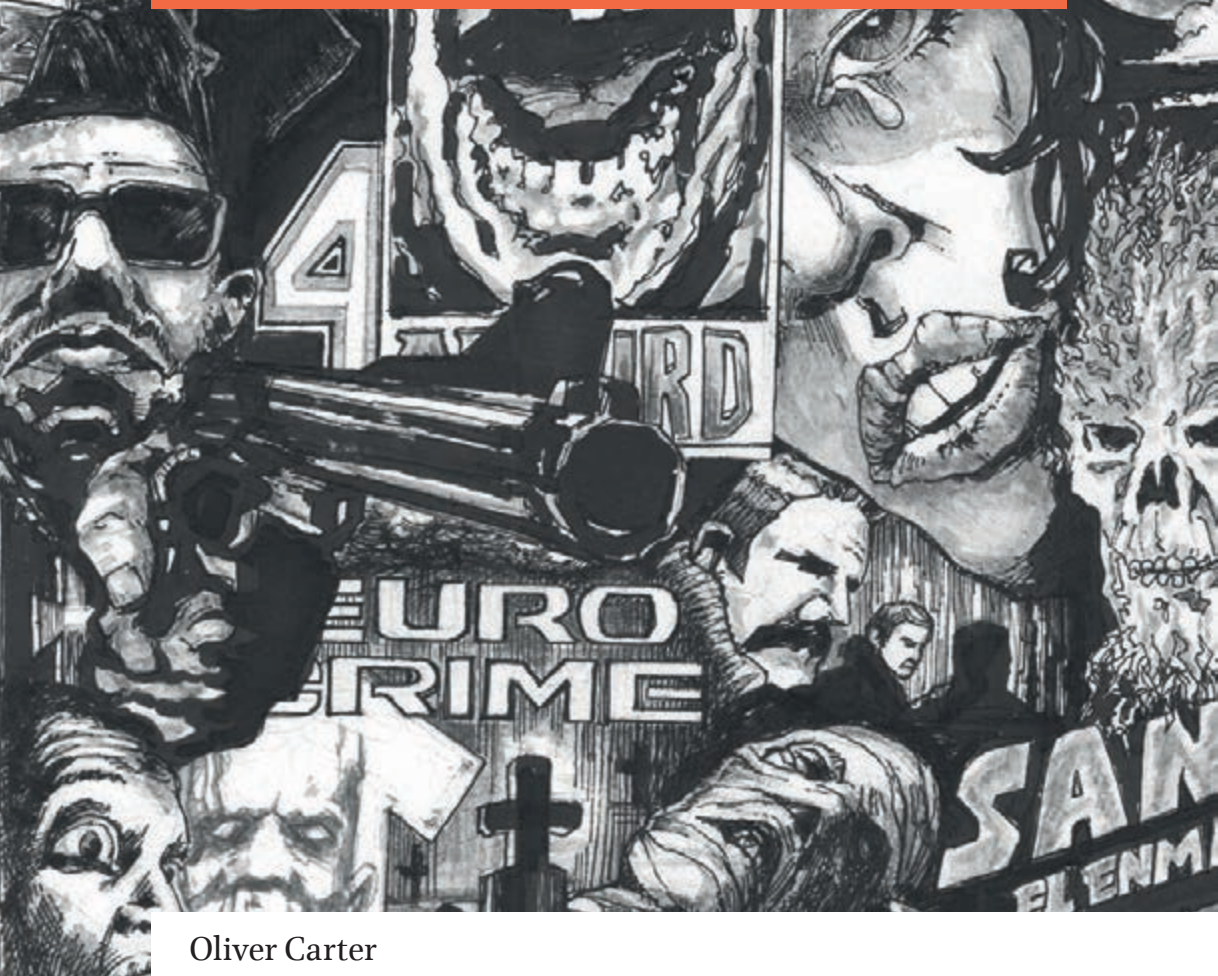


TRANSMEDIA



Oliver Carter

# Making European Cult Cinema

Fan Enterprise in an  
Alternative Economy

Amsterdam  
University  
Press

## Making European Cult Cinema

# Transmedia: Participatory Culture and Media Convergence

The book series *Transmedia: Participatory Culture and Media Convergence* provides a platform for cutting-edge research in the field of media studies, with a strong focus on the impact of digitization, globalization, and fan culture. The series is dedicated to publishing the highest-quality monographs (and exceptional edited collections) on the developing social, cultural, and economic practices surrounding media convergence and audience participation. The term 'media convergence' relates to the complex ways in which the production, distribution, and consumption of contemporary media are affected by digitization, while 'participatory culture' refers to the changing relationship between media producers and their audiences.

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*Fan Enterprise in an Alternative Economy*

*Oliver Carter*

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*For Katie*

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## Preface

Don't let the title fool you. This isn't a book just about fandom, nor is it a book about European cult cinema. Instead, this is a book about *how* and *why* people make 'things', approaching the enterprise of fans as an 'alternative economy'. I use this term alternative economy to indicate the existence of a parallel economy, or what is often termed as a grey market, where produced artefacts are exchanged as gifts and/or commodities. Colin Williams (2006, p.1) uses the term 'underground economy' when describing what he refers to as hidden enterprise culture, or 'off-the-books' business. Williams believes that the underground economy has been all but ignored in accounts of enterprise culture, being viewed as improper or illegal; yet he notes that many enterprises started by being underground before becoming legitimate businesses. The purpose of this book, therefore, is to consider how the practices of fans, which result in the formation of enterprises, can be understood as an alternative economy.

To do this, I focus on a specific fandom: European cult cinema. I choose this fandom for three specific reasons. Firstly, the majority of current academic work focuses on European cult cinema as a fan object, rather than questioning how it emerged and has been made significant. Secondly, the fan practices relating to European cult cinema are not unique to European cult cinema fandom; they are evident in other fandoms. Thirdly, as a fan of European cult cinema, this book emerges out of my own practices as a fan producer; a reflexive position that I will later demonstrate as being advantageous in both investigating and understanding practices that take place in an alternative economy.

So, how does this work relate to my own fandom? Well, in 1996 I read a review of a film named *Deep Red* (Dario Argento, 1975) in a 1994 issue of the British horror magazine *The Dark Side* (Martin, 1994). Being a teenage cult film fan, the lurid representations of murder and the challenging 'whodunnit' aspect of the film described in the review, led me to seek the film out. I was also drawn by the enigmatic front cover of the VHS tape reprinted in the review, featuring a black-and-white image that appeared to show shards of glass underneath the head of a woman; it was quite different

to anything else that I had seen. On a shopping trip to my hometown of Birmingham's city centre, I found the tape for sale in a branch of the now defunct entertainment store Tower Records. Being under 18, I managed to persuade a parent to purchase the film for me. Upon returning home, I immediately opened the case, loaded the VHS tape into my machine and watched the film. As described in *The Dark Side* review, the highly stylized film was indeed an assault on the senses. The strange settings, baroque architecture, thumping progressive rock soundtrack, violent murders, and odd narrative structure were unlike anything I had experienced before. Yet, the most vivid aspect of the film was its 'hook', where Argento openly gives away the identity of the film's murderer early on, but carefully hides the face in the background. At the end of the film, refusing to believe that I had missed this early giveaway, I rewound the VHS tape and watched the film again from beginning to end.

This event marked the beginning of a personal interest in Italian cult cinema, particularly a movement of 1970s Italian filmmaking known as the *giallo*, which continues to this day. My appetite now being whetted, I was eager to find out more about the work of Dario Argento and the series of films referred to as *gialli*. Through this, I discovered a highly organized British fan community devoted to European cult cinema that produced and distributed fanzines, videos, and related memorabilia through mail order, film fairs, and, eventually, the internet. Existing within this community of fan producers were a number of fan-run enterprises that sought to economically benefit from selling the texts they produced, such as fanzines and lavishly produced books focusing on European cult cinema. It became apparent that the *giallo* was a privileged object within many of these texts, due to the amount of coverage received.

As I became a scholar, as well as a fan, of European cult cinema, I noticed how this specific community of fans differed significantly to other popular fan communities that had been discussed and reported in academic literature. The academic study of fandom is a relatively new area, the formative year being 1992. According to Joli Jensen (1992, p. 9) academic studies prior to this date often pathologized fandom, viewing fans as 'obsessed' individuals or being part of a 'hysterical crowd'. In 1992, a number of studies emerged, such as Henry Jenkins (1992b) *Textual Poachers*, Lisa Lewis' (1992) edited collection *The Adoring Audience*, and Camille Bacon-Smith's *Enterprising Women* (1992), which approached fandom as a cultural activity. Studies such as these celebrated fan activities and focused on fan production being a symbolic activity. John Fiske (1992, p. 30) attempts to bridge the gap between these two terms, introducing his idea of fandom

being a 'shadow cultural economy' where fans use cultural, rather than economic capital, as a way to legitimize their fandom. Within this economy, fans graduate from producing 'semiotic meaning', such as pleasures that derive from the media texts they consume, to 'textual production', which is distributed amongst the fan community (*Ibid.*). For Fiske, fan-produced texts are indicators of cultural capital. What Fiske seems keen to avoid, though, is any consideration of the conditions in which such texts are produced, because he regards them as being 'not produced for profit' or loss-making, with no economic return on investment; a view that I find problematic (*ibid.*, p. 39).

Only recently have academics begun to recognize the commitment, time, and effort that fans invest when producing artefacts; Jeroen de Kloet and Liesbet van Zoonen (2007, p. 396) identify that the 'political-economical context in which media texts are produced and consumed' is under-represented in fan studies. As I will demonstrate in Chapter one, a number of studies have emerged that seek to address this call. Eileen Meehan (2000), Simone Murray (2004), Alan McKee (2004), and Abigail De Kosnik (2012b), amongst others, have produced work that conceptualizes the fan as a worker whose practices are often exploited by the powerful. Here, fandom goes beyond being a cultural activity; it is also an economic activity.

To study the enterprise activity of European cult cinema fans, I take a holistic approach that combines ideas from the disciplines of cultural studies and political economy to examine how European cult cinema fandom might be understood as an 'alternative economy' of fan enterprise. Building on Colin Williams' (2006) research into hidden enterprise cultures, Ramon Lobato's (2012) work on shadow economies of cinema and informal media economies (Lobato and Thomas, 2015), I identify an alternative economy as having three features: firstly, the advancement of digital technologies enables audiences to become workers and entrepreneurs; secondly, produced texts are instead artefacts that are exchanged as both gifts and/or commodities; and finally, rules and regulations, such as intellectual property laws, are commonly circumvented, manipulated, and countered to allow enterprise to take place.

My reasoning for adopting this approach is to address the limitations of past studies of fan production, which tend to 'celebrate' fandom as a cultural activity instead of considering the time, effort, and money fans invest in their production; these limitations will be discussed at length in the coming introduction. The empirical data for this study was sourced using a combination of data collection methods, merging interviews and observations of public offline and online fan activities, informed by my

own personal experiences as a fan, a method that I will argue is vital for investigating alternative economies such as fan enterprise. I will focus on a number of different instances of formal and informal fan enterprise, particularly those specializing in fanzines and small press publications, book publishing, film production, DVD production, film retail, T-shirt production, and documentary production. This book will reveal that fans are not only involved in a cultural activity of meaning creation, but also produce artefacts and commodities relating to their fandom, often with some economic benefit. It is through these cultural and economic processes that the fans I study here are actively making what has become known as European cult cinema. Simply put, the enterprise of fans *makes* fandoms.

# Introduction

## Abstract

In this introduction, I suggest the need for a reconceptualisation of fandom. I argue that fandom and cult media studies are the product of 'fancademia': the blurring of boundaries between fan and academic. For me this has affected how the field of fandom has been conceptualised, being dominated with work that celebrates fandom and privileges the practices of fans as a symbolic activity rather than an economic activity. Through exploring the field of fan studies, I consider how this discourse has limited the development of the field.

**Keywords:** fandom, fancademia, cultural studies, subculture

This book is an attempt to approach fandom from a perspective that has been surprisingly neglected: an economic perspective. In this extended introduction, I am going to explore these limitations, starting by showing how fan studies has been shaped by what I term 'fancademia', a product of the blurring of roles between fan and academic that has emerged out of a body of work that has sought to celebrate fandom. The purpose of this introduction is not to offer yet another history of fan studies – other titles, such as the introduction to Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss and C. Lee Harrington (2007), and Mark Duffett's indispensable *Understanding Fandom* (2013), have done a far more exhaustive job of this than I could offer – but to explore a central issue that has limited and, in some respects, continues to limit the field.

## Fancademia: A Limitation of Fan Studies?

As a regular attendee of academic conferences, it is noticeable how many, particularly those relating to cult film and fandom, are dominated by fan discourses. I have witnessed presentations where the presenter has exhibited his poster collection while telling the audience why he likes a particular



cult film director and why they should too; another presenter justified why he liked a generally reviled sequel of a famous slasher film series, and one presenter performed a scene of castration from a horror film to a mystified audience (thankfully, it was nothing more than a re-enactment). For me, such observations highlight how the boundaries between the academic and fan have become increasingly blurred, creating what I term fancademia. Fancademia celebrates the object of study, such as a cult text, at the expense of thinking about the conditions in which these texts are produced or, in some situations, received. This can result in work that becomes an extension of the scholar's own fandom. What I want to do in this introduction is to explore the emergence of fancademia, suggesting that this has resulted in fan studies celebrating fandom as a symbolic activity. In this sense, it could be argued that fan studies, which has been created by fan-scholars, is itself a fan construction.

The relationship between scholarship and fandom is a continuing area of academic debate, being concerned with how this 'moral dualism' might raise questions about author subjectivity and the integrity of academic work (Hills, 2002, p. 8). According to Matt Hills (2002), the term 'academic fan' was first mentioned in the work of Richard Burt (1998). Burt's view of the academic fan is rather pessimistic and can be seen as further evidence of the 'pathologizing' of the fan in academia (Jensen, 1992, p. 9). Simon Frith (1992) identifies the similarities between academic and fan, suggesting that both groups are similar in that they intellectualize the media they consume. From this view, an academic's object of study will often relate to their fandom. For scholars, this presents a problem as it can undermine the quality and objectivity of academic work (Burt, 1998). When questioning Burt's (*ibid.*) views, Hills (2002) uses the work of Alexander Doty (2000) to demonstrate how being open about one's fandom can have relevance in academic work, providing that it does not break the boundaries of informality and respectability. In reviewing this problem, Hills (2002, pp. 11–21) uses the terms 'scholar-fan' and 'fan-scholar', the former being the academic who admits that they are a fan in their academic work, while the latter is the fan who adopts an academic approach to writing about their fandom, although they may not be academically trained. Hills believes that the two groups face similar problems, both being devalued by their communities: scholar-fans are not seen as legitimate scholars by other academics, while fan-scholars are viewed by the fan community as being pompous and lacking authenticity (*ibid.*, pp. xvii–xxxvi).

Conflict also exists between the two groups. Camille Bacon-Smith's (1992) research into science fiction fandom reveals that fans mistrust

academics, feeling they are being used as research subjects. I encountered this mistrust first-hand when conducting the research for this book, an issue I explore at length in Chapter two. Addressing this issue of trust, Henry Jenkins (1992b) stresses that it is important for the academic fan, or aca-fan, to be open about their fandom. This is the approach Jenkins chose when researching science fiction fandom, aligning himself with the fan community by regularly attending fan conventions and allowing fans to be involved in his research by reading drafts of his work. This illustrates that academics' fandom is important in helping to gain trust and acceptance from the community, eradicating the problem identified by Bacon-Smith (1992). However, a potential issue arising out of this combining of roles is that it can lead to academic work that is the product of the author's fandom. I argue that approaching a study as a fan can raise questions of subjectivity, but also fails to ask significant questions about how texts are produced and received. From this view, Hills' (2002) roles of scholar-fan and fan-scholar are becoming further integrated, producing what I term fancademia. For the remainder of this introduction, I discuss the development of fancademia and the role that this has played in conceptualizing fandom as a cultural activity. I suggest that this has pushed fan studies in a particular direction, where fandom has been celebrated in academic work. Firstly, in order to show how fancademia has been constructed, I focus on how the fan has been defined in academic work.

## Defining the fan

For Hills (2002, p. ix), attempting to define fandom is 'no easy task'. The formative year of fan studies is evidently 1992, when the work of Lewis (1992), Jenkins (1992a, 1992b), and Bacon-Smith (1992) was published. Prior to this, according to Joli Jensen (1992, p. 9), studies of fandom were predominantly from the field of psychology, where fans were viewed as being either part of a 'hysterical crowd', or as the 'obsessed individual'. Jensen sees this as the 'pathological view' of fandom, which emerged from the negative representations of fans in the media, such as the hysterical female Beatles fan, the Elvis impersonator, and individuals such as Mark David Chapman, who murdered his 'idol', John Lennon (*ibid.*). This is a view repeatedly portrayed in film representations of fans. *The Fan* (Ed Bianchi, 1981), *Der Fan* (Eckhart Schmidt, 1982), and *The Fan* (Tony Scott, 1996), for example, all feature a mentally unhinged fan, whose obsession with a celebrity ultimately evolves into violence. It is unsurprising that this representation remains commonplace,

considering that the term fan is derived from the word fanatic (Ross and Nightingale, 2003, p. 122). Mathijs and Sexton (2011, p. 57) see the emergence of fan studies in the early 1990s to be a response to this 'demonization' of fans in the media and also in academia.

Prior to 1992, not all academic work viewed fandom in such a negative light, looking at fan activity as being evidence of a highly active audience (Tulloch and Alvarado, 1983; Bradley, 1985; Lamb and Veith, 1986). An important aspect of these early studies is that they were written by academics who were fans of science fiction-centred texts, further illustrating how the field of fan studies has been constructed by fans. Like Hills (2002), my reading of Jenkins' (1992b) *Textual Poachers* as an undergraduate media and cultural studies student proved to be a formative experience. The book raised my awareness and understanding of the practices that I personally engage in, even though I wasn't a fan of science fiction media. Being aware of the negative connotations associated with fandom, Jenkins counters this perception by demonstrating how fans engage in forms of production, ranging from the production of meaning to the production of texts. For Jenkins (*ibid.*, p. 45), fans do not just reproduce features from their chosen interest, but instead 'manufacture' their own texts. Taking ideas from the work of Michel de Certeau (1984), Jenkins (*ibid.*, pp. 24–27) identifies that fans of television programmes 'poach' from them in order to create alternative media texts.

Prior to publishing *Textual Poachers*, Jenkins (1992a, pp. 209–213) proposed a model of fandom that operates on four different levels. My summaries of each level are:

1. Fans adopt a distinctive mode of reception – fans have a more intensive, active, and social mode of reception than other media consumers.
2. Fandom constitutes a particular interpretative community – fans engage in debate, offering differing perspectives and interpretations of media texts in newsletters, fanzines, and fan clubs.
3. Fandom constitutes a particular art world – fans produce and distribute texts amongst the community.
4. Fandom constitutes an alternative social community – a non-face-to-face community separate to the one they inhabit in the real world. These alternative communities are often populated by marginalized groups, giving them a space to talk about their unique interests.

While useful in helping to define fandom, this model implies that all fans operate on each of these levels, not addressing the complex nature of fan participation. For example, certain fans might not choose to engage in

the alternative social community or participate in the interpretive community; some do not graduate beyond the first level of being devoted media consumers. Bacon-Smith (1992) similarly identifies this multifaceted nature of fandom from her ethnographic research into the science fiction fan community. For Bacon-Smith, fans use the term 'fandom' as a way to 'designate several different distinct levels of social organization' (*ibid.*, p. 23). This becomes increasingly complex when Bacon-Smith attempts to apply this to her object of study. Bacon-Smith sees the entire science fiction community as a fandom, yet also identifies the smaller factions within the community, such as the Star Wars fan fiction community, as a fandom. From this perspective, there are fandoms within fandoms, which Smith believes indicate 'filtering levels of participation' and also 'intensity' (*ibid.*). To alleviate this complexity, she uses the term 'interest groups' to help define the smaller fan communities (*ibid.*). For me, this further highlights the challenges faced when trying to define fandom.

To address this issue of definition, Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst (1998) present a continuum of fandom where fans have varying levels of participation. They see fandom as consisting of three specific groups: 'fans, enthusiasts and cultists' (*ibid.*, pp. 138–139). For Abercrombie and Longhurst, fans are followers of a particular media text they consume. They do not belong to any particular group and do not move beyond being a consumer that has a particular attachment to, perhaps, a television show, musician, or film genre. Abercrombie and Longhurst, for example, identify fans as typically being young children, because of their lack of 'social organization' (*ibid.*). Cultists are more active, having a higher level of attachment and interacting with other like-minded fans. Finally, there are the enthusiasts; the highest level of fan. The enthusiast will be part of the community that produces texts and attends fan conventions. At first, these different definitions appear to offer some value to solving the complexities of fandom, as identified by Jenkins (1992a, 1992b), and Bacon-Smith (1992), but when applying them to a specific fan community their limitations become evident.

Cornel Sandvoss (2005) attempts to apply Abercrombie and Longhurst's (1998) theory to his research on football fandom (Sandvoss, 2001). He finds that not one of his research subjects identified themselves as a cultist, instead they would use the term 'fan', despite them having differing levels of engagement within the football fan community. He also notes that fans far outnumber enthusiasts, who are extremely specialist in nature and therefore constitute only a small percentage of a community. As Sandvoss (2005) recognizes, the problem is one of terminology, replacing the word fan

with a series of synonyms does nothing more than confuse and 'is at odds with the use of this term [fan] in almost all of the other literature in the field' (Hills, 2002, p. ix). In a similar study on broader sports fandom, Garry Crawford (2004) builds on Abercrombie and Longhurst's (1998) continuum in an attempt to understand the career of a sports fan. Yet, Crawford (2004) does not seek to categorize fans. He instead offers a trajectory to describe how the position of fans of sport, and possibly other fandoms, can develop or regress over a period of time. For Crawford, a fan's role in a community is fluid, but also transient. Such studies highlight the limitations of Abercrombie and Longhurst's (1998) model of fans, cultists, and enthusiasts. It is undoubtedly a contradictory approach to understanding fandom theory, and highlights the complexity when attempting to typologize fan activity.

Further discussion of fandom having levels of participation can be found in Fiske (1992). Fiske sees fans engaging in three levels of productivity. Firstly, there is 'semiotic productivity', the most basic level of fan production where fans produce meaning from texts that they consume. Secondly, there is 'enunciative productivity', or verbal and non-verbal interaction (*ibid.*, pp. 37–42). This can include discussions with other fans and can also be found in dress, the wearing of items that signify fandom, such as the T-shirt of a band. Thirdly, there is 'textual production', the texts produced by fans for other fans (*ibid.*). This might include fanzines, fan art, or fan fiction. However, trying to establish a continuum of fandom can be a reductive approach, as fans are complex individuals who can occupy a variety of roles, making it difficult to group them. My own use of the term fan in this book draws on Hills's (2002, p. x) approach of integrating 'cult fan' with fan, as I agree that the 'separation of terms have [sic] never been entirely convincing'. For me, the fan is a specific member of the media audience that has a strong attachment to a media text, genre, or personality who can occupy a number of different cultural and economic roles that allow them to express their fandom.

From looking at how fandom has been defined in academic work, I have found that there is no clear definition. This has led academics to identify continuums of fandom where fans have differing levels of participation, each of these having their own complications. Many of the definitions I have discussed here predate the rise in internet access and therefore do not consider how the World Wide Web has 'mainstreamed fandom' (Pullen, 2004, p. 56). In the coming chapter, I consider how more recent work on fandom has approached fan activity in the digital age when offering my reconceptualization of fandom. What is interesting to note is that, with the exception of Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998), these definitions have all

been constructed by academics who identify as fans, or, to use the term I introduced earlier, fancademics. Therefore, fancademics have had a significant role in defining fan studies, privileging fandom, particularly science fiction fandom, as a cultural activity. What I want to do now is consider how and why fancademics might have taken this particular direction.

## Choosing a direction

To try to understand why fancademics have conceptualized fandom as a cultural activity, attention needs to be given to the British cultural studies movement. From the 1960s onwards, cultural studies academics established that popular culture was worthy of academic attention and that media audiences were active in their readings of media texts. Influenced by the ideas of Antonio Gramsci (1992), particularly his concept of hegemony, theorists such as Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (1993) and Dick Hebdige (1979), were interested in culture as a site of struggle and resistance. This approach can be seen as a reaction to ideas posited by The Frankfurt School and the work of Horkheimer and Adorno (1973), who viewed audiences as a homogenous mass that was ideologically deceived by the culture industry. There have been a number of criticisms levelled at cultural studies for neglecting to consider the political economy of media and, particularly, the context of media production (Babe, 2009; Fenton, 2007). This led to open disagreement between the fields of political economy and cultural studies, which is most evident in Nicholas Garnham's (1995) criticism of cultural studies and Lawrence Grossberg's (1995) responding defence. While it is not my intention to be drawn into this complex debate, in this book I wish to highlight how combining ideas from cultural studies and political economy can be productive in helping to understand fan enterprise. Solely adopting a political economy approach to the study of fandom is problematic in that it can focus too much on the subjectification of the individual within a capitalist society. From this perspective, the individual is able to resist, but only within the structures set by the dominant groups of society, i.e. the Bourgeoisie. Here, resistance is an illusion. The concern of a critical political economy theorist, such as Garnham (1995), is that cultural studies goes too far in the other direction, seeing individuals as freely being able to resist. The approach that I adopt in this book, which I outline in the coming chapter, attempts to bridge this gap between political economy and cultural studies.

An early conceptualization of fandom can be found in the work of Theodor Adorno (1990). Adorno's work has been 'regularly criticized and dispensed

with in academic and academic-fan accounts of fan culture' (Hills, 2002, p. 31). Although the ideas of Adorno (1990), and his other colleagues from The Frankfurt School, can now seem rather pessimistic, they continue to resonate. Adorno suggests that popular music texts are standardized, being structured and formulaic, and pseudo-individualized, the illusion of standardized texts being different. The fan of popular music is therefore deceived into believing that songs are different when they are ostensibly the same. For Adorno, the fan is part of the capitalist machine, manipulated into purchasing the same music. These ideas have been contested by theorists in fan studies, most notably Jenkins (1992b), Hills (2002), and Anderton (2006). The most common criticism that fan studies scholars give to the work of The Frankfurt School is that the ideas are outdated, treating audiences as an easily deceived mass.

Anderton (*ibid.*), questioning Adorno's (1990) 'homogenous' view of fandom, believes that Adorno ignores 'internal differences' (such as race, gender, and age), changes in the tastes of music audiences and does not recognize how music can 'create freedom of choice' for its listeners (Anderton, 2006, p. 164). Despite these criticisms, the influence of Adorno's (1990) work can be evidenced in those studies that have attempted to consider the political economy of fandom, such as the work of Meehan (2000) and Murray (2004). The limitations of both these works, which I explore in greater depth in Chapter one, share similarities with the work in Adorno (1990) in that they see fans as being manipulated by owners of media. Even though fans have the capacity to produce, this is only possible through the structures allowed by controlling forces.

The work of Adorno (*ibid.*) demonstrates how fandom can be understood as an economic activity. I now propose that the rise of cultural studies in the 1960s and 1970s responded to this position by attempting to enrich The Frankfurt School's approach to the study of popular culture. Rather than viewing audiences as being complicit in a capitalist system, scholars from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) were interested in how audiences opposed or resisted capitalism. This can be evidenced in the work produced by the CCCS that focuses on youth subcultures. I find it rather odd that many of the classic studies on fandom fail to address work on subculture; it is something of the 'elephant in room', which fails to be fully appreciated for its significance. Many of the studies of subcultures, such as 'teddy boys' (1993), 'skinheads' (1993a), and 'mods' (1993), are concerned with fans of popular music who externalize their fandom through their dress, a form of 'enunciative productivity' as Fiske (1992) might describe it. For Clarke (1993b), this externalization is also a form of resistance,



indicating the class struggle of working-class youths; their dress, hairstyles, and behaviour being a way for working-class youths to occupy a space in a society in which they feel alienated. This notion of resistance emphasizes the political nature of subcultural theory, CCCS theorists being interested in the cultural politics of the subcultural groups that they studied. However, CCCS scholar McRobbie (1997) questions why much of the research into the subculture of punk, such as the work of Hebdige (1979), failed to address how punk was sold (McRobbie, 1997, p. 192).

McRobbie discusses the significance the 'rag market' has for subcultures; a space where members of subcultures might purchase second-hand clothing for appropriation, but could also sell second-hand, sometimes reappropriated, clothing (*ibid.*). She refers to these individuals as 'subcultural entrepreneurs', members of subcultures who legitimately set up enterprises relating to their subculture. This is a key idea that forms part of the concept of the alternative economy that I discuss in Chapter one. McRobbie suggests that the enterprise activity of subcultures was not addressed by theorists of the period as it clashed with the idea of 'creative defiance', a central feature of subcultural production (Hebdige, 1979, p. 96). Focusing on members of subcultures who attempted to make money out of their interests would therefore 'undermine the "purity" or "authenticity" of the subculture' (McRobbie, 1997, p. 192). From this, it would appear that many CCCS theorists neglected this highly significant aspect of subcultural practice as it did not match their view of subcultures being resistant, the commodification of subcultural products ultimately devaluing their authenticity. Hebdige (1979, p. 96) believes that once products 'which signify subculture [...] [were] translated into commodities [...] by the small entrepreneurs and big fashion interests who produce them on a mass scale, they became codified, made comprehensible, rendered at once public property and profitable merchandise'. Hence, the commodification of punk meant that it became part of the mainstream and its rich symbolism was reduced to nothing more than fashion.

This idea of resistance is one that is prevalent throughout the early stages of fan studies. Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998, pp. 15–28) identify fan studies as being part of the 'incorporation/resistance paradigm' of audience studies. Here, audiences are involved in resisting the powerful through their use of media. Sandvoss (2005, p. 11) identifies that there was a 'dominant discourse of resistance' in studies of fandom that emerged in the late 1980s. Sandvoss sees this relating to the traditions of media and cultural studies research, such as those I have discussed, where issues of power were related to media consumption. Of importance here is the work of Fiske (1989), who saw fan activity as a form of resistance, 'undermining dominant ideologies'



(Mathijs and Sexton, 2011, p. 57). For Sandvoss (2005), it is Fiske's (1989) ideas that guided the field of fan studies. I have argued so far in this introduction that it was the ideas of the CCCS, particularly their work on subcultures, that directed fan studies in this particular direction. Mathijs and Sexton (2011, pp. 57–58) note that studies of fandom focused on 'micro-political acts: not large-scale radical activity, but small-scale resistant behaviour'. This can be evidenced in the fan practice named 'slash fiction'.

According to Henry Jenkins (1992b, p. 186), slash fiction is a form of fan writing that 'refers to the convention of employing a stroke or slash to signify a same-sex relationship between two characters and specifies a genre of fan stories positing homoerotic affairs between series protagonists'. Well-established examples of slash fiction include the homoerotic relationship between Spock and Kirk from the *Star Trek* television series (1992), Xena and Gabrielle in *Xena: Warrior Princess* (2003), and, more recently, characters from Harry Potter (2006), who have been the subject of many online slash writings. As can be seen from these examples, a large amount of academic enquiry has been devoted to homoerotic slash fiction. Slash fan fiction, whether it is written or visual, offers alternative interpretations to storylines and relationships offered by scriptwriters and is often produced by female fans. Tulloch and Jenkins (1995, p. 264) see slash fiction as a political act, a 'powerful form of resistant reading' that also empowers female media audiences. But what of the time, effort, and overall labour that fans put into such a creative practice as slash fiction? I find that solely viewing fans as resistant is problematic. With this in mind, it is difficult to understand why there have been so few attempts to integrate ideas from political economy to the study of fandom. I have attempted to demonstrate how the cultural studies approach, itself a response to the work of The Frankfurt School, was adopted by fancademia study fan cultures. I now argue that this led to what I term a 'celebration of fandom'.

## Celebrating fandom

In the introduction to their edited collection on fandom, Gray *et al.* (2007, p. 1) identify the first generation of fan scholarship as the 'fandom is beautiful' period. During the formative period of fan studies, which I identified earlier as being the 1990s, work focused on the practices of fans. These early studies, such as Bacon-Smith's (1992) research into science fiction, often adopted an ethnographic approach to understand how a fan community operated. The resulting work had a 'rhetorical purpose', which was to move

away from the pathological view of fandom (Gray *et al.*, 2007, p. 1). For Gray *et al.* (*ibid.*), this is problematic because it only focused on fans who have high levels of activity at the expense of studying those fans who are only active through their devoted consumption of media texts. In addition, I argue that these studies celebrated fan practices as a cultural activity, rather than looking at the investment fans place in their activities. During this early period, attention was placed on the cultural production of fans, such as their production of texts. Yet, little, if any, attention was awarded to the conditions of production and the processes involved in producing such texts. In the previous section of this introduction, I highlighted how McRobbie (1997) questioned the lack of discussion of enterprise in work on subculture, suggesting that it did not follow the model of resistance put forth by those studying subculture. I, too, question the absence of enterprise in work on fandom, wondering whether a similar accusation can be made of the celebratory approach adopted by fancademics to legitimize fandom as an area of academic study. I now want to focus on work that discusses fan production to illustrate how attention was given to the symbolic meaning of fan practice, rather than to the economics of fan practice.

The most influential work in this area is Jenkins' (1992b) *Textual Poachers*. Jenkins has admitted that he adopted an intentionally celebratory approach towards the study of fandom (Hills, 2002, p. 10). This was a response to the negative connotations fandom had in both the media and academia until this point. Jenkins (1992b) adopted the ideas of Michel de Certeau (1984) to explain how fans 'poach' from media texts to create their own productions. According to de Certeau (*ibid.*, pp. 29–42), people are involved in everyday creativity where consumption is a form of 'making do'. Audiences engage in 'tactics' that are responses to 'strategies' that have been set by the powerful. By using tactics, audiences make do with what is available to them to create new things, whether it be products or just meanings. A popular example of making do would be the tactic of tearing jeans. We can take a pair of new jeans and can rip them, thus creating a new meaning; in this case, a small-scale political act of resistance. De Certeau adds that the powerful can incorporate such acts of audience resistance as a way to control the tactics of audiences. Going back to the example of torn jeans, if you were to walk into any clothing store you will find torn jeans for sale as new.

For Jenkins (1992b), de Certeau's (1984) most useful concept is 'poaching'. De Certeau used the term poaching to explain how audiences reappropriate products within their own context. To illustrate how poaching works in relation to fandom, Jenkins (1992b) uses examples of different forms of fan production: slash fiction, music videos, and filking (fan-written folk songs

often inspired by the science fiction genre). These examples show how fans 'poach' from media texts to create their own cultural products. He concludes that there are five levels of fan activity, which modify the four levels of fan activity described in Jenkins that I discussed earlier in this chapter.

1. Fandom involves a particular mode of reception
  2. Fandom involves a particular set of critical and interpretive practices
  3. Fandom constitutes a base for consumer activism.
  4. Fandom possesses particular forms of cultural production, aesthetic traditions, and practices
  5. Fandom functions as an alternative social community.
- (Jenkins, 1992b, pp. 277–281)

For fans, consuming media is the start of a highly active process. In Jenkins's second level, fans interpret media in different ways, suggesting that this leads towards the creation of a meta-text that goes far beyond what the original creators intended. In relation to the third level, fans are activists; this consideration was absent in his earlier theorization of fandom. Jenkins highlights the conflict that exists between fans and producers, using examples of how fans campaign to ensure that networks continue to broadcast shows that have small followings, the television show *Beauty and the Beast* being one such example (*ibid.*, p. 124). He also adds how fans, through their textual production, can draw the ire of producers by breaching intellectual property laws, a point only fleetingly discussed by Jenkins. Level four relates to how fans develop 'alternative institutions of production, distribution, exhibition, and consumption' through their poaching of media text (*ibid.*, p. 279). It is this idea of the alternative institution, or, as I will refer to it, the alternative economy, which I expand on in Chapter one. Finally, level five applies to how fans create a world that allows them to escape from the realities of everyday life. I find that this final point highlights one of the central problems with Jenkins's work in that it is too utopian; again indicative of how this early period of research celebrated fandom.

In another early study of fandom, John Fiske (1992, p. 30) posits the existence of a 'shadow cultural economy', which is separate to the 'mainstream' cultural economy. In this shadow cultural economy, fans utilize their own systems of production and distribution, but draw on production practices that exist in the mainstream cultural economy. Within the shadow cultural economy, fans graduate from producing 'semiotic meaning', such as pleasures derived they from media texts they consume, to 'textual production': fan-produced texts that are distributed amongst the community (*ibid.*). For Fiske, fans who engage in textual production adopt production practices

that are 'often crafted with production values as high as any in the official culture' and, although there is an economic aspect to this production, it is a not-for-profit-driven pursuit that is often at the expense of the fan producer (*ibid.*, p. 39). He notes that the fan community frowns on fans that attempt to commodify their production. This is emphasized by other studies from this period, reducing fandom to a mere celebration and ignoring the economics involved in the fan production process (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Jenkins 1992a, 1992b). As I demonstrate in the coming chapters, fan production can have economic benefit, with some entrepreneurs running enterprises directly relating to their fandom with support from the wider fan community.

To explain why fans engage in these different forms of production, Fiske (1992) draws on the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984); a scholar whose work on cultural capital has been regularly used as a theoretical framework to study fandom (Thornton, 1996; Brown, 1997; Dell, 1998; Jancovich, 2002a). By adopting this approach, fandom can be understood as a cultural system in which economic capital is replaced by fan cultural capital, or, put more simply, fan knowledge. Therefore, within this cultural economy, there is a hierarchy in place where fan knowledge is a form of capital that indicates levels of activity and participation. The idea of fandom being an economy, as proposed by Fiske (1992), resonates with what I am attempting to achieve in this book. However, in Fiske's shadow cultural economy, cultural capital is 'good', but economic capital is 'bad' (Hills, 2002, p. 63). This again celebrates the manufacture of fan texts as cultural production rather than economic production. The context for Fiske's (1992) study must also be acknowledged as it does not consider the advent of new media technologies and the opportunities they present for fan producers, this being a key feature of an alternative economy that I discuss shortly. Though Fiske's work was influential in applying the work of Bourdieu (1984) to the study of fandom, Hills (2002, p. 63) believes that the work of Bourdieu acts as a useful 'metaphor' for the study of fandom, but, in turn, can present problems when analysing fandoms that do not fit Bourdieu's model of the 'economy of culture'.

Hills (2002) and Sandvoss (2005) move towards a consideration of fandom that is no longer wholly celebratory. Hills (2002) saw prior work on fandom to be contradictory, but also limiting in its approaches, not taking into account fandoms that were not as active as the science fiction community, and I have highlighted some of Hills' criticisms of the classic studies of fandom at various points during this introduction. In his reconceptualization of fandom, Hills addresses the psychology of fans (*ibid.*, p. 22). Adopting a psychoanalytic approach allows for a consideration of the performative

nature of fandom, such as the way that fans impersonate their heroes, go on pilgrimages, visit sites that are significant to them, and adopt identities in online communities. Sandvoss's (2005) approach shares similarities with Hills (2002), also adopting a psychoanalytic approach to understand how fans interact with media texts. For Sandvoss (2005), fandom is a mirror in which fans see reflected ideas that have a particular significance to them. From this perspective, fandom is very personal, each fan taking different meaning from the texts that they consume. According to Sandvoss, fans having strong attachments is not something that can be measured objectively (*ibid.*, p. 6). While both of Hills (2002) and Sandvoss (2005) are important for their introduction of new models for studying fandom, responding to the limits of early fan studies, I find it surprising that they make little mention of fan production. Sandvoss (*ibid.*, p. 6) is almost dismissive of fan-produced texts, believing them to be a 'minority activity' that a select few participate in. This is a view I find highly problematic, particularly considering the professionalism and creativity of much fan production that I will discuss in this book. I would counter this by suggesting that it is academic work on the economics of fan production that has become a minority activity.

### **Fan studies as fan production?**

The purpose of this introduction has been to discuss how the field of fan studies has been considerably shaped by fancademia, which I earlier described as the eroding boundaries between the academic and fan. By then exploring how academic work has defined fandom, I found that there is no obvious definition, highlighting the multifaceted nature of fan activity. I also found that fancademics were primarily involved in constructing specific definitions of fandom, having a key role in determining fandom as a cultural activity. I then showed how this approach emerged from cultural studies, particularly the CCCS's work on youth subcultures, which I considered an early example of fan studies. The CCCS approach reconsidered The Frankfurt School's conceptualization of popular culture, looking at how audiences opposed capitalism rather than being controlled by it. It is my view that their idea of culture as a site of struggle and resistance carried through to early studies of fandom that purposely celebrated fan activity. This was a politically motivated decision that aimed to address how the fan had been pathologized in earlier studies of fandom. Approaching fandom as an economic activity would therefore undermine the folk authenticity of fan

culture. For scholars of this period, such as Bacon-Smith (1992), Jenkins (1992a and 1992b), and Fiske (1992), fans who benefited economically from their textual production would be ostracized by the larger community. Subsequent studies utilized the work of Bourdieu (1984) to show how fandom could be viewed as a hierarchy where knowledge is the main form of exchangeable capital. More recent reconceptualizations have approached fandom as a performance, moving further away from studying fan production (Hills, 2002; Sandvoss 2005). From this, it can be determined that there has been a move away from focusing on fan production, to focusing more on fan behaviour.

What we understand to be fandom has been conceptualized through fancademia; it is fans themselves who have constructed the field. As Jenkins (cited in Hills, 2002) has admitted, this was done out of a necessity to challenge how fandom had been previously studied. To oppose this perception, fan studies had no other option but to celebrate fandom for it to become a serious route of academic enquiry. Therefore, symbolic resistance was the ideal choice of theoretical framework through which fandom could be recognized as a significant cultural activity. However, adopting this direction has limited the investigation of fan cultures. For example, much of the literature I have discussed here privilege science fiction fandom over others community over other fan communities; a limitation of the field that has also been identified by Hills (2002). This prompts the question: how does a fan who is also a scholar make use of such an advantageous position without offering a celebratory account of the fandom they are studying? The approach I present in this book seeks to negotiate these tensions.

### **The structure of the book**

In Chapter one, I offer my reconceptualization of fandom as a way to study fan enterprise as a cultural and economic process. To do this, I combine ideas introduced by cultural studies and political economy. I give my justifications for taking this approach, demonstrating how a political economy of fan enterprise would be too limiting as it suggests that the agency of the fan is limited and controlled by media organizations. This is problematic when investigating the complexities of fan enterprise. Instead, I frame fan enterprise as being part of an alternative economy of media production. I use the term alternative economy to indicate the existence of a parallel economy, or what is often termed a grey market or a hidden enterprise

culture (Williams, 2006), to reflect the way in which fan texts are produced and distributed.

Having introduced the concept of the alternative economy to understand fan enterprise as a cultural and economic process, in Chapter two I introduce a model that can be used to research fan enterprise. As studying the production that takes place in an alternative economy presents ethical problems, a specific approach is needed. For instance, those involved in production are not always keen to talk about their production activities, making it difficult for an outsider to gain access. To address this, I discuss how a method of data collection that I refer to as 'combined ethnography' can be a useful tool. I argue that using such an approach addresses limitations of past studies of fan production, allowing the researcher to move beyond celebratory accounts.

The purpose of Chapter three is to justify and define the object of study: European cult cinema fandom. I show that the meaning of European cult cinema was constructed by fans and has been further enhanced by fancademic study. This has led to European cult cinema being studied as a fan object, the majority of fancademic work textually analysing European cult film without investigating or problematizing either the fandom that surrounds it or the process through which the fan object was delineated, named, and made meaningful. While I recognize my own status as a fan of European cult cinema, I argue that this can be an advantageous position if utilized consciously and reflexively.

Chapter four considers how European cult cinema was first culturally and economically 'made' by historicizing the alternative economy of European cult cinema fan enterprise. This historicizing is based on the data gained from the combined ethnography model discussed in Chapter two and gives context for the chapters that follow. Through historicizing the alternative economy of European cult cinema fan production, I demonstrate how it originated and developed in the United Kingdom. Drawing on collected data, which includes interviews conducted with fan producers, interaction with the texts they produced, online fan activity, my own personal experiences as a fan, and secondary literature, I suggest that a combination of the do-it-yourself (DIY) ethos of punk, a culture of fanzine production, and the advent of VHS technology led to the forming of an alternative economy of European cult cinema fan enterprise. I focus on how three 'fantrepreneurs' set up their own businesses in this newly established market that specialized in producing fan publications, demonstrating how fan production can be understood as both a cultural and economic activity.



Chapter five looks at how European cult cinema is shared, reappropriated, and recirculated on an invite only file-sharing community that I refer to as *CineTorrent*. Drawing on a virtual ethnography of this community, engagement with its members and my own experiences of using the site as autoethnography, I consider how rules and regulations instigated by the moderators of the site both encourage and reward member creativity. I argue that this has led to the generation of a comprehensive archive of cult film in which Italian cult cinema plays a significant role, but also the emergence of a specific group of members who are devoted to making commercially unreleased European cult cinema accessible to English speaking audiences through a variety of do-it-yourself means. I argue that this site is part of an alternative economy of fan enterprise where fans are responding to the current limitations of commercially released European cult cinema on DVD by taking it upon themselves to make unreleased titles available for distribution within the alternative economy. I suggest that *CineTorrent* behaves as if it were a legitimate media enterprise, such as an independent DVD label, taking on the role of production house and distributor for the content that the community, or 'workers', produce.

In Chapter six I focus on how fans use the World Wide Web to create online fan enterprises, or, as I describe them, 'informal enterprises', which distribute produced artefacts as commodities. I explore how fan producers are using new economic models, such as online 'demand and supply' services. Drawing on interviews with owners of online fan enterprises, virtual ethnography of online fan enterprise, and a reflection upon my own fan enterprise, I show how these fan enterprises are part-time operations, run outside of full-time occupations. I focus on four specific forms of online European cult cinema fan enterprise: T-shirt production and distribution, DVD retailing, and fan publishing to explore the political and economic issues that arise when running online enterprises.

This book concludes that fans are not just producing artefacts related to European cult cinema, but are engaged in a far greater activity where they are culturally and economically making what is known as European cult cinema. I look at the economic model of crowdfunding and how it was used to fund a fan made documentary to consider how such new models might enable fan enterprise to move out of the alternative economy and become genuine businesses. Finally, I suggest that the field of fan studies now needs to take into consideration how fans are involved in making fandoms, indicating that further research needs to be done in order to discover how other fandoms have been culturally and economically made.



### **About the author**

Dr. Oliver Carter is a senior lecturer in media and cultural theory at the Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research, Birmingham City University. His research focuses on alternative economies of cultural production; informal forms of industry that are often removed from a formal cultural industries discourse.