

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Trischa Goodnow

In the Spring of 2001, the short documentary *Fan Geeks* was filmed. *Fan Geeks* explores *The X-files* fan community, showing the fans in context to the friendships and activities that express television as being part of their lives. Using film to document fans' micro-situations, *Fan Geeks* allows for audience analysis in context of popular and industrial texts. The written portion of *Fan Geeks* explores the work of previous fan research, a comprehensive discussion of the making of *Fan Geeks*, and conclusions that assist in the continuation of a television audience discourse.

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Fan Geeks

by

Clair N. Warnicke

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APPROVED:

Redacted for Privacy

Major Professor, representing Speech Communication

Redacted for Privacy

Committee Member representing Speech Communication

Redacted for Privacy

Committee Member representing English

Redacted for Privacy

Chair of the Department of Speech Communication

Redacted for Privacy

Dean of the Graduate School

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Clair N. Warnicke, Author

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*For Lulu,
Dashiell,
Sam,
and
Pierce.*

Introduction

Consider the film Trekkies, which documents fans of the Star Trek television and movie franchise. Viewers are introduced to several types of fans including the man with the Star Trek house, the woman obsessed with one particular character and the actor who portrays him, and the man who has spent thousands of dollars recreating large props from the original Star Trek series. Each fan is methodically broken down with how much time, money, and energy they devote to being fans, but within that they are shown alone. To a viewer of Trekkies how do these fans differ from going to see The Bearded Lady, then The World's Tallest Man, and then The Biggest Ball of String? Ultimately, the film Trekkies displays fans as strange, different, and lonely people. Is this what the viewer of Trekkies should walk away with? Or are we seeing these fans taken outside their community context?

The television show The X-files, like Star Trek, also has a fan culture and I am one of the many fans. I have seen the spectacle of fandom from my living room to online fan communities to traveling across the country going to fan conventions and gatherings. Being a fan and studying media I have a unique, yet subjective, perspective. Loving television sparks my interest in studying the medium and in making a film, I was able to explore production as well as criticism.

I have produced the short documentary film Fan Geeks about fans of the television show The X-files and what follows here is the companion guide to the film. The goal of Fan Geeks is to show a different view of fans within a specific context of the television viewing community the fans are a part of. By doing so, fans are show as part of a larger culture and become

less unknown and more relatable to any viewer. Not only do these fans watch The X-files, but they are participating in a community on the Internet and creating relationships that will last longer than a television show.

Similar to Trekkies, film is used to record fan activity in Fan Geeks, but some of the camera processes are changed to include the viewer. Portions of Fan Geeks places the viewer as the role of fan, the camera is placed as a participant. This process is combined with more traditional interview segments to give an overall, yet differentiated view of fans. Edited together these segments are meant to give brief, easy to process information, to help viewers see fans in context to a larger community and not the lone geek stereotype.

First, I will explore the research of media fandom and contextual audience analysis that led to this project, and also why I chose the principal media artifact The X-files. Secondly, I will discuss the process of the participatory film Fan Geeks and how it is created to demonstrate the context of media fandom community. Within this film process will be a discussion of production analysis and a breakdown of each of the films segments. Then, I will conclude with a framework for future study and a visual guide for visualizing cultural context analysis.

Literature Review

Henry Jenkins' study of fans, or media fandom, was first introduced to me by other fans. How and when I was introduced to his work I do not recall, either in an e-mail or the website long lost, but Jenkins' writing on media fandom introduced me to a methodology where one can be both a

researcher and a fan. Like Jenkins, I am a fan who studies televisions and fans. In his book Textual Poachers: Television fans & Participatory Culture, Jenkins recounts a journey similar to mine, "To no small degree, it was my fannish enthusiasm and not my academic curiosity that led me to consider an advanced degree in media studies" (3).

Being introduced to Jenkins' work permits one to be both a fan and an academic and gives a framework to work within. He describes his approach in the introduction to Textual Poachers:

When I write about fan culture, then, I write both as an academic (who has access to certain theories of popular culture, certain bodies of critical and ethnographic literature) and as a fan (who has access to the particular knowledge and traditions of that community). My account exists in a constant movement between these two levels of understanding which are not necessarily in conflict but are not necessarily in perfect alignment. If this account is not overtly autobiographical in that it pulls back from recounting my own experiences in favor of speaking with and about a larger community of fans, it is nevertheless deeply personal (5).

By acknowledging that this approach is also personal, Jenkins allows a researcher to use his or her own fan experience as a guide when studying fan culture. Using his academic and personal experiences, Jenkins makes the choice to discuss the larger community of media fandom and represent fan culture as a whole. What results is a comprehensive guide to fan culture, a travel guide for a world Jenkins knows and can relate to others.

Jenkins' definitions of fan culture creates a distinction that is important as a beginning to the discourse on fans. If Jenkins was to write about his fan experiences singularly then he become a singular oddity so he chooses to write about a homogenous whole and not individuals within fan

culture. As a fan, I find Jenkins systematic defining of fan culture to be too generalized. His work is key, but, as all encompassing and treating fans as foreign cultures is problematic. Responding to fan culture as unknown and in need of translation is a distinction that creates stereotypes where fans are the sideshow geek.

In an earlier piece on Star Trek fans, Jenkins recognizes condescending views of fans stating "Fans appear to be frighteningly out of control, undisciplined and unrepentant, rouge readers" (449). Jenkins is referring to fans treatment of media text, reading them and them integrating the text into their lives - the type of behavior on display in the film Trekkies. Fans reading of Star Trek becomes socially unacceptable, extreme and outside of the mainstream. Anyone can watch television, but it is the fan that becomes obsessed and alter their lives outside of what is considered normal behavior.

One type of behavior that is often focus of Jenkins' work is fan fiction. Fan fiction is a type of fan play where fans write their own stories using any character, scene, or setting from a television show, film, or comic book that is not the fans' own creation. Using these "poached" elements, fans write new and sometimes personalized fictions to be shared with other fans. Fan fictions could be told in various forms including script format, short vignettes, or even novel length stories. Fan fiction is produced outside of the industries that they are based on and perhaps because of that the possibilities of what can happen in these stories are endless for fan fiction writers.

Fan fiction writers are the rogue readers Jenkins is trying to define. Fan fiction writers are rebels, pirating characters from television shows that

are not theirs. By changing and altering televised text will viewers want to buy the original? Or does fan play alter the original televised text, somehow ruining the original?

While these questions are important, it seems more appealing for researchers to try and diagnose fan behavior. Jenkins describes, "For these fans, Star Trek is not simply something that can be reread; it is something that can and must be rewritten in order to make it more responsive to their needs, in order to make it a better producer of personal meanings and pleasures" (451). Fans are then forced into behavior out of a need left behind by viewing television. This is a cause and effect relationship, fan and fan play is a need, a trigger and an explosion. Fans are show as having to improve a medium that leaves them wanting something more. Television is then seen as something unfulfilling, leaving viewers empty and unfulfilled and not a creative cultural spark.

Fan fiction is just one type of fan play, but an example of the type of culture Jenkins work attempts to demystify, to show as just a group of people altering mediated images to their desire or own image. Jenkins' participant observer ethnography of these fans leads to a systematic exploration and definition of what Jenkins describes fans as being a "folk culture." In other words a community created around the fan action, or fan texts, created after reading a media text like Star Trek. Fans become producers of their own text altering the original televised text. Fan fiction is one form of fan text, but just like the media being emulated fans create not just fan fictions, but art, music, and websites as well.

Fan activity is not limited to viewing The X-files or any television text, but the participation in the culture of fans creating their own work to share amongst themselves. Viewing fans this way, fan play such as fan fiction is seen by Jenkins as an act of rebellion. By creating fan fiction, fans are dismissing industrial methods of media and creating their own homemade versions. Fans as folk culture is almost a quaint, home spun view of fans, and a way for researchers to relate to them. Fans are knitting a sweater instead of buying a sweater, but they like and need sweaters just like any other person.

Jenkins' seemingly innocent descriptions of fan play do seem correct, but bothersome in connotations. Fans seem to be suffering from an affliction, they are rebelling, they are stealing for their own pleasure. Yet fans are down to earth, independent, and craft away at projects that emulate something that they admire, but not quality or too self involved to be mainstream. Jenkins is working in a system where text is a commodity culture, where Star Trek can be stolen from the television production and reworked and resold or bartered in fan production. While a valid exploration of fan and text, what if the focus on economic culture was not the focus?

The absence created when focusing on commodity is lessening the work done by fans as an expression of being a participatory audience. It is not always the activity fans do that is important, but the activities being a visible product of 1) television is a readable text and 2) audience behaviors being expressed as a community. Jenkins clearly is aware and expresses these factors, but the focus is shifted to text as a commodity and not a shared story. This is not to say that Jenkins' work is unimportant. Defining

and discussing the behavior of fans is needed, but the goal here is to move forward the discourse past what I argue as the sideshow. Fan Geeks goal is to focus on the similarity of fans as television viewers and not the spectacle of what seems to us their strange expression of the common bonds.

The goal of my documentary film Fan Geeks was to focus on the similarity among fans as television viewers and not the spectacle of what the mainstream sees as a strange expression of common bonds. One key distinguishing feature of Jenkins' work is the absence of fans use of the Internet. My early fan experience differed for Jenkins then in one significant way, I was introduced to fandom via the Internet. The fan acts were the same as Jenkins' observed, fan fiction, fan art, etc., but the speed and accessibility the Internet gives fans is a floodgate of information in comparison to what Jenkins had encountered. Fans could watch an episode of The X-files, post their thoughts on message boards, read e-mails from people who had watch the episode in different time zones, and rewatch the episode in the span of hours without leaving the living room - without leaving the television set.

A researcher addressing the use of the Internet and also negation of fans, is S. Elizabeth Bird's ethnographic study of a Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman e-mail group. Bird summarizes her exploration of how fans have been portrayed previously in popular and academic works; "...fans are to be pitied or avoided; if their shared enthusiasm provides mutual enjoyment and a sense of connection, surely that is only because their lives are so

otherwise empty" (49). Battling against the stereotype of fans, much of Bird's study becomes asking the questions: do internet fan groups constitute a community and if so how do we study them?

Bird takes a middle ground, e-mail groups are not the wastelands of inhuman, freakish interactions nor are they a utopia communication commune. As an ethnographic study this was done by participating and observing in one specific e-mail list, the DQMW-L, consisting of Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman fans. The research is then very specific to a certain space, even though it is a virtual space. Bird explores specifics as how an e-mail group functions as a community and concludes with a call to action for more research to explore these communities, stating "I call for closer examination of different kinds of on-line activities, rather than taking extreme positions on the Internet as either the panacea for lost community or the harbinger of the destruction of close, personal affiliations" (49).

From Bird we can find grounding for the study of fans. Fan practices can seem strange, but fans do form communities. Fans are not the obliteration of community nor are they the ideal community. Yet, we also get a very small segmentation of fandom - an e-mail group. Bird does mention other fan practices, such as fan fiction and role playing, but all of the research and study take place in one e-mail group for one specific show, Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman, that is a family drama and not a Science Fiction or Fantasy television program. I would argue Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman is more acceptable television program, one Bird describes as "People who would never dress as Klingons for news cameras..." (52) These fans then are not the fans of the film Trekkies, but the wild west show. Bird finds them

doing the same fan activities as Jenkins documents when observing Star Trek fans - they have created a space on the Internet where they can discuss Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman and create their own text via fan fiction or other fan activities. Again the power is in the reader, or viewer, transforming the text into their own lives.

Departing from television fans to a study of different kinds of fans, sport fans, we can see if there is any similarity or differences. The reasoning for the departure is that sports fans are mentioned in Fan Geeks and in mentioning them show a different way fans can be viewed. Carbaugh's The Playful Self: Being a Fan at College Basketball Games addresses the concern "Are there scenes in contemporary American life where adults ably participate in expressive play, in a relatively civilized way?" (41) With this question Carbaugh sees this as "a challenge to students of communication to explore how playful selves are conducted in some scenes of public life" (41). By performing an ethnographic study of fans watching college basketball games Carbaugh concludes that there is a playful self that is displayed and that without fan's communication practices, basketball "would become a less lively, if not lifeless public event." Again the viewer has power, but here fans are given credit for creating the event just as much as the basketball players.

Carbaugh as a basketball fan chooses to look at fans as a whole, like Jenkins and Bird, but the conclusions become not just about fans themselves or their fan culture, but the whole of public discourse, public play. Why does Carbaugh results transform into a larger overview on not just fans, but of culture? We have discussed television study where we have seen

how fans are altered by television and the culture fans create altering television text, but the alteration of the television text seems to stay within the fan community and rarely escaping past this barrier. Is it the event Carbaugh observes or the field of observation that creates the difference?

Watching a basketball game is a repeatable, consistent event, with a large audience coming together as a whole. With such consistency I argue Carbaugh has an easier task of identifying communication acts than fan researchers. The field of observation is also consistent - think of different basketball stadiums you may have seen in person or even on television. There is then not only a consistent experience that can be viewed, but also consistency in location type which a researcher can observe and participate. I argue the importance of this repeatable event and location assists to the observer in the conclusions that basketball fans creating a "culture event" in the act of viewing a game.

What is at stake for the fan researcher then is methodology. How do we study these fan groups that spread throughout the physical and virtual world? Do we look for specific repeatable acts like Jenkins and Bird? Do we focus on gender? Do we try to define a field of play like Carbaugh? And if we do can it be encompassing in a way that shows the fan community as a whole? Because the sideshow aspect I keep referring to, as stated in the intro, seems a very lonely existence. Fans seem lone rogue readers and not the sport fans cheering as a whole in the stands.

Media fandom does have moments of repeatable events we can identify, but with fans who meet online and then meet in person, this community aspect is harder to identify repeated events and a shared space.

The Internet is a shared space, but one we go to alone. So like Bird, an e-mail list could be studied or it could be a message board, website, or chat room. Focusing only on fan behavior online negates fan gatherings that can be observed. As a fan I could attend and note my observations, like Carbaugh at a basketball game. Either way the whole of fandom, the community, is seemingly lost. Before the decision to make film, it did not seem possible to capture a singular or series of fan events and the impossibility of it, that these fan experiences were inconsistent from an observation standpoint became significant.

John Fiske's Ethnosemiotics: Some Personal and Theoretical Reflections gives not only a frame for study, but also a reasoning for the inconsistencies of fan observation. Fiske states that for the ethnographer it may not be what is there, but what is missing that is significant. That the ethnographer has to work not only with the similarities of a culture, but what is missing,

...for ethnography is often concerned with the investigations of differences and specificities, but it does mean that we should be able to explain such specificities as instances of culture in process in which similar cultural and social forces are negotiated with in specific ways. We should, in other words, see them not as representative, but as systematic (422).

The routine of fandom can be shown as a system with "differences and specifics." The methodological goal for fan study then does not become about creating definitions, but about exploring individual situations. Fandom becomes a process, just as life is a process.

To add further to a system methodology, Fiske recounts a "small-scale ethnographic study of viewer readings of The NewlyWed Game" (411)

and as unlikely as it may seem Fiske's uses this study as a point of reference for his reflections. First, Fiske describes his initial methodology of an autoethnography. Unlike Jenkins, Fiske explores his own motives and responses to the television text and records them in detail just like any other fan he is studying. Within this Fiske introduces a key concept of active selector, "My theory of popular culture did not situate me as a cultural dupe, but as an active selector and user of the resources provided by the cultural industries out of which to produce my popular culture and my pleasure" (412). Acting as active selectors we, not just Fiske, can pick and choose the text of our choice and create our own culture from which we gain pleasure. This differs from a view of audience being as Fiske states a "dupe" - that we are tricked into or forced into a culture like so much fuel for an industrial machine. We pick and choose and decide what we like therefore The Geek choses to be a geek.

Jenkins describes such behavior as cultural poaching, taking from Michel de Certeau's (1984) work and states "this type of reading as 'poaching' an impertinent raid on the literary preserve that takes away only those things that seem useful or pleasurable to the reader" (449). The differences are minute, but significant. Active selector is reading what industry gives you and when you decide you do not want something, it is polite, the active selector says "no, thank you" and moves on with their cultural experience. The cultural poacher on the other hand reads what the industry has and steals the bits and pieces they like, unapologetic and in some way taking away from the whole of text and culture.

A simple example - you offer to make an active selector and a cultural poacher each a peanut butter sandwich, but both decide they would just like some peanut butter instead of the whole sandwich. The active selector asks you for just some peanut butter and thanks you for accommodating their request. The poacher takes the sandwich as a whole, they open the sandwich, lick off the peanut butter inside, and throw away the bread. You, as the preparer of the peanut butter sandwich, are understanding with one and offended by the other.

This is a simplification, but I am trying to display again a world where not just fans, but television viewers, are viewed as a culture dupe or offensively stealing away just what they want. The viewer is finicky and hedonistic. As the producer of the peanut butter sandwich or the media text, we want the viewer to buy what they are told to, take what they are offered, and just eat the sandwich. No questions asked because the viewer is seen as having no taste or quality. It is a perfectly good peanut butter sandwich or television show or movie - its ready for consumption! Easily digestible! So if the viewer decides to make a change to the text then they are differentiated and put on display as an oddity. Especially those who seem to spend a good part of their lives devoted to a simple peanut butter sandwich or Star Trek or The X-files because they are all commodities.

This example seems to have been taken to an extreme, but is key to understanding how we study not only television, but popular culture. We do not always acknowledge the importance of popular or to generalize that the popular masses are a whole and not individual agents selecting the best of the best - or perhaps more offensive - the most pleasurable.

A way in which to focus on the popular and individuals moving throughout text is provided by Fiske. He introduces the concept of industrial and popular text. The industrial text is the television program or the media event shown for profit, a basketball game or The X-files episodes. The industrial text is tangible it is "a commodity that exists as electronic patterns on a tape that can be held and resold, stored, distributed, used and reused" (418). The popular text is then the act of consuming the industrial text, or as Fiske explains,

Popular texts, however, have no such physical presence - they exist only in their moments of reading, which are *their* moments of reproduction and circulation. They are elusive, they disappear as fast as they are produced, they are ephemeral and live only in their moments and contexts of production (417).

How do we study these ephemeral texts? The methodology used in Fan Geeks is to record the fan activities, the popular text. This is problematic as well, Fiske continues, "Popular culture exists only in its process, and the process is inherently contextual for it is social not symbolic or linguistic" (418). So the popular text is not separate from the industrial, but must be viewed in context to its source. The popular text is not symbolic of where it came from, but the process, the communication of the industrial text.

Watching television is the play that creates the popular texts that researchers are attempting to deal with. For pleasure or otherwise the popular text is action, not reaction, of communication events.

Having said this, Fiske finds a problem with such Ethnographic study. When academics record, "recording of the discussion, a photograph of the room in which the program was viewed, or a letter," (418) popular text they are altering the context of this recording and thus altering the purpose of the

text. A record of a popular text is now for the purpose of study, which changes its original production purpose. Concluding then "I attempt in my autoethnography to go some way towards contextualizing a moment of reading of an industrial text. I hope I showed in some of the ways in which the context is a text itself..." (421) To recap then we have the industrial text, the popular text, and now the context of the popular text becoming our, as academics, text to work from. Fan Geeks is meant to show fans in context. We must always remember that the popular is in motion, it is an action that once removed will become altered. We cannot study the fleeting, we must put both the industrial and popular into context. Context is our text and it is the play between the industrial and the popular.

Now to go back to the ethnographic studies discussed previously I would argue that Jenkins' work not only in his book Textual Poachers, but other essays is a textual analysis of fan created texts. Jenkins looks at the work fans do within their community as a text to study, let us use the example of fan fiction. The television text, or what we can now refer to as industrial text, fans alter to meet their needs or to alter the industrial characters to their liking in writing fan fiction. We can then refer to the fan fiction as a context of the fans ephemeral popular text. Jenkins reviews these now contextualized popular text or fan fiction as a fellow fan, and then himself creates another popular text. Remember he is a fan himself participating within the fan culture and is consuming fandom so has an initial ephemeral consumption of the fan text. So, Jenkins popular text is the text with which he studies and removes to a context of academia. He is trying to then find meaning in why these popular fan fiction text are created, but what is getting lost in

translation is the initial context of the fans popular text. Jenkins is now twice removed from the industrial text and the initial popular text of the fan and the context of that play, where meaning is initially created is lost. He is deciphering meaning by focusing on his personal fan context to other fans popular texts (fan fiction) and using them as the captured popular text to study. The context of the original popular text is removed and the fan text become isolated events without a context . This then can lead to the isolation of fans and singular events and not a larger cultural play.

What is key here is context being left behind is the cause of isolation of the fan. If we focus only on the popular text that are created, the fans do become a spectacle. A text without a context can become strange, unknown, and thus lessens the context of the work done by fans or where the work comes from. I would also argue that this spectacle is what is easy to identify as types of fan play and thus becomes central to the audience of the academics text. This play between industry and popular further compounds issues of text because in the viewing of the academics popular text creates a new industrial text - a book to be read in Jenkins work, a short film, Fan Geeks, to be watched in the work here. The discourse of academics becomes a separate industrial text to be viewed and accepted, broken down and popularized and contextualized again.

Bird, controlling text by focusing on one show and one particular Internet message board, is able to control the play of popular and industrial by the design of scale and a manageability of field of play. Context is explored by establishing the message board as a community. Carbaugh as

well focuses on context in focusing on the play of communication acts in response to a shared event.

Context is then the cycle of the text being created and popularized and then created and so on so on so on, infinite. In Fiske's words "an ethnosemiotics is a textual analysis is an auto ethnography is an ethnosemiotics. And through it all we catch glimpses of the play of culture which is ultimately our quarry" (424). Researchers become the cat and the mouse - being at once hunter of text and the prey of text, producers and readers, and in constant movement of creation of context. What is at stake is our culture, our very life's work, and any life in contact with televisions, not just fans. In viewing television this way, Fiske is allowing us to accept not only the medium's power in our lives, but our viewer power as interpreters of text and creators of text. The viewer creates the meaning. The work of the ethnographer is then recorders of the play between the industry and popular, the documenters of context.

If the whole of culture is not daunting enough of a task, one last complexity Fiske can give us regarding text. "...our use of the social system is not just a product of that system but a producer of it as well. Any system is modified by each and every one of its uses" (424). Or in other words, congratulations! In reading this you have altered the sum of culture by being a consumer and a producer of text. That is not to say that this work is monumental in proportion, the honor was not met to go to our heads, but to acknowledge the importance of the constant change to our system, our culture, by existing within it. Seems simplistic, systems change, yet to exist within in the play of the culture, the contexts of industry and popular text

surrounding and moving about it us, is so large and omnipresent how do we avoid making it generalized or stereotypical? How do we define our uniqueness in motion? How do we capture the system of industry becoming popular when it is so intrinsic and ephemeral? How do we not get lost?

To bring even more questions before we try to answer these, Ien Ang Understanding Television Audiencehood is helpful in continuing the discussion of text by acknowledging the complexity. Ang states "contexts are indefinite." (375) Accepting the contexts as forever continuing moves the discourse away from finite conclusions of what it means to be a fan, or a tv viewer, to a discourse of contexts in which television exist in our lives. In this discourse Ang describes a methodology that is "...a recognition that the social world of actual audiences only take shape through the thoroughly situated, context-bound ways in which people encounter, use, interpret, enjoy, think, talk about television" (375). Again, representing television viewers we then have to represent the context.

Ang suggests we use an approach that "rather than conceiving viewers as having a unified individuality that is consistent across circumstances, they should be seen as inhabiting multiple and mobile identities that fluctuate from situation to situation." (376) These situations then become the play of industrial text to popular text, can be captured, and we can establish context for the behaviors of audience. Ang establishes this as the study of micro-situations. Ang advises,

analysis of micro-situations of television audiencehood should take precedence over either individual 'viewing behavior' or totalized taxonomic collectives such as "television audience" because micro-situations cannot be reduced to the individual attributes of those participating in the situation (375).

By “attributes” Ang is referring to what the television industry uses to measure and study audience: demographics. This becomes another critique of the academic world, that in our study of audience we have been influenced by industries study of their audiences' behavior. Ang introduces the concept of “Institutional knowledge” (368), the knowledge we gain about audience via the institution or the production company/network/ratings that study audience for personal economic gain. Institutional knowledge wants to create audience identification that is homogeneous because more people will then buy the product that the industry is creating.

Institutional knowledge should not be completely ignored, it has a place, but again making the distinction between industry and popular text is what is important. If we look at demographics like industry does Ang indicates that quality television becomes what industry deems quality based on viewer demographics such as total number of viewers, their age, and their sex. These factors are not always easy to calculate, but I contend that they are easy to generalize. Quality television products then become those that are easily consumed by viewers and are seen as having the greatest purchase power. Quality for industry is an economic function and not textual quality.

Ang describes this generalization for consumption as “the isolation of distinct viewer types.” (372) A fan or fanatic being a distinct viewer type or “One of the most famous viewer types constructed by communication researchers is the ‘heavy viewer,’ on who all sorts of concerns are projected” (372). The types of concern range from “depression, anxiety, lack of ambition, fatalism, alienation” (372) and Ang reviews several studies of

“heavy viewer” - I argue this is the tv viewer stereotype that Jenkins, Bird, Ang, and now Warnicke are trying to alter and we are frustrated by what Ang describes as “the viewers that are implicitly put on trial, not the institutions that provide the programming” (373). Viewers are taken out of context of the television and culture they belong to and diagnosed with symptoms. This again goes back to reactionary readings of fans and not fans in action and making choices, everything we have established as a barrier to reaching context. Ang advises similarly,

The epistemological limitations of the pull toward generalized categorization implied in the search for viewer types can be illustrated, in an anecdotal but telling fashion, by...the couch potatoes.... They are self proclaimed heavy viewers, who cannot be understood by referring to the academically constructed fiction of this type of viewer. Faced with the idiosyncratic, self-reflective, witty, utterly recalcitrant “behavior” of the couch potatoes - and there is no reason to dismiss them as “atypical” in advance - communication researchers are ultimately left with empty hands, or better, want of words (373).

Our job as researchers or writers then becomes creating a differentiated view of couch potatoes, fans, poachers, active selectors, or whatever you want to call television audience. Ang’s suggestions becomes to particularize, or as we reviewed with Fiske, to show the differentiated experiences and not form generalizations. Ang defines our goal in that “the social world of actual audiences only takes shape through the thoroughly situated, context-bound ways in which people encounter, use, interpret, enjoy, think, and talk about television” (375).

This is a call to action, we must change how we view television audience. We must use the context to show the play of culture and the power of not only the medium of television, but the power of the audience

altering text to create the play of culture, a culture where television viewers and fans create, share, and discuss their popular text. In doing so it adds to the cultural discourse, or what Ang refers to as “ a never ending discourse that can enhance a truly public and democratic conversation about the predicaments of our television culture” (382). Going back to the discussion of quality, the public as a whole will make decisions of quality as individuals and this will create a larger discourse.

Fan Geeks is then a continuation of the conversation regarding not only fans, but television audience. Fan Geeks is a short documentary film (27 minutes) that shows micro-situations of The X-files fan community. The community started for most on the Internet in chat rooms and message boards. These fans have come together to meet up and not only discuss The X-files, but share their lives with each other. In the next section, “method of process,” we will explore each segment of the film as well as production of the film in context to this literature review.

Before we continue, the question must be asked, if the intent was to avoid the stereotypes and sideshow that is fandom, why call the project Fan Geeks? As previously reviewed fans as a segmentation of television viewer are easily identifiable for researchers because of their behaviors. We have now established that the behaviors are not the end product of the discourse, but the experience or the context of such behaviors must be explored. Much like Ang’s “couch potato” fan geeks are self proclaimed and similar in attitude. Fan geek as a term offers a duality - “fans” gives us devotion and media consumer, with “geek” implies use of technology and knowledge. By

acknowledging the stereotype, being upfront with it, the viewer of Fan Geeks can reconstruct another view of fans.

The factors that led to naming the project Fan Geeks were numerous. The one influence that must be acknowledged here is Jon Katz's book Geeks which follows two teenage boys rise from computer geeks in small town obscurity to the high-tech elite who have brought geek status where "Definitions involving chicken heads no longer apply." (xi) The dismissive term "geek," with the boom of the computer industry, Katz describes as taking on new, more empowering meaning. In Katz's introduction to Geeks we can find an explanation of the modern geek;

The truth is, geeks aren't like other people. They've grown up in the freest of media environments ever. They talk openly about sex and politics, debate the future of technology, dump on revered leaders, challenged the existence of God, and are viscerally libertarian. They defy government, business, or any other institution to shut down their freewheeling culture (xxvii).

Such a view of a geek is far different from an awkward high school student or the carnival sideshow we might imagine when we think "geek." Katz is keenly aware of making this distinction. Geek is an identity that one can choose. Geek does not have to just be a taunt yelled across the lunch room. Geek is one who follows pop culture and is tech savvy.

A key to Fan Geeks origins is in Katz's interview of Louis Rossetto, founder of Wired magazine. Rossetto offers a description of modern geeks,

Class used to be about race, gender, social standing - old ideas, he said. Geeks were involved with the new ones. "The new cultural class has no physical demands or restrictions," he said, "There are music geeks and dance geeks. Geekdom is evolving. Anybody who is obsessed with a topic and becomes completely one with it...whether it's computers, music, or art -

geeks come into that. Geek is sometimes about technology but mostly, it's about brains, and about being resented for being smart" (xxxviii).

Therefore fan geeks are those who are obsessed with being a fan. Fan geeks are not X geeks or File geeks or Mulder geeks or Scully geeks, but is about being a certain type of television viewer and industrial text reader. Fan geeks are educated and tech savvy, self aware, and are well read in not only television text, but books, movies, music, and endless amounts of information. My fan access was fans of The X-files, but this film could have been made about Star Trek, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, or Star Wars fans - just to name a few. What is displayed in the film, what is important, is the play of being a fan geek.

Before we focus on the film itself, a few X-file basics if you are not familiar. The television show The X-files is an hour long drama that aired on the FOX network from 1993-2002. The X-files was created by Chris Carter and at the end of the opening credits for nearly all the two-hundred and two episodes the catch phrase "The Truth is Out There" was displayed. The elusive truth was in reference to X-files, which in the show The X-files is, a fictional division within the FBI for unexplained cases and reports. Because of the unsolved or undefined elements within the case they are "X" for the unknown factor. Agent Fox Mulder, played by David Duchovny, is the believer in the paranormal. He believes in alien abductions and government conspiracies, even though he himself is an FBI Agent. His partner Agent Dana Scully, played by Gillian Anderson, was assigned to the X-file division to refute or validate Agent Mulder's work with the paranormal. She is a medical doctor, a scientist, and does not believe in aliens. Well, she did not

seem to believe until it appeared Agent Mulder was abducted and she was, at least to the audience, mysteriously pregnant.

And this is where The X-files was at the time Fan Geeks was filmed, in the middle of season nine. Before the East Coast portions of Fan Geeks was filmed Mulder was found dead in a field and for three long weeks fans had to wait and see what would happen. Would Mulder be dead and buried?

The answer, in true X-file fashion, was yes and no. Viewers of the show saw Scully crying over Mulder's grave, but fans knew Mulder was not dead. Fans were aware of the number of episodes David Duchovny had signed for because information such as this is available via the Internet as well as entertainment news sources. Duchovny was filming episodes at the time his character was "dead." The West Coast footage was shot months later, near the end of season nine with Mulder resurrected and Scully still mysteriously pregnant. There are references to these events throughout Fan Geeks, but they are not the point of the film.

Before this thesis was a film, when I first began, The X-files was the point of my study. As a cultural artifact, much has been written in the popular press about The X-files. Many factors make The X-files important: it was the first popular hour long drama on the FOX network, conspiracy theories and aliens being a part of a larger cultural zeitgeist, successfully creating a feature film while the television show was on the air. All of these factors make The X-files unique and in need of exploration.

In the academic realm, The X-files has been the focus of discussion for these reasons and more. Books and articles of nature began to appear i

instead of just the books and magazines filled with fan adoration or companion viewer guides.

"Deny All Knowledge" Reading *The X-files* is a collection of essays ranging from discussion of conspiracy theory , *The X-files* as mythology, and feminist critiques. While all vital, each essay is primarily a textual analysis of the show. What is interesting is the range of the subject matter written about *The X-files* matches the range of episodes and themes the show addressed.

An important essay that focused on the textual range of *The X-files* is Joe Bellon's *The Strange Discourse of *The X-files*: What it is, what it does, and what is at stake.* Bellon rhetorical focus is *The X-files* genre, specifically how it defies genre and he attempts to determine the true genre of the show. Bellon argues for the show being a detective program and not science fiction. Again, while valid, for the purposes of *Fan Geeks*, determination of what *The X-files* is in the hands of the audience.

The second book *PopLit, PopCult and The X-files: A Critical Exploration* is a textual analysis of *The X-files*. As a fan of *The X-files* this book is ineffective. Key facts of the show are either misrepresented or worse, wrong. Delasara misrepresents key mythos from *The X-files* narratives and in doing so her desire to study the popular seems false.

For example, in the season two episode "One Breath" Scully is lying comatose in a hospital bed and will most likely die. Mulder is convinced by Scully's sister Melissa to stop trying to avenge Scully's illness and say his goodbyes. Instead of killing those he believed put her in the hospital, Mulder goes to Scully's bedside and has a touching moment letting her know that

she is not ready to die, "the strength of her beliefs" will keep her alive. Mulder then returns to his apartment to find that it has been ransacked by the men who put Scully in the coma. These evil men are long gone, justice will never be served, and Mulder succumbs to tears believing that Scully is soon dead. We then cut to see Scully awaken, *alone*, in her hospital bed. Then we cut back to Mulder getting the phone call - which he thinks is to tell him Scully has passed - and we the audience see only Mulder's smile when he hears Scully is awake and will live. Delasara describes these same moments, "Melissa Scully contacts Mulder and asks him to go to Dana; as a result he is beside her bed when she wakes, and she tells him that she owes her survival to the strength of his beliefs." (10) While Scully did tell Mulder "I had the strength of your beliefs" and the events are similar, the power of the narrative is lost by telling things out of order and leaving out the textual elements that the television production has to offer. Delasara's popular text reading of The X-files will give her readers simplistic and I argue less than appealing views of The X-files.

As I have just demonstrated, I could go on and on about every detail within The X-files' text. Ultimately this diverts from the films goal of showing the culture of fans in motion. Being a fan myself discussion of The X-files becomes more a relating of my personal popular text, albeit of an academic nature, but by doing so the context of fandom would be lost . The process might yield a textual analysis of the industrial text, or my own fan culture play creating a popular text. Making a film I could attempt to be less a fan and more the observer. I was able to show the play of fans interacting with both the industrial and the popular. Fan Geeks is then a brief moment , or

micro-situation, of television audience. We are able to see the play of the culture and in what follows is my overview of the creation of the film as well as analysis of each of the film segments.

Method of Process

First, some background on this project. Winter term of 2001 I had the opportunity to travel to the East Coast and meet with several fellow fans of The X-files I had met via the Internet. I was working on my thesis about The X-files and fans while finishing my course work at Oregon State University. I am a native Oregonian, so going back East was not a frequent occurrence, but it was not my first trip to meet with fans.

At the time I was somewhat at loose ends with my thesis, finding the dual nature of being a fan and analyzing fans frustrating. This frustration, the feeling of being pulled in two different directions was always a concern with the project - could I see the fan forest while being a tree in the middle of said forest?

Yes, I could see the big picture of fans and also be a fan, but what I was finding more interesting was the view from the fans perspective. This is not to say that I enjoyed being a fan more than studying media, though it is a fair critique of my work, but that what I saw being a fan was more interesting than the whole of fandom I was trying to express in thesis form. The whole of me - fan and observer found the fan perspective intriguing. The problem that I have, and still battle, is translation from fan to observer to reader of my text. The inner dialogue between myself can become confusing to others and even myself.

With that in mind it was not just the adventure of seeing all my fellow fans, but the opportunity to talk with them about fandom and my work that sent me packing. I had been in contact with these fans throughout my education and they were always central to my work with fans. But what to do once I got there?

Like many media students, like many fans, I am not only interested in audience and textual analysis, but the actual production of media. There were resources available for me to make my own visual text and in my undergraduate studies I had taken video production classes. I was missing the opportunity to explore my other interest in film production. Instead of stepping back and trying to find focus within my dual nature, I added to the layer of film maker.

The factors against me were daunting. A few years had passed since I last used video equipment and this was the first time I had shot with a digital camera versus a larger VHS camera. The Speech Communication department had a Sony Mini DV camera, a compact, light weight, yet high quality piece of equipment. Mini DV tapes were also readily available, inexpensive, yet a higher quality of tape than the equipment I had been trained on. The video equipment was a small case for the camera, as small as carryon luggage, and I packed a small tripod. No lighting, no extra sound equipment, no crew members - all I had was the camera, the tripod, and myself.

Before leaving I scheduled where I would be traveling to, who I would be staying with, and when. Over a two week period I would go to gatherings in New York, New Jersey, Washington D.C. and Pennsylvania. Most of the

fans I had met previously at other fan events and had been in contact with via the Internet for many years. A large number of the fans in attendance, met in America Online's The X-File Forum. For subscribers to the America Online service you could go to weekly chats, post on message boards, and then use more private modes of communication such as e-mail or instant messaging.

During the East Coast trip, I had become aware of a group of Scully fans called OBSSE (Order of the Blessed Saint Scully the Enigmatic). The name is self awareness of the spectacle as well as serious, the group is devoted to Scully and Gillian Anderson. One of the ways OBSSE expressed this devotion was with a series of gathering where fans across the world could come together in local groups or in their own homes to raise money for NF, Inc. NF, or Neurofibromatosis, is a genetic disorder that causes tumors to grow on nerve endings and NF, Inc. is the charity Gillian Anderson supports to bring awareness and aid to those living with NF. In her honor, fans devoted themselves to the cause by watching their favorite Scullycentric episodes, having a Scully Marathon, and donating money during their favorite parts of The X-files episodes.

As a fan going to a nearby location, for me Vancouver, Washington, to watch episodes with other fans sounded fun, but as a researcher I wondered if other fans would mind me filming the event. I was not a member of OBSSE and I had never met the fans previously, in person or via Internet activities such as chat rooms or e-mails. I sent a few e-mails and was welcomed by all. Most of the fans at the event had never met before and for some this was their first fan gathering of any kind.

The initial goal at all the fan gatherings was to record as much as possible. There were diaries kept at the time of shooting, but that was just the first step in cataloging the footage. After the two separate trips there was eleven hours of tape to review and catalog in detail. At first, the tapes were reviewed on a home television and a log of usable footage was created.

Determining what was usable footage was based on a set of criteria: content, length of clip, and quality of footage. Content was first and most important. I would sort the content based on themes: fans talking about The X-files, fans in groups, talk about the Internet, and fan play. Not everything was easy to categorize, but each clip would be cataloged with a list of basic themes. Length of the clips would also be noted in detail and the time code for each clip.

For example, the first clip in Fan Geeks has the title card "We're not strange obsessed geeks (and the cute guy we met at the bar)," but in the log process it was referred to as "Stephen at The Blarney." The bartender in the clips name is Stephen and the bar's name The Blarney. I would then note in the log "fans talk about what film means to them, Internet, group"

The other criteria would also be logged, secondly quality of the footage and any abnormalities or technical difficulties. Low lighting, background noise, unstable camera: these were all possible problems that could make a clip unusable. Content would sometimes override any technical issues. Referring to the first clip again, there is low light and background noise, but what the fans say is far more important than camera issues. Having a detailed log of the footage I then began the editing process.

In the summer of 2001, I started my first edit of Fan Geeks. With my previous production history the decision was made to transfer the Mini DV digital tapes to SVHS - a higher grade yet similar tape that is commonly used in VCRs. This was done at Oregon State University's television studio KBVR. The transfer process narrowed down the amount of footage to a more workable set of clips, two hours of footage. Then the process of editing the footage together began, again at KBVR, from SVHS tapes to a master tape. This was an almost fatal error for this project.

To explain, my original footage was all shot on digital tape and I transferred it over to analog tape when transferring to SVHS. In doing so, I created a first generation copy of the footage to be transferred to a second generation tape - a copy of a copy which would be a master copy to make more copies of. The final product would be a third generation copy. If any mistakes or reediting needed to take place then the new footage would have to be copied over the top of some other footage. Degradation of tape was inevitable when making copies of copies, resulting in darkening, and poor audio. I was aware of these risks going into the KBVR studio daily for months and months, but I did not have the training with computer editing software which is digital editing equipment. With digital editing there is no degradation of tapes to worry about. All the footage would remain digital throughout the editing process. Instead of copying layers upon layers physically on a tape that could be worn out, digital editing is moving data around. In 2001, time and space were limited for Digital editing - time to be trained and use digital editing equipment and also the physical space on the

computers hard drives. Trying to create a thirty minute documentary may not seem like a lot of space on a computer, but at the time this was a huge resource.

This is no way a reflection on the department or the technology of OSU, but these were the factors that brought me to my decision to use more traditional editing equipment. The resources were available and I knew how to use them. As the project went on and I was faced with what seemed to be simple edits, I was crushed by the enormity of what I was going to have to do.

An example, I misspelled someone's name wrong in the end credits and it was not pointed out to me until several weeks after I had thought I was finished editing. I was going to have to get permission to go back into KBVR, retype the entire credits, sync the audio, find the time code of where to edit in the new credits, and pray that re-recording the segment would not cause too much harm to the master tape. What if the tape broke in half under the strain of so many edits? Using a backup copy would put me another generation away from the original, another chance to cause more technical problems. The probability that there would be problems, not if, was heartbreaking.

Overall, the first edit of Fan Geeks was less than satisfactory. I did not like the look of my film. I was embarrassed to show it. There were other factors, but I decided to step away from the project. Indefinitely.

Being a fan and an academic perhaps I needed distance, as a film maker I needed technology. The desire to make movies never left me and over the course of the past year I have been able to purchase a computer with editing software and DVD burner and my own Mini DV camera. Instead

of going into a television studio I am able to sit at my desk or even on my couch with a small table that is two feet wide and can hold my laptop and video camera. I can review footage and then copy the footage digitally without any degradation to the quality of footage. If there is a need to reedit, I am a few mouse clicks away from deleting and recreating the clip. If I misspell something, I can correct it and press a button that says "update" and the problem is solved. The investment in the equipment was not for this project, but I realized how I could come back to Fan Geeks and make it what I always wanted it to be.

In terms of cost, Fan Geeks had no set budget, but there were limitations. The use of a single camera and the observer/interviewer/fan that is myself being the camera operator was due to cost. I could not afford multiple cameras and multiple people to run them. If I would have had multiple camera operators then several of things would be changed. I would be either fully behind the scenes and not interacting with those around or I would become the focus of the camera. Instead of my perspective as a fan, the camera angle would have become the viewer of the film's perspective. The concept of the camera being a fan, being me, forces the viewer into seeing from a fan's perspective.

With a fan perspective there still could have been the use of multiple cameras. Multiple cameras would have given more coverage of the events as well as more footage to work with. I would have more opportunity to be behind the scenes. For me as a fan and in many cases knowing these particular fans via the internet and other gatherings, it would have been difficult to be fully behind the scenes. One option would have been film crew

documenting me and my fan activities or one particular fan or some such combination. The problem I have with this type of process would be losing the sense of community I wanted to capture.

Much of the footage was taken on the go, in cars, bars, hotel rooms, dorm rooms, and where fans went. There was no professional fan gathering, like the Star Trek convention of Trekkies mentioned in the introduction where fans pay an entrance fee to an organized event where for example fans get autographs, buy memorabilia, and attend talks by producers and actors. The settings for Fan Geeks was where people, not just fans, meet up and watch television or meet up to just be friends, not specifically fan only events.

To further this discussion, we will look at the individual segments. Within each I hope to show insight why I picked these particular segments out of the eleven hours of footage there was to work with. A general overview of the structure used was to start with clips that gave general explanation of what the film is and then move on to fans actually talking about The X-files, next go into some clips of fan play or behavior, and conclude with clips that ultimately show these geeks as a group of friends.

The opening of Fan Geeks has changed throughout the course of this project. Originally, a voiceover set up the events that were going to take place and to try to set a tone for the film. The voiceover was placed over a montage of clips that jump cut, quick edits with fading in and out, to show the participants and some of the settings the film would show.

In the 2006 edit, I attempted to rework the voiceover, but determined near the end of editing that I could set up the importance of each clip's title card with an opening similar in nature. Being able to remove the voiceover completely and add in a longer segment of scrolling text is the perfect example of digital editing flexibility. I could have never made such a drastic change in the 2001 edit because to put a longer segment at the beginning would override other segments of the film. This would cause an entire reedit of the film.

The singing that accompanies the opening credits after the scrolling text, as well as the ending credits, is the fans from the Philadelphia weekend. A rented bus chauffeured us back to the hotel after a day on the town. If you look closely you can see that there are streetlights in the background flashing by and sometimes you can make out the shape of a person. Instead of blacking out this background image I chose to keep it to add a visual texture to the opening credits.

"We're not strange obsessed geeks (and the cute guy we met at the bar)" was one of the most unexpected pieces of footage. The reason the camera started rolling was someone wanted footage of the cute bartender from Ireland. I obliged and got a great clip of the fans describing what the film is to them. In many ways, what Jo and Jen say in this clip help shape Fan Geeks and give a base to showing a different view of what we the viewer of the film might expect fans to be.

"My Hockey Stick is Bigger than Your Lightsaber" is also a segment that challenges what it is to be a fan. Rachel's views about how science fiction fans are portrayed in popular culture was a personal manifesto that

she had alluded to online prior to our meet up. At the time Rachel was an under grad at American University . The indoor footage with Rachel was filmed at her dorm room on campus. Like myself, Rachel studies were media focused so it was not just The X-files we had in common. The set up of the shot was important. If you notice she is sitting in front of her computer with a wallpaper of Mulder and Scully. This is the computer that we had communicated via for the years between our meeting. In some of the footage not used Rachel actually looked up emails we had set to read things, they were fuel for her fan outrage in many ways. Also these emails and the computer were as much artifacts or mementos of being a fan as the clippings and merchandise we will see her show later in the film.

These first two clips set a tone of what these groups of fans do are different and self aware. The next two clips “We are all friends here.” and “Being a fan is an investment.” show a more traditional view of fans, the mind set, the lengths to which they will go to mentally and monetarily in their fan activities. Yet I would argue watching people saying these things is less isolating than if I wrote an account of such behavior. Using film to allow the fans to express themselves is key to breaking fan stereotypes.

“We are all friends here.” was shot as Jenn Kearney was driving me to the airport, right at the end of the East Coast trip. Throughout the two weeks I had spent a lot of time with Jenn. I slept on her couch for a week, she traveled with me to Washington D.C. to meet with Rachel, and finally Jenn, Eileen, and I met up with another group of friends in Philadelphia. Both Jenn and Eileen are from New Jersey and while not at specific fan gatherings they graciously gave me a couch to sleep on. There were several factors -

focusing on other fans more or maybe we had both figured out after two weeks what needed to be said - but it was on the road from Philadelphia to Newark that I was able to interview Jenn.

“We are all friends here” shows a glimpse into the fan processing text. By processing I mean that Jenn is actively going through all the text or information she has surrounding The X-files and decides what is industrial and what is popular for her. Fiske called this being an active selector, but I see more layers to it than just that. There is participation between fan and the industry that creates The X-files, but at the heart of it all is affection for the characters. Not only does the fan have to select which industrial text they like, in this case The X-files, but within the text select the elements that are important to them. Jenn mentions industry terms such as contract negotiations and reading scripts, these are also important to the fan, but in a different way than their popular text .

“Being a fan is an investment” brings us back to Jo, one of the women from the opening clip. This is the first clip of several from a much longer interview conducted with Jo. One of the difficulties in shooting was deciding what and when to shoot. This was day two in Philadelphia and the only morning the group was not in transit to or from the hotel, our fan gathering hub. Jo was sitting in a quiet corner checking her email and message boards, it was a chance to get the “geek” in their natural habitat. The lighting was low, natural, and I didn’t intervene to turn on lights and I started the interview with the camera hand held. In later clips of this interview I moved to the tripod for stability.

The next segment "A story of how some of us met because of a tragic event and celebrity" was almost not included. For one we do not take it lightly that the events surrounding our meeting online was horrific, the catastrophic TWA Flight 800. In reviewing the clips again what became more important than the story Eileen is telling was the friendly play between Eileen, Jenn, and I. The interview the clip came from was long and there is the problem of making each other laugh. Instead of avoiding the laughter, editing it out, why not show it? And that was the choice of editing the clip right after the whip pan over to Jenn and making Eileen chuckle. The camera work could be better, but the story of meeting online and that the viewer can see that we are good friends was more important to the overall film than the steadiness of the camera.

The following two clips are important in context to each other "The Reluctant Fan is not alone." and "Mulder is rather persuasive." both tell a similar story of how a fan became to be. There are other factors at play, but I want to make note the similarity between two fans on other side of the countries. The first title card alludes to this that some of these fans are reluctant to become fans, but as the second card title card implies there are elements of the show that win the fans over. In the case of both clips the attractiveness of Mulder, played by David Duchovny, is key.

"Just words on a page" we come back to Jo, still multitasking at the computer typing and talking to me. I would like to point out that there were twelve people at the Philadelphia gathering. In the background throughout Jo's interview you can hear other people in the kitchen and living room area. I was frustrated at the time of filming because we had two of these large,

town house like hotel rooms and one was completely empty. An empty room seemed perfect for interviews, but then the noisy room was where the fan action was happening.

I did do several interviews in the more quiet room. The problem was the interviewees seemed guarded or they would take it as an opportunity as a platform for arguments about what was wrong with The X-files and what they, the fans, would do better. While valid and not uncommon fan behavior, these diatribes felt boring in the editing process and not in theme with what I wanted Fan Geeks to be which is the fun of being a part of this community. Maybe that makes the one on one interview impossible. With Jo she had the computer with her and with other interviews that seem one on one there is someone listening off camera other than myself.

Yes, I feel that Jo typing was like having a third party there because she was either typing emails or posts on message boards, she was not just reading them. Perhaps because of that she was completely open in her explanations of being a fan. In "Just words on a page" Jo describes some of what fans do on the Internet, in particular spoilers which is information about an episode fans find before the episode airs. Another element discussed was taping the episode and Jo goes over her almost ritual of getting backup tapes. To the viewer this is the type of behavior that is seen as obsessive. I challenge the viewer that it not only shows the role technology plays in the life of a fan, but it also shows the community of people the fans have to rely on if technology fails them.

To follow this up I chose to go to a larger group clip, "They never met face to face before today," and chose a clip that shows fans who met online

coming together to something more than a television show. Originally I had this clip end with how much money The Scully Marathons raised, but then I had hours of footage of the actual event. So before putting up a total I cut to a clip of the actual event itself. Earlier in the day I put the camera on the tripod next to the big screen television used to watch ten episodes of The X-files. After a favorite moment or a line of dialog the fans would toss money into a metal bucket creating a ringing out effect and the louder the clang the more people and money in favor of that part of The X-files. During the lunch break I let the camera roll, this is also where the clip "The Reluctant Fan is not alone" comes from. In that clip if you notice I am walking in the background of the shot, in the kitchen getting lunch, but in "They never met face to face before today," clip I conducted a large group interview.

I had tried the large interview previously in Philadelphia without success. It is possible that because these fans in Vancouver did not know me personally they took the interview a little more seriously. In Philadelphia the group seemed to laugh, interrupt, swear, and drink beer instead of answering my questions. This goes back to the problematic participant observer element of Fan Geeks. While being the camera operator, interviewer, and fan was practical, for future projects I would recommend for myself or others having a least one other person paying attention to the details, if not a more full scale, professional crew.

"Crazy, obsessed, nuts?" was filmed in Rachel's dorm room. As mentioned earlier Rachel took us through her X-file memorabilia. Jenn is reading a clipping from TV Guide where Rachel was interviewed. The clipping is kept in a large scrapbook that is not uncommon for fans to keep

and mirrors a clip from Trekkies where a woman shows pictures of the actor and character she follows. The theme of the article featuring Rachel is fitting with the theme of Fan Geeks and also introduces the viewer to Chris Carter as the creator and executive producer of The X-files.

Which then created a good introduction to “Chris Carter created The X-files, but he is not alone.” This clip is another from the longer interview conducted on our way to the airport. Like the previous clip “We are all friends here” we see the play between being industry and popular text. Jenn expresses frustration over the show not always having answers, but how it is also something she likes about the show. To put this into a context of what has been discussed in the literature review fans express dissatisfaction when the industrial text does not fit with their own popular text. The X-files is unique in that it seems to foster an industrial text with little to no closure, making the creation of a detailed popular text mandatory. It is not just a popular text that fans create, they create a portion of what the show is that the industry has no control over. The X-files is creating a fandom that it demands to be participatory whereas researchers like Jenkins can find confusion in why women are interested in participating in Star Trek culture, fans of The X-files it is a prerequisite.

“Driving around Washington D.C talking about UFOs” is made up of two clips that are longer than other clips. Instead of an interview in a car I decided to record my perspective as a fan. I sat the camera on my shoulder, sat in the backseat of the car, and anywhere I looked so did the camera. The frame produced is unstable, whipping in every direction making it not ideal footage, but is one of the few clips I included of fans just being fans and not

talking about being fans. Originally these clips were edited together in a longer version to show the drive Jenn, Rachel, and I made to the FBI Building. The FBI Building being the setting of The X-files makes the clip seem more geeky, but The FBI Building is where Rachel and I first met. We were both in line for the now defunct FBI Tour back in 1999 at a large gathering of X-files fans that primarily took place at the Watergate hotel.

“Driving around Washington D.C talking about UFOs” is the first section of Fan Geeks that has a fade out and fade in that does not have a title card or location stamp, but the fade technique was used to move time forward. As I said this was a much longer clip originally and it needed to be cut down. Some might argue that I should have not bothered fading back in, but the portion of the clip about Snuffleupagus is funny and shows a key nature of fandom; fans are media consumers from an early age. Mr. Snuffleupagus is a character on the preschool targeted show Sesame Street and here we have three grown woman who remember him fondly and have the ability to compare a child’s character to the characters they enjoy as adults. In the longer version of this driving scene there was a similar reference to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles a comic book turned action figure turned televised cartoon turned mainstream movies. All of these industrial texts are part of the fans popular text and accordingly connections are made within the popular text that the original industrial text would have never expected to make. The only uncertainty is if the viewer of Fan Geeks walks away with that knowledge or connection.

“Mulder and Scully went there? Well, then we have to go” was not in the original edit of the film and it was one of the last clips to be added to the

final edit. The reason being it felt too fannish, too home movies like. Sharon, Jenn, Eileen and I did not go all the way to Philadelphia to go some place our fictional friends Mulder and Scully went, but that was the deciding factor when we were told we had enough time to see one of three historic landmarks. One random reference from The X-files and we were able to make our choice. In retrospect I also like Eileen's story of the chicken figure which is another text, albeit a personal experience that becomes text.

Another longer clip is "Peep Wars: Can you count how many TV shows are discussed?" and it is centered on fan activity. I did not think this clip would make it into the film and I almost did not film "The Peep Challenge." Once I was viewing the footage what stood out, what was unexpected, was the number of television shows and other pop culture that was discussed in such a short time frame. Another point of reference, this is the only clip which has male fans in it, even if they are just heard off camera.

The absence of men at fan gatherings is discussed in "X chromosome." This was the original opening clip in my first edit of Fan Geeks. Having the clip near the end gives it more weight because hopefully the viewer either agrees after watching the previous clips or has a moment of realization. The discussion shown was part of a larger discussion. There were issues with the audio being faint when more than one person was talking in different areas of the room and I was not at the camera to get everyone in frame, so I kept the part that was short and to the point.

"More in common than a TV show." again is used as a summery for Fan Geeks. What these fans do off-line and online is not uncommon, they are not strange, nor are they alone. Jo points out that many fans she is in

contact with no longer watch the show, yet they share a common bond that keeps them together. This is a lovely sentiment, but should be read with caution for any future research. Fans move on from different interests and what you may think you will find is probably not there any more. I thought I would have more footage about the show and it would be the same as gatherings from the past three years. What I found in many people was fandom moving on and friendship remaining. I allowed this to shape the film, but it was with some frustration that I wished I had started filming sooner. I wish I could show the whole journey and not just this small portion.

“The Truth is Out There for fans, and for friends” title card is based on the opening credit of The X-files. At the end of the opening credits each episode of The X-files appears a saying, most often “The Truth is Out There.” This clip has always played before the end credits in Fan Geeks. I had not realized this until I watched my first edit, which is much like the final edit in content, but the quality of digital tape going to a computer and then onto DVD is remarkable. Eileen statement in this clip sums up not only that what the viewer has seen is weird for them, but for the film participants as well. The relationships and community formed online around a television show seems to surprise those within Fan Geeks perhaps more so than the viewer.

The end credits again have the singing of the Philadelphia participants, but the choice was made to blackout the background for the longer closing credits. After the closing credits I included a clip that no matter how many times I watch it I laugh, Jenn, Eileen and I laughing about

The Simpson episode "The Springfield Files" which guest starred David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson as Mulder and Scully. I have always liked films that leave the audience with something extra after the end credits and even though the discussion of The Simpsons could have fit into the film elsewhere, I like it as the parting laughter at the end.

Conclusions

Much like the ending of Fan Geeks, I conclude that The X-files may no longer be in production, but the community created lives on. Many of the fans are still in contact with each other and still get together in small fan gatherings or at larger fan conventions. Newer shows have captured their fan geek desire, but The X-files will forever be a part of these fan's popular text.

As a fan, this is very satisfying conclusion. As a researcher, it is still problematic. Where and what do we study? Why do we study it? These questions can still be asked even if you answer them, because culture moves on. There are no definitive answers, just a voice adding on to the discussion.

The concept of a continued discussion was difficult to grasp as a student. I hope to have shown some of the factors that complicate the conversation. The study of fandom can focus on validating the work, such as Jenkins and Bird, but the work itself is the acknowledging the conversation or what has been described as play between a myriad of texts. Ultimately, Fiske's work with identifying the industrial and popular text, and that context for popular text is what researchers must focus on. Much like Ang continuing

the conversation, we must continue to discuss television and how important it is in context to our lives.

Fan Geeks is a context for the viewer of what it means, and what it is like, to be a fan of The X-files. It took many years to describe my actions of picking up a video camera and not only pointing it at those around me, but subsequently myself. In those years I not only was able to increase upon the final product, what the film Fan Geeks is today, but my understanding of what Fan Geeks means for the study of fandom.

Fan Geeks is as Ang described a “micro-situation” or just one small portion of the enormous culture that is fandom, not just that of The X-files, but fans as far back as history can record. The film itself is a series of micro-situations and a micro-situation in itself. I have chosen the whole of these situations to create a larger, yet still microscopic, narrative. Others could choose to use film and find a series of similar behaviors or as a means to collect data. Fan Geeks as a narrative is a decision to create an industrial text, heavily influenced by the popular, but still as a whole it is being converted from contexts of study, to a narrative that is consumable. Fan Geeks is a product, one that an outsider to the discussion of fan culture could pick up the dialogue and join in.

This concept of accessibility, that a portion of this project could be read by anyone, is a challenge I pose to all academics. Anyone from any background could watch Fan Geeks and add to the discussion of fan culture and, hopefully television culture itself. A driving force behind this work is the importance of television. No matter how you feel about television, there is no denying it is a huge part of society. Perhaps Ang said it best, “Given

television's conspicuousness in contemporary culture and society, this poverty of discourse, this lack of understanding is rather embarrassing indeed, if not downright scandalous" (367).

In continuing with the discourse, and in an attempt to help others find their way, I would like to offer a visual compilation, a working model for understanding context. Figure 1 is a visual interpretation of Fiske's extrapolation of context, including industrial and popular text, and also the addition of Ang's micro-situations.

Figure 1 is a two dimensional representation to simplify the concepts, but the sections of industrial and popular text are infinite. Fans are represented as moving throughout the texts, which is represented by time. Time is a linear concept, it is always moving forward, but it is moving freely between and throughout the popular and industrial text. Popular text is ephemeral, so it may seem wrong to place it on the static figure, but time moving through the text is in constant motion - this figure is a way to represent the passing of fans through the texts. Also we have the popular text as being grounded and building from the industrial text. Time can move freely throughout the texts and may backtrack, or what we show looping back, to a previous text which represents fans rereading the industrial text as well as making connection between past viewing or past popular text. The larger picture of this movement is then context.

The concepts again are infinite and what is represented is just a fraction of the play of culture. Within this small section we have the boxes representing micro-situations, the infinitesimal moments that the researcher is able to extrapolate and study. The minuscule nature of the work should

not be daunting, but representational of the grand nature of studying popular culture. The work done with micro-situations adds to a louder, greater voice that speaks all around us.

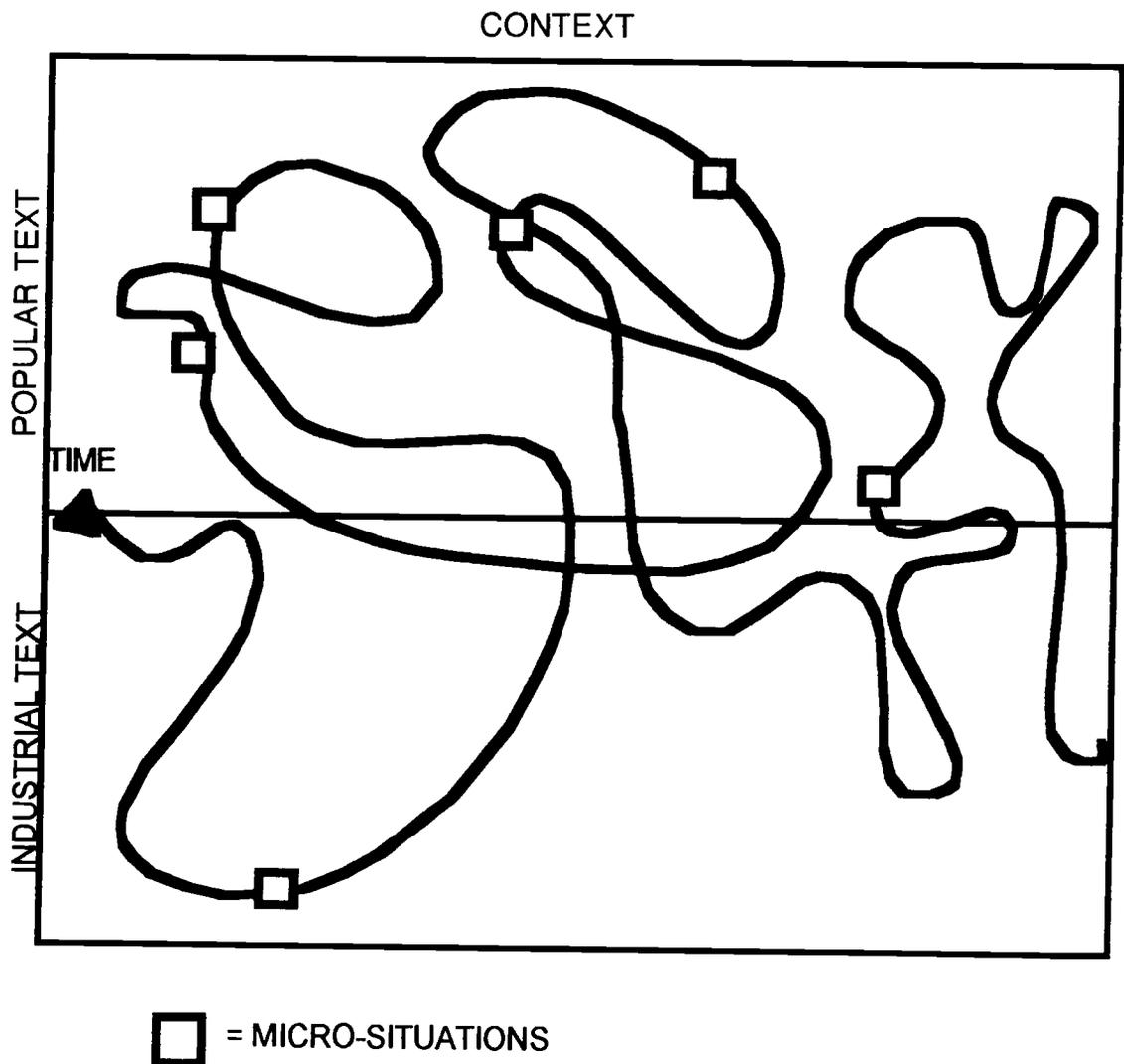


Figure 1. Cultural context in visual form.

For future study, I have several suggestions. The only regret I have is that I did not make the decision to film earlier. While my study of fans and being a fan started early in my studies, the choice to pick up the camera was late coming. With the cultural context methodology, the goal is to capture as many micro-situations as possible. With more data, perhaps over the life of a show or a significant period of time, there will be more conclusive results. By results, as suggested by Ang, quality of television could be effected and also a greater understanding of audience for industry as well as academics.

Starting early with a fan community would in part be subjective to a researcher's fan access. I challenge future researchers to choose a show that they enjoy watching, understand the appeal, but are not as engaged in the fan community as I was with The X-files. Of course, if I was not as involved the project would be significantly altered. So the idea is to be involved with fandom or a part of a television audience, then choose a different show based on that experience. Pick a newer show that you feel might create a similar experience, or one worth study based on your personal experience. This will open up a world of new experiences to work from.

Your personal experience would not be limited to television. Any media can work and any type of audience. The idea is to open up researchers to the world of cultural context. A new release movie or the fans of an old movie, a comic book, a rock band - documenting the culture and community that is created around these is eligible for study.

One last suggestion is to be your own crew. The frustrations that I had as director, camera operator, editor is overwhelming, but the experience is worth the pain. When filming Fan Geeks there was a joke "Clair you need better minions!" because I would be doing so many things at the same time and did not always have an extra set of hands to help me. Having a crew is a goal I have now, yet as a researcher and as a first time film maker, the experience is invaluable. Not only can I say I can film, edit, and produce a documentary film, I will know what it is like for those around me during future projects.

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