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Chapter 12
Celebrity: The Return of the Repressed in Fan Studies?
Mark Duffett

It wasn't very pleasant but I was absolutely stuck where I was and I couldn't move. I had to keep watching him. I was in a really good seat right at the front and I'd gone with another girl who was a Bowie fanatic and she was crying. Then she passed out and the St John Ambulance men had to take her away. She was in a state of hypnotism almost, just gone. There was hysteria, particularly on the left-hand aisle because people were going wild when he reached down to the audience. They were crying and screaming. They'd try and touch him. And he'd tease them terribly. He was a right provocative little sod. (...) And I suppose we were such gullible people we allowed him to do that. Julie (in Vermorel 2011: 105)

Celebrity remains a necessary – though I suggest not sufficient – contextual element in much media fandom, but seems *missing in action* from fan studies.¹ It feels like a truism to say that fans around famous people can manifest strong emotions, but how much do we really understand why? The opening quotation is a concert report by Julie, aged 25, who describes her rock star as *hypnotic*: riveting, watched and teasing. He enjoys letting his audience almost touch him and is, in her eyes, a 'provocative little sod'. His fans, meanwhile, are described as *hysterical*: 'gullible people,' stuck, watching, crying, screaming, passing out, going wild. Julie's account refers to David Bowie, but – without too much alteration – it could have been written about Elvis, the Osmonds, Justin Bieber or One Direction. Why do fans of different performers behave in similar ways? If the participatory culture tradition talks about fan love for famous people at all, it focuses on consequential practices, not motivating causes. My argument in this chapter is that participatory culture research has, in effect, repressed celebrity, and that the *right kind* of attention to the 'cult of personality' will greatly help us integrate and extend our understanding of fandom. The chapter is divided into five sections. The chapter begins by examining the development of a fan studies mainstream as a process of *marginalization* of attention to celebrity. I then consider how deductive areas of fan research have also inadequately conceptualized celebrity attachment. Using Gary Boas and Richard Simpkin as examples, I then show that there are subtle differences between fandom and celebrity following *per se*. The chapter reaches its climax with a discussion of *effervescence*: a useful explanatory mechanism from Emile Durkheim's theory of religion. Finally, I will contrast a neo-Durkheimian approach to fandom with some classic and contemporary research on parasocial

¹ I am conceptualizing celebrity in its broadest sense here as concerning famous people. This should not be mixed up with the stricter notion of celebrity as human 'pseudo events,' talentless fame obsessives who do not merit any attention except as quirky examples of how people can profit from the dramas of their 'private' lives.

interaction. I suggest that focusing on fan motivation and affect – perhaps through a refashioning of Durkheim’s work – may help us escape the long shadow of the mass culture critique that haunts even celebratory fan studies.

Celebrity and the Fan Studies Mainstream

In the aftermath of decades of commentary about fans as exemplars of the mass audience, almost three decades ago a pair of publications on the subject dominated the popular discussion. John Caughey’s seminal study *Imaginary Social Worlds* (1984) examined mentally ill audience members who committed acts of atrocity. Its author argued that fantasizing about celebrities was a practice shared by both the sane and the insane. A year later, Fred Vermorel’s influential fan mail collection *Starlust* portrayed music fandom as a realm of fantasy and imagination, an escape route from everyday life.² For a long time, when academics wrote about fandom, they would dutifully cite Caughey’s and Vermorel’s work. Fred Vermorel introduced his findings as an exposé: ‘Not all these people wanted to speak at first, and many were reluctant to express the full extent of their feelings.’ (2011 [1985]: 9) His volume was divided into sections on *passion, mystery, power, possession, obsession, ecstasy* and *delirium*. If *Starlust’s* fan fantasies were not uniform, collected together they revealed - through a careful process of selection and editing – that fans could be highly imaginative and outlandish in their obsessions. The book caused an inevitable stir. Despite being interested in different performers, its quirky collection of devotees *thought along similar lines and behaved in similar ways*. *Starlust* was therefore about *both* the hold that celebrities could have on their audiences *and* the ways that fans could appropriate their heroes as cultural resources.

In their different ways, Caughey and Vermorel negotiated the mass culture critique’s dismissal of fan as manipulated audience. As a young researcher sympathetic to fans, I was sufficiently inspired by their contributions to start a research career examining the role of celebrity following in the lives of music listeners. The renown of the performer or author remains a prominent and some might say necessary context for much media fandom, but it still inadequately understood as a part-object in fan studies. Perhaps because the mass culture critique and its legacy associated stardom with objectionable ideas (like solipsistic fantasizing and stalking), issues connected with celebrity following have been marginalized in fan studies.³ Less than a decade after the publication of *Starlust*, Henry Jenkins’ offered a very different picture of media fandom in his book *Textual Poachers* (1992). Jenkins’ contribution arrived as

² Rather confusingly, *Starlust’s* 1985 first edition was attributed to both Fred and Judy Vermorel. The book’s 2011 reprint was attributed to Fred as the sole author. I have referenced the book just to Fred here.

³ The mass culture critique is the tradition of work associated with oppositional elitist thinkers like Dwight Macdonald (1957). Here I am using the term loosely to include any scholarship that suggests cultural production determines consumption by manipulating or infantilizing the audience.

part of a paradigm shift in cultural studies.⁴ If previous popular work had negotiated longstanding perceptions of fandom as inadequate or abnormal, Jenkins and other researchers of his era *created an idealized portrait of fandom detached from the issue of celebrity*. In stark contrast to Caughey's mentally unbalanced case studies and Vermorel's lovesick pop fans, Jenkins argued that representations of fan hysteria were examples of media stereotyping. He successfully charted a new course for fan studies, one that showed how ordinary people could be creative, communal, resistant, mobilized and political. *In light of the continuing pull of celebrity* in many forms of fandom, however, it may now be time to consider the limitations of its approach.

Textual Poachers was based mostly on research with science fiction television enthusiasts. It came to dominate the field of media fan research together with his later work (Jenkins 2006a, 2006b, 2008). Since the early 1990s, research has tended to focus instead on the collective agency of fans as textual poachers, cultural producers and online social networkers (see Jenkins 1996, 2006a and 2006b, Hellekson and Busse 2006, Gray, Sandvoss and Harrington 2007). This tradition has been guided by attention to television franchise fandom, to the way that fans interact with textual works (not their makers), and to seeing fans as rebellious agents who either rework or 'spoil' the text in some way. Furthermore, until Henry Jenkins' recent research into fan activism (see Jenkins 2012), his own output rarely if ever referenced to fans' connections with famous people. Indeed, when talking about the celebrity image – in accordance with an autobiographic turn in cultural studies – in his work the most prominent image under discussion has been that of *the researcher himself*. As ways to start talking about fan stereotyping and the adoption of technology, his book *Fans, Bloggers, Gamers* (2006a), explained, for example, how 'Professor Jenkins' fared on the *Donohue* television show (187) and his son's fortunes in the world of dating (173). Such anecdotes explained relative little about the process of celebrity fandom and that is not their aim. When Jenkins' work has occasionally examined media products such as *American Idol* (2006b, 59) that evoke audience fascination with celebrity, it has approached fans as *followers of the television show*, not of its individual contestants.

As a subject matter in fan studies, the hegemony of telefantasy drew attention to the interaction between serial television programming and its fans. However, fandom is a wide ranging socio-cultural phenomenon. Indeed, the word 'fan' has sometimes become used simply to describe impassioned consumers: those who follow particular products, brands or styles. Some forms of media fandom focus

⁴ The shift I am referring to here is part of the second generation of reception studies. Stemming from the influence of writers such as Janice Radway (1984) and John Fiske (1989), it represented a positive new attitude to fandom and included other writers such as Constance Penley (1992) and Camille Bacon-Smith (1991).

on specific products such as computer games or narrative texts such as ensemble movies. One way of thinking of devoted audiences comes from enquiring about the appropriate ontological place of fame and celebrity. Audience members may start by becoming fascinated by a particular text or moment in a performer's career, but what usually marks out their passion *as fans* is that they have become interested in the continuity *between* texts (genre fandom) *between* texts and makers (auteur fandom), and *between* what happens on-stage and offstage (star fandom). Rather like collecting, celebrity following is therefore something common across a wide range of fan experiences and central to *some* forms of media fandom. The claim is important to make, because it is easily forgotten: while fans often *begin* with an interest in the authored work, they may also go further. There is *a common tendency to shift attention from the work to its makers*: from enjoying a text or product to recognizing the creativity of its authors, to exploring *their* identities as the sources of their creativity, and even to desiring to meet and know them. Even though the process is clearest in relation to star actors or popular musicians, other creative agents (directors, authors, designers) can easily prompt emergent followings. Indeed, public creative work of any sort can potentially legitimate certain kinds of celebrity following. Almost inevitably fans seek out 'creative signatures' and other indications of agency. They then become interested in understanding his or her cultural influences, industrial context and biography. They desire to investigate the 'real' person behind the image and find possible avenues of intimacy.⁵ Eventually creative figures – Josh Whedon or Dario Argento, for example – become known as auteurs. They can then lever this to attract followings, increase their public profile and emerge in their own right as part of the marketing process.

In so far that fandom is frequently about loving the work, performance or image of another individual, then pursuing a human emotional connection is part of the process. An extreme example here might be 'fandom' for Apple products. Although an iPad is not a media text, its enthusiasts are fans of a sort. As part of their interest, many, by extension, have become interested in Apple's late CEO Steve Jobs or the corporation's senior vice president of industrial design, Jonathan Ive. Such enthusiasts would categorically separate themselves from the teenagers who collect posters of boy band members: after all, they are primarily fascinated by *the product* itself. However, the autographs of figures like Ives have grown in value as their social recognition has become a pretext for fan phenomena. If the iPad example seems extreme, the tendency is much clearer in relation to more obvious media forms, where a fascination for the text is regularly associated with fans identifying the individuals who are responsible for its creation. In so far that fandom is often – perhaps always – an emotionally-charged recognition of style, attitude or

⁵ Of course this real person is also still a construct, but nevertheless a functional one in fan discourses.

creativity in the work of an individual or group, this is a crucial dimension of the phenomenon itself. In consequence, although the distinction between different forms of fandom remains meaningfully significant, it is important to understand celebrity following as *an affective tendency* that can emerge in many – if not most – media cultures. Admiration for the work and a pleasure in following its maker are often *both* at play in the trajectory of fandom as personal journey.

Given two decades of academic work on practices like spoiling, slash writing and fan activism, it seems easy, returning to *Starlust*, to dismiss Vermorel's account as a work entrenched in the outdated problematic of mass consumerism. The book's subjects both speak and are judged through the paradox of their own apparent powerlessness.⁶ However, for several reasons, to fully leave behind issues that it raises would be a significant error of judgement. The first is that beneath the selection of fan mail, at some level *Starlust* touches on an empirical reality: many fans *do* have emotional reactions to the physical presence of heroes, or *just the thought of* more intimacy with them, reactions that are poorly theorized and understood. The second error is that in attempting to draw readers away from the shadow play of the mass consumer critique, *Textual Poachers* simply *inverted* that critique. In fan studies, fans are therefore now a caricature, but of a different sort. They appear techno-savvy, politically active, communal and progressive folk; artful dodgers of popular culture whose tactics re-imagine gender and evade the control of the corporate media. This portrayal has both hidden a shadow side (the *non-participatory* audience of theoretically-unworthy fans who do not protest, subvert or resist) and lent itself to *promoting* digital technologies to their eager users. Furthermore, key elements of media fandom which *do not* fit the template of fan studies are ignored. Recent research has black-boxed some crucial elements of fandom, such as the fundamental question of *why* people become fans. Finally, if the *Poachers* version of fandom runs gloriously counter to tired, everyday stereotypes, it does not mean – even in an era of industrially-sponsored fan participation – that the stereotypes have all gone away. As Matt Hills (2012: 113) recently put it, 'fandom has indeed become part of marketing strategies (...) we cannot deduce from this industrial normalization that wider cultures have embraced fan identities as uncontroversial.'

Deductive Frameworks: Religion, Consumption, Projection

While the participatory culture tradition has been the dominant strand of fan research in cultural studies, it is not the only one. Unfortunately, however, celebrity following has also been inadequately conceptualized in other areas of the field. In the absence of a clear steer from television studies, other areas of research have struggled to conceptualize celebrity following as a prominent dimension of fandom.

⁶ There is a case to be made that fan mail instrumentally emphasizes powerlessness as a way to beseech the famous and it should not, therefore, be taken as a straightforward record of the disposition of its writers.

This surprising lack of insight into celebrity following can be illustrated by considering three other academic traditions: research on fame and celebrity, popular music studies, and studies of audience psychology. In both film studies and celebrity studies, research on fame and celebrity has offered insight about screen images, social myths and media marketing, but has been remarkably quiet about fans themselves (see, for example, Gledhill 1991, Rojek 2001, Kurzman et al. 2004). Some books on celebrity, such as Turner (2004), have included sections on the audience, yet they have tended to collate other work on the subject as either textbooks or overviews. Other studies have ignored fandom or been unaware of a cross over. For example, authors such as David Wall (2010) have examined specific cases of the industrial policing of star images through devices such as trademark and intellectual property legislation. Such cases can involve adventurous fans who attempt to co-opt their stars' image for prominent social pursuits. Celebrity following, however, has rarely been the motivating question behind such work. Popular music fandom research, meanwhile, remains a rather embryonic field, perhaps because there have been so few researchers interested in the questions that it can raise. Nevertheless, popular music research offers the potential to be fruitful, because, according to P. David Marshall (1997: 158), 'The directness of the address of the musical performer has always constructed the relationship between performer and audience at a very personal level.' Displays of emotion are often central to the live music experience and, indeed, music fans bond through their shared proclamations of conviction and expressions of desire for their heroes. However, disciplinary traditions are a significant problem here: music researchers have tended to either be sociologists or musicologists, with both camps more concerned with texts, performers or industries than audiences and contexts of reception. Listening analysts as diverse as Tia DeNora (2000) and John Sloboda (2004) have asked about music reception in different ways, but their work largely ignores fandom as a personal and social process.

The third tradition, research on audience psychology, has its own problems if used to generalize about fan identification. Clinical psychologists have traditionally portrayed a selective, refracted pathologized version media fandom motivated solely in relation to celebrity stalking. Unfortunately, much of this work has confused ordinary fandom with abnormal attachment to celebrity figures. Other approaches have examined fandom as a product of ordinary universal psychoanalytic drives. Indeed, the central theorists of fan studies have also begun to address this issue (see Hills 2002, Sandvoss 2005). Their cultural studies work consciously eschews the pathologizing tendencies of clinical psychology and instead locates fandom instead as an outcome of supposedly universal processes such as projection, introjection and transference. In so far that attention to fan identification necessarily *generalizes* a range of individual activity, however, such work still creates a deductive *ideal type*, in the Weberian sense. Although

there *is* a quite strong reason to believe that fandom is a form of attachment (for example, see Cohen 2004), what, however, does saying so actually add to the study of the subject that allows us to gain further insight? Psychoanalytic approaches, at worst, offer the general story of a generalized individual. Rather than see such theory as a normalizing imposition (see Deleuze 1987: 81), if we assent to it then we must presume that we all share common psychological processes. Why, then, do such processes facilitate fandom in some people and not others? Freudian or Kleinian theories may begin to account for the ways in which we - as individuals - emotively conceptualize important others, but they do not fully address the question of how celebrity following is communally generated and socially constituted. Exceptional writers like P. David Marshall (1997), Nick Couldry (2000) and Kerry Ferris (2001) *have* also attempted to explore the power of fame from a sociological viewpoint. None of this writing, however, squarely considers *why* fans are so fascinated with stars and celebrities. It is as if, without acknowledgement, fan fascination is bracketed off and taken for granted as an *a priori* process. In media and cultural studies, then, celebrity currently remains a missing, perhaps repressed, dimension of fandom research. In the popular imagination, connections between fandom and celebrity have often, nevertheless, been conceptualized in relation to concerns from outside areas of study that *deductively* frame the phenomenon. The first discussed in this section is consumption and the second, religion.

The idea of fandom as a form of consumption hails from the notion that the culture industries narcotize their audiences for the purpose of their own commercial survival (see Adorno 1991). Rupert Till's recent book *Pop Cults* provides a summarized version of this thesis:

Since the objects in the market sector are non-essential, the potential size of this market is almost infinite. Since there is no physical need for these things that can be satisfied by a certain quantity of them, there is no obvious physical limit to the size of the market. At no point will a dedicated fan call a halt to purchases by choice, they would be likely to consume until they are limited by lack of funds, or failure of the product to continue to attract their loyalty. Thus as long as the fans' devotion can be maintained, products can continually be created, marketed, sold and consumed. This makes the maintenance of an obsessive devotion to a popular icon by the fan, [sic] a key relationship within popular music. If this relationship can be established and sustained, the popular music icon's career will continue. The quality of the musical product therefore becomes only a small part of that relationship, and not necessarily the most important element in the success of a popular music star. (Till 2010: 51-2)

This approach puts *all* the emphasis on media producers' abilities to manipulate fans and prompt participation in a process of economic exchange. It has sometimes been extended to evoke the ideology of *consumerism*: the idea that purchasing a particular good or service can significantly improve your quality

of life (for a classic study, see Ewan 1976). Because stars practice conspicuous consumption (see Dyer 1998) and can act as popular role models, commentators such as Peter Stromberg (1990) maintain that they promote consumerism to their fans. However, fans' perceptions of the practice of material consumption in the lives of stars do not simply show that they primarily act as role models (Duffett 2000). Take, for example, Elvis Presley's famous habit of purchasing Cadillacs. In one early interview, Elvis carefully explained his choice of purchase: 'I'll tell... the reason I bought those cars. Maybe someday I'll go broke and I can sell one of 'em.' (Osbourne 2006: 37) For Elvis, then, the Cadillac becomes as a form of financial collateral, but functions, too, as a form of publicity, symbol of success, and – when he later gave away cars – as an opportunity to demonstrate kindness to others. Fans understand *Elvis's* car purchases not so much as economic gateway to pure happiness, but rather as an indication of *his own value system*. The same cars might have been purchased by someone else – like, say, Elvis's manager Colonel Parker - for completely different reasons. Rather than articulating consumerism *in general*, Elvis's cars reflect *his* myth to dedicated fans. Indeed, everyone knows that the best of consumer society never made Elvis completely happy and that he died in a tragic way; his story is partly about the failure of consumerism to make a difference to an individual whose personal life descended into tragedy.

If the culture industries see consumption as an end in itself, to fans it is a means to an end. As they have no other choice, they distrust and marginalize the business *at the same time* as participating in its economic systems (see Cavicchi 1998, 63). Fandom's relation to consumption is therefore more nuanced than it at first seems, it is not simply a process of material exchange or in accordance with the materialist values of a consumerist society (see, for example, Duffett 2000). While consumption is often part of the socioeconomic context of fandom, many fans actually like to get things for free. They love gratis downloads, recordings, broadcasts, encounters, autographs. Commerce is therefore one frame within which fandom usually operates, each element is tangential to the other, and they come together in a process of mutual exploitation. The danger of consumption-based theories is that they reduce both celebrity and fandom to the stark circuit of mass production and consumption.

A second deductive explanation of celebrity following fandom likens it to religion. The notion that fandom may be explained as a veiled or dissipated form of religious activity was most prominent in discussions about fandom and celebrity in the late 1990s and early 2000s (see, for example, Doss 1999, Hills 2002). This paradigm was positive only in so far that it reflected the way that fans often spoke about their love, and the strength and intensity of connection they felt for their heroes. Fandom evidently already offers people a kind of affective resource base in their lives. After talking to Bowie fans, Nick

Stevenson (2009: 84) noted, 'Apparently during periods of stress and emotional turmoil, many of the male fans suggested that Bowie's music had helped them.' He later added, 'Bowie is rediscovered at times of intense insecurity or emotional vulnerability' (Stevenson 2009: 94). While much earlier scholars like Adorno (1991) tended to explain fan empowerment away as a hallucination in the midst of unequal material relations, Stevenson's Bowie fans are not so easily dismissed. Indeed, unless we reductively caricature them as gullible dupes, the high prices that such fans pay for concert tickets and other goods or services is evidence of the *high emotional use value* that they put on them. Elsewhere I have analysed the class basis of the academic turn towards religiosity as an explanation (see Duffett 2003a). Here I wish simply to point out that such conceptions locate fandom as a kind of primal activity that, at the same time, retains the spirit of something transcendent which could offer a messianic redress to the ills of the social system. That conception forgets, however, the extent to which fans can be *critical* of their own objects and *disappointed* by heroes who fail to serve their ongoing needs. Religion is often used as modernity's other, something outside of and prior to modern rationality. To conceptualize fandom as a celebrity-following religion is to essentially perceive it as servile and misguided: with no real promise of an afterlife, fandom is not even a true religion. Indeed, it could be argued that the notion of fandom as a *petite religion* has, in effect, become a kind of veiled addition to the critique of fandom as an intensified form of consumerism. After all, if capitalism can endow its commodities and their salespeople with god-like powers, then the system will work all the more effectively at suckering in participants. While the religious analogy highlights the affective thrill of fandom, it tends to inadequately frame the phenomenon as a meeting point between folk instinct and commodity fetishism.

Boas and Simpkin: Celebrity Following or Fandom?

Notions of the fan as consumer or pseudo-religious devotee contain the idea that *celebrity is an exchange value*, that it matters and can be conceptualized deductively in relation to fandom *in general*. There is a certain amount of evidence to support this: fans of different performers behave in similar ways, cultural production is geared to supplying a quest for intimacy with famous appealing people, celebrity is premised on the social inequality between the star as one individual and the greater collective mass of their fans. However, even if fans are so gleeful about the attributes of their particular heroes, there are reasons to believe that they are *not* simply star struck and hung up on the power of celebrity *in general*. At this juncture I wish to inject a disruptive element: what if fandom is *not* about celebrity following? What if we have *confused* two closely associated phenomena?

Celebrity following in general results in the kinds of behaviour exhibited by Gary Boas and

Richard Simpkin. Starting off with a Brownie Bullseye camera, from his teenaged years in the mid-1960s until the start of the 1980s, Boas continually photographed himself with the teeming glitterati who lived in or visited New York City. Eventually, Boas's archive was turned into an art exhibition and a book called *Starstruck* (2006). In a society fascinated by fame, his thousands of photographs resonated with the popular imagination. Richard Simpkin pursued a similar path in Australia inspired by Boas, who got a credit in the back of Simpkin's book *Richard & Famous* (2007). From the end of the 1980s onwards, the Australian photographer obsessively photographed himself with a multitude of visiting stars, from Adam Sandler to Elton John. In the front his book, he explained:

For me getting a photo with a celebrity is far more important than getting their autograph because anyone can buy an autograph but how do you put a price on actually meeting someone that is going to be remembered in history? (...) I got to thinking, if people were so fascinated with celebrities then I should start to get my photo taken with every celebrity that I met. (...) The photos that I have taken represent a moment where the celebrity transcends into the world of reality. Am I the reality or am I simply just trying to escape my world into the world of celebrity? It's something that I do question from time to time. (Simpkin 2007: 10-11)

As if to begin answering to his own question, Simpkins added, 'Security, public relations girls, doormen and limousine drivers all look at you in disbelief as you casually walk over to the celebrity. (...) All that waiting was quickly forgotten; the battle was won and you feel the highest high' (2007: 13). His words imply that he engineers photo opportunities for the challenge not just for the glow of reflected glory.

The photographic activities of Boas and Simpkin are almost pornographic in that they reflect on celebrity at its omega point of its interchangeability – its *exchange value*. Indeed, a similar conclusion can be reached about those who repeatedly pursue sexual contact with the famous. Such people are, in effect, fame collectors, not fans. In the free love era, for instance, Cynthia Albritton (better known as Cynthia Plastercaster) made casts of the penises of famous musicians from Jimi Hendrix to Wayne Kramer of the MC5. Celebrity followers like Boas, Simpkin and Albritton only recognize the individuality of the celebrities who they meet in so far that those individuals represent a different stratum of society, one that is above the reality of ordinary life (see Couldry 2000). While their books tend to talk in terms of fandom, what is evident is that they are not normal fans, either in their degree of dedication or in something more qualitative: their appreciation of the style, character or creative skills of those whose bodies they continually document remains relatively marginal. Individuals like Boas and Simpkin are therefore *not* super fans. If they ever feel the emotional conviction of a fan, it either comes incidentally to their photography, or perhaps appears afterward, when they find that *in the flesh* a particular icon was

especially nice to them. They are obsessively *interested in the social power of celebrity*, but they do not personalize it as a connection with a few individuals whom they hold especially dear to their hearts. They are extreme celebrity hunters whose careers are pragmatic expositions of the idea that chasing fame can be *its own practice*. What they really document is our society's widespread fascination with the power, mechanisms and ethics *of celebrity itself*.

The Thrill of It All: Fandom, Totemism and Effervescence

The question remains that if fans are not celebrity followers per se, then how should we conceptualize the prominence of their connection to the famous? One crucial point here is that fandom as we know it emerged most fully alongside *not* fame itself but the dissemination of images of famous people in photographic or electronic media: photography, sound recording, cinema, television and the Internet. Fandom was both a way to label a set of followers and demarcate them as excessive in response to social anxieties about mass broadcasting. To go further, it is only possible to be a fan of someone who has a public profile and is therefore, at least to an extent, known socially through the media. Though you can be a relative, friend or admirer of someone who has never entered the public sphere, you cannot be *a fan*. Social media and local fame somewhat blur the distinction, granted, but it still remains crucial to the understanding of fandom. At some level, celebrity is a necessary but not sufficient precondition for many kinds of fannish connection. Rather than ignoring it, the question is how we might conceptualize it in a way that avoids both deductive theory's tendency to over-generalize and any agency-destroying notion of celebrity following. One answer is that we need to hold open a duality that connects the commonplace (fandom, on some level, as a quest for intimacy with the famous) with the particular (social and personal reasons why *I* like *this* particular icon).

While superficial comparisons between celebrity following and religion are as I have suggested here, unproductive, attention to *one* central mechanism from Emile Durkheim classic study of religion may be useful. In 1912, Durkheim published a book-length analysis of totemic religions of Australian tribal clans called *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (2008). For Durkheim, religious clans are focused on central objects or figures called totems that act as a foci of community attention and separate the secular from the sacred. His work on totemic religion offers us a crucial opportunity to understand fandom as an emotional encounter with socially-valued people. As I have previously explained it:

Each totem functions to mediate the emotional force of the social collective. (...) In a key moment, which Durkheim calls 'effervescence', each emotionally-heightened crowd member experiences a life-changing jolt of electricity as they subconsciously recognize a personal connection to the totem. The energy boosts his or her levels

of individual strength and confidence. Each individual is therefore connected to the social body on a primal and mysterious level. For Durkheim, 'religion is above all a system of notions by which individuals imagine the society to which they belong and their obscure yet intimate relations with that society (2008: 170). To elaborate, the crucial aspects of this are twofold. First, social electricity only exists in so far that individuals feel it. The process is based on shared assumptions, perceptions and experiences. Nothing literally leaps between people, yet those involved feel an intense and undeniable human chemistry. Second, the mechanism of effervescence is productive. By shaping the believers' loyalty, morality and commitment and to the group, it helps generate their identity. (Duffett 2012a: 22–23)

An adapted version Durkheim's work might see the fan base *as a clan*, the star *as a totem* and the fan *as an emotionally convinced member of the collective*. As a proviso, however, it is important to note that Durkheim's division between the secular and sacred, specifically, is of limited use in discussing popular media culture. Celebrity is not based on a contagion of sacredness, but instead on a gravitation pull towards intimacy. Rather than viewing Durkheim's work as a window on spiritual mystery, we should therefore consider it as a theory of *human chemistry* that might allow us to understand the affective dimension of celebrity fandom. Once we strip away the idea of sacredness, Durkheim's totemic mechanism offers profound insights about why celebrities have social status and how fans become drawn towards them. The schema rests on unspoken assumptions that circulate in wider culture. It suggests that the star's social worth is perceived as a product of his or her talent reflected in vast size of the fan base. The idea simultaneously clears up many of the mysteries of the phenomenon and opens up new possibilities for research.

More specifically, the notion of effervescence allows us to move forward in understanding *both* stardom and fandom together. Without seeing stars as inhuman industrial products, it offers an explanation for intense audience responses, and shows how they can be routinely invited by the culture industry as it builds up famous individuals and brings them near. Durkheim's ideas can explain why the most-prized performers – from Dylan to Lady Gaga – are constantly framed and understood, not just as individuals but also as *icons of individuality*. The energizing social loop behind totemism – which I have sometimes called a 'symbolic economy' – also allows us to examine *posthumous celebrity* from the standpoint of fan base continuity and emotional community. It also gives us an opportunity to compare and contrast *specific* stars and their particular fan phenomena. For example, in some popular music communities - the Grateful Dead phenomenon springs to mind - *the music itself* can have a totemic function far beyond any individuals who make it. Such musicians then act like gateways or guarantors. In contrast, fan knowledge of the private life or social position of iconic individuals is often crucial to the totemic pull of their stardom. Elvis Presley is the ultimate case study here. As well as being a talented stage performer, he had an extremely magnetic and resonant myth. His *disarmingly humble*, Southern,

working class persona left nobody feeling he was a superior or dismissive individual. Consequently, while his fans evidently loved his music, they also felt *extremely thrilled* at the idea of meeting *him*.

Another advantage of Durkheim's work is that it does not limit our understanding to any particular category of celebrity: totemic individuals can be real or imagined, alive or dead, and still hold popular attention. Indeed, *without* asking researchers to resort to negative deductive discourses, attention to the mechanics of totemism lets us theorize fandom and stardom *together*, resolving distinctions between structure and agency by building a link between the heady feelings that fans can experience and the marketing of famous people. Durkheim's work lets us understand why *promoted existing popularity* is part of the marketing process for stars, and shows how associated metrics – from box office charts to YouTube hits – have found a role in how fandom is realized.

Just over a century after *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* was published, a secularized 'reboot' of Durkheim's theory permits us to understand precisely why celebrity following is such a frequent and highly pleasurable part of fans' experiences. On the fan's side of the equation, the idea frames practices of celebrity following as part of a rewarding socio-cultural system (a symbolic economy). It helps us understand why fans frequently aim to *boost* the public profiles of their heroes (see Barbas 2008 and Duffett 2012b). Because each star then embodies stratospheric levels of audience approval, it also explains why fans feel that being individually accepted by him or her is as exciting as overcoming stage fright. Attention to totemism enables us to transcend central paradoxes that haunt the discussions about the relationship between devotees and their heroes, paradoxes such as why those who 'get' a particular star *feel* different to those who do not, and why collective fandom can be experienced as individual empowerment by fans, yet *appear* as 'subservient worship' to outsiders. Furthermore, because fans can relate to their totem in a wide variety of positive ways and still be part of the fan base, researchers are *not* limited to assuming a specific type of audience identification like 'lust' or 'admiration.' Finally, since the mechanism *cannot* entirely explain *why* a particular individual becomes interested, it also leaves room for each fan as an individual subject - and, potentially, for the psychoanalytic readings of his or her *individual* attachment. Equally, it does not contradict the participatory culture tradition, but rather augments it by revealing many of the motives for fan activity and practices.

Intimacy in An Age of Social Media: Is the Medium Really the Message?

Finally, in this piece I would like to address the relationship between totemism and intimacy by looking at a longstanding concept called 'parasocial interaction' and its more recent critics. The idea deals with *intimacy* in media culture, so from the outset, it is important to say that a neo-Durkheimian approach

allows us to distinguish *at least four different constituents* of intimacy in media culture. First, there are *communal feelings* that fans hold as they form bonds with each other through, for example, pen pal letters and in online forums. Second, there is each *star's performance of intimacy* (such as, whispers, sighs, tweets, close ups, confessions and asides). Third, is the clear evidence of a *fannish desire for intimacy* reflected in wanting to get closer and know more about one's star and a yearning for a real encounter. Fourth, there are each *fan's performed solicitations of intimacy*: gestures aiming to attract the attention of their object (for example, sending tweets, fan mail, photographs and gifts such as fan art). My argument here is that existing research has *constantly reduced fandom to contemporary media forms* and *failed to distinguish or account for these different aspects of intimacy*. For instance, the participatory culture tradition focused only on results of only the first kind of intimacy (communal activity). On the other hand, research to be explored in this section of the chapter sees the star's performance of intimacy in a way that prizes structures of mediation form over issues of affect.

In the mid-1950s, Donald Horton and Richard Wohl published an article in the journal *Psychiatry* that defined what they called the 'parasocial' relationship (also see Giles 2002). For Horton and Wohl (1956), parasocial interaction happens when the audience takes up a role – essentially a *subject position* – offered to them by a combination of mimetic media (such as radio and television) and the skilful labour of performers (as 'media personalities'). The researchers' work contained elements of a wider mass culture critique: the idea that the media offer *illusions* of face to face intimacy, that audiences are only active in choosing whether to watch and that some of viewers are compensating for social isolation. Within Horton and Wohl's schema, fans are positioned as paradigm examples of parasocial pitfalls of electronic media. Hence, radio announcers read out fan mail on air, for example, to demonstrate the subject position of the parasocial spectator and encourage casual viewers to adopt that role. How does the parasocial interaction idea relate to totemism? Horton and Wohl's notion assumes that the media facilitates the star's performance of intimacy as a one-way proposition which automatically prompts the fans' desires for intimacy. Those interested in a totem in the Durkheimian sense are not, however, recruited to a subject position. Rather, they believe that the performer's talent *means* that he or she has organically attracted a large following and is somehow 'worthy' of that level of attention. Fans combine a high estimation of the performer's social worth with a fascination for his or her performance. Horton and Wohl do not talk about any fannish desires for intimacy *that may spring from this process*. They see intimacy, first, as something produced by the industry (referring only to the first constituent of intimacy) and, second, as offered to the fan to accept or reject - not something produced *inside* and *by* the fan in relation to his or her assumptions and estimations about the performer.

Since fans in Horton and Wohl's schema are ultimately placed in a position where they respond to an accumulation of performed and mediated gestures *as if* relating to a present living person, the idea contains an *implicit ontology of mediated presence*. It is a small step further to say that fans *mistake* the mediated image for the living person, and some researchers have gone as far as saying the corollary, *that fans also mistake the living person for his or her mediated image*. The totemic argument does not, however, suggest that fans are 'blinded by love': depending on their knowledge of the star, they can, and do, change their estimation. This can be understood by considering a particular case. In his analysis of the Beatles' famous August 1965 Shea Stadium concert, Phil Auslander drew on my idea of 'imagined memories' (Duffett 2003b) to go a step further and suggest that fans, in a sense, *dematerialized the Beatles while they were there*.

My analysis here indicates, however, that something very much like imagined memory (remembered imaginings, perhaps) underpinned the audience's experience at Shea Stadium, since the audience was drawing on its memory of its own imaginings of the Beatles *even while in their physical presence*. The spectators' memories of the concert, therefore, would be memories (perhaps imagined) of remembered imaginings. (Auslander 2006: 264–5; emphasis mine)

Auslander's claim could be used to question fan interest as a form of ontological blindness – not admitting that the living people are there – but it is perhaps more appropriate to reflect on those fans' estimations of their heroes *as totems*. The fans in the Shea stadium audience *did* know that John, Paul, George and Ringo were stood before them. Indeed, the Beatles' presence that was actually *a necessary ontological premise* for their loud counter-performance. It is not so much that Beatles fans were blinded by their fantasies (remembered or otherwise), but that *they could not believe their own luck*. At last, their moment of opportunity to solicit the attention of such powerful totemic figures had finally arrived. In other words, the Beatles had not exactly been eclipsed by their media image. Rather, their fans knew from mediated traces of them that they had a vast fan base and tremendous appeal. As totemic stars of immense standing, their mere presence was enough to trigger *fan's performed solicitations of intimacy* that were louder than the music.

A related issue here is that fan *are always calibrating*, asking whether their heroes deserve totemic status. Stars can actually *lose* their followings if their value systems or behaviour seem unacceptable. This may be most obvious for cases like Gary Glitter, who was disgraced after being exposed as a paedophile. In less obvious cases, it may only take a performer behaving unexpectedly neglectfully or obnoxiously to make a fan reconsider their connection. A good example here comes from a Take That fan on the BBC Radio 1 documentary *Fans: Doing the Business*. She discussed her affective shift from one band member,

Robbie Williams, to another, in light of her discovery that Robbie was arrogant:

We were at *Top of the Pops*, en route, with me and my friend. Robbie and Mark [Owen] were there,

presenting the show. Robbie was standing on the stage with, like, all these bouncers surrounding him. There was a little gap so I just put my hand through – because he was looking – just to touch him. Because I thought, ‘God, my hero is standing in front of me: Robbie. The person whose posters are plastered all over my bedroom is standing in front of me!’ I went up to shake my hand. And he just pushed away my hand, to one side, and just looked at me. And I just stood there in amazement, thinking, ‘God, how arrogant is he?’ Then later on, during the show, he just brushed past everyone: didn’t have time for nobody. But then Mark walked past, and I had some beads that I was going to give to Robbie. And I didn’t. I passed them to Mark. And Mark looked at me and went, ‘thank you,’ and gave me a kiss on the lips. And I just burst into tears in front of everybody. (From the radio documentary *Doing the Business: Fans*, first broadcast on BBC Radio 1, November 5, 1995. See: <http://epguides.com/DoingtheBusiness/>)

It is interesting to note here that the female fan in the documentary, unlike arguments made about extreme fandom and stalking might suppose, did not become angry or resentful at Robbie for wasting her time and effort. Instead, she simply found a more suitable hero. In effect, her desire for intimacy with Robbie waned when his attitude stopped appealing to her.

Of course, it *could* be argued that parasocial interaction – and even totemism – exemplify outdated products of the ‘mass culture’ age, rendered obsolete by the widespread uptake of reciprocal, social media. In light of the immense popularity of platforms such as Facebook (launched in 2004), YouTube (2005) and Twitter (2006), media researchers have begun to question not just parasocial interaction, but also the nature of celebrity itself. Microsoft researchers Alice Marwick and danah boyd (2011) have perhaps developed this line of thinking the furthest:

Networked media is challenging celebrity culture, the ways that people relate to celebrity images, how celebrities are produced, and how celebrity is practiced. (...) Micro-celebrity can be understood as a mindset and set of practices in which audience is viewed as fan base; popularity is maintained through ongoing fan management; and self-presentation is carefully constructed to be consumed by others. (139-40)

Further, Marwick and boyd specifically single out Twitter for the way that it facilitates a *reciprocal* relationship between celebrities and fans:

Performing celebrity [on Twitter] requires that this asymmetrical relationship is recognized by others. Fans show deference, creating mutual recognition of the status imbalance between practitioner and fan. In return, fan-practitioner relationships move beyond parasocial interaction, the illusion of a ‘real,’ face-to-face friendship with a performer created through watching television shows or listening to music (Horton and Wohl, 1956). In parasocial relationships, or what John Thompson calls ‘mediated quasi-interaction’ (J Thompson, 1995: 98), a fan responds to a media figure ‘as if s/he was a personal acquaintance’ (Giles, 2002: 289); in contrast, Twitter suggests the possibility of [real] interaction. (2011: 144)

They later add that Twitter conversations can involve direct personal engagement between the

fan and object in a highly visible and public forum. This new, reciprocal interaction therefore both recontextualizes the star-fan relationship and places it in a medium that people also use to talk to their friends and family. Twitter therefore ‘depathologizes’ the parasocial interaction (Marwick and boyd 148; also see Marshall 2010).

Accepting that not all celebrities use social media in reciprocal ways (see Lueck 2012), there are still a number of issues with Marwick and boyd’s interesting claims. First, they tend to deploy the term ‘fans’ rather liberally: some of their case examples seem to be more like vocal ‘anti-fans’, that is, oppositional critics (see Gray 2003). Equally, the Twitter researchers say fandom is about showing ‘deference’ (Marwick and boyd 2011: 144 and 155). While star-fan relationships often *incorporate differences in perceived status*, saying that fans by definition ‘show deference’ implies that celebrity is a matter of social office, not audience choice. Fan connections are not about deference, they are about affective resonance discovered and interpreted in positive ways. Finally, parasocial interaction is not an empirical reality that has been eclipsed by the use of social media, it is a theoretical artifact of the mass culture era that is now being challenged precisely because we have accepted the idea that the media bring us together rather than push us apart. Indeed, if anyone in an age of social media still seriously holds on to the assumption of that the media alienate people, then they would still have to say – wrongly in my opinion – that *both* celebrities and fans are locked into *mutual* parasocial performances online. If this is not quite so, though, does it follow that everyone online is now socially equal because they can all contribute in some way to the public sphere?

Marwick and boyd claim: ‘[Social media] reveals that the reasons for power differentials between “celebrities” and “non-celebrities” are performative constructs that can be leveraged by anyone with a webcam, social network site profile, or Twitter account for their own uses’ (2011: 156). In effect, they therefore confuse the *results* of celebrity status with its *causes*. First, while Twitter might be one forum for the performance of celebrity, its practice is rarely the means by which celebrity is *primary* generated. In other words, even though celebrity tweets might *look different* to those of ordinary people (with their assumptions about asymmetrical social status, their mutual endorsements, etcetera) – unless, perhaps, a person’s Twitter posts are noteworthy in themselves as performance pieces – I cannot tweet myself into the upper realm of celebrity. Second, for several reasons, the use of Twitter by broadcast media celebrities is not grounds for claiming that their totemic power has been degraded. Popularity figures still indicate vast differences in the size of fan followings. These differences are inherent in celebrity itself, since, by definition, no successful famous celebrity has enough time to keep up with the many, many fans who wish to communicate with them.

An interesting recent case was the Internet sensation singer Kina Grannis, who was celebrated as a performer that successfully utilized social media (see Tham 2010). As a piece in the *Orange County Register* explained, she spent much of her time after a while trying to keep up with her own fans:

She reads more than 200 fan e-mails a day. Writes 100. She Tweets. Facebooks. Blogs. YouTubes. Posts homemade music videos with Happy Birthdays and shout-outs to fans. She's nurtured an intensely personal relationship with her fans, but the more popular she gets, the more exacting its price. 'Lately, I've had zero time for music,' she says. 'I need every second to make this the most successful release it can be.' (Berg 2010: online)

It appear that Grannis is well beyond 'micro-celebrity' here, reaching a place where any apparent semblance of a fully reciprocal relationship with her all her fans was starting to prove impossible. In other words, while the emergence of performance platforms like YouTube might have helped stretch the spectrum of possible identities between fans and icons *at the lower end* to include 'micro-celebrities,' but even if they have been augmented by *additional* practices online, at the upper end social relations remain totemic. Instead of seeing Twitter conversations as a new, unique form of public reciprocity, it may be more appropriate to place them on a continuum with previous examples from the public sphere – such as book signings, fan conventions, meetings outside of star's houses, press conferences or small talk made at live shows – where celebrities have interacted with their individual fans in public. Just as *prior to the rise of the Internet* the most dedicated fans were likely to create public moments of personal interaction with their heroes, so can fans on Twitter prompt moments of such moments of interaction. Stars who have Twitter accounts may notionally be expected to be more *available* to their audiences, but the medium *actually highlights their immense popularity by referencing their total number of followers* and has not, therefore levelled the playing field in a totemic sense.

Both Horton and Wohl (1956) and Marwick and boyd (2011) believe that arguments about Media form can smoothly translate into conclusions about celebrity and fandom. Horton and Wohl's work primarily considers intimacy performed by the star and *assumes* reasons for the consequent fannish desire for intimacy. Marwick and boyd's analysis suggests that new media technologies have encouraged a mutuality of star-performed and fan-performed types, without thinking about fannish desire (that is,

affect). By focusing on celebrity as a matter of media practices rather than affective connections, such researchers have confused shifts in media technology with the constitution of totemic relationships along performative lines. What their work nevertheless points toward is that our notions of intimacy really need to be thought through again in a much more careful way. Durkheim's schema suggests that fan's desires for intimacy emerge from their individual understandings of the sociocultural process of totemic stardom. While this is *partly facilitated by* star-performed intimacy, it is also connected to the other kinds of intimacy.

This chapter has suggested that fan research has struggled with integrating celebrity following and has aimed to address that by proposing a selective appropriation of Emile Durkheim's sociology of religion. His idea represents *an engaging working hypothesis for research into fandom*. It may not explain all types of fandom or everything about the phenomenon. It may not explain all celebrity connections. It does, however, offer one very strong explanation for why so much fandom is pursued as *a special type of celebrity following* and why, so far, by avoiding the mechanism, we have been studying contingent results rather than primary causes. Re-imagining Durkheim's work offers a way to integrate the study of celebrity following and fandom research without resorting to disrespectful or derogatory deductive stereotypes. A selective interpretation of the schema opens up new vistas of research, allowing us to examine the usual relationship between fans and celebrities as one of *consented inequality and collusion*. It also helps us to review marketing material and fan discourses in order to illuminate how different elements can support or contest the totemic process. Furthermore, it raises an opportunity to see where and how totemism may be implicated in wider cultural work, perhaps becoming a stake or an alibi in other situations or contingent processes. A revised Durkheimian perspective does not prevent us from also examining practices celebrated by fan studies, such as fanfic writing. Nor does it preclude the integration of other viable theoretical schemas. Instead it *assigns them an appropriate position*, often as approaches that examine results rather than causes. Most important, attention to Durkheim's work and the agenda that it creates may show us – without having to shadow box with the aftermath of the mass culture critique – *why* those wonderfully 'provocative little sods' on stage have become such engaging objects of desire.

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