

# TEXTUAL POACHERS

TELEVISION FANS &  
PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

## HENRY JENKINS

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## "Get a Life!": Fans, Poachers, Nomads

When *Star Trek* star William Shatner (Captain James T. Kirk) appeared as a guest host of *Saturday Night Live*, the program chose this opportunity to satirize the fans of his 1960s television series. The "Trekkies" were depicted as nerdy guys with glasses and rubber Vulcan ears, "I Grok Spock" T-shirts stretched over their bulging stomachs. One man laughs maliciously about a young fan he has just met who doesn't know Yeoman Rand's cabin number, while his friend mumbles about the great buy he got on a DeForest Kelly album. When Shatner arrives, he is bombarded with questions from fans who want to know about minor characters in individual epi-



1.1 "Get a Life": Two "Trekkies" on *Saturday Night Live*

sodes (which they cite by both title and sequence number), who seem to know more about his private life than he does, and who demand such trivial information as the combination to Kirk's safe. Finally, in incredulity and frustration, Shatner turns on the crowd: "Get a life, will you people? I mean, I mean, for crying out loud, it's just a TV show!" Shatner urges the fans to move out of their parent's basements and to proceed with adult experiences ("you, there, have you ever kissed a girl?"), to put their fannish interests behind them. The fans look confused at first, then, progressively more hurt and embarrassed. Finally, one desperate fan asks, "Are you saying we should pay more attention to the movies?" Enraged, Shatner storms off the stage, only to be confronted by an equally angry convention organizer. After a shoving match and a forced rereading of his contract, an embarrassed Shatner takes the stage again and tells the much-relieved fans that they have just watched a "recreation of the evil Captain Kirk from episode 27, 'The Enemy Within.' "

This much-discussed sketch distills many popular stereotypes about fans. Its "Trekkies":

- a. are brainless consumers who will buy anything associated with the program or its cast (DeForest Kelly albums);
- b. devote their lives to the cultivation of worthless knowledge (the combination to Kirk's safe, the number of Yeoman Rand's cabin, the numerical order of the program episodes);
- c. place inappropriate importance on devalued cultural material ("It's just a television show");
- d. are social misfits who have become so obsessed with the show that it forecloses other types of social experience ("Get a Life");
- e. are feminized and/or desexualized through their intimate engagement with mass culture ("Have you ever kissed a girl?");
- f. are infantile, emotionally and intellectually immature (the suggestion that they should move out of their parents' basement, their pouting and befuddled responses to Shatner's criticism, the mixture of small children and overweight adults);
- g. are unable to separate fantasy from reality ("Are you saying we should pay more attention to the movies?").

Those in doubt about the "credibility" of this representation of fan culture need only flip to the cover story of the December 22, 1986 issue of *Newsweek* to see an essentially similar depiction of a fan convention, though in this case, one which claimed no comic exaggeration (Leerhseh, 1986). (Fans saw little comic exaggeration in the *Saturday Night Live* sketch, in any case, since Shatner had repeatedly expressed many of these same sentiments in public interviews and clearly meant what he said to his fans.) Where *Saturday Night Live* served its audience jokes, *Newsweek* interviewed "experts" who sought to explain "the enduring power of *Star Trek*"; where *Saturday Night Live* featured comic actors as stereotypical characters, *Newsweek* provided actual photographs of real *Star Trek* fans—a bearded man ("a Trekkie with a phaser") standing before an array of commercially produced *Star Trek* merchandise; three somewhat overweight, middle-aged "Trekkies" from Starbase Houston dressed in Federation uniforms and Vulcan garb; an older woman, identified as "Grandma Trek," proudly holding a model of the Enterprise. The article's opening sentences could easily be a description of the *Saturday Night Live* fan convention: "Hang on: You are being beamed to one of those *Star Trek* conventions, where grown-ups greet each other with the Vulcan salute and offer in reverent tones to pay \$100 for the autobiography of Leonard Nimoy" (66). Fans are characterized as "kooks" obsessed with trivia, celebrities, and collectibles; as misfits and "crazies"; as "a lot of overweight women, a lot of divorced and single women" (68); as childish adults; in short, as people who have little or no "life" apart from their fascination with this particular program. Starbase Houston is "a group of about 100 adults who have their own flag, jackets and anthem" (68); Amherst's Shirley Maiewski ("Grandma Trek") "has a Klingon warship hanging from her rec-room ceiling and can help you find out what three combinations Captain Kirk used to open his safe" (68); one man was married in Disneyland wearing a Federation uniform and his "Trekkie" bride wore (what else), rubber Vulcan ears. Such details, while no doubt accurate, are selective, offering a distorted picture of their community, shaping the reality of its culture to conform to stereotypes already held by *Newsweek's* writers and readers. The text and captions draw their credibility from the seemingly "natural" facts offered by the photographs and quotes, yet actually play an important role fitting those "facts" into a larger "mythology" about fannish identity (Barthes, 1973). The smug and authoritative tone of the *Newsweek* article, especially

when coupled with countless other similar reports in local newspapers and on local newscasts, lends credibility to the only slightly more hyperbolic *Saturday Night Live* sketch, until "everyone knows" what "Trekkies" are like and how they would be likely to react to being chastised by William Shatner. These representations won widespread public acceptance and have often been quoted to me by students and colleagues who question my interest in fan culture; their recognition and circulation by non-fans reflects the degree to which these images fit comfortably within a much broader discourse about fans and their fanaticism.

### FANS AND "FANATICS"

Many of these stereotypes seem to have been attached to the term "fan" from its very inception. "Fan" is an abbreviated form of the word "fanatic," which has its roots in the Latin word "fanaticus." In its most literal sense, "fanaticus" simply meant "Of or belonging to the temple, a temple servant, a devotee" but it quickly assumed more negative connotations, "Of persons inspired by orgiastic rites and enthusiastic frenzy" (*Oxford Latin Dictionary*). As it evolved, the term "fanatic" moved from a reference to certain excessive forms of religious belief and worship to any "excessive and mistaken enthusiasm," often evoked in criticism to opposing political beliefs, and then, more generally, to madness "such as might result from possession by a deity or demon" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Its abbreviated form, "fan," first appeared in the late 19th century in journalistic accounts describing followers of professional sports teams (especially in baseball) at a time when the sport moved from a predominantly participant activity to a spectator event, but soon was expanded to incorporate any faithful "devotee" of sports or commercial entertainment. One of its earliest uses was in reference to women theater-goers, "Matinee Girls," who male critics claimed had come to admire the actors rather than the plays (Auster, 1989). If the term "fan" was originally evoked in a somewhat playful fashion and was often used sympathetically by sports writers, it never fully escaped its earlier connotations of religious and political zealotry, false beliefs, orgiastic excess, possession, and madness, connotations that seem to be at the heart of many of the representations of fans in contemporary discourse.

Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence (1977), for example, come close to the original meaning of the word, "fanaticus," in their absurdly literal account of the mythic aspects of *Star Trek* and of "Trekkie Religion." Drawing on the work of Joseph Campbell, Jewett and Lawrence claim that science fiction television and its fans constitute a kind of secular faith, "a strange, electronic religion . . . in the making" (24). The hyperbolic rhetoric of fan writing is read literally as "written in the spirit of . . . religious devotion" (26); Kirk and Spock are understood as "redeemers," fans as their "disciples," and fanzines as "apocryphal literature" forming the basis for a new "theology" (27-31). Jewett and Lawrence are particularly concerned with the program's female devotees, whose erotic fantasies about the characters are likened to the "temple rites" of vestal virgins. The writers both celebrate and distrust this zealous relationship to fictional texts, seeing it as evidence supporting their own claims about the mythic possibilities of *Star Trek*, yet also comparing it to the obsessiveness of the Manson family and the suicidal Werther cult of 19th-century Germany. In the end, Jewett and Lawrence are unable to understand how a television program could produce this extreme response, a confusion they pass onto the fans who are characterized as inarticulate about the series' popularity.

Building on the word's traditional links to madness and demonic possession, news reports frequently characterize fans as psychopaths whose frustrated fantasies of intimate relationships with stars or unsatisfied desires to achieve their own stardom take violent and antisocial forms. The murderous actions of Charles Manson (a Beatles fan), John Hinckley (a Jodie Foster fan), and Dwight Chapman (a John Lennon fan), as well as less-publicized incidents like the attack on *Cagney and Lacey*'s Sharon Gless by a "lesbian loony" as one tabloid described it, are explained according to a stereotypical conception of the fan as emotionally unstable, socially maladjusted, and dangerously out of sync with reality. Julie Burchill (1986) evokes this same myth of the "unbalanced" fan in her account of the destructive quality of celebrity culture:

A harmless crush can become a clinical obsession when held a beat too long. The fan has no power over the performer but to destroy. . . . The thin line between love and hate, between free will and fate, gradually disappears for the fan in the attic, lumping around his unacknowledged, unwanted love like an embarrassing erection all stressed

up with nowhere to go; and the love turns into a weapon as he realizes he can never touch the one he wants, except with a bullet. (143)

What Burchill describes as "the fan in the attic" is a stock figure in suspense films, detective novels, and television cop shows, one of the "usual suspects" for the commission of crimes and a source of almost instantaneous threat. So powerful is this stereotype that the opening of one recent film, *The Fan* (1981), provokes terror simply by depicting a lone fan (Michael Biem) sitting in a darkened room slowly typing a letter to his favorite Broadway actress (Lauren Bacall): "Dear Ms. Ross, I am your greatest fan because unlike the others, I want nothing from you." The camera's slow pan over a room strewn with countless autographed photographs, playbills, and posters and the relentless clatter of his keys already primes the viewer for the horrible acts of violence which will follow. Unable to get a personal response to his persistent letters, the fan slaughters those closest to the star, breaks into and vandalizes her apartment, sends her death threats, and finally kidnaps her and threatens rape and murder. Similar images of dangerous fans can be found in films such as *Fade to Black* (1980), *King of Comedy* (1983), and *Misery* (1990), each of which represent fans as isolated, emotionally and socially immature, unable to achieve a proper place for themselves in society, and thus prone to replace grim realities with rich media fantasies.

If the psychopathic "fan in the attic" has become a stock character of suspense films, comic representations offer a more benign but no less socially maladjusted figure: the star-struck projectionist in Buster Keaton's *Sherlock Jr.* (1924), the escapist book publishers in *The Seven Year Itch* (1955) and *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (1947), the movie-mad extras in *Ali Baba Goes to Town* (1937) and *The Errand Boy* (1951), the accident-prone comedy fiend in *Stoogemania* (1985), and the romantically frustrated film critic in *Play It Again, Sam* (1972). Like their counterparts in more dramatic films, these men live unrewarding lives, have few social ties, unsuccessful or threatening romantic relationships, and hectic or demeaning jobs, often at the periphery of show business. They are drawn inward toward a rich and varied realm of personal fantasy that substitutes for the decisive action they fail to display in their everyday lives. Such figures can, no doubt, trace their roots back to earlier representations of distracted or overidentified readers, such as *Don Quix-*

*ote* or *Madame Bovary*, and enjoy a place in centuries-old debates about the dangers of consuming fiction.

The myth of the "orgiastic" fan, the groupie, survives as a staple fantasy of rock music reporting and criticism, exemplified perhaps most vividly by the lurid promotion of Fred and Judy Vermorel's *Starlust* (1985). That book promises its readers "the secret fantasies of fans," fantasies largely erotic in nature (such as the confessions of a woman who thinks about Barry Manilow while making love to her husband). The book's editors claim their project was initiated by a desire to offer a sympathetic treatment of fans "not [as] passive victims of showbiz exploitation, but real and socially functioning people working through and acting out the consequences of fandom for all of us" (247). However, their presentation of this material, from the image of a screaming woman on the cover to chapters with titles like "Possession," "Obsession," "Ecstasy," and "Delirium," confirms traditional stereotypes. The Vermorels' fans speak endlessly of their desire to possess and be possessed by their favorite celebrities.

Significantly, if the comic fan and the psychotic fan are usually portrayed as masculine, although frequently as de-gendered, asexual, or impotent, the eroticized fan is almost always female (the shrieking woman on the cover of the Vermorels' book); the feminine side of fandom is manifested in the images of screaming teenage girls who try to tear the clothes off the Beatles or who faint at the touch of one of Elvis's sweat-drenched scarfs, or the groupie servicing the stars backstage after the concert in rockumentaries and porn videos. Not only are these women unable to maintain critical distance from the image, they want to take it inside themselves, to obtain "total intimacy" with it. Yet, these representations push this process one step further: the female spectator herself becomes an erotic spectacle for mundane male spectators while her abandonment of any distance from the image becomes an invitation for the viewer's own erotic fantasies.

As these examples suggest, the fan still constitutes a scandalous category in contemporary culture, one alternately the target of ridicule and anxiety, of dread and desire. Whether viewed as a religious fanatic, a psychopathic killer, a neurotic fantasist, or a lust-crazed groupie, the fan remains a "fanatic" or false worshiper, whose interests are fundamentally alien to the realm of "normal" cultural experience and whose mentality is dangerously out of touch with reality.

### "A SCANDALOUS CATEGORY"

To understand the logic behind these particular discursive constructions of fans, we must reconsider what we mean by taste. Concepts of "good taste," appropriate conduct, or aesthetic merit are not natural or universal; rather, they are rooted in social experience and reflect particular class interests. As Pierre Bourdieu (1979) notes, these tastes often seem "natural" to those who share them precisely because they are shaped by our earliest experiences as members of a particular cultural group, reinforced by social exchanges, and rationalized through encounters with higher education and other basic institutions that reward appropriate conduct and proper tastes. Taste becomes one of the important means by which social distinctions are maintained and class identities are forged. Those who "naturally" possess appropriate tastes "deserve" a privileged position within the institutional hierarchy and reap the greatest benefits from the educational system, while the tastes of others are seen as "uncouth" and underdeveloped. Taste distinctions determine not only desirable and undesirable forms of culture but also desirable and undesirable ways of relating to cultural objects, desirable and undesirable strategies of interpretation and styles of consumption. Witness, for example, the ways that Shakespeare's plays have provoked alternative responses, demanded different levels of intellectual investment as they have moved from popular to elite culture (Levine, 1988).

Though the enculturation of particular tastes is so powerful that we are often inclined to describe our cultural preferences not simply as natural but as universal and eternal, taste is always in crisis; taste can never remain stable, because it is challenged by the existence of other tastes that often seem just as "natural" to their proponents. The boundaries of "good taste," then, must constantly be policed; proper tastes must be separated from improper tastes; those who possess the wrong tastes must be distinguished from those whose tastes conform more closely to our own expectations. Because one's taste is so interwoven with all other aspects of social and cultural experience, aesthetic distaste brings with it the full force of moral excommunication and social rejection. "Bad taste" is not simply undesirable; it is unacceptable. Debates about aesthetic choices or interpretive practices, then, necessarily have an important social dimension and often draw upon social or psychological categories as a source of justification. Materials viewed as undesirable within

a particular aesthetic are often accused of harmful social effects or negative influences upon their consumers. Aesthetic preferences are imposed through legislation and public pressure; for example, in the cause of protecting children from the "corrupting" influence of undesired cultural materials. Those who enjoy such texts are seen as intellectually debased, psychologically suspect, or emotionally immature.

The stereotypical conception of the fan, while not without a limited factual basis, amounts to a projection of anxieties about the violation of dominant cultural hierarchies. The fans' transgression of bourgeois taste and disruption of dominant cultural hierarchies insures that their preferences are seen as abnormal and threatening by those who have a vested interest in the maintenance of these standards (even by those who may share similar tastes but express them in fundamentally different ways). As Bourdieu (1980) suggests, "The most intolerable thing for those who regard themselves as the possessors of legitimate culture is the sacrilegious reuniting of tastes which taste dictates shall be separated" (253). Fan culture muddies those boundaries, treating popular texts as if they merited the same degree of attention and appreciation as canonical texts. Reading practices (close scrutiny, elaborate exegesis, repeated and prolonged rereading, etc.) acceptable in confronting a work of "serious merit" seem perversely misapplied to the more "disposable" texts of mass culture. Fans speak of "artists" where others can see only commercial hacks, of transcendent meanings where others find only banalities, of "quality and innovation" where others see only formula and convention. One *Beauty and the Beast* fan, for example, constructed a historical account of American broadcasting, echoing the traditional narrative of a '50s golden age followed by a '60s wasteland, yet, using it to point toward certain fan favorites (*Twilight Zone*, *Outer Limits*, *Star Trek*, *The Avengers*, *The Prisoner*) as representing turning points or landmarks. These series stand apart from the bulk of broadcast material because of their appeal to the intelligence and discrimination of their viewers, contrasting sharply with "mediocre series," such as *Lost in Space*, *Land of the Giants*, *The Invaders*, or *The Greatest American Hero*, which were characterized by their "poor writing, ridiculous conflicts offering no moral or ethical choices, predictable and cardboard characterizations, and a general lack of attention to creativity and chance-taking" (Formaini 1990, 9-11). His historical narrative ends, naturally enough, with the appearance of his favorite series, *Beauty and the*

*Beast*, which achieves the perfect melding of fantasy, science fiction, and classical literature that had been the goal of this "great tradition" of pop "masterpieces." Such an account requires not simply an acknowledgement of the superior qualities of a desired text but also a public rejection of the low standards of the "silly and childish offerings" that fall outside of the fan canon. The fan's claims for a favored text stand as the most direct and vocal affront to the legitimacy of traditional cultural hierarchies.

Yet the fans' resistance to the cultural hierarchy goes beyond simply the inappropriateness of their textual selections and often cuts to the very logic by which fans make sense of cultural experiences. Fan interpretive practice differs from that fostered by the educational system and preferred by bourgeois culture not simply in its object choices or in the degree of its intensity, but often in the types of reading skills it employs, in the ways that fans approach texts. From the perspective of dominant taste, fans appear to be frighteningly out of control, undisciplined and unrepentant, rogue readers. Rejecting the aesthetic distance Bourdieu suggests is a cornerstone of bourgeois aesthetics, fans enthusiastically embrace favored texts and attempt to integrate media representations into their own social experience. Unimpressed by institutional authority and expertise, the fans assert their own right to form interpretations, to offer evaluations, and to construct cultural canons. Undaunted by traditional conceptions of literary and intellectual property, fans raid mass culture, claiming its materials for their own use, reworking them as the basis for their own cultural creations and social interactions. Fans seemingly blur the boundaries between fact and fiction, speaking of characters as if they had an existence apart from their textual manifestations, entering into the realm of the fiction as if it were a tangible place they can inhabit and explore. Fan culture stands as an open challenge to the "naturalness" and desirability of dominant cultural hierarchies, a refusal of authorial authority and a violation of intellectual property. What may make all of this particularly damning is that fans cannot as a group be dismissed as intellectually inferior; they often are highly educated, articulate people who come from the middle classes, people who "should know better" than to spend their time constructing elaborate interpretations of television programs. The popular embrace of television can thus be read as a conscious repudiation of high culture or at least of the traditional boundaries between high culture and popular culture. What cannot easily be dismissed as ignorance must be read

as aesthetic perversion. It is telling, of course, that sports fans (who are mostly male and who attach great significance to "real" events rather than fictions) enjoy very different status than media fans (who are mostly female and who attach great interest in debased forms of fiction); the authority to sanction taste, then, does not rest exclusively on issues of class but also encompasses issues of gender, which may account for why popular publications like *Newsweek* or programs like *Saturday Night Live* find themselves aligned with the academy in their distaste for media fans as well as why stereotypes portray fans either as overweight women (see *Misery*) or nerdy, degendered men (see *Fade to Black*).

The fan, whose cultural preferences and interpretive practices seem so antithetical to dominant aesthetic logic, must be represented as "other," must be held at a distance so that fannish taste does not pollute sanctioned culture. Public attacks on media fans keep other viewers in line, making it uncomfortable for readers to adapt such "inappropriate" strategies of making sense of popular texts or to embrace so passionately materials of such dubious aesthetic merit. Such representations isolate potential fans from others who share common interests and reading practices, marginalize fan activities as beyond the mainstream. These representations make it highly uncomfortable to speak publicly as a fan or to identify yourself even privately with fan cultural practices.

Even within the fan community, these categories are evoked as a way of policing the ranks and justifying one's own pleasures as less "perverse" than those of others: a flier circulated at a recent science fiction convention categorized *Star Trek* fans as belonging to the "G.A.L." ("Get a Life") club, part of an ongoing struggle between literary science fiction fans and media fans; the advocate of an unpopular opinion in a *Twin Peaks* computer net discussion group was dismissed as a "Trekkie" and told to seek his company elsewhere; a critic for a commercial publication aimed at science fiction fans dismissed one professional *Star Trek* novel as "too fannish." There is always someone more extreme whose otherness can justify the relative normality of one's own cultural choices and practices. As C. E. Amesley (1989) notes, "I have yet to find a self-identified 'Hardcore Trekkie.' Whether fans watch the show every night, miss other events to come home to watch, go to conventions, participate in contests, collect all the novels or study Klingon, they always know others who, unlike them, are 'really hardcore.' The idea of a 'hardcore Trekkie' influences their beliefs concerning their

Are you a Star Trek fan? Do you dream at night that you're aboard the starship Enterprise, giving the orders to boldly go where no man has gone before? Do you dream about this all the time? If you answered yes, then you may be the sort of pellucid go-getter we've been looking for! This may be your once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to join the elite ranks of the.....



Yes, freind, the G.A.L. squad is looking for people just like yourself to partake in the exciting, glamourous life already enjoyed by members the world over.

- Attend conventions!
- Wear authentic costumes!
- Be heard at our never-ending technical information debates!
- Enjoy our fast food buffets!
- Join in our monthly laundry excursions!
- Go on trips to exotic, distant lands and spend your time in the best mediocre hotel suites!
- See Jimmy Doohan ten, twenty, fifty times!
- Learn how to speak Klingon—our teachers will also help you understand and memorize every detail of the Enterprise!

#### No Club Gimmicks!

Sound too good to be true? Guess again! It's all happening even as you read this! Never again will you feel alone in your absolutely worthwhile devotion to the most celebrated cultural enigma in world history—**STAR TREK!** Join the proud members of the G.A.L. squad and you too will enjoy all the exciting hebediel! If you're a thoroughly ardent, exacting person, then delay no longer! Just send \$200.00 today! After you receive your membership certificate, you automatically inherit all the benefits existing in the G.A.L. SQUAD! So what are you waiting for? Join today!

**Live it to the limit**

YES! I WANT TO JOIN THE G.A.L. SQUAD! ENCLOSED IS TWO HUNDRED DOLLARS IN CRISP, UNMARKED BILLS. PLEASE RUSH ME MY MEMBERSHIP CERTIFICATE!

**Join the Adventure!**

1.2 "G.A.L. Squad" (Get a Life Squad): Anti-*Star Trek* fan flier circulated by literary science fiction fans

GET  
YOUR ROCKETS OFF

**IMPROVE  
YOUR IMAGE**

(Sign) \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
State \_\_\_\_\_  
P.S. You don't need to spend a fortune to get a good American Value.

own behavior, but does not, except in theory, exist" (338). Fans prefer to describe themselves as "Trekkers" rather than "Trekies" (a term which has increasingly come to refer only to the media constructed stereotype)—or better still, to describe themselves simply as fans (a term which signifies their membership within a larger subculture of other fans and denies a fixed reader-text relationship).

Ien Ang (1985) confronted many of these issues in her interpretation of letters solicited by her from a group of Dutch viewers of *Dallas*. Her correspondents found it relatively easy to explain why they disliked the American soap opera, falling back on readily accessible categories from "the ideology of mass culture," gaining security from their commonsensical appeals to widely circulated discourses about cultural contamination. For those who found pleasure in *Dallas*, for those who might consider themselves fans of the program, defending their tastes proved a far more complex and difficult process. None of Ang's letter-writers could fully escape from the categories established by mass culture's critics, none could treat their pleasures as innocent or unproblematic. Critical discourse against mass culture, Ang concludes, had seemingly foreclosed any possibility for the *Dallas* fans to articulate their own social and cultural position or to "hit back" against their critics from a position of authority and strength.

Much like the *Dallas* fans Ang discusses, *Star Trek* fans often find themselves arguing from a position of weakness in attempting to defend their fascination with the program. For many, the only legitimate defense is to assert the "normality" of their lifestyle, professing their general conformity to middle-class culture as a way of creating common ground with nonfan friends. One fan wrote in response to the *Saturday Night Live* sketch:

I resent having those assumptions made about me. I have 'got a life.' I have a husband and children. I do volunteer work and have opinions on a wide variety of matters, both political and religious. I do shopping, vote in elections and change diapers. I do live in a real world, with all of its tensions and stress. That is the reason I am a Trekkie. A hobby is necessary for mental health. *Star Trek* helps me to keep from burning out in all the "important" things I do. It helps me relax. It helps me retain my perspective. It is fun. It is not my religion. I already have a perfectly good religion. (Well, I'm Catholic.) And I suspect that the

majority of fans are more like me than the stereotype. (Kulikauskas, 1988, 5)

Others justify the program's appeal in terms derived from traditional high culture: they cite scripts by renowned literary science fiction writers such as Robert Bloch, Theodore Sturgeon, Norman Spinrad, and Harlan Ellison; they note its confrontation of serious social issues such as racism, terrorism, and drug abuse; they tout its recognition by the industry and educational groups; they insist upon its ability to "change lives" with its optimistic vision, all categories that appear with frequency in the pages of books like *Star Trek Lives!* (Lichtenberg, Marshak, and Winston, 1975) or *The World of Star Trek* (Gerrold, 1973), whose authors explain fandom to mundane and neofan readers. Still others respond from a position of "cultural populism," offering a negative identification of their critics as close-minded and conformist ("know-it-alls" and "cynics") while praising the program's fans for their open-mindedness and communalism. Like Ang's *Dallas* viewers, these fans have internalized many aspects of dominant taste; they are struggling to understand their own relationship to the media within the terms provided by the ideology of mass culture. *Star Trek* can be defended as a kind of ersatz high culture and judged according to its standards (standards that are bound to judge it impoverished, if only because it lacks the history of critical interpretation surrounding earlier popular works that have been absorbed into the official canon); there seems to be no way of defending it as popular culture, as responsive to consumer tastes, as satisfying audience desires and producing immediate pleasures at the moment of its consumption, as "fun."

Yet there is an important difference between Ang's *Dallas* viewers and the *Star Trek* fans. The *Dallas* viewers wrote in isolation, watching the program in their own homes with little or no acknowledgement that others shared their enthusiasm for the series. What led them to write to Ang in response to an advertisement soliciting such letters might have been an attempt to overcome these feelings of cultural isolation, to gain a larger identity as fans apart from the alienation imposed on them by dominant discourse about mass culture. Ang's respondents were *Dallas* fans only in the narrow sense that they watched the program regularly but they lacked social connections to a larger network of fans and did not participate in the complex fan culture described here. The Trekkers, however, see themselves as already participating in a larger social and cultural

community, as speaking not only for themselves but for *Star Trek* fans more generally. These fans often draw strength and courage from their ability to identify themselves as members of a group of other fans who shared common interests and confronted common problems. To speak as a fan is to accept what has been labeled a subordinated position within the cultural hierarchy, to accept an identity constantly belittled or criticized by institutional authorities. Yet it is also to speak from a position of collective identity, to forge an alliance with a community of others in defense of tastes which, as a result, cannot be read as totally aberrant or idiosyncratic. Indeed, one of the most often heard comments from new fans is their surprise in discovering how many people share their fascination with a particular series, their pleasure in discovering that they are not "alone."

This book is written on the assumption that speaking as a fan is a defensible position within the debates surrounding mass culture. Rejecting media-fostered stereotypes of fans as cultural dupes, social misfits, and mindless consumers, this book perceives fans as active producers and manipulators of meanings. Drawing on the work of Michel de Certeau, it proposes an alternative conception of fans as readers who appropriate popular texts and reread them in a fashion that serves different interests, as spectators who transform the experience of watching television into a rich and complex participatory culture. Viewed in this fashion, fans become a model of the type of textual "poaching" de Certeau associates with popular reading. Their activities pose important questions about the ability of media producers to constrain the creation and circulation of meanings. Fans construct their cultural and social identity through borrowing and inflecting mass culture images, articulating concerns which often go unvoiced within the dominant media.

The fans' response typically involves not simply fascination or adoration but also frustration and antagonism, and it is the combination of the two responses which motivates their active engagement with the media. Because popular narratives often fail to satisfy, fans must struggle with them, to try to articulate to themselves and others unrealized possibilities within the original works. Because the texts continue to fascinate, fans cannot dismiss them from their attention but rather must try to find ways to salvage them for their interests. Far from syncopatic, fans actively assert their mastery over the mass-produced texts which provide the raw materials for their own cultural productions and the basis for their social inter-

actions. In the process, fans cease to be simply an audience for popular texts; instead, they become active participants in the construction and circulation of textual meanings.

Fans recognize that their relationship to the text remains a tentative one, that their pleasures often exist on the margins of the original text and in the face of the producer's own efforts to regulate its meanings. While fans display a particularly strong attachment to popular narratives, act upon them in ways which make them their own property in some senses, they are also acutely and painfully aware that those fictions do not belong to them and that someone else has the power to do things to those characters that are in direct contradiction to the fans' own cultural interests. Sometimes, fans respond to this situation with a worshipful deference to media producers, yet, often they respond with hostility and anger against those who have the power to "retool" their narratives into something radically different from that which the audience desires.

### TEXTUAL POACHERS

Michel de Certeau (1984) has characterized such active reading as "poaching," an impudent raid on the literary preserve that takes away only those things that are useful or pleasurable to the reader: "Far from being writers . . . readers are travellers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves" (174). De Certeau's "poaching" analogy characterizes the relationship between readers and writers as an ongoing struggle for possession of the text and for control over its meanings. De Certeau speaks of a "scriptural economy" dominated by textual producers and institutionally sanctioned interpreters and working to restrain the "multiple voices" of popular orality, to regulate the production and circulation of meanings. The "mastery of language" becomes, for de Certeau, emblematic of the cultural authority and social power exercised by the dominant classes within the social formation. School children are taught to read for authorial meaning, to consume the narrative without leaving their own marks upon it: "This fiction condemns consumers to subjection because they are always going to be guilty of infidelity or ignorance. . . . The text becomes a cultural weapon, a private hunting reserve" (171).

Under this familiar model, the reader is supposed to serve as the more-or-less passive recipient of authorial meaning while any deviation from meanings clearly marked forth within the text is viewed negatively, as a failure to successfully understand what the author was trying to say. The teacher's red pen rewards those who "correctly" decipher the text and penalizes those who "get it wrong," while the student's personal feelings and associations are rated "irrelevant" to the task of literary analysis (according to the "affective fallacy"). Such judgments, in turn, require proper respect for the expertise of specially trained and sanctioned interpreters over the street knowledge of the everyday reader; the teacher's authority becomes vitally linked to the authority which readers grant to textual producers. As popular texts have been adopted into the academy, similar claims about their "authorship" have been constructed to allow them to be studied and taught in essentially similar terms to traditional literary works; the price of being taken seriously as an academic subject has been the acceptance of certain assumptions common to other forms of scholarship, assumptions that link the interests of the academy with the interests of producers rather than with the interests of consumers. Both social and legal practice preserves the privilege of "socially authorized professionals and intellectuals" over the interests of popular readers and textual consumers. (Jane Gaines, 1990, for example, shows the ways that the primary focus of trademark law has shifted from protecting consumers from commercial fraud toward protecting the exclusive interests of capital for control over marketable images.) The expertise of the academy allows its members to determine which interpretive claims are consistent with authorial meaning (whether implicit or explicit), which fall beyond its scope. Since many segments of the population lack access to the means of cultural production and distribution, to the multiplexes, the broadcast airwaves or the chain bookstore shelves, this respect for the "integrity" of the produced message often has the effect of silencing or marginalizing oppositional voices. The exclusion of those voices at the moment of reception simply mirrors their exclusion at the moment of production; their cultural interests are delegitimized in favor of the commercial interests of authorized authors.

De Certeau's account of academic and economic practice is a highly polemical one; he offers a partial and certainly partisan version of certain traditional beliefs and attitudes. One does not have to abolish all reverence for authorial meaning in order to recognize

the potential benefits of alternative forms of interpretation and consumption. Yet de Certeau poses questions that we as scholars and teachers need to consider—the ways we justify our own positions as critics, the interests served by our expertise, the degree to which our instruction may hinder rather than encourage the development of popular criticism. Education can be a force for the democratization of cultural life. If it couldn't be, there would be no purpose in writing this book for an academic audience or committing oneself to a classroom. Often, however, education is too preoccupied with protecting its own status to successfully fulfill such a role. All too often, teachers promote their own authority at the expense of their students' ability to form alternative interpretations. De Certeau invites us to reconsider the place of popular response, of personal speculations and nonauthorized meanings in the reception of artworks and to overcome professional training that prepares us to reject meanings falling outside our frame of reference and interpretive practice.

De Certeau (1984) acknowledges the economic and social barriers that block popular access to the means of cultural production, speaking of a culture in which "marginality is becoming universal" and most segments of the population remain "unsigned, unreadable and unsymbolized" within dominant forms of representation (xvii). Yet de Certeau seeks to document not the strategies employed by this hegemonic power to restrict the circulation of popular meaning or to marginalize oppositional voices but rather to theorize the various tactics of popular resistance. De Certeau gives us terms for discussing ways that the subordinate classes elude or escape institutional control, for analyzing locations where popular meanings are produced outside of official interpretive practice. De Certeau perceives popular reading as a series of "advances and retreats, tactics and games played with the text," as a type of cultural bricolage through which readers fragment texts and reassemble the broken shards according to their own blueprints, salvaging bits and pieces of the found material in making sense of their own social experience (175).

Like the poachers of old, fans operate from a position of cultural marginality and social weakness. Like other popular readers, fans lack direct access to the means of commercial cultural production and have only the most limited resources with which to influence entertainment industry's decisions. Fans must beg with the net-

works to keep their favorite shows on the air, must lobby producers to provide desired plot developments or to protect the integrity of favorite characters. Within the cultural economy, fans are peasants, not proprietors, a recognition which must contextualize our celebration of strategies of popular resistance. As Michael Budd, Robert Entman, and Clay Steinman (1990) note, nomadic readers "may actually be powerless and dependent" rather than "uncontainable, restless and free." They continue, "People who are nomads cannot settle down; they are at the mercy of natural forces they cannot control" (176). As these writers are quick to note, controlling the means of cultural reception, while an important step, does not provide an adequate substitute for access to the means of cultural production and distribution. In one sense, then, that of economic control over the means of production, these nomadic viewers truly are "powerless and dependent" in their relationship to the culture industries. Yet, on another level, that of symbolic interpretation and appropriation, de Certeau would suggest they still retain a degree of autonomy. Their economic dependence may not be linked directly to notions of passive acceptance of ideological messages, as these critical writers might suggest; consumers are not governed by "a subjectivity that must, perforce, wander here, then wander there, as the media spotlight beckons," as these writers characterize them (Budd, Entman, Steinman 1990, 176). Rather, consumers are selective users of a vast media culture whose treasures, though corrupt, hold wealth that can be mined and refined for alternative uses. Some of the strategies fans adopt in response to this situation are open to all popular readers, others are specific to fandom as a particular subcultural community. What is significant about fans in relation to de Certeau's model is that they constitute a particularly active and vocal community of consumers whose activities direct attention onto this process of cultural appropriation. As such, they enjoy a contemporary status not unlike the members of the "pit" in 19th-century theatre who asserted their authority over the performance, not unlike the readers of Dickens and other serial writers who wrote their own suggestions for possible plot developments, not unlike the fans of Sherlock Holmes who demanded the character's return even when the author sought to retire him. Fans are not unique in their status as textual poachers, yet, they have developed poaching to an art form.

## FANS AND PRODUCERS

The history of media fandom is at least in part the history of a series of organized efforts to influence programing decisions—some successful, most ending in failure. Many have traced the emergence of an organized media fan culture to late 1960s efforts to pressure NBC into returning *Star Trek* to the air, a movement which has provided a model for more recent attempts to reverse network decisions, such as the highly publicized efforts to save *Beauty and the Beast* or *Cagney and Lacey* (D'acci, 1988). Local *Blake's 7* clubs emerged in many American cities throughout the 1980s, with their early focus on convincing local PBS stations to buy the rights to this British science fiction program. American *Doctor Who* supporters volunteer their time at PBS stations across the country, trying to translate their passion for the program into pledge drive contributions that will ensure its continued airing. *War of the Worlds* devotees directed pressure against its producers trying to convince the studio not to kill some of their favorite characters, playfully suggesting that the only rationale for such a decision could be that “aliens have infiltrated Paramount studios!!!!” (flier distributed at MediaWest, 1989). COOP, a national *Twin Peaks* fan organization, employed local rallies and computer networking to try to keep that doomed series on the air (“All we are saying is give *Peaks* a chance!”) Chapter five will document a similar movement on behalf of *Beauty and the Beast*.

The television networks often help to publicize such audience campaigns, especially when they later decide to return programs from hiatus, as evidence of their responsiveness to their viewership. *Cagney and Lacey* producer Barney Rosenzweig actively solicited viewer support in his effort to convince CBS to give the series a second chance to attract higher ratings and publicizing the degree to which he had incorporated audience reactions directly into “the actual production process” (D'Acci, 1988). A recent commercial for *Quantum Leap* showed viewers swamping the network offices with their letters, forcing a reconsideration of its scheduling. Yet, just as often, fan campaigns produce little or no result. When ABC canceled the science fiction series, *Starman* (86–87), after less than a full season on the air, five of the program’s fans organized Spotlight Starman to lobby for its return (Menefee, 1989). At its peak, the group maintained a mailing list of more than 5,000 names from across the United States and Canada and some 30 regional coor-

dinators maintained systematic contact among its various chapters. Since then, the group has hosted several national conventions of *Starman* fans, has sustained three different monthly publications focused on the movement, has worked closely with the PTA to publicize the family orientation of the program, and has continued to target both network executives and program producers with letters on behalf of the short-lived series. Despite such extensive efforts and some signs of receptiveness by the program’s producer and stars, the network has so far not returned the series to the air nor has it released rights to broadcast the series in syndication. The fans have found themselves powerless to alter the program’s fate.

While this grassroots campaign suggests extraordinary efforts by the program’s audience and a remarkable success given how few viewers saw or even heard of the series during its initial airing, their numbers still amount to a small fraction of the ratings required to make such a series profitable for the networks. Moreover, even if the audience’s ranks expanded dramatically, even if the campaign to save *Starman* was truly national in scope, it is doubtful that the viewers could force their will upon the network executives. As Eileen Meehan (1990) has suggested, despite the myth of popular choice that surrounds them, the *Nielsen* ratings reflect only a narrowly

Is your show in the top ten and in no danger of cancellation? Want to keep it that way? Use Dr. Decker's patented Reverse Psychology Method. You know that Network programming bigwigs are all scheming, conniving bastards. Well, this is your chance to enter the game and influence the men who make the decision on what millions of people will and will not watch.

"How?" You ask. Simple! Using the patented Reverse Psychology Method, write to those Network bigwigs and demand they take your favorite show off the air—cancel it immediately! Be neat, of course, write in crayon, state that you belong to a demographic group known to have almost no buying power (such as middle-aged spinning wheel repairmen), and tell them the reason you want the show off the air is because it isn't good for you or anyone else. What Network programming executive wouldn't be thrilled to find out one of their shows tuned out the people sponsors wouldn't want watching their program anyway. And everyone knows Americans spend the majority of their free time doing things that aren't good for them!

This is a letter campaign that actually works! Why try to save a show after it's hit the skids? Put your effort behind a show that is in no danger of hiatus and demand it be cancelled today!

**1.3** Advice from a frustrated fan: from (*Not*) The MediaWest Convention Program

chosen segment of the television audience—a “commodity audience”—which can be sold to national advertisers and networks, but which reflects neither mass taste nor the taste of an intellectual elite. Meehan’s history of the different rating systems employed by American network television suggests that shifts between different systems reflect economic interests rather than attempts toward greater social scientific accuracy; changing forms of data collection result in the appearance of shifts in cultural preference that are the product of the different “commodity audiences” constituted by the systems of measurement. The ratings are not statistically sound, according to standards of social science research, yet, they allow the networks to dismiss popular movements or to justify otherwise questionable programing decisions. The myth is, of course, that the American public gets the programing it wants (and can thus blame no one but itself for the banality of mass culture); the reality is that the American public gets programing that is calculated to attract the “commodity audience” with limited concern for what most viewers actually desire (see also Streeter, 1988).

Many program producers are sympathetic to such campaigns and have shrewdly employed them as a base of support in their own power struggles with the network executives. Others, however, have responded to such fan initiatives with contempt, suggesting that fan efforts to protect favorite aspects of fictional texts infringe upon the producer’s creative freedom and restrict their ability to negotiate for a larger audience. Confronted with a letter campaign by *Batman* comic book fans angry about the casting of Michael Keaton as the Dark Knight, *Batman* director Tim Burton responded: “There might be something that’s sacrilege in the movie.... But I can’t care about it.... This is too big a budget movie to worry about what a fan of a comic would say” (Uricchio and Pearson 1991, 184). William Shatner adopts a similar position in his characterization of *Star Trek* fans: “People read into it [the series] things that were not intended. In *Star Trek*’s case, in many instances, things were done just for entertainment purposes” (Spelling, Lofficier, and Lofficier 1987, 40). Here, Shatner takes on himself the right to judge what meanings can be legitimately linked to the program and which are arbitrary and false.

In extreme cases, producers try to bring fan activities under their supervision. Lucasfilm initially sought to control *Star Wars* fan publications, seeing them as rivals to their officially sponsored and corporately run fan organization. Lucas later threatened to pros-

ecute editors who published works that violated the “family values” associated with the original films. A letter circulated by Maureen Garrett (1981), director of the official *Star Wars* fan club, summarized the corporation’s position:

Lucasfilm Ltd. does own all rights to the *Star Wars* characters and we are going to insist upon no pornography. This may mean no fanzines if that measure is what is necessary to stop the few from darkening the reputation our company is so proud of.... Since all of the *Star Wars* Saga is PG rated, any story those publishers print should also be PG. Lucasfilm does not produce any X-rated *Star Wars* episodes, so why should we be placed in a light where people think we do?.... You don’t own these characters and can’t publish anything about them without permission.

This scheme met considerable resistance from the fan-writing community, which generally regarded Lucas’s actions as unwarranted interference in their own creative activity. Several fanzine editors continued to distribute adult-oriented *Star Wars* stories through an underground network of “special friends,” even though such works were no longer publicly advertised or sold. A heated editorial in *Slaysu*, a fanzine that routinely published feminist-inflected erotica set in various media universes, reflects these writers’ opinions:

Lucasfilm is saying, “you must enjoy the characters of the *Star Wars* universe for male reasons. Your sexuality must be correct and proper by my (male) definition.” I am not male. I do not want to be. I refuse to be a poor imitation, or worse, of someone’s idiotic ideal of femininity. Lucasfilm has said, in essence, “This is what we see in the *Star Wars* films and we are telling you that this is what you will see.” (Siebert, 1982, 44)

C. A. Siebert’s editorial asserts the rights of fan writers to revise the character of the original films, to draw on elements from dominant culture in order to produce underground art that explicitly challenges patriarchal assumptions. Siebert and other editors deny the traditional property rights of producers in favor of a readers’ right of free play with the program materials. As another *Star Wars* fan explained in response to this passage:

I still don't agree with the concept that property rights over fiction, such as *Star Wars*, include any rights of the author/producer to determine *how* readers or viewers understand the offering. In this sense, I don't believe fans can take from the producers anything which the producer owns. . . . Any producer or author who wants to ensure as a legal right that audiences experience the same feelings and thoughts s/he put into the work, has misread both the copyright law and probably the Declaration of Independence. . . . Fans' mental play is no business of producers and neither are their private communications, however lengthy." (Barbara Tennison, Personal Correspondence, 1991)

This conflict is one which has had to be actively fought or at least negotiated between fans and producers in almost every media fandom; it is one which threatens at any moment to disrupt the pleasure that fans find in creating and circulating their own texts based on someone else's fictional "universe"—though an underground culture like fandom has many ways to elude such authorities and to avoid legal restraint on their cultural practices.

The relationship between fan and producer, then, is not always a happy or comfortable one and is often charged with mutual suspicion, if not open conflict. Yet lacking access to the media, lacking a say in programing decisions, confronting hostility from industry insiders, fans have nevertheless found ways to turn the power of the media to their own advantage and to reclaim media imagery for their own purposes. *Spotlight Starman* may have failed to return its series to the air, but in the process of lobbying for its return, as the group notes, "an impressive body of 'fan art'—visual, literary and musical—has been created" which extends the body of the primary text in directions never predicted by the program's producers (Werkley, 1989). *Star Wars* fans continued to circulate erotic stories that expressed their desires and fantasies about the characters, even though such stories were forced even further underground by Lucas's opposition.

De Certeau's term, "poaching," forcefully reminds us of the potentially conflicting interests of producers and consumers, writers and readers. It recognizes the power differential between the "landowners" and the "poachers"; yet it also acknowledges ways fans may resist legal constraints on their pleasure and challenge attempts to regulate the production and circulation of popular meanings.

And, what is often missed, de Certeau's concept of "poaching" promises no easy victory for either party. Fans must actively struggle with and against the meanings imposed upon them by their borrowed materials; fans must confront media representations on an unequal terrain.

### READING AND MISREADING

A few clarifications need to be introduced at this time. First, de Certeau's notion of "poaching" is a theory of appropriation, not of "misreading." The term "misreading" is necessarily evaluative and preserves the traditional hierarchy bestowing privileged status to authorial meanings over reader's meanings. A conception of "misreading" also implies that there are proper strategies of reading (i.e., those taught by the academy) which if followed produce legitimate meanings and that there are improper strategies (i.e., those of popular interpretation) which, even in the most charitable version of this formulation, produce less worthy results. Finally, a notion of "misreading" implies that the scholar, not the popular reader, is in the position to adjudicate claims about textual meanings and suggests that academic interpretation is somehow more "objective," made outside of a historical and social context that shapes our own sense of what a text means. (This problem remains, for example, in David Morley's *Nationwide* study (1980) which constructs a scholarly reading of the program against which to understand the deviations of various groups of popular readers.) De Certeau's model remains agnostic about the nature of textual meaning, allows for the validity of competing and contradictory interpretations. De Certeau's formulation does not necessarily reject the value of authorial meaning or academic interpretive strategies; such approaches offer their own pleasures and rewards which cannot easily be dismissed. A model of reading derived from de Certeau would simply include these interpretive goals and strategies within a broader range of more-or-less equally acceptable ways of making meaning and finding pleasure within popular texts; it questions the institutional power that values one type of meaning over all others.

Secondly, de Certeau's notion of "poaching" differs in important ways from Stuart Hall's more widely known "Encoding and Decoding" formulation (1980). First, as it has been applied, Hall's model of dominant, negotiated, and oppositional readings tends to

imply that each reader has a stable position from which to make sense of a text rather than having access to multiple sets of discursive competencies by virtue of more complex and contradictory place within the social formation. Hall's model, at least as it has been applied, suggests that popular meanings are fixed and classifiable, while de Certeau's "poaching" model emphasizes the process of making meaning and the fluidity of popular interpretation. To say that fans promote their own meanings over those of producers is not to suggest that the meanings fans produce are always oppositional ones or that those meanings are made in isolation from other social factors. Fans have chosen these media products from the total range of available texts precisely because they seem to hold special potential as vehicles for expressing the fans' pre-existing social commitments and cultural interests; there is already some degree of compatibility between the ideological construction of the text and the ideological commitments of the fans and therefore, some degree of affinity will exist between the meanings fans produce and those which might be located through a critical analysis of the original story. What one fan says about *Beauty and the Beast* holds for the relationship many fans seek with favorite programs: "It was as if someone had scanned our minds, searched our hearts, and presented us with the images that were found there." (Elaine Landman, "The Beauty and the Beast Experience," undated fan flier). Yet, as chapter four will suggest, the *Beauty and the Beast* fans moved in and out of harmony with the producers, came to feel progressively less satisfied with the program narratives, and finally, many, though not all, of them rejected certain plot developments in favor of their own right to determine the outcome of the story.

Such a situation should warn us against absolute statements of the type that appear all too frequently within the polemical rhetoric of cultural studies. Readers are not *always* resistant; *all* resistant readings are not necessarily progressive readings; the "people" do not *always* recognize their conditions of alienation and subordination. As Stuart Hall (1981) has noted, popular culture is "neither wholly corrupt [n]or wholly authentic" but rather "deeply contradictory," characterized by "the double movement of containment and resistance, which is always inevitably inside it" (228). Similarly, Hall suggests, popular reception is also "full of very contradictory elements—progressive elements and stone-age elements." Such claims argue against a world of dominant, negotiating, and oppositional readers in favor of one where each reader is continuously

re-evaluating his or her relationship to the fiction and reconstructing its meanings according to more immediate interests.

In fact, much of the interest of fans and their texts for cultural studies lies precisely in the ways the ambiguities of popularly produced meanings mirror fault lines within the dominant ideology, as popular readers attempt to build their culture within the gaps and margins of commercially circulating texts. To cite only one example, Lynn Spigel and Henry Jenkins (1991) interviewed a number of "thirtysomethings" about their childhood memories of watching *Batman* on television. Our study sought not so much to reconstruct actual viewing conditions as to gain a better sense of the roles those memories played in the construction of their personal identities. The memories we gathered could not have been fit into ideologically pure categories, but rather suggested complex and contradictory attitudes towards childhood and children's culture. Remembering *Batman* evoked images of a personal past and also of the intertextual network of 1960s popular culture. Remembering the series provided a basis for a progressive critique of contemporary political apathy and cynicism, suggesting a time when social issues were more sharply defined and fiercely fought. Participants' memories also centered on moments when they resisted adult authority and asserted their right to their own cultural choices. For female fans, Catwoman became a way of exploring issues of feminine empowerment, of resistance to male constraints and to the requirement to be a "good little girl." Yet remembering *Batman* also evoked a more reactionary response—an attempt to police contemporary children's culture and to regulate popular pleasures. The adults, no longer nostalgic for childhood rebellion, used the 1960s series as the yardstick for what would constitute a more innocent style of entertainment. The same person would shift between these progressive and reactionary modes of thinking in the course of a single conversation, celebrating childhood resistance in one breath and demanding the regulation of childish pleasures in the next. These very mixed responses to the series content suggest the contradictory conceptions of childhood that circulate within popular discourse and mirror in interesting ways the competing discourses surrounding the television series when it was first aired.

As this study suggests, we must be careful to attend to the particularities of specific instances of critical reception, cultural appropriation, and popular pleasure—their precise historical context, their concrete social and cultural circumstances, for it is the specifics

of lived experience and not simply the abstractions of theory which illuminate the process of hegemonic struggle. For that reason, among others, this book is primarily a succession of specific case studies designed to document particular uses of the media within concrete social and historical contexts rather than a larger theoretical argument which would necessarily trade such specificity for abstraction and generalization. Having established in this chapter some general concepts regarding fan culture and its relationship to the dominant media, I want to illustrate these concepts in action, show how fan culture responds to actual historical and social contexts and trace some of the complex negotiations of meanings characterizing this cultural community's relationship to its favored texts.

### NOMADIC READERS

De Certeau offers us another key insight into fan culture: readers are not simply poachers; they are also "nomads," always in movement, "not here or there," not constrained by permanent property ownership but rather constantly advancing upon another text, appropriating new materials, making new meanings (174). Drawing on de Certeau, Janice Radway (1988) has criticized the tendency of academics to regard audiences as constituted by a particular text or genre rather than as "free-floating" agents who "fashion narratives, stories, objects and practices from myriad bits and pieces of prior cultural productions" (363). While acknowledging the methodological advantages and institutional pressures that promote localized research, Radway wants to resist the urge to "cordon" viewers for study, to isolate one particular set of reader-text relationships from its larger cultural context. Instead, she calls for investigations of "the multitude of concrete connections which ever-changing, fluid subjects forge between ideological fragments, discourses, and practices" (365).

Both academic and popular discourse adopt labels for fans—"Trekkies," "Beastie Girls," "Deadheads"—that identify them through their association with particular programs or stars. Such identifications, while not totally inaccurate, are often highly misleading. Media fan culture, like other forms of popular reading, may be understood not in terms of an exclusive interest in any one series or genre; rather, media fans take pleasure in making intertextual connections across a broad range of media texts. The female *Star*

*Trek* fans discussed earlier understood the show not simply within its own terms but in relationship to a variety of other texts circulated at the time (*Lost in Space*, say, or NASA footage on television) and since (the feminist science fiction novels of Ursula LeGuin, Joanna Russ, Marion Zimmer Bradley, and others). Moreover, their participation within fandom often extends beyond an interest in any single text to encompass many others within the same genre—other science fiction texts, other stories of male bonding, other narratives which explore the relationship of the outsider to the community. The *Batman* fans Spigel and I interviewed likewise found that they could not remain focused on a single television series but persistently fit it within a broader intertextual grid, linking the Catwoman across program boundaries to figures like *The Avengers'* Emma Peel or the *Girl from UNCLE*, comparing the campy pop-art look of the series to *Mad* or *Laugh In*. Fans, like other consumers of popular culture, read intertextually as well as textually and their pleasure comes through the particular juxtapositions that they create between specific program content and other cultural materials.

On the wall of my office hangs a print by fan artist Jean Kluge—a pastiche of a pre-Raphaelite painting depicting characters from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*: Jean-Luc Picard, adopting a contemplative pose atop a throne, evokes the traditional image of King Arthur; Beverly Crusher, her red hair hanging long and flowing, substitutes for Queen Guinevere; while in the center panel, Data and Yar, clad as knights in armor, gallop off on a quest. Visitors to my literature department office often do a double-take in response to this picture, which offers a somewhat jarring mixture of elements from a contemporary science fiction series with those drawn from chivalric romance. Yet, this print suggests something about the ways in which *Star Trek* and other fan texts get embedded within a broader range of cultural interests, indicating a number of different interpretive strategies. The print could be read in relation to the primary series, recalling equally idiosyncratic juxtapositions during the holodeck sequences, as when Picard plays at being a tough-guy detective, when Data performs *Henry V* or studies borscht-belt comedy, or when the characters dash about as Musketeers in the midst of a crewmember's elaborate fantasy. Indeed, Kluge's "The Quest" was part of a series of "holodeck fantasies" which pictured various *Star Trek* characters at play. The combinations of characters foreground two sets of couples—Picard and Crusher, Yar and Data—which were suggested by program subplots and have formed the

focus for a great deal of fan speculation. Such an interpretation of the print would be grounded in the text and yet, at the same time, make selective use of the program materials to foreground aspects of particular interest to the fan community. Ironically, spokesmen for *Star Trek* have recently appeared at fan conventions seeking to deny that Data has emotions and that Picard and Crusher have a romantic history together, positions fans have rejected as inconsistent with the series events and incompatible with their own perceptions of the characters.

The image could also invite us to think of *Star Trek* transgenerically, reading the characters and situations in relation to tradition of quest stories and in relation to generic expectations formed through fannish readings of popular retellings of the Arthurian saga, such as Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Mists of Avalon* (1983), Mary Stewart's *The Crystal Cave* (1970), T. H. White's *The Once and Future King* (1939), or John Boorman's *Excalibur*. Such an interpretation evokes strong connections between the conventional formula of "space opera" and older quest myths and hero sagas.

The print can also be read extratextually, reminding us of actor Patrick Stewart's career as a Shakespearean actor and his previous screen roles in sword and sorcery adventures like *Excalibur*, *Beast Master*, and *Dune*. Fans often track favored performer's careers, adding to their video collections not simply series episodes but also other works featuring its stars, works which may draw into the primary text's orbit a wide range of generic traditions, including those of high culture.

A fan reader might also interpret the Kluge print subculturally, looking at it in relation to traditions within fan writing which situate series characters in alternate universes, including those set in the historical past or in the realm of fantasy, or which cross media universes to have characters from different television series interacting in the same narrative.

Finally, a fan reader might read this print in relation to Kluge's own oeuvre as an artist; Kluge's works often juxtapose media materials and historical fantasies, and encompass not only her own fannish interests in *Star Trek* but a variety of other series popular with fans (*Blake's 7*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Alien Nation*, among others).

Contemplating this one print, then, opens a range of intertextual networks within which its imagery might be understood. All available to *Trek* fans and active components of their cultural experience,

these networks link the original series both to other commercially produced works and to the cultural traditions of the fan community. Not every fan would make each of these sets of associations in reading the print, yet most fans would have access to more than one interpretive framework for positioning these specific images. Thinking of the print simply as an artifact of a *Star Trek*-fixated fan culture would blind us to these other potential interpretations that are central to the fans' pleasure in Kluge's art.

Approaching fans as cultural nomads would potentially draw scholars back toward some of the earliest work to emerge from the British cultural studies tradition. As Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson's *Resistance through Rituals* (1976) or Dick Hebdidge's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979) document, British youth groups formed an alternative culture not simply through their relationship to specific musical texts but also through a broader range of goods appropriated from the dominant culture and assigned new meanings within this oppositional context. The essays assembled by Hall and Jefferson recorded ways symbolic objects—dress, appearance, language, ritual occasions, styles of interaction, music—formed a unified signifying system in which borrowed materials were made to reflect, express, and resonate aspects of group life. Examining the stylistic bricolage of punk culture, Hebdidge concluded that the meaning of appropriated symbols, such as the swastika or the safety pin, lay not in their inherent meanings but rather in the logic of their use, in the ways they expressed opposition to the dominant culture.

Feminist writers, such as Angela McRobbie (1980, 1976), Dorothy Hobson (1982, 1989), Charlotte Brunsdon (1981), and Mica Nava (1981), criticized these initial studies for their silence about the misogynistic quality of such youth cultures and their exclusive focus on the masculine public sphere rather than on the domestic sphere which was a primary locus for feminine cultural experience. Yet their own work continued to focus on subcultural appropriation and cultural use. Their research emphasized ways women define their identities through their association with a range of media texts. McRobbie's "Dance and Social Fantasy," (1984) for example, offers a far reaching analysis of the roles dance plays in the life of young women, discussing cultural materials ranging from a children's book about Anna Pavlova to films like *Fame* and *Flashdance* and fashion magazines. Like Hebdidge, McRobbie is less interested in individual texts than in the contexts in which they are inserted; McRobbie

shows how those texts are fit into the total social experience of their consumers, are discussed at work or consumed in the home, and provide models for social behavior and personal identity.

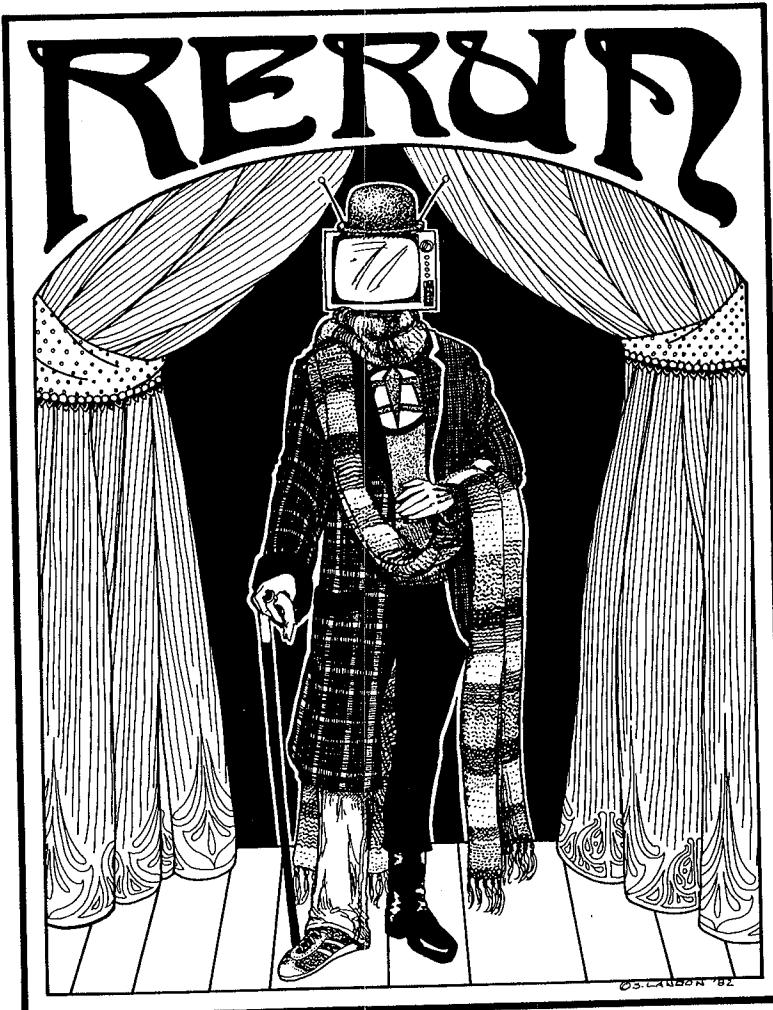
These British feminist writers provide useful models for recent work by younger feminists (on both sides of the Atlantic) who are attempting to understand the place of media texts in women's cultural experiences, (for useful overviews of this work, see Long, 1989; Rotman, Christian-Smith, and Ellsworth, 1988; Schwichtenberg, 1989; Woman's Studies Group, 1978). Drawing on McRobbie's research, Lisa Lewis (1987), for example, has explored what she describes as "consumer girl culture," a culture which converges around the shopping mall as a specifically female sphere. Lewis links the "woman-identified" music videos of Cyndi Lauper and Madonna to the concerns of this "consumer girl culture," suggesting that these pop stars provide symbolic materials expressing the pleasure female adolescents take in entering male domains of activity. The young women, in turn, adapt these symbolic materials and weave them back into their everyday lives, imitating the performers' idiosyncratic styles, and posterizing their walls with their images. Images appropriated from MTV are linked to images drawn from elsewhere in consumer culture and form the basis for communication among female fans about topics common to their social experience as young women.

Following in this same tradition, I want to focus on media fandom as a discursive logic that knits together interests across textual and generic boundaries. While some fans remain exclusively committed to a single show or star, many others use individual series as points of entry into a broader fan community, linking to an intertextual network composed of many programs, films, books, comics, and other popular materials. Fans often find it difficult to discuss single programs except through references and comparisons to this broader network; fans may also drift from one series commitment to another through an extended period of involvement within "fandom." As longtime fan editor Susan M. Garrett explains: "A majority of fans don't simply burn out of one fandom and disappear. . . . In fact, I've found that after the initial break into fandom through a single series, fans tend to follow other people into various fandoms, rather than stumble upon programs themselves" (Personal correspondence, July 1991). Garrett describes how fans incorporate more and more programs into their interests in order to facilitate greater communication with friends who share common interests

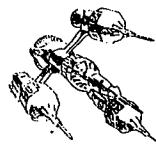
or possess compatible tastes: "Well, if she likes what I like and she tends to like good shows, then I'll like this new show too" (Personal correspondence, July 1991). To focus on any one media product—be it *Star Trek* or "Material Girl"—is to miss the larger cultural context within which that material gets embedded as it is integrated back into the life of the individual fan.

Fans often form uneasy alliances with others who have related but superficially distinctive commitments, finding their overlapping interests in the media a basis for discussion and fellowship. Panels at MediaWest, an important media fan convention held each year in Lansing, Michigan, combine speakers from different fandoms to address topics of common interest, such as "series romances," "disguised romantic heroes," "heroes outside the law," or "Harrison Ford and his roles." Letterzines like *Comlink*, which publish letters from fans, and computer net interest groups such as Rec.Arts.TV, which offer electronic mail "conversation" between contributors, facilitate fan discussion and debate concerning a broad range of popular texts. Genzines (amateur publications aiming at a general fan interest rather than focused on a specific program or star) such as *The Sonic Screwdriver*, *Rerun*, *Everything But . . . The Kitchen Sink*, *Primetime*, or *What You Fancy* offer unusual configurations of fannish tastes that typically reflect the coalition of fandoms represented by their editors; these publications focus not on individual series but on a number of different and loosely connected texts. *Fireside Tales* "encompasses the genre of cops, spies and private eyes," running stories based on such series as *Hunter*, *I Spy*, *Adderly*, *Riptide*, and *Dempsey and Makepeace* while *Undercover* treats the same material with a homoerotic inflection. *Walkabout* centers around the film roles of Mel Gibson including stories based on his characters in *Lethal Weapon*, *Year of Living Dangerously*, *Tim*, *Tequila Sunrise*, and *The Road Warrior*. *Faded Roses* focuses on the unlikely combination of *Beauty and the Beast*, *Phantom of the Opera*, and *Amadeus*, "three of the most romantic universes of all time." *Animazine* centers on children's cartoons, *The Temporal Times* on time-travel series, *The Cannell Files* on the series of a particular producer, *Tuesday Night* on two shows (*Remington Steele* and *Riptide*) which were once part of NBC's Tuesday night line-up, and *Nightbeat* on stories in which the primary narrative action occurs at night, "anything from vampires to detectives."

This logic of cultural inclusion and incorporation is aptly expressed within the flier for one fan organization:



**1.4** Signe Landon Danler, *Rerun*. This cover for a multi-media zine borrows iconography from a number of different series, including the Doctor's scarf, Barnabas Collins' cane and ring, John Steed's bowler, and Jim Kirk's pants.



### DO YOU :

Have the urge to wear a 17-foot scarf?  
Desire to be known as 'Madam President?'  
Find it "Elementary, my dear Watson?"  
Are you continually looking toward  
the sky for 'unwelcomed' visitors?

OR

Do you just want to visit "Fawlty Towers?" or  
Join CI-5 to become a true 'Professional'?  
Then you need search no further!  
Set your time/space/relative dimension coordinates

FOR:



### Anglofans Unlimited

(A British Media/Doctor Who/Blake's 7, etc. club)

Begun by a merry troupe of loonies and ex-Federation convicts in February of 1987. Our boundaries encompass the entire colonies of Britain (U.S., Canada & Australia). Among the benefits we offer are:

- A bi-monthly newsletter, "PLAIN ENGLISH," filled with club news, articles, fanzine reviews, convention reports, trivia and more.
- Round Robins--a way to make friends while participating in lively discussions about your favorite subjects.
- A Writing Department for those interested in creating fan fiction.
- Meetings for local members.
- And much, much more!

THE C.I.5

UFO

**1.5** Nomadic Poaching: AngloFans Unlimited (A British Media/Doctor Who/Blake's 7, etc. Club)

## DO YOU:

Have the urge to wear a 17-foot scarf?  
 Desire to be known as "Madame President?"  
 Find it "Elementary, my dear Watson?"  
 Are you continually looking toward the sky for  
 "Unwelcome" visitors?

OR

Do you just want to visit "Fawlty Towers?" Or  
 Join CI-5 to become a true "Professional?"  
 Then you need search no further!  
 Set your time/space/relative dimension coordinates

FOR:

**ANGLOFANS UNLIMITED**  
 (A British media/Doctor Who/Blake's 7, etc. club).

Members of this club share not simply or even primarily a strong attachment to any given series but a broader configuration of cultural interests and a particularly intimate relationship to media content. The "etc." in the club's description foregrounds the group's constant and "unlimited" ability to accommodate new texts.

**WHAT DO POACHERS KEEP?**

If I find de Certeau's notions of textual poaching and nomadic reading particularly useful concepts for thinking about media consumption and fan culture, I want to identify at least one important way in which my position differs from his. (Other differences will surface throughout the discussion). De Certeau draws a sharp separation between writers and readers: "Writing accumulates, stocks up, resists time by the establishment of a place and multiplies its production through the expansionism of reproduction. Reading takes no measures against the erosion of time (one forgets oneself and also forgets), it does not keep what it acquires, or it does so poorly" (174). Writing, for de Certeau, has a materiality and permanence which the poached culture of the reader is unable to match; the reader's meaning-production remains temporary and transient, made on the run, as the reader moves nomadically from place to place; the reader's meanings originate in response to immediate concerns and are discarded when they are no longer useful. De Certeau draws a useful distinction between strategies and tactics:

strategies are operations performed from a position of strength, employing the property and authority that belong exclusively to literary "landowners," while tactics belong to the mobile population of the dispossessed and the powerless, gaining in speed and mobility what they lack in stability. The tactical strength and the strategic vulnerability of reading, he contends, lies in its inability to form the basis for a stable or permanent culture; readers maintain a freedom of movement at the expense of acquiring resources which might allow them to fight from a position of power and authority. Tactics can never fully overcome strategy; yet, the strategist cannot prevent the tactician from striking again.

While this claim may be broadly applicable to the transient meaning-production which generally characterizes popular reading, it seems false to the specific phenomenon of media fandom for two reasons. First, de Certeau describes readers who are essentially isolated from each other; the meanings they "poach" from the primary text serve only their own interests and are the object of only limited intellectual investment. They are meanings made for the moment and discarded as soon as they are no longer desirable or useful. Fan reading, however, is a social process through which individual interpretations are shaped and reinforced through ongoing discussions with other readers. Such discussions expand the experience of the text beyond its initial consumption. The produced meanings are thus more fully integrated into the readers' lives and are of a fundamentally different character from meanings generated through a casual and fleeting encounter with an otherwise unremarkable (and unremarked upon) text. For the fan, these previously "poached" meanings provide a foundation for future encounters with the fiction, shaping how it will be perceived, defining how it will be used.

Second, fandom does not preserve a radical separation between readers and writers. Fans do not simply consume preproduced stories; they manufacture their own fanzine stories and novels, art prints, songs, videos, performances, etc. In fan writer Jean Lorrah's words (1984), "Treksfandom. . . is friends and letters and crafts and fanzines and trivia and costumes and artwork and folksongs and buttons and film clips and conventions—something for everybody who has in common the inspiration of a television show which grew far beyond its TV and film incarnations to become a living part of world culture." (N.P.) Lorrah's description blurs the boundaries between producers and consumers, spectators and participants, the commercial and the homecrafted, to construct an image of fandom

as a cultural and social network that spans the globe. Fandom here becomes a participatory culture which transforms the experience of media consumption into the production of new texts, indeed of a new culture and a new community.

Howard Becker (1982) has adopted the term "Art World" to describe "an established network of cooperative links" (34) between institutions of artistic production, distribution, consumption, interpretation, and evaluation: "Art Worlds produce works and also give them aesthetic values" (39). An expansive term, "Art World" refers to systems of aesthetic norms and generic conventions, systems of professional training and reputation building, systems for the circulation, exhibition, sale, and critical evaluation of artworks. In one sense, fandom constitutes one component of the mass media Art World, something like the "serious audience" which Becker locates around the symphony, the ballet, or the art gallery. Not only do "serious audience members" provide a stable base of support for artistic creation, Becker suggests, they also function as arbiters of potential change and development. Their knowledge of and commitment to the art insures that they "can collaborate more fully with artists in the joint effort which produces the work" (48). Historically, science fiction fandom may be traced back to the letter columns of Hugo Gernsbeck's *Amazing Stories*, which provided a public forum by which fans could communicate with each other and with the writers their reactions to published stories; critics suggest that it was the rich interplay of writers, editors, and fans which allowed science fiction to emerge as a distinctive literary genre in the 1930s and 1940s (Ross, 1991; Del Rey, 1979; Warner, 1969; Moskowitz, 1954; Carter, 1977). Since Gernsbeck and other editors also included addresses for all correspondents, the pulps provided a means by which fans could contact each other, enabling a small but dedicated community of loyal science fiction readers to emerge. Fans, under the approving eye of Gernsbeck and the other pulp editors, organized local clubs and later, regional science fiction conventions to provide an arena where they could exchange their ideas about their favorite genre. By 1939, fandom had grown to such a scale that it could ambitiously host a world science fiction convention, a tradition which has continued to the present day.

So, from its initiation, science fiction fandom has maintained close ties to the professional science fiction writing community and has provided intelligent user criticism of published narratives. Fan conventions play a central role in the distribution of knowledge

about new releases and in the promotion of comic books, science fiction novels, and new media productions. They offer a space where writers and producers may speak directly with readers and develop a firmer sense of audience expectations. Fan awards, such as the Hugo, presented each year at the World Science Fiction Convention, play a key role in building the reputations of emerging writers and in recognizing outstanding accomplishment by established figures. Fan publishing has represented an important training ground for professional writers and editors, a nurturing space in which to develop skills, styles, themes, and perhaps most importantly, self confidence before entering the commercial marketplace. Marion Zimmer Bradley (1985) has noted the especially importance of fandom in the development of female science fiction writers at a time when professional science fiction was still male-dominated and male-oriented; fanzines, she suggests, were a supportive environment within which women writers could establish and polish their skills.

Yet media fandom constitutes as well its own distinctive Art World, operating beyond direct control by media producers, founded less upon the consumption of pre-existing texts than on the production of fan texts. Much as science fiction conventions provide a market for commercially produced goods associated with media stories and as a showcase for professional writers, illustrators, and performers, the conventions are also a marketplace for fan-produced artworks and a showcase for fan artists. Fan paintings are auctioned, zines are sold, performances staged, videos screened, and awards are given in recognition of outstanding accomplishments. Semiprofessional companies are emerging to assist in the production and distribution of fan goods—song tapes, zines, etc.—and publications are appearing whose primary function is to provide technical information and commentary on fan art (*Apa-Filk* for fan music, *Art Forum* for fan artists, *Treklink* and *On the Double* for fan writers, etc.) or to publicize and market fan writing (*Datazine*). Convention panels discuss zine publishing, art materials, or costume design, focusing entirely on information needed by fan artists rather than by fan consumers. MediaWest, in particular, has prided itself on being fan-run and fan-centered with no celebrity guests and programming; its activities range from fan video screenings and fanzine reading rooms to workshops with noted fan artists, focused around providing support for the emergence of fan culture. These institutions are the infrastructure for a self-sufficient fan culture.

From its initiation in the 1960s in the wake of excitement about *Star Trek*, media fandom has developed a more distant relationship to textual producers than that traditionally enjoyed within literary science fiction fandom. If literary fans constituted, especially in the early years, a sizeable segment of the potential market for science fiction books, active media fans represent a small and insignificant segment of the audience required to sustain a network television series or to support a blockbuster movie. Media producers and stars have, thus, looked upon organized fandom less as a source of feedback than as, at best, an ancillary market for specialized spin-off goods. The long autograph lines that surround media stars often prohibit the close interaction that fans maintain with science fiction writers and editors.

Indeed, the largely female composition of media fandom reflects a historical split within the science fiction fan community between the traditionally male-dominated literary fans and the newer, more feminine style of media fandom. Women, drawn to the genre in the 1960s, discovered that the close ties between male fans and male writers created barriers to female fans and this fandom's traditions resisted inflection or redefinition. The emergence of media fandom can be seen, at least in part, as an effort to create a fan culture more open to women, within which female fans could make a contribution without encountering the entrenched power of long-time male fans; these fans bought freedom at the expense of proximity to writers and editors. Where this closeness has developed, as in the early years of American *Blake's 7* fandom, it has proven short-lived, since too many institutional pressures separate media professionals and fans.

Moreover, since copyright laws prohibit the commercial distribution of media fan materials and only a small but growing number of fans have gone on to become professional writers of media texts, these fan artists have a more limited chance of gaining entry into the professional media art world and thus have come to regard fandom less as a training ground than as a permanent outlet for their creative expression. (A growing number of media fans have "turned pro," writing professional *Trek* novels, contributing to commercial publications, pursuing careers as science fiction writers, or submitting scripts to television programs, a fact that offers inspiration to many current fan writers who have similar aspirations, yet, I would argue that the importance of media fan cultural production far exceeds its role as a training ground for professional

publishing.) Some fanzine stories and novels, such as the writing of Jean Lorrah, Jacqueline Lichtenberg, Leslie Fish, and Alexis Fagin Black, have remained in print since the late 1960s while others continue to circulate in mangled second-hand editions or faded photocopies. Works by some respected fan artists, such as Jean Kluge, Karen River, Suzan Lovett, and Barbara Fister-Liltz, may fetch several hundred dollars in convention auctions. There are a sizeable number of people who have been active in fandom for most or all of their adult lives and who are now raising children who are active fans. (Perhaps even a few have grandchildren in fandom.)

Media fandom gives every sign of becoming a permanent culture, one which has survived and evolved for more than twenty-five years and has produced material artifacts of enduring interest to that community. Unlike the readers de Certeau describes, fans get to keep what they produce from the materials they "poach" from mass culture, and these materials sometimes become a limited source of economic profit for them as well. Few fans earn enough through the sale of their artworks to see fandom as a primary source of personal income, yet, many earn enough to pay for their expenses and to finance their fan activities. This materiality makes fan culture a fruitful site for studying the tactics of popular appropriation and textual poaching. Yet, it must be acknowledged that the material goods produced by fans are not simply the tangible traces of transient meanings produced by other reading practices. To read them in such a fashion is to offer an impoverished account of fan cultural production. Fan texts, be they fan writing, art, song, or video, are shaped through the social norms, aesthetic conventions, interpretive protocols, technological resources, and technical competence of the larger fan community. Fans possess not simply borrowed remnants snatched from mass culture, but their own culture built from the semiotic raw materials the media provides.