice itself. It is evident that displeasure intensifies together with pleasure. 'The celebrity sign effectively contains this tension between authentic and false cultural value... a real person is housed in the sign construction' (Marshall, 1997: xi); thus, 'seeing the true her' becomes a powerful justification here, and the fan uses the concept of the audience's right to surreptitiously confirm a star's value to rationalise fans' special interest in star-chasing. This very use of self-justification reveals the displeasing anxieties of fans who are questioned by others or who question themselves about why they want to star-chase. The speaker's laughter could be interpreted as a defensive weapon that she uses to avoid embarrassment; her laugh reflects her uneasiness about the possibility of further questions.

In addition to this slight displeasure, the competition for intimacy with the star among envious fans leads the speaker to experience another type of annoyance and conflict. The leader of the Hong Kong fan club, although she is far away from the event location, claims 'ownership' of her star. Many fans regard the game of star-chasing as a zero-sum game, as one's intimacy with a star may attenuate others' opportunities for intimacy. Grace might never have imagined challenging the hierarchical position of a remote

Hong Kong fan, but in this trans-cultural networking fan community, showing off can certainly produce displeasure:

You cannot be low-key because your presence in front of stars is kind of high-profile! (Emma, female, Shanghai)

Fans can be more low-key and avoid this type of envy by not posting pictures or discussing their experiences online. Failure to share with other fans will decrease the intensity of those fans' pleasure. Thus, fans are hesitant to admit their pleasure at star-chasing partially because they wish to show off. However, one fan's showing off often leads to other fans' envy and hostility; thus, pleasant star-chasing may lead to unpleasant conflicts among the fan communities. If the object of fandom is a text or sports team, then the object of desires and pleasures might be multidimensional. Because there is only one true person housed in the commodity surface, the fan-star relationship is always imaginably limited, and the possibility for displeasure increases.

The status of un-organising also contributes to this type of displeasure. Because fan communities in Mainland China are simultaneously organised and dispersed, mainstreamed and subcultural, game rules are cultivated in tacit and unclear ways, especially in the practices of face-to-face star-chasing and showing off. An un-organised fan might be unaware of the rules and cultures of fan communities, especially those of the official fan clubs, thereby intensifying the possibility for displeasure. For example, Grace was accused by the Hong Kong fan club leader of chasing more than one star at the same time. However, this accusation was unwarranted because an un-organised fan has reasons to be 'fickle' in star-chasing without the burden of being loyal to only one star. Obviously, the moral accusation can serve as a powerful weapon to cover the leader's envy and anxiousness, but Grace saw through the façade. This self-reported story of how an un-organised fan conducts star-chasing demonstrates that the analysis of fan displeasure may shed light on the discourses of stardom and authenticity, the one-to-many model of the fan-star relationship and the conflictual yet co-existent fan organising structures and their moral wars.

De-Organised Fans

De-organisation is a chosen identity, an intentional refusal to join formal fan clubs, whereas un-organised fans are somewhat unconscious in assuming this identity. Some fans find it difficult to continue to be de-organised, as this type of fanning style demands high social capital and networks of social relations, which tend to be beyond young fans' capacity because of their weaker social positions.

Sometimes I am very frustrated that I cannot afford the time wasted on the blind waiting, as I don't know the confirmed details of their (the stars') arrival information. My favourite star Nancy (Nancy Wu) seldom flies to Shanghai, and I wouldn't want to lose that precious opportunity. (Mandy, female, Shanghai)

Schedules for public events in Hong Kong are posted online; this is a publicity strategy that is used in shopping mall marketing and is part of the star-making policy of TVB. However, not all schedules can be checked online, especially those for public promotions outside Hong Kong, and flight information is usually only available to fan club leaders and can only be accessed by de-organised fans who know 'insiders' working at airplane companies and airports. Otherwise, de-organised fans must guess their idols' schedules and will often wait blindly for long hours. In this case, social capital is crucial in star-chasing, although it has some relation to fans' social class and other cultural positions. Some TVB stars remain in their local market and do not plan to expand their career into Mainland China, thereby limiting the chances of intimacy to local, 'movable' or 'well-informed' fans. Refusing to be 'governed' by the official fan clubs, these fans, like Mandy, are thus strongly 'governed' by their own social positions.

Worse still, some de-organised fans are also trapped in conflicts with fan clubs even though this is not their intention:

I have not joined any fan clubs so far, but I am unavoidably involved in the battles with the clubs. On one occasion, I successfully invited a rookie star to have dinner with several fans when he was shooting a co-produced drama in Zhejiang province. One fan wanted to inform her friends in a Mainland Chinese fan club, and another fan wanted to inform her friends in a Hong Kong official fan club, but these two clubs were not that friendly at that moment. Ultimately, everybody was unhappy in that dinner, and they complained that it was my fault for not coordinating the two parties. Was it a duty of mine? I did not belong to any clubs, and I really did not want to join any clubs after that event.
(Laura, female, Guangdong)

Still, feelings of helplessness and wretchedness form just one aspect of de-organised fandom; such fans also celebrate their freedom.

I won't go star-chasing if it is an activity organised by fan clubs; I hate them; nobody can rule me; I am a firm individual fan. If he [the star] flies to Shanghai, this is my city – why should I listen to your [Hong Kong fan club leaders'] commands? (Emma, female, Shanghai)

Emma's plan, on most occasions, goes smoothly and does not require that she obey any regulations because she is older and has a great deal of money and time. In the field of star-chasing, her position is relatively superior because she has much more social and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Consequently, Emma could boldly declare her ignorance of and contempt for fan clubs, projecting an attitude of resistance. Additionally, there is a war of ownership regarding the relationship between function location and star-chasing. One way of enjoying this freedom without consuming much social or economic capital could be

lowering the expectation of intimacy; under this circumstance, some disempowered fans (Fiske, 1992:30) can afford to be de-organised:

It is not necessary to chase him every time and everywhere; I'd like to chase him freely by myself, whenever I am willing to do so. (Samantha, female, Guangdong)

Official Fan Clubs

In comparison with un-organised fans and de-organised fans, organised fans (whether part of official fan clubs, unofficial fan clubs or informal fan groups) can justify their star-chasing practices as a beneficial way of cultivating social capital (Putnam, 2001) and of socially engaging with fans from all walks of life. However, the official fan clubs and their regulations (both explicit and implicit) can be the 'engines' of displeasure within networking fan communities because they impose centralised regulations upon their members and because the conflicts between the official clubs and other types of groups (de-organised fans, unofficial fan clubs, informal fan groups, etc.) are difficult to reconcile. Unlike many official Japanese fan clubs, which are directly constructed and run by stars and their management companies, the official fan clubs of Hong Kong TVB are usually grassroots organisations that are launched spontaneously by fans and then formalised and incorporated by star agents of TVB with an 'official' title. The differences between official and unofficial fan clubs lie primarily in the inequality of the information and resources that are accessible to the two types of groups: official fan club leaders can be given star schedules that are not publicly announced and show tickets that are not sold publicly because they have relationships with the agents or assistants of the stars, whereas unofficial fan clubs lack such direct relationships. Most of the official fan clubs are run by local Hong Kong fans, whereas the unofficial ones are usually run by Mainland Chinese fans (although many non-Hong Kong fans also choose or are forced to join the official clubs). This complicated dynamic is the root of negative relationships between groups, which will be discussed later in this paper.

A fan community is a society in miniature; you have to accept unacceptable terms if you want to join. For example, the official fan club charged me 200 HKD per year; it is a little bit expensive to me, but I had to pay because I really wanted to go to that function and I didn't have other ways of getting the tickets. Since his events in Tianjing are really rare, I think the price should decrease for us Mainland Chinese fans. (Anna, female, Tianjing)

Although HKD 200 is much cheaper than the membership fee for the average Japanese fan club, this fee nevertheless represents a type of direct and obvious exploitation. Although her longing for intimacy with the stars outweighs her dissatisfaction with the unreasonable payment, we should not dismiss this type of displeasure. In a case study of Japanese fans of local rock stars, Stevens (2004) noted that the fans develop intimacy with the stars primarily

by buying souvenirs and sending gifts. Although the situation in her study is quite harmonious, the unpleasant moments in her essay are also self-evident: 'Cynics may wonder if the fans are not fooling themselves, but there may be more self-awareness than outsiders expect' (Stevens 2004: 74). Self-awareness itself is not enough to justify the consuming pleasure, nor is it powerful enough to disguise the issue of exploitation. Through the more productive lens of displeasure, one can obtain a clearer perspective of the uneasy processes of fan-star relationship construction. Fan practices, as suggested by Anna's calculations and self-analysis, provide a more complicated picture in terms of consumption behaviours.

In addition to these direct exploitations, the free labour of fans can be exploited even more easily than such direct economic benefits. 'Free Labour' is an important issue in fan studies (Yang, 2009; Milner, 2009), and in this case, it is sometimes even compulsory.

For instance, they ask you to hold banners, buy and wear the uniforms, and share in the extra expenditures. I'm too short to hold the heavy banners, and I want to take photos, but I have to hold the banners in one hand and take photos in the other; it is very strenuous, but I have to do it. I often fly to Hong Kong to see my idols, so I have to abide by the rules. (Grace, female, Shanghai)

Obviously, Grace does not want conflict with the leaders for fear that she will be unfairly punished in the future. She can tolerate these restrictions and sacrifices, but some 'disruptive' fans cannot.

We can support our idol without wearing uniforms; the banners have proved our love to them already. Why T-shirts? I don't want to be recognised by my friends in the street with a strange T-shirt. (Jack, male, Hong Kong)

As a thirty-something male fan, Jack seems to be reluctant to publicly declare his identity as a star-chasing fan. Perhaps for this reason, he can tolerate holding the banners (after all, banners can be used to cover one's face in public places). However, he is scared of openly wearing the uniform, as he could most likely be quickly recognised and stigmatised. Wearing uniforms is a type of discipline of the body in public places; however, it still wins consent among many fans who eagerly desire intimacy.

In addition to the annual fee, we have to pay a lot more extra money: for example, a small gathering costs us 200 RMB! Many students' cost of living for one week! I don't believe the leaders would pay, too! You know, they require 100 HKD for Hong Kong fans and 100 RMB for Mainland Chinese fans, but everybody know the exchange rate is beneficial to the Hong Kong fans; it's unfair. (Lucy, female, Shanghai)

The corruption in fan clubs and Sino-Hong Kong conflict has led to grudges as well. However, leaders have their own ways of thinking about these issues. A former leader commented:

We work voluntarily, and the undisciplined fans are hard to guide, but our idol needs order and safety, so we organise everything in order to increase efficiency. We also have to toil morning to night, you know, so we have no time to make clear financial reports! Even if we put more money and effort into the clubs, we will not be able to please everybody. (Sally, female, Shanghai)

Because the structure of TVB stars' official fan clubs is generally a semi-professional, semi-grassroots model, these clubs are administered by volunteer fans without formal posts and salaries. However, these leaders are highly subject to the willingness of the stars and their managers. Thus, there are two layers of free labour: the stars use the leaders for free, and the leaders make the member fans work for free. In an ideal situation, every party in this game would be satisfied by this contingent symbiosis because they all receive what they desire: support for the stars, powerful status in fan communities for the leaders, and the chance to meet with the stars for member-fans without high social capital and cultural positions. However, the star-chasing reality seldom progresses smoothly with such a contingent symbiosis. With no standard rules to follow, especially in this transcultural context, everything depends on conscience: 'As with any social unit, internal policing also occurs ... equity and harmony are not always features of the alternative community' (Staiger, 2005:109). When the stars tighten the control on the official fan clubs, these organisations become more 'professional' as secondary organs that generate benefits for stars by exploiting fans. In contrast, when the control is loose, the official fan clubs show their 'grassroots' origins and justify their existence by providing necessary services to the member fans.

Unofficial Fan Clubs

Fans who cannot abide by such exploitations can join or even form an unofficial fan club to challenge the official one. Unofficial Fan Clubs are primarily thought of as pleasure-seeking grassroots organisations that are founded to consolidate fan power and serve the fans themselves. The organisational styles of these clubs vary enormously, and some can become even more corrupted and hierarchical than official clubs; on the other hand, some provide their members with a freer and more relaxed environment than the official clubs do. Most of these unofficial fan clubs are established by Chinese Mainland fans, whereas most of the official fan clubs are in Hong Kong.

Actually, one fan club is enough for one idol, but usually there are several clubs competing with each other, and there are groups divided by districts, like Beijing groups, Shanghai groups, etc. This situation makes conflicts unavoidable. For example, I am witnessing the decline of a former unofficial fan

club of KC (Kevin Cheng) and the birth and development of his official fan club's Mainland Branch. I do not identify myself with either of them; I enjoy my fanning life with several like-minded fan friends. (Anna, female, Tianjing)

The very existence of such a large number of clubs reflects the hostilities within different fan communities devoted to one idol. Nearly all of the official fan clubs are run by Hong Kong fans. Because of TVB's constant efforts to expand its Mainland Chinese market, as I have observed first-hand, some stars, such as Kevin Cheng, Raymond Lam and Bosco Wong, authorise Mainland Chinese clubs to manage Mainland Chinese activities, giving them the name 'Mainland branch of Hong Kong official fan club' or 'Mainland official fan club'. This strategy is intended to consolidate potential consumers and to avoid the possible conflicts that Anna mentioned, although such titles still indicate that Hong Kong's position is more valuable than that of any other area. In addition, some stars, such as Linda Chung and Kate Tsui, refuse to provide such authorisation altogether, which leads to significant distrust and conflict.

I think it might not be the star (Kate Tsui) who do not want to share power with us; it is the Hong Kong leaders. (Lucy, female, Shanghai)

Competition for an official title is not based on achievements and influence; rather, it is based on social relations. We wrote several letters and sent them directly to Linda, but she never replied to us. One official leader explained that if they cooperated with us, it would be unfair to the American fan club and the Malaysia fan club. I don't think this is a good reason; they are discriminating against us Mainlanders. (Vivien, female, Guangdong)

Lucy and Vivien used to be leaders of unofficial fan clubs, and their discontent regarding the official club and its title reflects their displeasing experiences as they sought to be acknowledged by the stars and TVB. The official Hong Kong club leader justified herself by inviting more and more players onto the map of cultural consumption, using the networking logic as an oppressive weapon, although Vivien suspects that a much more powerful and popular issue is at play: that of the traditional Sino-Hong Kong conflicts (Hung, 1997; Ma, 1999; Ma, 2012) in recent years. In such discourse, a highly debated and sensitive political issue is identified by fans. 'The relationship between Hong Kong and Mainland China is complicated. Hong Kong's status as a globalised, semidemocratic territory with a mature economy works under the aegis of a developing economy in a post-socialist state. Furthermore, the latter is struggling to establish ideological control over the former. There are inevitable tensions' (Pang, 2002: 55-56). Kate Tsui and Linda Chung privilege the Hong Kong fan clubs to the extent that they do not support the idea of a centre-and-periphery model to grant a 'branch' title, and Lucy and Vivien resort to the discourses of Sino-Hong Kong conflicts to vent their displeasures. However, more complicated reasons should be

taken into account; for example, different stars may envision different trans-local plans. Kevin Cheng is gradually leaving Hong Kong and seeking an ambitious career in the Mainland, whereas Linda Chung has never joined any Mainland productions.

Interestingly, a Hong Kong fan of Kevin Cheng responded to this concept in her comments:

Could you [Mainland Chinese fans] please consider our feelings, OK? Now my star goes north to make money; he seldom comes back. It is heartbreaking because he treated the Mainland fans more nicely. (Iris, female, Hong Kong)

As the identity of Hong Kong has been in constant crisis in recent years, these mutual misunderstandings emerge from time to time, echoing the constant capital flows crossing the Sino-Hong Kong borders. Although a thorough discussion of Sino-Hong Kong is beyond the scope of this paper, it is obvious that these different geographic and social-historical positions, even within one country, are the main factor causing the displeasure in this case.

As TVB has a worldwide Chinese-ethnic market, the more players are involved, the more difficult it will be to resolve these types of area-based prejudices and conflicts. It would be naive to emphasise the resistance of unofficial fan clubs; if they have a chance to receive an official title, most of them will be happy to embrace this formalisation and incorporation. Unfortunately, they are excluded and pushed aside by official forces, and this position of weakness and discontent makes them political and even progressive.

Informal Fan Groups

Some fans adopt a flexible stance by forming temporary groups while also holding official group membership. This boundary-spanning organising format is fluid, contingent and transformable, much like resembling the spirit of networking structures. It is more popular among fans of the north-moving TVB stars who successfully win popularity in the Mainland Chinese market.

I paid the money (the official membership fee), but I chase Raymond with my best friends. We communicate with each other privately via QQ groups or Weibo groups. There are no regulations in this group; you can join and withdraw at any time. Our members come from different cities all over the world. Some gather the schedule information; some do the Photoshop design... The existence of our group is not meant to challenge the official clubs because some of us are formal official club members in the meantime. (Lydia, female, Zhejiang)

Evidently, the fan base of stars who aim to develop their Mainland market is much greater than that of stars who stay in Hong Kong. Thus, it is easier for their fans to find more like-minded individuals and form flexible groups within or outside of the affiliation of fan clubs.

Sometimes these informal groups' star-chasing may escape the control of Hong Kong official fan clubs. Without the need to be loyal to any fan club as a community, these informal groups indicate the flexibility and pragmatism of fanning styles. Indeed, there is no standardised way of star-chasing, and such a standard would be redundant. However, this process might not occur as smoothly as Lydia's description suggests because the official fan clubs' tolerance towards such groups varies from club to club. In addition, although the informal group is a freer structure, it is not utopian. In the context of a more individualised type of fanning style, displeasure arises from the very structure of the informality.

Everyone thinks and behaves differently and has different desires, especially since we are from rather different cities and grew up differently. I quit the group because we hate each other's way of star-chasing. (Jennifer, female, Shanghai)

Fan friendships are very fragile, which really tortured me. We know each other because of the stars, but it is hard to maintain such bonds. Sometimes, we have nothing in common except sharing information about the stars. (Laura, female, Guangdong)

The most unpleasant thing in star-chasing, to me, is the loss of the friendship with other fan friends. It's wonderful that we know each other because of loving the same star, so it's unworthy to break up in the process of star-chasing. I have learned that only star-chasing together cannot guarantee friendship; you have to share the same worldviews, and not just the idol. Friend A, friend B, and friend C, they quarrel with each other, and our group is collapsing, but everyone has her own benefits and concerns. There is no fundamentally good fan or bad fan; it all depends on the situation. (Lucy, female, Shanghai)

Fuelling this displeasure is the importance attached to the fan friendship and its contingency and fragility. Whereas the fan clubs, both official and unofficial, are formed on the basis of community benefits and the un-organised and de-organised fans live their fanning lives almost by themselves, the informal group identity cannot be assumed without a relatively higher expectation of friendship and fan bonding. Due to the flexible structure of informal groups, fans enter a small emotional space where they can join together with the people they choose. Jennifer, Laura and Lucy all regretted their fragile friendships with other fan friends, and Laura and Lucy noted that they were essentially strangers to each other except for their star consumption. There are two points that I would like to make here.

First, the good fan/bad fan dichotomy mentioned by Lucy is different from this issue in previous fan studies. Hills (2002) claimed that both fans and scholars tend to draw distinctive lines between the good producer-fan and the bad consumer-fan, whereas what constitutes a good fan is a highly debated concept. Lucy felt that it was unreasonable to

condemn some fans' fanning styles in favour of others' styles because a clear and mutually recognised concept of a good fan is impossible to identify in practice. Fans might quarrel about such topics because the death of a star makes the meaning and the benefit of being his fans even more unstable and conflictual (Scodari, 2007). Fans might have disagreements with each other because they have different values regarding whether it is good to step into the borderland of copyright issues (Jones, 2003), or they may struggle over the meaning of the object of fandom by attacking other fans' tastes and practices (Haddas, 2013). The meaning and pleasure of the object of fandom cannot be governed stably and seamlessly. On the one hand, this lack of governmentality invites numerous interpretations and practices that lead to diverse pleasures. On the other hand, this characteristic is an important root of inescapable disputes and displeasures.

Second, I would argue that the conflicts in fanning styles and ways of star-chasing involve the myth of the two terms 'audience' and 'fan', utilised by ordinary people and academics. We need to move from a vision based on seeing some people primarily as members of audiences and fans related to some media texts/stars towards a vision based on understanding people as heterogeneous social human beings. Mosco and Kaye (2000: 42) questioned the concept of 'audience' by pointing out that 'the very term audience is not an analytic category, like class, gender, or race, but a product of the media industry itself, which uses the term to identify markets and to define a commodity'. These authors are sceptical about why we can continue to use this term without critical reconsideration. The same logic could be applied to the term 'fan', though this term is easier to identify, and fans do assume some shared identity. They are first and foremost living human beings; on some occasions, they can be described as fans of something or someone. If we shift our perspective, disharmonious fanning styles and uncertain friendships can be understood more clearly. The presumption 'like idol, like fans' has made the unpleasant experiences of fan friendship unavoidable for the fans themselves:

We're family members because we love the same idol – this slogan is totally rubbish! After being cheated, back-stabbed and betrayed, I definitely don't believe that. (Dorothy, female, Sichuan)

After more than ten years of star-chasing, Dorothy has become cynical because of unbearable displeasure. Her case is not unique among my interviewees, as most of them, except Tom, indicated some degree of disappointment and disillusionment. At the least, there is no strong identification with a powerful structural organisation among these fan communities; none of the types of groups (official or unofficial clubs, informal groups) can guarantee comparatively solid and loyal fan bonding. In contrast to the slogan 'United we stand' (Brown, 1998), these fan communities seem to be far more unstable as 'imagined worlds' (Appadurai, 1996: 33) than as 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1983), as the former are based only on consumption choices.

Stars and Their Working Staff

Even if fans are sufficiently lucky and intelligent to overcome all potential conflicts or they do not care about other fans, they might be confused by the stars and their staff.

One day my friend went to the airport and got autographs from her idol but was scolded by a star's assistant; we wondered for a long time about whether that was the idol's intention or not. (Grace, female, Shanghai)

This manager always disappoints fans. When she is there, the star does not dare to talk with me! I'm so upset, but my friend said, "don't worry about it, it is the star you're chasing after, not the manager". (Lydia, female, Zhejiang)

Once, a seemingly violent man approached my idol and I blocked his way. He cursed at me, but I had to do it, and my idol thanked me. (Mandy, female, Shanghai)

I myself have had similar experiences. I was once turned away by hotel security when I intended to enter the hotel lobby to wait for the stars on a cold winter night in Beijing in 2009. Lydia's friend insisted that the focus of star-chasing fandom is the stars rather than their retinue; however, it is undeniable that stars are impossible to approach without various staff members. The more popularity the star enjoys, the more staff members surround him or her. The assistants, the security, the agents, the managers, the make-up artists and the hair stylists are possible obstacles to the desired intimacy. Even the fans themselves can stand out by playing an unpleasant role, like Mandy did, relieving the tension between the star and his/her fans but complicating the situation. Celebrities are negotiated products that are constructed and circulated through multiple subindustries. The belief that the unified power of the entertainment and media industries imposes its will on the public is not an accurate one; the dynamic is more muddled and complicated than that (Gamson, 1994: 78). For this reason, fans often cannot truly comprehend the source of their displeasure. Stars' behaviour can be better understood as a series of compromises between various push-and-pull influences, and fans may sometimes conspire with the industries that manufacture celebrity.

Even if fans manage fan-star and fan-fan relations well, they will question themselves self-reflectively from time to time:

After many frustrations, I asked myself, if I cannot be with the star and cannot get money from him, and it's hard to maintain friendships with fan friends, why have we suffered and worked so hard? (Laura, female, Guangdong)

At the beginning we won't demand repayment; over time, we will be dissatisfied. (Sally, female, Shanghai)

Unlike Stevens (2004: 72) who suggested that fans do not expect reward, I contend that no one pays for anything without expecting repayment; fans continuously rethink and renegotiate the relationships between themselves and other parties in the game of star-chasing. During several hours of talking and sharing, I discovered that Laura was a senior fan who had been chasing the stars for approximately ten years and who constantly questioned herself regarding the value of star-chasing by calculating her gains and losses over these years. The same is true of Sally. Fandom might begin with an overwhelming compulsion to seek pleasure, but it is a lengthy game that can guarantee nothing. When the requirements outweigh the rewards and the displeasure outweighs the pleasure, fandom can be renegotiated and rethought, and fans may experience a crisis. The most important reason for this difficulty is that there is never a one-to-one relationship between one star and one fan. Fans experience multifarious relationships complicated by the increasing number of players in the networking society. This essay does not claim that the mode of local fans chasing local stars would be more stable and less networked; rather, I intend to emphasise here that the risks of trans-cultural fandom open the door to greater (dis)pleasure and renegotiation and even crises of fan identity.

The Politics of Displeasure

When confronted with the question 'having experienced so much pain and unfairness, will you resist?', almost every interviewee answered, 'No, I won't resist.'

This answer is shocking to a research student like myself who has been taught within the second tradition which over-emphasises the self-empowerment and resistance of fans. I would consider fan identities to be fluid, contingent and contextualised, at least in this case.

Why resist? Come on, this is just a game, just for fun; I will de-fan myself when I find that the pain outweighs the pleasure. I will resist in my workplace, but not in fan circles. (Lucy, female, Shanghai)

If I like a star, this star is my idol and they are my leaders; otherwise, all of you are nothing to me. (Rita, female, Guangdong)

If the stars treat us badly and don't care about us, we will not care about them in return. (Winnie, female, Jiangsu)

We won't chase stars for our entire lives; it only lasts for a period of time. (Tom, male, Zhejiang, in his twenties)

The identities of these fans and their identification with the stars and with each other are not guaranteed results in this fandom. What I want to emphasise is that the 'power of identity' (Castells, 2010b) cannot guarantee consolidated identity-formation in this case.

Castells stated that in the network society, the most effective way of countering these decentring structures is the consolidation of identifications among special groups. However, the identities of these types of fans in this era are so fluid and fragile that Castells' theoretical frameworks needs to be redefined here in a more open-ended manner: the network society can be seen here as a new and powerful way of understanding the power relations in translocal fan communities, whereas the 'power of identity' is questioned because of the existence of unpleasant experiences and their consequences, which are commonly described by star-chasing fans. Such experiences result in unstable fan identities without a strong collective connection. In other words, the 'power of identity' does not necessarily counter the decentring networking structure and consolidate the identity recognition mentioned in Castells' (2010b) work; rather, it can also lead to disrupted, instable and contingent identities.

The reason for these fans' refusal to resist may be their need to justify their unpleasant experiences with star-chasing when other people challenge their immersion in fan practices; this is a game, they argue, and they do not take it seriously enough to use the word 'resistance'. To explicate their displeasure in entertainment, Lucy maintained a distinction between leisure and work, and Rita and Winnie attempted to be flexible in fan identification according to different objects of fandom, whereas the male fan, Tom, turned to the discourse that 'fandom is just a phase one is going through', indicating that the femininity and childishness connected with fandom might be embarrassing for him. However, if star-chasing is simply an unimportant game, why do these fans feel so displeased? If star-chasing harms one's masculinity and leads to inexpressible displeasures, why do the thirty-something Tom and Jack continue chasing? This difficulty was evident in some 'helpless' fans' narrations:

Who is to blame? I don't know who we can turn to or who we should scold.
(Vivien, female, Guangdong)

All the unhappiness ... I guess is the fault of the game itself; when there are stars, there will be fans ... (Laura, female, Guangdong)

Owing to the powerlessness of fans against the risks of networking and star-chasing, Vivien ultimately disbanded her unofficial fan club, while Laura ascribed her feelings of displeasure to the game rules. Stardom and fandom are both (re)negotiations of multiple visible and invisible push-and-pull forces. As Hardt and Negri (2000: 210-211) said:

The first question of political philosophy today is not if or even why there will be resistance and rebellion, but rather how to determine the enemy against which to rebel. Indeed, often the inability to identify the enemy is what leads the will to resistance around in such paradoxical circles...We suffer exploitation,

alienation and command as enemies, but we do not know where to locate the production of oppression. And yet we still resist and struggle.

I have noted that the star-making process is a war of control and that the process is by no means transparent. Perhaps fans can partially resist some types of oppression exerted on them by one 'enemy', but they cannot influence the entire game:

Once I refused to hold the banners; they did nothing to me on that day, but they punished me subtly the next time. (Jack, male, Hong Kong)

Even if you published your misfortunes openly online, some people would empathise with you but others wouldn't. Who knows who is right and who is wrong? We don't know either. (Lucy, female, Shanghai)

Jack found resistance ineffective, and Lucy did not even know whether it was reasonable to resist. The answers of 'I would not resist/I cannot resist' cannot be taken as given, as these individuals might resist in various implicit ways in their everyday star-chasing. Indeed, I discovered some tactics deployed by those who claimed not to resist. In addition to the temporary and partial resistance mentioned above in the detailed analysis, the most effective method of resistance is to change idols. 'Whereas in the disciplinary ear sabotage was the fundamental notion of resistance, in the era of imperial control it may be desertion' (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 212). Evident instances of this strategy as it was exhibited by all of the interviewees include acts of chasing of more than one idol and shifting to new idols from time to time despite most organisations' requirement that fans be loyal to one idol. Adorno (1991: 137-138) argued that the products of culture industries have no essential differences from each other; nonetheless, as the important products of culture industries, stars act inconsistently in the face of direct fan contact:

I used to devote too much to Kate; now she has changed, and I deserted her, too. My new idol Nancy treats me warmly now; I'm afraid she will change one day, but I am just enjoying this moment – who knows? (Mandy, female, Shanghai)

It is clear that both Hong Kong television stars and global stars may become the focus of star-chasing. Travelling within a 'galaxy' of numerous stars, fans surmount networking obstacles in their own ways. In addition, the real alternatives and the potential for liberation actually exist within this very structure. Networking fandom is a double-edged sword; the risks and displeasure might increase, but if the players are multiplied and decentralised, fans can also draw on these characteristics to construct new methods of resistance and then enjoy the pleasures of fandom.

I made friends with a hairdresser online and found out the time and venue of the drama-shootings; then I went there and met with my star one-on-one. (Laura, female, Guangdong)

I developed a friendship with my idol's assistant; every time I chase, she texts me directly, so things have become very smooth now. (Lydia, female, Zhejiang)

I know people in the airline company, so I know when they fly to Shanghai. (Emma, female, Shanghai)

I feel much more equal to the stars now that I work as a reporter, as the stars do not dare to treat me impolitely. (Jennifer, female, Shanghai)

Similarly, there are other flexible tactics employed by fans. To be close to the stars without waiting outside for long periods of time, many interviewees sneak into press areas and pretend to be reporters. Jennifer even obtained a part-time job as an entertainment reporter to make money while chasing stars more conveniently. If the structure of networking fandom consists of numerous parties that render it too complicated to identify the 'enemies', this very structure may also provide us with different methods of forming alliances from time to time. Admittedly, such tactics may not 'overthrow' the hierarchy within the fan communities. However, such star-chasing practices used in everyday life at least prove that trans-local fandom can still draw on the infinite and beyond-boundary networking logic to cultivate its own way to reduce displeasure and increase pleasure.

Conclusion

Proposing a new term, 'displeasure', and culturally theorising a special transcultural networking fan study, this paper reveals that the pleasures of popular culture consumption, at least in the case of star-chasing, are never guaranteed in advance. I also indicate that the 'power of identity' concept should be replaced by one that acknowledges the more contingent, fluid and ephemeral fan identities driven by displeasing experiences in (re/de)networking trans-cultural contexts. Although pleasure is the ultimate aim of star-chasing, displeasure is frequently the result of such practices, especially in networking fan cultures composed of numerous visible and invisible players and stakeholders. Based on the thesis of networking society, the structures of star-chasing and the possibilities of fan agency have been explicated. To understand power relations in a more nuanced way, we need to shed the intellectual blinders of the dualism model and adopt a multidimensional networking way of thinking.

This essay does not intend to discredit the substantial previous studies of pleasure in popular culture and fan studies. Rather, based on those studies, especially those that are situated within the second tradition, it investigates displeasure and its consequences in fan cultures. As a result, it has delineated a more complex and nuanced vision of fan culture and

entertainment consumption. The tensions and dynamics of pleasure and displeasure are crucial dimensions of cultural consumption, and research in this area cannot afford to sacrifice one for the other. Entertainment is a complicated consuming experience and cultural practice, and it does not necessarily and exclusively lead to pleasure; if they did, the everyday practices of popular culture would be significantly over-simplified. If we recognise the importance of displeasure and face it head on in terms of its relationship with pleasure, how can we assert that fan communities are weekend-only paradises? How can we believe that we are amusing ourselves to death with entertainment culture? How can our research be criticised as overly celebratory and strangely complicit with the interests of the culture industries? How can we declare that the more intense the pleasure is (the more active the audience is), the more the audience is exploited? Displeasure is a precious, nourishing experience; its very existence evidences the complexity and ambivalence of the consumption practices of globalised popular culture.

Biographical note:

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Interviews:

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Time	City	Interview format
Anna	F	20-30	2012-10-12	Tianjin	QQ
Emma	F	30-40	2012-10-30	Shanghai	face-to-face
Dorothy	F	20-30	2012-10-14	Sichuan	telephone
Grace	F	20-30	2012-10-31	Shanghai	face-to-face
Iris	F	20-30	2012-10-15	Hong Kong	face-to-face
Jack	M	30-40	2012-10-16	Hong Kong	face-to-face
Jennifer	F	20-30	2012-10-30	Shanghai	face-to-face
Laura	F	20-30	2012-10-22	Guangdong	face-to-face
Lydia	F	20-30	2012-10-16	Zhejiang	face-to-face
Mandy	F	20-30	2012-11-3	Shanghai	face-to-face
Mira	F	20-30	2012-11-6	Fujian	QQ
Lucy	F	20-30	2012-11-1	Shanghai	face-to-face

Rita	F	20-30	2012-10-23	Guangdong	face-to-face
Sally	F	30-40	2012-10-13	Shanghai	face-to-face
Samantha	F	20-30	2012-10-14	Guangdong	email
Tom	M	20-30	2012-10-17	Zhejiang	QQ
Vivien	F	20-30	2012-10-11	Guangdong	QQ
Winnie	F	20-30	2012-10-19	Jiangsu	QQ

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Notes:

¹ Star-chasing (rather than 'celebrity-stalking' (de Becker, 1997; Meloy, Sheridan & Hoffmann, 2008), 'para-social interactions' (Horton & Wohl, 1956) or 'fan-celebrity encounter' (Ferris & Harris, 2011)) is proposed as the main focus in this attempt to explore the mutually constructed relationships between fans and celebrities. This focus prevents unnecessary stigmatisation and emphasises the inherent inequality in the relationship. In comparison with the production of fan fictions and fan role-playing games, which are researched substantially in western fan studies, star-chasing is the most popular and well developed fan practice in this case. Star-chasing can be conceptualised as the intentional seeking of face-to-face contact with stars in public spaces. Like the other processes, star-chasing is a productive practice: it produces relationships.

² Detailed information on my interviews can be found in the attached table. All of the interviewees have been anonymised here, and all of them have given permission for their comments to be used in this paper. The interviews were conducted in Chinese, and I have translated the transcripts into English.

³ As can be seen from the table, a disproportional female/male ratio seems to indicate a gender-concerned research approach. However, this paper purposely avoids situating itself within the tradition of feminist studies or women's studies for two reasons. First, it is evident how often the gender-centred agenda can be found atop the crest of audience studies since its reinvention with an 'ethnographic turn' (Hermes, 2010). A number of seminal studies have repeatedly underscored the gendering politics of audience studies (Hobson, 1982; Drotner, 1983; Radway, 1984; Ang, 1985; Morley, 1986; Gray, 1992; Hermes, 1995) and fan studies (Fiske, 1989; Jenkins, 1992; Penley, 1992; Brown, 1994; Stacey, 1994; Scodari, 1998, 2003, 2007; Thorn, 2004; Bury, 2005). My interest is not to dispute gendered academic interests but rather to examine what this deluge of gender discourses has unintentionally hidden and what it excludes from its present focus on audience studies. Second, this paper refuses to accept gender as the dominant cultural position that constructs and is constructed by fan practices. Rather, the ethnography indicates that all kinds of cultural positions, including but not limited to gender, play dynamic roles in fan experiences. Among them, the Sino-Hong Kong conflict, not gender identity, emerges as the most evident cultural position in this case.

⁴ Television Broadcasts Limited, commonly known as TVB, is the first wireless commercial television station in Hong Kong. The Group has now grown to include approximately 4,200 individuals, including contract artistes and staff in overseas subsidiary companies. During prime-time viewing hours, the Chinese Jade Channel and English Pearl Channel enjoy a remarkable 87% and 80% average share of Hong Kong's television audience, respectively. See <http://www.tvb.com>.

⁵ The list and profiles of TVB's contracted artistes can be found on the company's official website: <http://artiste.tvb.com>.