

# THE NEW MEDIA BOOK

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### Interactive Audiences?

#### Henry Jenkins

'You've got fifteen seconds. Impress me.'

An advertisement for Applebox Productions depicts the new youth consumer: his straggly dishwater blonde hair hangs down into his glaring eyes, his mouth is turned down into a challenging sneer and his finger poised over the remote. One false move and he will zap us. No longer a couch potato, he determines what, when and how he watches media. He is a media consumer, perhaps even a media fan, but he is also a media producer, distributor, publicist and critic. He is the poster child for the new interactive audience.

The advertisement takes for granted what cultural studies researchers struggled to establish throughout the 1980s and 1990s, that audiences are active, critically aware and discriminating. However, this advertisement promises that Applebox productions has developed new ways to overcome his resistance and bring advertising messages to this scowling teen's attention. The interactive audience is not autonomous, still operating alongside powerful media industries.

If the current media environment makes visible the once invisible work of media spectatorship, it is wrong to assume that we are somehow being liberated through improved media technologies. Rather than talking about interactive technologies, we should document the interactions that occur among media consumers, between media consumers and media texts and between media consumers and media producers. The new participatory culture is taking shape at the intersection between three trends:

1. New tools and technologies enable consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate and recirculate media content.
2. A range of subcultures promote do-it-yourself (DIY) media production, a discourse that shapes how consumers have deployed those technologies.
3. Economic trends favouring the horizontally integrated media conglomerates encourage the flow of images, ideas and narratives across multiple media channels and demand more active modes of spectatorship.

It would be naive to assume that powerful conglomerates will not protect their own interests as they enter this new media marketplace, but, at the same time, audiences are gaining

greater power and autonomy as they enter into the new knowledge culture. The interactive audience is more than a marketing concept and less than 'semiotic democracy'.

### COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE

In *Collective Intelligence*, Pierre Levy offers a compelling vision of the new 'knowledge space', or what he calls 'the cosmopedia', which *might* emerge as citizens more fully realise the potentials of the new media environment. Levy explores how the Web's 'deterritorialisation' of knowledge might enable broader participation in decision-making, new modes of citizenship and community, and the reciprocal exchange of information. Levy draws a productive distinction between organic social groups (families, clans, tribes), organised social groups (nations, institutions, religions and corporations) and self-organised groups (such as the virtual communities of the Web). He links the emergence of the new knowledge space to the breakdown of geographic constraints on communication, of the declining loyalty of individuals to organised groups and of the diminished power of nation-states to command the exclusive loyalty of their citizens. The new knowledge communities will be voluntary, temporary and tactical affiliations, defined through common intellectual enterprises and emotional investments. Members may shift from one community to another as their interests and needs change, and they may belong to more than one community at the same time. However, they are held together through the mutual production and reciprocal exchange of knowledge. As Levy explains:

Not only does the cosmopedia make available to the collective intellect all of the pertinent knowledge available to it at a given moment, but it also serves as a site of collective discussion, negotiation, and development. . . . Unanswered questions will create tension within cosmopedic space, indicating regions where invention and innovation are required.<sup>1</sup>

Online fan communities are the most fully realised versions of Levy's cosmopedia. They are expansive self-organising groups focused around the collective production, debate and circulation of meanings, interpretations and fantasies in response to various artifacts of contemporary popular culture. Fan communities have long defined their memberships through affinities, rather than localities. 'Fandoms' were virtual communities, 'imagined' and 'imagining' communities, long before the introduction of networked computers.<sup>2</sup> The history of science-fiction fandom might illustrate how knowledge communities emerged. Hugo Gernsbeck, the pulp magazine editor who has been credited with helping to define science fiction as a distinctive genre in the 1920s and 1930s, was also a major advocate of radio as a participatory medium. Gernsbeck saw science fiction as a means of fostering popular awareness of contemporary scientific breakthroughs at a moment of accelerating technological development.<sup>3</sup> The letter column of Gernsbeck's *Astounding Stories* became a forum where lay people could debate scientific theories and assess new technologies. Using the published addresses, early science-fiction fans formed an informal, postal network, circulating letters and amateur publications. Later, conventions facilitated the

face-to-face contact between fans from across the country and around the world. Many significant science-fiction writers emerged from fandom. Given this history, every reader was understood to be a potential writer and many fans aspired to break into professional publication; fan ideas influenced commercially distributed works at a time when science fiction was still understood predominantly as a micro-genre aimed at a small but passionate niche market.

This reciprocity between readers, writers and editors set expectations as science fiction spread into film and television. *Star Trek* fans were, from the start, an activist audience, lobbying to keep the series on the air and later advocating specific changes in the programme content, the better to reflect its own agendas. *Star Trek* fandom, in turn, was a model for other fan communities to create forums for debating interpretations, networks for circulating creative works and channels for lobbying producers. Fans were early adopters of digital technologies. Within the scientific and military institutions where the Internet was first introduced, science fiction has long been a literature of choice.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the slang and social practices employed on the early bulletin boards were often directly modelled on science-fiction fandom. Mailing lists focused on fan topics took their place beside discussions of technological or scientific issues. In many ways, cyberspace is fandom writ large. The reconstitution of these fandoms as digital enclaves did not come without strenuous efforts to overcome the often overtly hostile reception female fans received from the early Internet's predominantly male population. Operating outside technical institutions, many women lacked computer access and technical literacy. Heated debates erupted at conventions as fans were angered at being left behind when old fan friends moved online. At the same time, fan communities helped many women make the transition to cyberspace; the group ensured that valued members learned to use the new technologies.<sup>5</sup>

Nancy Baym has discussed the important functions of talk within online soap fandom: 'Fans share knowledge of the show's history, in part, because the genre demands it. Any soap has broadcast more material than any single fan can remember.'<sup>6</sup> Fans inform each other about the programme's history or recent developments that they may have missed. The fan community pools its knowledge because no single fan can know everything necessary to appreciate the series fully. Levy distinguishes between shared knowledge (which would refer to information known by all members of a community) and collective intelligence (which describes knowledge available to all members of a community). Collective intelligence expands a community's productive capacity because it frees individual members from the limitations of their memory and enables the group to act upon a broader range of expertise. As Levy writes, within a knowledge community, 'no one knows everything, everyone knows something, all knowledge resides in humanity'.<sup>7</sup> Baym argues:

A large group of fans can do what even the most committed single fan cannot: accumulate, retain, and continually recirculate unprecedented amounts of relevant information. . . . [Net list] participants collaboratively provide all with the resources to get more story from the material, enhancing many members' soap readings and pleasures.<sup>8</sup>

Soap talk, Baym notes, allows people to 'show off for one another' their various competencies while making individual expertise more broadly available. Fans are motivated by 'epistemophilia', not simply a pleasure in knowing, but a pleasure in exchanging knowledge. Baym argues that fans see the exchange of speculations and evaluations of soap operas as a means of 'comparing, refining, and negotiating understandings of their socio-emotional environment.'<sup>9</sup> Fan speculations may, on the surface, seem to be simply a deciphering of the material aired but, increasingly, speculation involves fans in the production of new fantasies, broadening the field of meanings that circulate around the primary text.

For example, in the early 1990s, *alt.rec.arts.twin-peaks*, a group devoted to discussing David Lynch's cult mystery/soap opera series, sought to 'break the code and solve the crime', that is, to predict successfully future revelations about the Laura Palmer murder and thus to arrive at the 'truth' of the series.<sup>10</sup> However, as members mobilised and interpreted the series' 'evidence', they introduced a range of different potential narratives, centring on alternative assumptions about 'who done it' and how Laura's death fitted within larger schemes. Their ability to recognise previously undiscovered narrative possibilities enlarged their pleasure in watching *Twin Peaks*, and the group actively recruited new members to expand the range of interpretations. This collective exchange of knowledge cannot be fully contained by previous sources of power which depended on maintaining tight control over the flow of information, for example, 'bureaucratic hierarchies (based on static forms of writing), media monarchies (surfing the television and media systems), and international economic networks (based on the telephone and real-time technologies)'. The dynamic, collective and reciprocal nature of these exchanges undermines traditional forms of expertise and destabilises attempts to establish a scriptural economy in which some meanings are more valuable than others.<sup>11</sup> The old commodity space was defined through various forms of decontextualisation, including the alienation of labour, the uprooting of images from larger cultural traditions, the demographic fragmentation of the audience, the disciplining of knowledge and the disconnection between media producers and consumers. The new information space involves multiple and unstable forms of recontextualisation. The value of any bit of information increases through social interaction. Commodities are a limited entity and their exchange necessarily creates or enacts inequalities. However, meaning is a shared and constantly renewable resource and its circulation can create and revitalise social ties.

### HOW COMPUTERS CHANGED FANDOM

For Levy, the introduction of high-speed networked computing constituted an epistemological turning point in the development of collective intelligence. If fandom was already a knowledge culture well before the Internet, then how did transplanting its practices into the digital environment alter the fan community? The new digital environment increases the speed of fan communication, resulting in what Matthew Hills calls 'just in time fandom'.<sup>12</sup> If fans once traded ideas through letters, they now see the postal service as too slow ('snail mail') to satisfy their expectations of immediate response. Hills explains, 'the

practices of fandom have become increasingly enmeshed with the rhythms and temporalities of broadcasting, so that fans now go online to discuss new episodes immediately after the episode's transmission time or even during ad-breaks perhaps in order to demonstrate the "timeliness" and responsiveness of their devotion'.<sup>13</sup> Where fans might have raced to the phone to talk to a close friend, they can now access a much broader range of perspectives by going online. Hills worries that the broadcast schedule may be determining what can be discussed and when. This expectation of timeliness complicates the global expansion of the fan community, with time lags in the distribution of cultural goods across national markets hampering full participation from fans who will receive the same programme months or even years later. International fans often complain that they have an additional disadvantage because their first experience of the episodes is 'spoiled' by learning too much from the online discussions.

The digital media also alters the scope of communication. Fandoms centring on Asian popular culture, such as Japanese *anime* or Hong Kong action films, powerfully exploit the Internet's global reach. Japanese fans collaborate with American consumers to ensure the underground circulation of these cultural products and to explain cultural references, genre traditions and production histories.<sup>14</sup> *Anime* fans regularly translate and post the schedule of Japanese television so that international fans can identify and negotiate access to interesting programmes. American fans have learned Japanese, often teaching each other outside a formal educational context, in order to participate in grassroots projects to subtitle *anime* films or to translate *manga*. This is a new cosmopolitanism: knowledge-sharing on a global scale.

As the community enlarges and as reaction time shortens, fandom becomes much more effective as a platform for consumer activism. Fans can quickly mobilise grassroots efforts to save programmes or protest against unpopular developments. New fandoms emerge rapidly on the Web, in some cases before media products actually reach the market. As early participants spread news about emerging fandoms, supporters quickly develop the infrastructure for supporting critical dialogue, producing annotated programme guides, providing regular production updates and creating original fan stories and artwork. The result has been an enormous proliferation of fan Web sites and discussion lists. Kirsten Pullen estimates, for example, that by June 2000 there were more than 33,000 fan Web sites listed in the *Yahoo! Web Directory*, dealing with individual performers, programmes and films.<sup>15</sup> One portal, *Fan Fiction on the Web*, lists more than 300 different media texts that have generated at least some form of fan fiction, representing a much broader array of genres than previously suspected.<sup>16</sup>

As fandom diversifies, it moves from cult status towards the cultural mainstream, with more Internet users engaged in some form of fan activity. This increased visibility and cultural centrality has been a mixed blessing for a community used to speaking from the margins. The speed and frequency of communication may intensify the social bonds within the fan community. In the past, fans inhabited a 'weekend only world', seeing each other in large numbers only a few times a year at conventions.<sup>17</sup> Now, fans may interact daily, if not

hourly, online. Geographically isolated fans can feel much more connected to the fan community and home-ridden fans enjoy a new level of acceptance. However, fandom's expanded scope can leave fans feeling alienated from the expanding numbers of strangers entering their community. This rapid expansion outstrips any effort to socialise new members. Online fan discussion lists often bring together groups who functioned more or less autonomously offline and have radically different responses to the aired material. Flame wars erupt as their taken-for-granted interpretive and evaluative norms rub against each other. In some cases, fans can negotiate these conflicts by pulling to a meta-level and exploring the basis for the different interpretations. More often, the groups splinter into narrower interests, pushing some participants from public debates into smaller and more private mailing lists. Levy describes a pedagogical process through which a knowledge community develops a set of ethical standards and articulates mutual goals. Even on a scale much smaller than Levy's global village, fandoms often have difficulty arriving at such a consensus. Andre MacDonald has described fandom in terms of various disputes; between male and female fans, between fans with different assumptions about the desired degree of closeness of the producers and stars, between fans who seek to police the production of certain fantasies and fans who assert their freedom from such constraints, between different generations of fans, and so forth.<sup>18</sup> MacDonald depicts a community whose Utopian aspirations are constantly being tested against unequal experiences, levels of expertise, access to performers and community resources, control over community institutions and degrees of investment in fan traditions and standards. Moreover, as Nancy Baym suggests, the desire to avoid such conflicts can result in an artificial consensus which shuts down the desired play with alternative meanings.<sup>19</sup>

Networked computing has also transformed fan production. Web publication of fan fiction, for example, has almost entirely displaced printed 'zines'. Fanzines arose as the most efficient means of circulating fan writing.<sup>20</sup> Fan editors charged only the costs of reproduction, seeing zines as a vehicle for distributing stories and not as a source of income. In some fandoms, circuits developed for lending individually photocopied stories. In other cases, readers and editors came to see zines as aesthetic artifacts, insisting on high-quality reproduction and glossy colour covers. Fans have increasingly turned to the Web to lower the costs of production and to expand their reading public. Fans are also developing archives of older zine stories, helping to connect newer fans with their history. The higher visibility of fan fiction on the Web has inspired many new writers to try their hand and spread the practice to new fandoms, yet older fans complain of the lack of editing and nurturing of emerging talents. In several cases, fans have organised themselves to map out alternative story arcs and to script their own episodes when series were cancelled or took unwelcome turns.

Digital technologies have also enabled new forms of fan cultural production. Elena Garfinkle and Eric Zimmerman have documented the emergence of *Kisekae* or digital paper-dolls, which can be dressed and undressed by the user and programmed to perform simple actions. The *Kisekae* become vehicles for erotic play and fantasy, primarily among *anime* fans.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, game fans have produced short, animated films using game engines,

developed to enable *Quake* enthusiasts to record and replay their gameplay. Fans call these new works 'machinema' after a Japanese word that refers to puppetry.<sup>22</sup> Game avatars become, in effect, puppets that enable fan artists to tell their own stories. The scrapbook function in *The Sims* has similarly enabled new forms of fan fiction, as fans play the game in order to create the images necessary to illustrate their stories. In some cases, they also develop 'skins' designed to represent favourite television or comic book characters. Fan artists have been part of the much larger history of amateur film and video production. George Lucas and Steven Spielberg were themselves amateur film-makers as teenagers, producing low-budget horror or science-fiction movies. *Star Wars*, in turn, has inspired Super 8 film-makers since its release in the early 1970s. As the video recorder became more widely available, fans re-edited series footage into music videos, using popular music to encapsulate the often-unarticulated emotions of favourite characters.<sup>23</sup> As fan video-makers have become more sophisticated, some fan artists have produced whole new storylines by patching together original dialogue.

The World Wide Web is a powerful distribution channel, giving what were once home movies a surprising degree of public visibility. Publicity materials surface while these amateur films are still in production, most of the films boast lavish posters and many of them include downloadable trailers to attract would-be viewers impatient with download times. *Star Wars* fans were among the first to embrace these new technologies, producing more than 300 web movies at the last count.<sup>24</sup> These fan film-makers have used home computers to duplicate effects LucasFilm had spent a fortune to achieve several decades earlier; many fan films create their own light sabre or space battles. Some of these fan film-makers have had offers for professional projects or had their films screened at international film festivals. When *Amazon.com* offered videos of one favourite amateur *Star Wars* production, *George Lucas in Love*, it outsold *Star Wars Episode 1: The Phantom Menace* (1999) during its first week in circulation. Amateur film culture has already made an impact on the commercial mainstream. Spike Jonze, the director of *Being John Malkovich*, for example, began his career by making amateur films within the skateboard subculture. Similarly, MTV's *Jackass* took its inspiration from the Web-based distribution of amateur stunt films, while *Celebrity Death Match* adopts an aesthetic remarkably similar to action figure cinema. In the future, amateur productions may initiate many innovations in popular culture that gain higher visibility as they are pulled into mainstream media, just as the fans appropriate and recirculate materials from commercial culture.

#### KNOWLEDGE CULTURE MEETS COMMODITY CULTURE

Levy distinguishes between four potential sources of power: nomadic mobility, control over territory, ownership over commodities and mastery over knowledge. He suggests a complex set of interactions and negotiations between them. The emergent knowledge cultures never fully escape the influence of the commodity culture, any more than commodity culture can totally function outside the constraints of territoriality. However, knowledge cultures will, he predicts, gradually alter the ways that commodity culture operates. Nowhere is that



transition clearer than within the culture industries, where the commodities that circulate become resources for the production of meaning: 'The distinctions between authors and readers, producers and spectators, creators and interpretations will blend to form a reading-writing continuum.'<sup>25</sup>

Creative activity, he suggests, will shift from the production of texts or the regulation of meanings towards the development of a dynamic environment, 'a collective event that implies the recipients, transforms interpreters into actors, enables interpretation to enter the loop with collective action'.<sup>26</sup> Room for participation and improvisation is being built into new media franchises. Kurt Lancaster, for example, has examined how commercial works (including computer, role-playing and card games) surrounding the cult science-fiction series *Babylon 5* facilitate a diverse range of fan performances, allowing fans to immerse themselves in the fantasy universe.<sup>27</sup> Cult works were once discovered, now they are being consciously produced, designed to provoke fan interactions. The producers of *Xena: Warrior Princess*, for example, were fully aware that some fans wanted to read Xena and Gabrielle as lesbian lovers and thus began to consciously weave 'subtext' into the episodes. As Levy explains, 'The recipients of the open work are invited to fill in the blanks, choose among possible meanings, confront the divergences among their interpretations.'<sup>28</sup>

The new cultural works will have to provoke and reward the production of collective meaning through elaborate back-stories, unresolved enigmas, excess information and extratextual expansions of the programme's universe in order to be marketable.<sup>29</sup> Over the past decade, there has been a marked increase in the serialisation of American television, the emergence of more complex appeals to programme history and the development of more intricate story arcs and cliff-hangers. To some degree, these aesthetic shifts can be linked to new ways of receiving information arising from the home archiving of videos, Net discussion lists and Web programme guides. These new technologies provide the information infrastructure necessary to sustain a richer form of television content, while the programmes reward the enhanced competencies of fan communities. Television producers are increasingly knowledgeable about their fan communities, often courting their support through networked computing. *Babylon 5* producer J. Michael Straczinski went online daily, responding to questions about his complex and richly developed narrative, sometimes actively engaging in flame wars with individual fans, as well as conducting what he saw as a continuing seminar on the production of genre television.<sup>30</sup> While Straczinski sought to be more accessible to fans, he found it difficult to shed his authority or escape a legal and economic system designed, in part, to protect corporate interests from audience appropriation. His lawyers warned him that he would have to leave the group if there were danger that he would be exposed to fans' speculations that might involve him in potential plagiarism suits. Straczinski is perhaps unique in the degree of exposure he has had to fans; however, other producers have shown a similar awareness of online fan discourse. For example, when the WB Network postponed the season finale of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* shortly after the Columbine shootings, producer Josh Whedon made a notorious public call for Canadian fans to 'bootleg that puppy' and distribute it over the Web to American

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viewers. Fans, in turn, rallied to Whedon's defence when the religious right launched a letter-writing campaign against the introduction of a lesbian relationship involving regular characters.<sup>31</sup> By contrast, *Survivor* producer Mark Burnett engaged in an active disinformation campaign to thwart audience efforts to predict the winner of its million-dollar competition, burying false leads in the official Web site to be discovered by fan hackers. When long-time World Wrestling Federation announcer Jerry Lawler was fired, he brought his side of his disputes with Vince McMahon directly to online fans.

For many media producers, who still operate within the old logic of the commodity culture, fandom represents a potential loss of control over their intellectual property. The efforts of the recording industry to dismantle Napster demonstrated that the traditional media companies were prepared to spend massive sums in legal action against new forms of grassroots distribution.<sup>32</sup> Television producers, film studios and book publishers have been equally aggressive in issuing 'cease and desist' letters to fan Web sites that transcribe programme dialogue or reproduce unauthorised images. If new media have made visible various forms of fan participation and production, then these legal battles demonstrate the power still vested in media ownership.

The horizontal integration of the entertainment industry, and the emergent logic of synergy, depends on the circulation of intellectual properties across media outlets.<sup>33</sup> Transmedia promotion presumes a more active spectator who can and will follow these media flows. Such marketing strategies promote a sense of affiliation with and immersion in fictional worlds. The media industry exploits these intense feelings through the marketing of ancillary goods from T-shirts to games with promises of enabling a deeper level of involvement with the programme content. However, attempts to regulate intellectual property undercut the economic logic of media convergence, sending fans contradictory messages about how they are supposed to respond to commercial culture.<sup>34</sup> Rosemary Coombes and Andrew Herman have documented intensifying legal and political skirmishes between corporate lawyers and consumers. Many fan Webmasters post their 'cease and desist' letters in order to shame the media industries: shutting down grassroots promotional efforts results in negative publicity.<sup>35</sup> Often, the conflict boils down to an issue of who is authorised to speak for a series, as when a Fox television executive justified the closing of *The Simpsons* fan sites: 'We have an official Web site with network approved content and these people don't work for us.' Levy sees industry panic over interactive audiences as short-sighted: 'by preventing the knowledge space from becoming autonomous, they deprive the circuits of commodity space . . . of an extraordinary source of energy'. The knowledge culture, he suggests, serves as the 'invisible and intangible engine' for the circulation and exchange of commodities.<sup>36</sup>

The online book dealer *Amazon.com* has linked bookselling to the fostering of online book culture. Readers are encouraged to post critical responses to specific works or to compile lists of their favourite books. Their associates programme creates a powerful niche marketing system: Amazon patrons are offered royalties for every sale made on the basis of links from their sites. Similarly, the sports network ESPN sponsors a fantasy baseball

league, a role-playing activity in which sports fans form teams, trade players and score points based on the real world performance of various athletes.<sup>37</sup>

Attempts to link consumers directly into the production and marketing of media content are variously described as 'permission-based marketing', 'relationship marketing' or 'viral-marketing', and are increasingly promoted as the model for how to sell goods, cultural and otherwise, in an interactive environment. As one noted industry guide explains, 'Marketing in an interactive world is a collaborative process with the marketer helping the consumer to buy and the consumer helping the marketer to sell.'<sup>38</sup>

Researchers are finding that fandom and other knowledge communities encourage a sense of passionate affiliation or brand loyalty that ensures the longevity of particular product lines.<sup>39</sup> In viral marketing, such affiliations become self-replicating as marketers create content which consumers actively want to circulate among their friends. Even unauthorised and vaguely subversive appropriations can spread advertising messages, as occurred with Internet spoofs of the Budweiser 'whazzup' commercials.

Building brand loyalty requires more than simply co-opting grassroots activities back into the commodity culture. Successful media producers are becoming more adept at monitoring and serving audience interests. The games industry, which sees itself as marketing interactive experiences rather than commodities, has been eager to broaden consumer participation and strengthen the sense of affiliation players feel towards their games. LucasArts has integrated would-be *Star Wars* gamers into the design team for the development of their massively multi-player online game. A Web page was created early in the design process and ideas under consideration were posted for fan feedback.<sup>40</sup> Maxis, the company that manages *The Sims* franchise, encourages the grassroots production and trading of 'skins' (new character identities), props and architectural structures, even programming code. *The Sims*' creator Will Wright refers to his product as a 'sandbox' or 'doll house', where consumers can play out their own stories. Ultimately, Wright predicts, two-thirds of *The Sims* content will come from consumers.<sup>41</sup>

It remains to be seen, however, whether these new corporate strategies of collaboration and consultation with the emerging knowledge communities will displace the legal structures of the old commodity culture. How far will media companies be willing to go to remain in charge of their content or to surf the information flow? In an age of broadband delivery, will television producers see fans less as copyright infringers and more as active associates and niche marketers? Will global media moguls collaborate with grassroots communities, such as the *anime* fans, to ensure that their products achieve visibility in the lucrative American market?

## FROM JAMMERS TO BLOGGERS

In his 1993 essay, 'Culture Jamming: Hacking, Slashing and Sniping in the Empire of Signs', Mark Dery documented emerging tactics of grassroots resistance ('media hacking, informational warfare, terror-art and guerilla semiotics') to 'an ever more intrusive, instrumental technoculture whose operant mode is the manufacture of consent through the manipulation

of symbols'.<sup>42</sup> In Citizens' Band Radio slang, the term 'jamming' refers to efforts to 'introduce noises into the signal as it passes from transmitter to receiver'. Dery's essay records an important juncture in the history of DIY media. Over the past several decades, emerging technologies – ranging from the photocopier to the home computer and the videocassette recorder – have granted viewers greater control over media flows, enabled activists to reshape and recirculate media content, lowered the costs of production and paved the way for new grassroots networks.

Many of the groups Dery describes, such as Adbusters, ACT UP, Negativeland, The Barbie Liberation Army, Paper Tiger Television, and the Electronic Disturbance Community, would happily embrace his 'culture jammer' banner. However, Dery went too far in describing all forms of DIY media as 'jamming'. These new technologies would support and sustain a range of different cultural and political projects, some overtly oppositional, others more celebratory, yet all reflecting a public desire to participate within, rather than simply consume, media. Dery, for example, distorts the fan community concept of 'slash' when he uses it to refer to 'any form of jamming in which tales told for mass consumption are perversely reworked.' Culture jammers want to opt out of media consumption and promote a purely negative and reactive conception of popular culture. Fans, on the other hand, see unrealised potentials in popular culture and want to broaden audience participation. Fan culture is dialogic rather than disruptive, affective more than ideological, and collaborative rather than confrontational. Culture jammers want to 'jam' the dominant media, while poachers want to appropriate their content, imagining a more democratic, responsive and diverse style of popular culture. Jammers want to destroy media power, while poachers want a share of it.

Returning to this same terrain at the end of the decade, it is clear that new media technologies have profoundly altered the relations between media producers and consumers. Both culture jammers and fans have gained greater visibility as they have deployed the Web for community building, intellectual exchange, cultural distribution and media activism. Some sectors of the media industries have embraced active audiences as an extension of their marketing power, have sought greater feedback from their fans and have incorporated viewer-generated content into their design processes. Other sectors have sought to contain or silence the emerging knowledge culture. The new technologies broke down old barriers between media consumption and media production.

The old rhetoric of opposition and co-option assumed a world where consumers had little direct power to shape media content and where there were enormous barriers to entry into the market place, whereas the new digital environment expands their power to archive, annotate, appropriate and recirculate media products. Levy describes a world where grassroots communication is not a momentary disruption of the corporate signal, but the routine way that the new media system operates: 'Until now we have only reappropriated speech in the service of revolutionary movements, crises, cures, exceptional acts of creation. What would a normal, calm, established appropriation of speech be like?'<sup>43</sup> Perhaps, rather than talking about culture jammers, we might speak of bloggers. The term 'blog' is short for weblog, a new form of personal and subcultural expression involving summarising and

linking to other sites. In some cases, bloggers actively deconstruct pernicious claims or poke fun at other sites; in other cases, they form temporary tactical alliances with other bloggers or with media producers to ensure that important messages get more widely circulated. These bloggers have become important grassroots intermediaries, facilitators, not jammers, of the signal flow. Blogging describes a communication process, not an ideological position. As Levy writes:

The new proletariat will only free itself by uniting, by decategorizing itself, by forming alliances with those whose work is similar to its own (once again, nearly everyone), by bringing to the foreground the activities they have been practicing in shadow, by assuming responsibility – globally, centrally, explicitly – for the production of collective intelligence.<sup>44</sup>

Bloggers take knowledge in their own hands, enabling the successful navigation within and between these emerging knowledge cultures. One can see such behaviour as co-option into commodity culture insofar as it sometimes collaborates with corporate interests, but one can also see it as increasing the diversity of media culture, providing opportunities for greater inclusion and making commodity culture more responsive to consumers. In an era marked both by the expanded corporate reach of the commodity culture and the emerging importance of grassroots knowledge cultures, consumer power may now be best exercised by blogging rather than jamming media signals.

### Notes

1. Pierre Levy, *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace* (Cambridge: Perseus, 1997), p. 217.
2. The phrase 'imagined community' comes from Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991). Pierre Levy introduces the concept of an 'imagining community' in *Collective Intelligence*, p. 125.
3. A fuller account of Gernsbeck's role in the development of science-fiction fandom can be found in Andrew Ross, *Strange Weather: Culture, Science and Technology in the Age of Limits* (New York: Verso, 1991). For a fuller account of contemporary literary science-fiction fandom, see Camille Bacon-Smith, *Science Fiction Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).
4. Sherry Turkle, *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit* (New York: Touchstone, 1984) provides some glimpse of the centrality of science fiction in that early hacker culture, as does my study of *Star Trek* fans at MIT in John Tulloch and Henry Jenkins (eds), *Science Fiction Audiences: Watching Doctor Who and Star Trek* (London: Routledge, 1995).
5. Susan J. Clerc, 'Estrogen Brigades and "Big Tits" Threads: Media Fandom Online and Off', in Lynn Cherney and Elizabeth Reba Weise (eds), *Wired Women: Gender and New Realities in Cyberspace* (Seattle, WA: Seal, 1996).
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