Fandom as an object and the objects of fandom

O *fandom* como objeto e os objetos do *fandom*

■ Interview with M A T T H I L L S*

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Self-proclaimed fan of the British series *Doctor Who,* Hills has been writing about fans and fandom since his early career, especially about *Doctor Who, Torchwood,* and *Sherlock* more recently, alongside pieces on media audiences, cult film and TV, quality television and digital culture. His book *Fan Cultures* (2002) is among the most well known contributions to fan studies.

In his office, surrounded by books, film memorabilia, and assorted cult objects, Matt Hills spoke about the theoretical and empirical challenges in defining and studying fans, the complexity of the term, and the types of engagement and behavior of fandom online and offline.

MATRIZes: What is your academic background and how did you become interested in fan studies?

Matt Hills: I've been a fan of a range of TV shows and films all my life, pretty much. Particularly - and this does relate to the fact that I've done more work on this - I was, as a child, very much a *Doctor Who* fan. *Doctor Who* has been a significant part of British culture, certainly through the 1970's and into the 1980's when I was growing up with it. And it went off air as an active TV show towards the end of the 1980's, came back in 1996 as a TV movie and then disappeared again. But there was a fandom that carried on all throughout that

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time with original novels being written, and a magazine that continued to run with new material, revisiting the archive of *Doctor Who*. And also video releases, so a generation of fans who hadn't been able to watch older TV stories could start to watch previous *Doctor Who* on video. So there was a fan culture there, although, for me, I wasn't really part of a socially organized fandom at that point. I could buy the books and videos and the magazine, I was aware of a culture and a community out there, but as a teenager I didn't really participate in it very much. Nonetheless, I absolutely grew up as a *Doctor Who* fan, and that was a really strong part of my personal self-identity. And then I decided I didn't want to study ancient literature when I went to University, I wanted to study something that mattered to me. So I ended up doing English Literature with Media Studies at Sussex University, but I was more passionate about media studies. And I think it was in my second year as an undergraduate that I discovered fan studies. I discovered (Jenkins, 1992) one day and saw the cover – it was a kind of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* cover – and I flipped through the book and thought "wow, this looks amazing!" I took it home with me and I just read it all the way through. Until that point I hadn't really wanted to study my fandom. I'd done the classic thing of thinking "well I am a fan, but that's for me, it's a personal thing, I don't actually want to study it or theorize it". But then, when I read *Textual Poachers,* I thought "OK, people are actually taking this seriously and they're studying it". So it wasn't until my third year as an undergraduate that I wrote an initial essay where I was actually analyzing something I was a fan of, and then kind of fell into academia through that, through being able to realize, unexpectedly, that I could bring together the academic version of *me*, i.e. the scholar, with parts of my identity that felt as though they had been there all my life, which was about being a fan. That was a huge transformative moment for me, when I realized that it might be possible to bring those different things together. And I had a favorite lecturer at Sussex University when I was an undergraduate. Well, I had a number of lecturers where I really liked what they did and their work, but Roger Silverstone was a key figure for me. When he gave a lecture for first years it was pretty much at the same level as if he lectured to MA students. So you just had that sense of intellectual discovery and of concepts being introduced and played with, and then expanded upon, and you never really felt that you were being spoken down to. So I found that very inspiring. And then I was very fortunate; I managed to get a grant to do a PhD with Roger on fandom at Sussex. In between, I did a Master's taught by David Morley and others at Goldsmiths, partly because Roger recommended that it would be good for me to go somewhere other than Sussex, and see a different way of working, and work with some different people.

And as much as I liked Roger's work, I also liked David Morley's work, and considered staying at Goldsmiths. And that may have worked out, but in the end I was really, really happy to go back to work with Roger at Sussex. Then I published *Fan Cultures* (Hills, 2002), which was a massively re-written version of my PhD, in 2002, ten years after *Textual Poachers*. So, across that decade I went from "wow, what is this amazing book by Henry Jenkins?" to "oh, now I've written my own book" that actually had a lovely blurb from Henry on the back cover, which I was very excited about.

MATRIZes: In *Fan Cultures* you outline a history of fan studies' theories. The definition of a *fan* is complex and has undergone transformations throughout the years. What are the main difficulties, nowadays, of defining a *fan*? What is the best way, in your opinion, of theorizing the relationships between fans and their objects of affection?

Matt Hills: I still think that one of the key difficulties that I tried to place centre stage at the beginning of *Fan Cultures* remains a difficulty, which is related to the mainstreaming of fandom, so that more people may accept that they are fans today, rather than seeing it as a stigmatized identity. But even so, certain fan objects can still be pathologized, and certain fan cultures can still be pathologized, quite often fandoms linked to younger fans and quite often fandoms that are linked to younger female fans particularly, so there's very much a need for feminist critique still there. But even if we accept the notion of a general mainstreaming of fandom, I think fandom is still performative. It remains as I thought about it in *Fan Cultures* – that is to say, fandom is performed differently and can mean different things in different micro-contexts, in different moments of social interaction, and even on different platforms. Being a fan on Tumblr can mean one thing; being a fan at a convention can mean something else. There can be many different kinds of fandom, going well, well beyond the notion of affirmational [fandom] versus transformational [fandom][1] as a problematic binary. There can be all sorts – of different kinds and modes and levels and hierarchies of fandom which can be performed in a variety of ways. So, the idea that one can just come up with a definition of fandom I think is problematized through the fact that it's performed in so many different ways and in so many varied contexts. Rather than focusing on defining fandom we need to think about how fandom is performed and for whom and in what context, and try to think, really, about what kind of subset of this vast overarching diffused category of fandom we might be dealing with. Is it what Jonathan Gray and Kristina Busse have called "industry-driven" fandom, or what Rebecca Williams terms *post-object* fandom, or transformational/

1. *Affirmational Fandom* vs. *Transformational Fandom* is a binary set out by fan theorist obsession_inc on Dreamwidth.org (2009), suggesting that *affirmational* would be potentially a *male* form of fandom, centered on creators under rules within the community, while *transformational* fandom would be a female-dominated community with democracy of taste linked to rewriting the text for fans' purposes.

affirmational fandom (if you accept that binary), or cult fandom? There are potentially so many different versions, so that's one difficulty. You can think about fandom in relation to different platforms, where fandom might also be performed differently. In certain forums you might have longer postings as compared to how fan identity might be performed on Twitter, or how it might be performed on Tumblr. It could be performed through writing fanfics as compared to creating prop replicas. So you also need to consider that fandom isn't just a range of different performances, it is a series of different activities. There's a whole set of difficulties arising just from the term *fan*.

Given all of that, it is hugely unlikely that there is going to be one theoretical framework through which we can best understand media fandom. Going back to *Fan Cultures*, again, I was partly interested in a sociological approach to fandom and I was partly – and continue to be – interested in a psychoanalytic or psychosocial, I guess it would be called now, object-relations approach. I think the sociological approach to fandom has tended to be able to tell you more about subcultural capital and distinction in its Bourdieusian frame, but that leaves out significant things about the affective life of the fan. I think so much of fandom is about performing an identity, it's about a sense of self, it's about affect, in terms of working at an emotional, subjective level. And it's about the individual being placed within the community, where you may need a notion of discourse as well as affect. So I guess one of the things I'm working on at the moment – which I haven't fully worked through, but one of the things I'm interested in – is trying to bring together work on fan affect in a non Deleuzian sense, with work not only on fan discourses but on discourses of fandom coming from the industry. So I'm interested in what Margaret Wetherell, a discourse psychologist, has called *the affective-discursive*, that kind of collision between the two, rather than taking them apart into a binary, which leaves you in a very difficult position in terms of how you can analyze fan cultures and communities. I think we still need more convincing tools for integrating the sociological and psychoanalytic, or the discursive and the affective.

MATRIZes: How can we identify the differences between *fan*, *spectator* and *audience*?

Hills: OK, good question. Take Cornel Sandvoss's work, which some people have critiqued for having an overly open definition of fandom – along with some of my own work, he is also interested in fans who might not be part of fan communities. The idea is that fandom could be acquiring a more culturally individualized level. As I've already said, I think coming up with one definition of fandom is actually hugely problematic, but Cornel Sandvoss

has a go. And he talks about the regular, emotionally invested consumption of cultural narratives. So the idea is that this would be habitual, a routine linked to self-identity in some way. But it is also about a level of emotional engagement and in his definition of being a *fan* you would need both of those things. I think in actuality, the term *fan* – however you use it, whatever discourses it is placed within, and whatever version or variety of fandom it is – simply cannot operate as an entirely bounded category or term. I think fandom is always a fuzzy set, or concept; there is never going to be a completely clear line around it as a category. There's going to be gradations that move between notions of *fan* and *audience*. There may be some people who wouldn't consider themselves to be fans and wouldn't be part of a fan community or a fan culture, they wouldn't use the discourse of fandom, and would not self identify as a fan. So you would say that they are an audience member or they're something else – they're not a fan. But if you analyze their activities, which could be using social media, which could involve being creative in certain ways, it might still be possible to say that there are audiences that are fan-like. I think some of Sharon Ross's work touches on the notion of mainstreamed or almost generalized fandom, where people are engaged in social media activities and practices that would have been the preserve of a previous generation of fans. But where people are engaging in related cultural practices without using the label or the discourse of fandom, then analytically, in terms of cultural continuities, it could be argued that these are fan-like. Actually Sandvoss has recently published a piece in the *Ashgate Research Companion to Fan Cultures* (Sandvoss e Kearns, 2014) co-written with Laura Kearns which talks about something termed "ordinary fandom". Ordinary fans are people who perhaps don't create fan texts, so they're not necessarily involved in *textual productivity* in that classic Fiskean or fanfic sense, and they are not part of fan communities, but they may just dip in and out of fans' digital spaces, almost as what we would've called *lurkers*[2]. They might dip in and out of fan forums, to bounce their interpretations of a text off what's being discussed there, reading some stuff and then jumping straight out. Sandvoss and Kearns use the term *ordinary fandom* which again, to me, looks a lot like what you might want to call fan-like audience practices, where people aren't using the label, or the discourse, but they are doing something that relates to the histories and the traditions of media fandom.

2. In Internet culture, a lurker is typically a member of an online community who observes, but does not actively participate.

Classically, there's a "fans versus followers" distinction in Tulloch and Jenkins (1995), in their co-authored book *Science Fiction Audiences: Watching Doctor Who and Star Trek.* They argued that a difference between a fan and a follower is that a fan would claim a cultural identity through their fandom, so they would wear the t-shirt, perform the identity for others – for actual and

imagined others – and may also be involved in textual productivity. So that would make you a fan, whereas a follower would watch a certain TV show but if they missed one episode they could live with it. They're still following, they're still engaged with the programme, but they don't quite have the intensity of emotional engagement. And the crucial distinction is that they don't claim a cultural identity through that. So we could consume a vast array of media, we could watch *content* pretty much habitually – in line with Sandvoss's definition – and we might watch it with a level of emotional engagement. But what if that happened without any cultural identity being claimed via the activity? Is that still *fandom*? You'd almost have to start quantifying emotional engagement, rather problematically. Where is the threshold, how much emotional investment would you need, to cross over from *follower* to *fan*? The real difference remains that the followers, so the audience members here – the people that don't meet the category of fan in this argument – are audiences who aren't constructing their cultural identity through this media consumption. On that argument, where *audiences* or *spectators* are consuming media then they are not articulating that consumption significantly with performed and lived self identity. And I would argue we all do that a lot of the time. We don't only consume media texts that we are passionate fans of; we watch all sorts of other things quite habitually or routinely but don't integrate those things powerfully into our sense of self. So the fan/follower separation is probably still useful in certain ways.

I do think one of the amusing things about fan studies is that it has told a lot about what it would might mean to be a *fan*. And now we've flipped that over and we've started to learn about what it might mean to be an *anti-fan*. But the category of *non-fan* is still this weird, amorphous thing that nobody can really get a handle on. No one has empirically studied what it would mean to be a *non-fan*, or how that could possibly be refined. No one has really studied indifferent audiences, as a focal point in and of themselves. I suspect the assumption is that those people wouldn't have anything interesting to say. Audience/fan studies perhaps still assumes that the non-fan, the very casual kind of audience, wouldn't make a *good* research subject: they're not going to produce quotable quotes, which is what you want. We just seem to have assumed that there aren't any interesting cultural processes going on in relation to indifference or casualness. And I think there's always a danger when you think "oh, this is where the interesting area of study is, this is where we should all concentrate our attention, because that other thing over there is just obvious and self-explanatory and uninteresting". But it's not. When you open the thing up, it isn't obvious at all, there are probably all sorts of productive ways in which you could study indifferent, bored or disengaged media consumers

and audiences, for example people who start watching a TV series but give up after a few episodes. It's a big underexplored, if not unexplored, area. Maybe that will be the next big turn in fan studies – that after fans and anti-fans we might properly get to grips with casual non-fans?

MATRIZes: What are the main changes in research methods that are needed to study fan behavior today, in comparison to twenty years ago?

Hills: This is a discussion I had with somebody recently, actually. I guess a lot of fan study now, because it seems easier to do, is actually the study of online performances of fan identity. Because you haven't got to travel somewhere or arrange focus groups or interview people; you could do online interviews. But that takes you back to netnography, or online virtual ethnography as it used to be known, or even cyber-ethnography. There have been all sorts of different labels for this, linked to the rise of digital media studies, or what Paul Booth (2010) has written about in *Digital Fandom*. So that's both been a blessing for fan studies, because it makes all this stuff accessible and you can study it, but it has also been a little bit of a curse, because at least some of the foundational studies of fandom were actually about studying fans at conventions, or doing an ethnography of sitting and watching *Star Trek* with a group of fans at the end of the 1980s. So I think there's a danger of moving too far the other way, where we may all be producing digital fandom work while ignoring other fan performances of identity and fan histories, and fan affects, and complexities of performed fandom that we might not so regularly get access to if we remain at the level of how fandom is performed within an online community. We might also be missing aspects of fan culture more closely linked to material culture, whether that's cosplaying or replica prop construction and all its variations. Traces of those aspects can be found online, but you might still want to go back to other views in anthropology and ethnography, and do multi-sited ethnography. Or you might actually want to triangulate digital fandom and other versions of – how to describe it? – experiential, situated fandom. So I think the key thing is that many of us may be drawn to the allure of studying social media as scholars: there's going to be a lot of studies on Tumblr, I have no doubt, in the next couple of years, and there's starting to be all manners of studies on Twitter. There's less on fan facebook groups, somehow that's not quite fashionable in the way that Twitter and Tumblr seem to be. But I think we need, in terms of research methods, to try to hold on to a sense of a multi-sited approach so that we're not just doing online or offline or contrasting those in another binary. But instead we could examine a range of different cultural sites where fandom is displayed, performed, negotiated, and enacted.

MATRIZes: And could you discuss what the differences are in the behavior of fans online and offline?

Hills: It would be difficult to say absolutely clearly what the distinctions are. I guess if you're operating within, say, a fan forum, there are clearly regulars who start to build fan cultural capital and a persona over time, and who start to perform in certain ways. So you can focus on a particular fan-cultural taste or stake in a particular online conflict, because by doing that it's almost a Bourdieusian position-taking within a field of fandom; you carve out your little space. You're the person who's identified with this specialism, it's a relational space for fans' almost self-branding. Whereas, you wonder if you were engaging with those fans at a convention, or in different social spaces, then would they perform quite the same stylized self-identity? So I think there are perhaps less channeled performances of the *fan self* that you might encounter potentially in other social fan environments compared to in forums. That's very hypothetical though: I think it is an empirical question, actually, which is a reason why it's important to try to study digital fandom and other types or modes of fandom. Because sometimes, if you're just speaking to a fan or you're interviewing a fan through semi-structured interviewing you can follow up with something and you can get a sense of a range of other contexts. So, for example, you sometimes get what I would say is a thinner slice of stylized self-identity online, you may not get access to a person's politics, or elements of their biography, of their life narrative. And depending on the type of fan interactions online that people are engaging in, in some other cases there can be a lot of discussion of self-identity and relatively little of the actual fan object. So, it does depend on the actual platform, context, site, you know, and the particular norms that are discursively in operation around gender, age, and so on. But I think sometimes you can study a realization of particular fan identities articulated with other aspects of someone's cultural identity that you may not so readily get access to online.

MATRIZes: In your article "Patterns of Surprise" (Hills, 2005), through the idea of *cyclical fandom* you point out the cyclical quality of taste, suggesting that people who are fans of a programme or music band can change, and stop being a fan after some time. What are the differences (or the relationship) between those types of fans and the cult fans, such as Trekkers or Whovians?

Hills: Well, I guess the *cyclical fandom* concept itself came out of a piece of empirical research, where I was doing very in-depth weekly repeated interviews with a limited number of people. I was doing a series of five hour-long weekly interviews with respondents. And it was a kind of psychosocial study, thinking about taste, distinction, and sociological issues, but also trying to think

about affective structures or patterns that could be seen to be characteristic of individual engagement. It was almost a Freudian *case study* that ideally wanted to look at individuals rather than fan cultures and communities. So that article emerged out of something that I wasn't expecting; the Bourdieusian theory I was drawing on didn't predict that an individual would engage in that kind of cyclical fandom. That's what was really interesting to me – that there was a lived experience of a type of fandom which you wouldn't have readily predicted from the theory that existed at that point. And that's why I think we are still sometimes missing more in-depth, *thick description* kinds of empirical work with people where you try and get a sense, not quite holistically, but you try to place the fan activities in relation to a much broader range of social and psychodynamic and personal contexts than often happens. It was all about surprise, that article, it was about the respondent's surprise and my surprise as an academic. This was a type of fandom that I hadn't expected to discover. It may be relatively marginal, and may be unusual, but I partly identified with it when I realized what was going on. It was about mastering something new, it was linked to the idea of binge viewing, where you would just completely immerse yourself in this new thing and master it, and then you'd move on to something else.

You've asked about the distinctions between that and cult fandom. There may be some limitations to how I've thought about cult fandom, but I have *tended* to argue that cult fandom – and that's why I differentiated it from the *nostalgia cult* in *Fan Cultures* – has meant holding on to an object of fandom over time and across the life course. There's a sense of ongoing attachment, so cyclical fandom seems to be defined and experienced against that, almost as if it perceives a danger in attachment. And it was possibly not an accident that it was a male fan [in the case study of *cyclical fandom*], who wanted to become passionately immersed in something and then step back from it, whereas cult fans by contrast are very committed. They tend to be very faithful. Even if they are annoyed by aspects of the thing they are fans of – they might hate remakes, reboots, prequels or whatever – they tend to not let go of the object of fandom. Sometimes these types of fans don't even seem to derive much pleasure from the object of fandom; they seem to be constantly grumpy about the object of fandom, or unhappy with it. As an aside, we can't assume that fandom is all about positive affect where you love something, and celebrate it – and that anti-fandom is the binary opposite, that dark, negative affect, because there's often a pronounced collision of the positive and the negative in the experience of fandom. Henry Jenkins has said that fandom is significantly about fascination and frustration, that it's both of those things mingled in an awkward way.

But for the cult fan, I would say it tends to be very much about not letting go of something, which is why I theorize that attachment as a kind of Winnicottian secondary transitional object. It's something that, in that theorization, you hold on to not because you are child-like or can't bear to let go of something, but it's actually an object that you carry with you across the life course, potentially, because you can't really imagine not being a fan of this thing, and it allows you to go on being creatively yourself. I can't imagine not being a fan of *Doctor Who*, as long as I'm living and breathing, really. Even if the show doesn't exist, I'll still have some connection to it, in whatever way. And then if you theorize that in a revisionist Winnicottian way, as I've tried to do – and I've come back to that recently in the collection *Little Madnesses* that Annette Kuhn edited, where I write about fans' repeated re-viewings of *Inception* and *Blade Runner* (Hills, 2013) – then rather than being regressive or odd, I see that *holding on to* as being linked to good mental health, basically. It's a form of creativity. And it's a grounding in and of self continuity, which you can counterpose to a *liquid modern* consumer culture, constantly shifting, constantly upgrading. Cultists exist within liquid modernity but they want to slow that down slightly, or they want to hold on to an insistent and consistent thread through product cycles and remakes, although the thread can still evolve as their identity shifts, so one wouldn't be a cult fan in exactly the same way as a teenager, later in life, in middle age, or as a senior citizen, and so on. The connection can, sociologically and semiotically, shift and develop across the life course. But for cultist, it is always there, whereas cyclical fandom needs that sense of the cycle, of moving on and beginning again. And the cycle, at least in the case study I explored, was very rapidly iterated; there wasn't a huge gap between fan objects. There was a fallow period, let's say, and then that particular individual would find a new object that impressed itself upon them, and surprised them, and that would open up the next cycle of affective discovery. By contrast, you could be a cultist for, like, thirty years, and then for whatever reason let your fandom lapse. Though I think you would probably still consider yourself as a lapsed cultist, or lapsed fan, in that case, and you would probably keep up with bits of fan information. For instance, I haven't always been such a fan of *Doctor Who*, I kind of left my fandom behind in certain periods of my life and then I came back to it, and that's not hugely uncommon. I would say, from speaking to other fans, that sometimes they have a slightly murky period where their fan commitment was challenged or weakened, but then you rediscover the passion. So there could be rhythms, not quite cycles, but lived rhythms of fandom in relation to the life course, even within the overarching analytical notion of a long-term, ongoing cultist commitment. Yeah, so I think there's an analytical

distinction between the *cyclical* fan and the cultist but, as usual, if you push me far enough on that, then there are ways in which it isn't simply a binary. I think football fans are a lot like media cultists; I tend to read a fair amount of work on football fans and I think fan studies' work on media fandom could really benefit from bringing in more work on sports fans and lifelong sports fans. I really appreciate Gary Crawford's (2004)work on the mediatization of football and how fan identities are performed in relation to that: there are all sorts of useful intersections with media fandom *per se*. So I sometimes think that fan studies needs to not only pay more attention to non-fans, it also needs to pay attention to fandom across as wide a range of culture and context as possible. I like Mark Duffett's work for the same reason, as he integrates work on pop music fandom into fan studies' approaches and lineages.

MATRIZes: In your recent chapter in the *Ashgate Research Companion to Fan Cultures,* you write about how the spectator becomes a fan. What explains this emotional bond? How is that fan *self* constructed?

Hills: There, I was interested in returning to what various writers have called *becoming a fan* narratives, which people like C. Lee Harrington and Denise Bielby (1995), and Daniel Cavicchi (1998) in a great ethnography on Bruce Springsteen fans have explored – this notion of what it means to reflect on how you became a fan. I think, again, we know quite a lot in fan studies today about fan communities and digital fandom, when people are in those domains and self-identified in those ways. But relatively speaking, we still know less about how people enter into those fan experiences, and about the mechanisms and processes of *getting into* fandom. And actually, we know fairly little about how people leave longer-term fandom. So that's something else that would be interesting to think more about, empirically and in a nuanced and detailed way. But in this particular piece I was looking at *becoming a fan*. And I suggested that previous work had been quite keen to stress a transformational, transformative self-narrative. The standard idea is one of "I saw this thing, I experienced it and it just completely blew me away", so that the fan is hooked by a cultural object, and it opens up the self in some unexpected way, i.e. we are transformed. I mean, the key comparison, the crucial metaphor, would be falling in love. You know, how generally you don't expect to fall in love with somebody: if you're planning to fall in love with somebody then that's probably not going to work. The point is that love tends to be something that's unanticipated, that just happens; it is emergent, as a phenomenon, I suppose. So the typical notion of *becoming a fan* has been this discovery of falling in love with something, which completely changes the sense of self, meaning there's a very clear *before* and *after*.

That was the kind of narrative that was present in scholarship. That's only one version of how one might become a fan, though, and the question I wanted to ask in that chapter was: "Are there not other versions of this, that haven't really being narrated within fan studies?" And I think there's at least one other major version, which is that rather than this transformative falling-in-love moment of discovery, people can already have experienced a fandom, but for whatever reason that other fan object or that fandom may be unfulfilling or problematic. So somebody might leave that prior fandom voluntarily, and they would then be looking for another fandom to get in to. They're like a fan without a fan object. They've got the dispositions of fan culture – they've got a self-reflexive knowledge and awareness of how fandom could be performed online and in a variety of contexts. And it's almost like they are casting around for the next fandom. It's not quite cyclical fandom though, although it is sequential. Not quite serial monogamy, perhaps, but close to that. So the idea becomes "oh, I'm fed up with this fandom, I've had enough of this, I want a new fandom to be part of". That isn't the same transformative version of *becoming a fan*. Instead, there's much more self-continuity; there's a far more reflexive transferring of fandom. Not quite a cycle, where you've exhausted that previous object and then you disconnect and you go on to something else. It's close, but I would say it doesn't quite have the coloration of the cyclical: it is more about a sequence rather than a great big emotional peak in some new fandom. Because cyclical fandom has the moment of excitation, it has the hook of the passion, that sparks it off again, and then you get really into the new fan object passionately before it's a case of "oh no, I'm gonna cut that off, carry on, and wait for the next big passion". Instead, I reconsidered *becoming a fan* narratives in relation to the transferring of a fan disposition from one object to another where transferring a fandom, I suggested, can be more gradual. So, cyclical fans have the key moment of "I was blown away", transformative *becoming a fan* has the same key moment of "oh my God this is amazing, I've fallen in love with this thing", whereas transferred fans, I think, can gradually become interested in something: you gradually decathect and recathect. Not quite imperceptibly, but it is a shift rather than a thunderbolt from the heavens, and is much more about relocating an already established set of fan practices and dispositions, so it doesn't transform the self in quite the same way. There's not that huge *before* or *after*, there's just a sequence of moving between fan objects. And this is one of, you know, so many different things that fan studies could look at more in the future. Another thing that continues to intrigue me, and I'd love to do a huge funded project on it, is the notion of *trans-fandom*: people who are moving across different fandoms, so rather than saying someone's a *Sherlock*

fan, or a *Doctor Who* fan, what about looking at *Superwholock* devotees, who are combining a range of US and UK based different fan texts. Or *Inspector Spacetime* fans, where you would probably be a fan of *Community* and *Doctor Who* – most likely you'd be combining, moving across these different forms of fan knowledge. So, the chapter that you've asked me about is really about different ways of entering fandom. But I think we also need to think about all sorts of different ways of leaving fandom, and also ways of navigating across and combining and fusing fandoms. Trans-fandom is a big area in pervasively mediated culture that remains to be properly tackled. So there's lots still to do!

MATRIZes: Have you had any contact with Brazilian or Latin-American reception studies? This is the name given to a traditional and important line of investigation that has been contributing to fan studies in Brazil and Latin-America.

Hills: I read stuff on telenovelas quite some time ago. It's not something that's currently at the forefront of my mind, but I've certainly read work on that. I wrote a section in *Fan Cultures* about whether there could be such a thing as a cult soap opera, and how seriality related to – or didn't relate to – cultification, and whether you needed gaps in seriality to enable fan creativity. If you've always got another episode on tomorrow, then when are you going to write your fanfic, or when are you going to speculate about plot developments if there's seemingly quite a narrow window for that creative engagement? Whereas if you've got a cliffhanger and then an episode a week later, or an end of season cliffhanger, or even a show that gets cancelled but ends in some ambiguous way, then instead you've got a huge space opened up, for example by something like *Twin Peaks*, for fan speculation and creativity. And so, when I was reading about soaps I really wanted to argue at that point – I don't now agree with everything single thing I say in *Fan Cultures* – that you probably couldn't have a cult soap opera. And I remember reading about telenovelas at that point too. It was part of constructing that argument, because my suggestion was that ongoing soap operas, or serials that have a very specific resolution through multi-stranded narratives, weren't going to give you the same spaces for types of fan creativity that would be more prevalent with *open* texts or prematurely cancelled texts, or texts that ended on a massive cliffhanger, as a lot of cult TV shows have done, historically. Or equally, shows that ended with some great puzzle that other types of seriality may not hinge upon – a singular *perpetuated hermeneutic*, as I called it. If you've got a number of different narrative puzzles which get resolved at different moments across the serial or across the multi-stranded soap, and there's not an ending that leaves open one central puzzle, you know,

then this kind of textuality doesn't seem to pose narratological puzzles and riddles in quite the same way. So, yeah, I have been rightly critiqued for that. People have said to me about the idea that cult can't operate in relation to a soap opera, "isn't that really gendered?" and "isn't that problematic?" There is a set of assumptions there that, looking back on it, I wouldn't want to sign up to at this moment, thinking about it now. It was an unfair binary premised on a gendered devaluation of soaps, I feel, and I really ought to have known better.

MATRIZes: Do you have any work in progress at the moment? What can we expect to be the next contributions from Matt Hills?

Hills: I'm writing a book for the Palgrave Pivot range, a series of books that are 30 to 50 thousand words long, sort of 3 or 4 chapters, or half a full-length monograph. I'm doing one of those on *Doctor Who*'s 50th anniversary which was in 2013, looking at that through the lenses of mediatization and the *media event*. So I'm interested in the notion of a media/brand anniversary and the huge array of paratexts that circulate around it – branded merchandise as well as marketing and promotion. So, I'm looking at that in relation to theories of the media event and also in relation to significant theories of paratextuality. I want to engage in a critical debate with both of those areas in relation to *Doctor Who* and its fandom.

My book title, *Doctor Who*: *The Unfolding Event*, is a riff on the very first academic book published on the series by Macmillan in 1983 called *Doctor Who*: *The Unfolding Text* (Tulloch e Alvarado, 1983). So I'm suggesting a shift, not only from a textual orientation, but also saying we might need to go even further in paratextual studies. We have such a variety of paratexts now that some have their own paratexts: there are press releases and news stories publicizing trailers, or *film premieres* for bluray extras. So we're in such a multi-paratextual and para-paratextual and inter-paratextual, pervasively mediated culture that you almost need to complicate a paratextual approach to think about how these things unfold temporally, and how a notion of an *event* is anticipated or counted down towards. So I want to try and think about what happens if the paratextual approach is in a sense so accurate, if there's so much paratext and increasingly paratexts for paratexts, that the approach almost limits itself as an analytical focus on paratext-text relations, and where it might go from there.

And after that I'm going to be working on a book for I.B. Tauris called *Sherlock: Detecting Quality TV,* which will partly look at Tumblr fandom, but will also look at notions of transfandom in greater depth, i.e. people being fans of one show but linking that to other shows and media content, i.e. being a fan of Conan Doyle and *Sherlock* in certain ways. So, what happens when

fans move across different versions, and adaptations, and different imaginings of a character. I also want to engage with work on *quality TV*, and discourses of quality, industry and fandom. TV aesthetics have become a major topic in the field. My *Sherlock* book will be a lot like *Triumph of a Time Lord,* which tackled certain debates at the time, through the study of BBC Wales' *Doctor Who.* There will be a chapter on the showrunners as celebrities, and Benedict Cumberbatch and *Sherlock* as a star vehicle in relation to Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman… so there'll be stuff on re-thinking stardom and celebrity in relation to contemporary quality TV. A range of different topics really, including the final few chapters that will be fan studies-oriented. But I mentioned the idea of the *affective-discursive* earlier, that I'm trying to bring together work on affect and what matters to people with work on the discursive construction of *quality* television drama. So part of what the *Sherlock* book will do, will be to not only theorize quality in a particular way but try to link that, in an innovative way, to this notion of the *affective-discursive.* I'm working on lots of other things as well, but those books are my main projects at the moment.

Longer term – and I've been saying this for too long already, because I want to get on with it but it remains a longer term goal because of these projects that have to be completed first such as *Doctor Who: The Unfolding Event* and *Sherlock: Detecting Quality TV* – but longer term I would like to revisit the book *Fan Cultures* and do a brand new fan studies book akin to that; an overview thinking about how the area of study has developed, and how it can be developed further. So hopefully I'm going to come back to *Fan Cultures 2.0*, let's say, or *Fan Cultures - The Sequel*, at some point. M

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