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FAN CULTURES BETWEEN COMMUNITY AND HIERARCHY

In the last chapter, I suggested that we can use Adorno's work to think through the fan-consumer contradiction rather than trying to resolve it. In this chapter, I want to examine another theorist whose work has played an important part in fan studies: the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. His work on processes of cultural distinction offers a way for theorists to analyse how fan 'status' is built up. It allows us to consider any given fan culture not simply as a community but *also as a social hierarchy* where fans share a common interest while also competing over fan knowledge, access to the object of fandom, and status.¹ It is this emphasis on competitiveness which provides my title and the image of fans as 'players'. According to Bourdieu and his followers, fans play in the sense that they tacitly recognise the 'rules' of their fan culture, attempting to build up different types of fan skill, knowledge and distinction.

In the first section of this chapter, then, I will introduce and explore Bourdieu's work, examining what it can offer fan studies and also pointing out some of the limits to this approach. In particular, I will illustrate how Bourdieu's work—unlike that of Adorno in chapter 1 and Winnicott in chapter 4—closes down the contradictions of fandom, ultimately producing a hyperrational view of the 'calculating' fan. I will also explore how Bourdieu's work is unable to account adequately for the moral dualisms and the broadly 'moral' struggles over cultural value and legitimation that fandom is always caught up in.

I will then address the work of theorists who have adapted and criticised Bourdieu's work on distinction, applying it to specific fan cultures and fans of popular culture more generally. Finally, in the third section of this chapter I will present a case study focusing on fans of what has been termed 'psychotronic cinema'.

A powerful metaphor: the work of Pierre Bourdieu

The central concept employed in Bourdieu's model is a metaphor. Just as the behaviour of an enterprise is determined by the nature and location of its physical plant or 'capital', that of the individual is determined by the nature and location of their 'human capital'... perhaps economic...or perhaps 'social capital' (i.e. a personal network of friends and acquaintances), or 'cultural capital' (the general information about cultural artefacts absorbed as a by-product of daily life), or else 'educational capital' acquired through schooling.

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(Gershuny 2000:84–5)

As Gershuny usefully notes, Bourdieu's work is rooted in a central and guiding metaphor. Bourdieu supposes that cultural life can be modelled by taking an 'economistic' approach. This treats all social relations as if they are economic; people invest in knowledge (reading the right books), in social contacts (networking and knowing the right people) and in culture (having knowledge of appropriate cultural works and how to respond to them). Bourdieu argues that different types of capital as well as 'economic capital' (money) are unequally distributed across society. The amounts of different capitals that we possess (economic; social; cultural) are not random, but relate to our place in a class system. The dominant bourgeoisie possess relatively high levels of economic capital, social capital (the old boys' network) and cultural capital (having been well-educated at the right schools). The dominated bourgeoisie, on the other hand, have high cultural capital, but possess lower economic capital than the 'dominating' fraction. The dominated bourgeois can be thought of as bohemians, scholars and intellectuals; they value 'culture' and 'learning' over financial rewards, and seek to legitimate their class position and tastes by viewing the dominant bourgeoisie as vulgar and as lacking in cultural discrimination. Bourdieu also identifies other class fractions: the petit bourgeois (who possess mid-range levels of forms of capital) and the working class (who possess low levels of forms of capital).

Bourdieu (1984, 1990) goes on to offer a monumental cataloguing of social practices and activities, including cultural consumption. His work attempts to account for the reproduction of cultural identities by examining the objective social and economic conditions in which people find themselves (see Robbins 1991:131). But while the bourgeoisie is supposedly split in two (into 'dominant' and 'dominated' fractions), Bourdieu's analysis assumes a more homogeneous petit bourgeoisie and a more homogeneous again proletariat or working class.

Bourdieu's work presents an interesting challenge to fan studies since it suggests that fandoms may be thoroughly reducible to the practices of specific class fractions. Bourdieu discusses 'fandom' in four different ways, in line with his four major categorisations of cultural groups:

The dominating fraction of the bourgeoisie can depend on economic and (to a lesser extent) cultural capital in its pursuits: it is thereby typified in the ostentatious display of 'expensive' works of art. According to Bourdieu's argument, this class fraction would never correspond to, or participate in, the cultural activities of fan culture. Strictly speaking, Bourdieu does not attach the label of 'fandom' to the dominant bourgeoisie; there is something always culturally 'improper' about the notion of fandom in his account.

The dominated fraction of the bourgeoisie relies on (and seeks to increase) its highly developed cultural capital by 'liking the same things differently, liking different things, less obviously marked out for admiration':

Intellectuals and artists have a special predilection for the most risky but also

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most profitable strategies of distinction, those which consist in asserting the power, *which is peculiarly theirs*, to constitute insignificant objects as works of art or, more subtly, to give aesthetic redefinition to objects already defined as art, but in another mode, by other classes or class fractions (e.g. kitsch).

(Bourdieu 1984:282, 283)

The petit bourgeois lifestyle, however, is caught up in the resolute impropriety of fandom that is identified by Bourdieu. The *petit bourgeois* is able to recognise 'legitimate culture', but does not possess sufficient knowledge of it. This gap between recognition and knowledge results in the *petit bourgeoisie's* perversely misplaced fan knowledge which cannot bring the rewards or the legitimacy of official cultural capital:

[T]he *petit bourgeois*, always liable to know too much or too little,... is condemned endlessly to amass disparate, often devalued information ... The stockpiling avidity which is the root of every great accumulation of culture is too visible in the perversion of the jazz-freak or cinema-buff who carries to the extreme, i.e. to absurdity, what is implied in the legitimate definition of cultivated contemplation, and replaces consumption of the work with the consumption of the circumstantial information.

(1984:329, 330)

Working class tastes actually merit the debasement of the term 'fan' itself in Bourdieu's account (1984:386). Bourdieu views this fandom as an 'illusory compensation' for the working class fan's lack of social and cultural power.

The flaw with this argument is that it simply *assumes* the legitimacy of a fixed and monolithically legitimate 'cultural capital', rather than considering how 'cultural capital' may, at any single moment of culture-in-process, remain variously fragmented, internally inconsistent and struggled over. Does the 'cultural capital' of an IT specialist have the same 'value' as the 'cultural capital' of a scholar of Latin? How can a single thing called 'cultural capital' exist even in a 'single' culture? Our objects of cultural knowledge and education are various and are themselves caught up in networks of value which may vary between communities and subcultures as well as across class distinctions. Such a fixed model also neglects the possibility that struggles over the legitimacy of 'cultural capital' may occur both between and *within* class fractions, communities and subcultures.

Bourdieu's model also implies that moral evaluations stem from struggles over class difference and distinction. But as Honneth has put it: '[t]he central economic concepts upon which... [Bourdieu's] cultural analysis is based, compel him to subsume all forms of social conflicts under the types of struggles which occur over social distribution—although the struggle for the social recognition of moral models clearly obeys a different logic' (cited in Robbins 2000:126). Given that fandom is so often placed within a moral dualism, then it is quite likely that any moral devaluation of 'the fan' (as a deficient subject) cannot entirely be explained through Bourdieu's model. (And this is especially so given that Bourdieu himself appears to adopt a moral position in relation to 'the fan', albeit under the guise of 'neutrally' explicating different class fractions.)

Applying Bourdieu's model means treating popular culture and media fandom as a

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'scandalous category' which opposes notions of 'proper' cultural capital and 'proper' aesthetic distance or appreciation (see Jenkins 1992a: 16–19). In Henry Jenkins's account, this also means reading an attributed lack of morality off from 'fans' transgression of bourgeois taste and disruption of dominant cultural hierarchies' (1992a:17). Jenkins notes that 'aesthetic distaste brings with it the full force of moral excommunication and social rejection' (1992a:16). This cultural linkage of (alleged) immorality and 'bad' or improper tastes is undeniable, but I would argue that the moral dualism at play here cannot simply be subordinated to Bourdieu's master-narrative. Of course, moral dualisms and distinctions may well operate to naturalise and shore up dominant (bourgeois) aesthetics. But having said that, the legitimacy of 'bourgeois' aesthetic values can equally well be challenged if these values are recontextualised within negatively evaluative moral dualisms (i.e. where detached appreciation is deemed 'bad'). This altered moral dualism may also, as Jenkins notes, be adopted by 'highly educated, articulate people who come from the middle classes, people who "should know better"' (1992a:18). But despite this fact, Jenkins closes down his interpretation in line with Bourdieu's ideas. By consistently reading morality off from aesthetics (i.e. cultural and educational capital) he privileges cultural capital, suggesting that it is automatically a source of cultural legitimation. This type of account cannot explain, for example, why fan-scholars using the language of media studies and writing about a television programme such as *Doctor Who* are marginalised and stereotyped within their own fan culture *as well as being marginalised and stereotyped outside of it and in academia*. These fan-scholars possess the trappings of 'proper' cultural capital/educational capital and certainly do not present themselves as 'immersed' or non-analytical readers. They may also belong to the dominant as well as dominated bourgeoisie. And yet their 'detached' work is seemingly valued neither by academics (anxious to differentiate themselves from this all-too-close fan shadow) nor by fellow fans (keen to preserve a separation from overly-rationalising and jargon-heavy academics). Although we could argue that these fans are marginalised within fan culture because they are too close to displaying 'proper' cultural capital, this does not adequately account for their simultaneous 'othering' within academia where we might expect their work to be welcomed. In the absence of differences in cultural capital and aesthetics, fan-scholars remain marginalised here by the need to preserve a moral dualism between 'good' accredited and 'duly trained' professional academics and 'bad' amateur fan-scholars practising 'wild' analysis outside the academy. This indicates that rather than reading morality off from cultural capital, we should, at the very least, view the two as being non-coincident, although I would argue that *moral dualisms logically precede the valorisation of cultural capital rather than vice versa as Bourdieu (1984) and Jenkins (1992a) seem to imply*. The assumption that cultural capital is unquestionably 'good', and that more is unquestionably socially and culturally better is perhaps itself the product of a grounding and preceding moral dualism which belongs to academic imagined subjectivity.

Bourdieu's account therefore seems to run aground when confronted by the powerful moral dualisms which structure imagined fan and academic subjectivities. Because his work tacitly assumes that the 'cultural capital' embedded in a sociological and self-

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reflexive worldview automatically carries cultural legitimacy and authority, Bourdieu's theory has little purchase on the possibility that 'cultural capital' (whether this is in its incorporated, objectivated or institutionalised states: see Robbins 2000:34) can fragment along subcultural (Thornton 1995) lines as well as being subjected to recontextualising moral dualisms.

In the rather mechanical world of Bourdieu's *Distinction* there can only be as many different types of fan culture and fan activity as there are class fractions or relevant distributions of forms of capital. Either that, or any one fan culture can only represent in microcosm the same four class-based spaces allotted by Bourdieu's thought. Although Henry Jenkins uses the work of both Bourdieu and de Certeau in *Textual Poachers* (see, for example 1992a:61–2), he does not consider de Certeau's own criticism of Bourdieu's master-narrative of distinction: 'Bourdieu...gives the impression of *departing* (of going towards these tactics [the multiplicity of cultural distinctions]), but only in order to *return* (to confirm the professional rationality)' (de Certeau 1988:60).

Post-Bourdieu: fandom and the diversifications of cultural capital

Bourdieu's 'capital' metaphor has been developed by revisionists of his work. Later theorists have coined the term 'popular cultural capital' (Fiske 1992), and minted the concept of 'subcultural capital' (Thornton 1995). In this section I want to explore the critiques of Bourdieu which these theorists have offered.

John Fiske's (1992) piece 'The Cultural Economy of Fandom' presents two critiques of Bourdieu:

- Bourdieu emphasises 'economics and class as the major (if not the only) dimensions of social discrimination' (1992:32) thereby neglecting gender, race and age in Fiske's view (although Bourdieu has consistently related social discrimination to age through his concern with 'inter-generational' differences and struggles; cf. Garnham with Williams in Garnham 1990:87n2).
- Bourdieu fails 'to accord the culture of the subordinate the same sophisticated analysis as that of the dominant' (Fiske 1992:32).

Fiske then partially misrepresents the concept of habitus, suggesting that 'losing capital of either sort [cultural/economic] changes...one's habitus' (1992:33). This seems mistaken, since one's habitus is not merely a product of types of capital, it is a product of early (i.e. childhood) socialisation (see R.Jenkins 1992:76; Garnham with Williams in Garnham 1990:75). Fiske also develops the concept of habitus, but again with limited reference to Bourdieu's use of the term. Fiske suggests that fans occupy a 'popular habitus' as opposed to a 'dominant habitus' (1992:43). The latter leaves the logic of Bourdieu's work in place, but the former creates a new type of unclassed habitus seemingly linked only to the consumption of popular culture. Fiske contrasts the 'dominant' to the 'popular' habitus in a number of ways. First, the popular habitus promotes participation in the text, whilst the dominant habitus promotes discrimination between texts. Second, the popular habitus allows fans to 'see through' the text to

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production information, while the dominant habitus 'uses information about the artist to enhance or enrich the appreciation of the work' (1992:43). Neither of these two distinctions is convincing. Selecting *Rocky Horror* fans as an example of participation smacks of selecting an example to bolster one's argument, while the contrasted discrimination of the 'buff ignores the fact that *Rocky Horror* fans may well discriminate between different stagings of the show, evaluating them in relation to an ideal or in relation to the film version. Fiske's second contrast seems similarly weak: 'enriching appreciation' (dominant) and 'seeing through the text' (popular) sound suspiciously like rephrasings of the same thing, since both are concerned with the use of extra-textual information which acts as a supplement to the consumption of the text, and both provide a sense of 'expert' knowledge and hence greater pleasure for the fan or the 'appreciator'. Sconce (1995:389) appears to accept Fiske's separation here, but then demonstrates that Fiske's 'opposed' notions are brought together by 'paracinema' fans, a move which still suggests that Fiske's initial binary opposition is flawed. Furthermore, the binary opposition of the 'popular' versus the 'dominant' habitus seems to resemble a moral dualism desperately seeking some kind of stable theoretical distinction between 'good' popular culture and 'bad' high culture, but unable to alight on anything substantial enough to divert attention from its incessant splitting of terms, cultures and experiences.

Remaining focused on Fiske's separation of 'popular' and 'official' culture, this distinction is explained by the fact that 'popular cultural capital, unlike official cultural capital, is not typically convertible into economic capital, though... there are exceptions' (1992:34). The exception to the rule proves to be fan-artists, able to sell their work at conventions, but just as Fiske announces this exception he seems to introduce a further distinction between 'more mundane popular cultural capital, which is never convertible to economic capital, and fan cultural capital which, under certain conditions, may be' (1992:40). Just as popular cultural capital becomes tainted by the possibility of being exchanged for hard cash, Fiske temporarily carves it away from 'fan cultural capital' (the terms are otherwise used interchangeably throughout Fiske's essay). This has the curious effect of maintaining popular cultural capital's anti-economic purity, something which Fiske returns to twice in the course of four pages: 'the fan's objects of fandom are, by definition, excluded from official cultural capital and its convertibility, via education and career opportunity, into economic capital' (1992:42), and again: 'It is the exclusion of popular or fan cultural capital from the educational system that... disconnects it from the economic' (1992:45). But what of media and cultural studies? Do these new disciplines not allow one route through which fan cultural capital can—admittedly when allied with 'official' cultural capital—make it into the realm of employment? Other possibilities for the exchange of fan cultural capital into economic capital include writing for niche or genre magazines such as *Cult Times* (discussed in the previous chapter), as well as the examples of 'music and style journalists and various record industry professionals' given by Sarah Thornton (1995:12). Fiske's cleavage of popular cultural capital and economic capital also appears to defend some imagined 'pure' use-value against the predatory iniquities of 'exchange-value'. This particular splitting falsifies the 'dialectic of value' that I have identified as centrally important because it allows us to think about fans' 'sense of possession' (Fiske 1992:40) of their

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object of fandom as feeding back into a redefined exchange-value. (While also reminding us that we cannot split apart use-value and exchange-value, or 'the fan' and 'the consumer', but should view these terms and identities as always being interlinked in contradiction.)

Sarah Thornton (1995) offers a further supplement to Bourdieu's work. Thornton suggests a further series of problems which need to be addressed in any media or fan studies application of Bourdieu:

- Bourdieu does not relate the circulation of cultural capital to the media (television/radio), meaning that the media are seemingly neutral or inconsequential within the processes of accumulating different types of capital.
- Bourdieu's view of cultural capital focuses on subcategories of capital which 'are all at play within Bourdieu's own field, within his social world of players with high volumes of institutionalised cultural capital. However, it is possible to observe subspecies of capital operating within other less privileged domains' (Thornton 1995:11).

Addressing these blind spots, Thornton conceives of the 'hipness' of clubbers as a form of 'subcultural capital' which 'confers status on its owner in the eyes of the relevant beholder.... Just as books and paintings display cultural capital in the family home, so subcultural capital is objectified in the form of fashionable haircuts and well-assembled record collections' (*ibid.*) Thornton suggests that subcultural capital does not correlate with class distinctions in any one-to-one way, although she is careful to note that this does not mean that class becomes wholly irrelevant.

Thornton's account also focuses on how what I have termed 'moral dualisms' can be constructed and sustained through imagined subjectivities. She describes how previous academic studies of youth have 'relied on binary oppositions typically generated by us-versus-them social maps... Inconsistent fantasies of the mainstream are rampant in subcultural studies' (1995:92-3). Thornton attempts to set aside these us-versus-them otherings in order to investigate how the clubbers' subculture constructs its own moral dualism between a 'good' and authentic in-group and a 'bad' and deficient out-group which lacks taste and knowledge in relation to dance music. Thornton recounts how clubbers disparaged 'raving Sharons and Techno Tracys' as representatives of 'handbag house' (1995:100). This feminised and classed 'mainstream' works to support the value system of the clubbers: 'whether these "mainstreams" reflect empirical social groups or not, they exhibit the burlesque exaggerations of an imagined *other*' (1995:101).

Thornton therefore *locates moral dualisms and processes of othering both in previous academic studies and in the subculture under analysis* (see 1995:115), but she has relatively little to say about the moral dualisms which allow value to accrue to her own work. Thornton meticulously relates subcultural capital to media circulation, arguing that the mass media circulation of subcultural information causes this subcultural capital to plummet in value (being viewed as a form of 'selling out'), while moral panics cause subcultural capital to rise since the youth culture concerned can then construct itself in celebratory and rebellious opposition to the 'cultural status quo' (1995:129). But academic publishing is not discussed or considered (and would this count as mass media, niche media or micro media?). Academic studies of youth and fan culture may well be of

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interest to the cultures analysed, but Thornton devotes all of half a page to this possibility (1995:162). How can we explain this notable absence given Thornton's eagerness to question and analyse cultural systems of value where 'nothing classifies somebody more than the way he or she classifies'? (Bourdieu 1990:132 cited in Thornton 1995:101).

I would argue that Thornton's critiques of previous work in the field of subcultural studies fit into the practices of academic imagined subjectivity. In order to demonstrate the 'originality' of one's work it is necessary to clear a space in the field of academic argument. This is therefore an activity which strives to construct cultural capital (as symbolic capital) in one's academic field, while preserving a sense of argument via disinterested and logical reason. (And this clearly applies as much to my own work here as to Thornton's.) Playing by the rules of the academic game also requires, then, a sense of the lofty and disinterested imagined subjectivity of the academic who is not placed within his or her own object of study, and who is not implicated in the conclusions that can be drawn about this 'other'. By cutting academic publishing off from discussions of industry, authenticity and subcultural value, Thornton is able to maintain a 'detached' and implicitly 'universal' academic position. The value system of the cultural studies academic is tacitly assumed but never subjected to the same analysis as that of her respondents. This doesn't simply leave Thornton as *participant-observer* out of the equation, as Gilbert and Pearson (1999:18–19) have noted, it also leaves Thornton's specific brand of 'academic capital'—and the distinctions which may have accrued to her by way of coining 'subcultural capital'—in the privileged position of remaining unspoken. In part, then, Thornton seems to over-correct Bourdieu's focus on the forms of capital which circulate in his own academic field, since her focus on 'subspecies of capital operating within other less privileged domains' neglects her own investments and capitals as a Lecturer in Media Studies at Sussex University (at the time of the publication of *Club Cultures*). In short, Thornton rails against 'us' versus 'them' accounts, but then reconstructs precisely such a moral dualism by writing out her own (academic) writing and its position within a series of overlapping cultural fields and struggles over cultural value. While 'they' are caught up in subcultural classifications, 'we' seem able to document such struggles serenely and without being implicated in them.

And yet the 'universal' academics of cultural studies have shown a remarkable propensity to return time and time again to the study of subcultures, fan cultures and youth cultures. I wonder if this is because cultural studies, with its own authenticities and its own well-practised sense of existing as a 'good' moral campaign or inter-discipline rather than as a 'bad' institution or industry, is caught up in some of the same us-versus-them distinctions which it keeps rediscovering in 'subcultural capital'. Indeed, it is tempting to suggest that the predilection for studies of subculture and fan culture has emerged through a partial (but projected outward) recognition of academia as a subculture and 'critical industry'. Perhaps when academics describe subcultural capital and its authenticities (and the subcultural dislike of 'the mainstream') they are, in part, describing a cloaked version of themselves: 'The traditional dilemma of...an account of the culturally different is contained in the postulate of authenticity which, explicitly or implicitly, underlies it. In this context the word "postulate" should be taken quite

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literally: *a moral demand is made of the group being investigated, that it keep as far away as possible from worldly influence*' (Lindner 2001:81, my italics). Locating games of authenticity and their moral dualisms 'out there' is one way of safely leaving these issues silent in relation to the self.

Bourdieu has used the term *illusio* to describe the loss of self-awareness which is necessary to keep players in a 'game' of cultural distinction: '*Illusio* in the sense of investment in the game doesn't become illusion...until the game is apprehended from the outside, from the point of view of the impartial spectator, who invests nothing in the game or its stakes' (Bourdieu cited in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1999:90). This is a problematic statement, since it assumes that the rules of a game can only be analysed when we are fully 'outside' the game in question. It therefore relies on an inside-outside binary opposition which ignores the possibility that cultural distinctions can be accrued by analysing one's own game while still remaining *sufficiently* within its terms (i.e. Bourdieu writes his own position out of his argument here!). However, Thornton's veiling of her own investments in analysing club cultures does seem to correspond to the notion of *illusio* in its academic form. Inside the game of subcultural analysis, and accepting its rules, Thornton unselfconsciously reproduces those distinctions which accrue to the 'invisible' and 'detached' academic.

Having considered two post-Bourdieu accounts of fandom, I have shown how Fiske's work moves away from the subtleties of Bourdieu's formulations and towards an insistent use of binary oppositions, despite aiming to restore the complexity of popular cultural capital to Bourdieu's insistent 'legitimate' (and legitimating) account of cultural capital. And I have shown how Thornton's later account reworks Bourdieu more effectively, but remains caught within a logic of academic distinction. However, both Fiske's and Thornton's accounts preserve and re-emphasise a central logic of Bourdieu's argument: the economic metaphor assumes a type of calculating subject, intent on maximising the return of their investment in forms of capital. For example, Fiske observes that within 'such a local or fan community the pay-offs from the investment are continuous and immediate' (1992:39). Investment in fan knowledge, and hence fan cultural capital, is represented as a compensation for low achievement at school (1992:33) or as a way for young fans to challenge their elders and betters. And Thornton notes that 'subcultural capital...has long defined itself as extra-curricular, as knowledge one cannot learn in school' (1995:13). This type of knowledge brings with it the rewards of subcultural 'authenticity' (1995:26; see also Lindner 2001:81).

In each case, then, Fiske and Thornton reconstruct a calculative rationale for the investment in fan or subcultural capital. Proto-fans, fans in the making, are therefore represented as committed utilitarians, assessing the options that are open to them before deciding where to put their time and energy in order to reap certain rewards, and occasionally getting it wrong by 'trying too hard' (Thornton 1995:12). Now, while this account may well accurately represent sections of fandom, it seems unlikely that such a calculative model will account for all fans, especially given the 'becoming-a-fan' stories which I considered in the Introduction. If many fans emphasise being transformed by their emerging fandom, suddenly being swept away by a need to know more, then it is difficult to see how these 'self-absent' and self-transformative accounts can be squared

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with Bourdieu's model. It may well be the case that Bourdieu's model functions more adequately for fans who are already securely placed within the institutions, organisations and social networks of fan cultures (being inside the 'rules of the game' of fan distinction) while nevertheless failing to capture the processes at work in fans' initial 'conversions' to their fandoms.

Assuming that Bourdieu's model accounts for organised fandom, we would also expect to uncover some discussion, however minor or brief, which applies (or reworks) the concept of 'social capital' in relation to fan cultures. However, despite the rewritings of Bourdieu offered by Fiske and Thornton, both of these revisionists focus on the concept of 'cultural capital'. Why should this concept have proved so alluring to academic critics, whilst social capital languishes in neglect? There are, I think, two plausible explanations. One is that the concept of cultural capital is exaggerated in Bourdieu's work, with social capital being subordinated to this. These tendencies are then reproduced in later work: 'Erickson (1996), accusing Bourdieu of neglecting social capital...[argues] that social networks play a much stronger role in the maintenance of social position than does the possession of cultural capital' (Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999:268).

A further possibility is that cultural capital has proved more appealing to academic followers of Bourdieu because of its resonance with the concerns of *cultural* critics. In other words, it is possible that a relative homology occurs between the substance of Bourdieu's account and the inculcated predispositions (dare I say the *habitus*?) of academic critics, who tend to value the possession of culture as a primary source of distinction, since their professional and institutional identities are, to a large extent, premised on this type of distinction. As Carol A. Stabile has usefully commented:

[A]s critics we are implicated in a logic of distinction that...is at once ideological (a tacit acceptance of the rules of the game) and economic (if we do not 'contribute' to our fields, that is, play by the rules, we are less likely to get jobs...thereby risking exclusion from the game itself).

(Stabile 1995:417)

The curious neglect of social capital among Bourdieu's revisionists reinforces Stabile's cautionary note to the effect that '[i]n order to understand the homologies between and among fields, then, media analysts must understand the logic of the field occupied by their object of study as well as the logic structuring their own field' (1995:418).

Against Fiske and Thornton, I would suggest that the social hierarchy of fandom needs to be more explicitly analysed. John Tulloch has referred to 'executive fans', by which he means 'fans who are executives of the fan club and its magazines' (Tulloch in Tulloch and Jenkins 1995:149). And Andrea MacDonald has suggested that:

Fandom, just like the legitimate culture Bourdieu (1984) describes, is hierarchized.... Fans do not explicitly recognise hierarchies [within their fan cultures; this is not always the case], and academics also hesitate to recognise hierarchies in fandom. Jenkins (1991, 1992), although never specifically denying the existence of hierarchies in fandom, does not address them, and implies that they do not exist by focusing on the grass roots production of fan

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culture.

(MacDonald 1998:136)

Neither Tulloch nor MacDonald, then, go on to relate their discussions of fan hierarchy to Bourdieu's concept of social capital, although MacDonald nevertheless develops a sensitive and detailed account of the multiple dimensions of fan hierarchies, which she identifies as hierarchy of knowledge, hierarchy of fandom level, hierarchy of access, hierarchy of leaders and hierarchy of venue (see MacDonald 1998:137–8). Following Fiske's coinage of 'fan cultural capital' (the knowledge that a fan has about their object of fandom), I would suggest that 'fan social capital' (the network of fan friends and acquaintances that a fan possesses, *as well as* their access to media producers and professional personnel linked with the object of fandom) must also be closely investigated in future analyses. Of course, fan social capital cannot be entirely divorced from fan cultural capital, since it is likely that fans with a very high fan cultural capital will become the 'executive fans', and will therefore possess high level of fan social capital. But while high fan social capital is likely to be predicted by high fan cultural capital, this relationship need not follow. Extremely knowledgeable fans may also 'lurk' or refuse to participate in organised fandom. One highly unlikely combination of these forms of capital would, however, be high fan social capital and relatively low fan cultural capital. It is difficult to imagine how this fan would move through fan circles without betraying their lack of knowledge, and hence their lack of prestige within the fandom.²

This raises a further possible absence: 'fan symbolic capital'. Bourdieu uses 'symbolic capital' to refer to 'capital with a cognitive foundation, which rests upon knowledge and recognition' (cited in Earle 1999:183). It is not at all clear that 'symbolic capital' is actually a type of capital, since elsewhere Bourdieu has written that symbolic capital is 'commonly called prestige, reputation, fame, etc., which is the form assumed by these different kinds of capital [economic, cultural and social capitals] when they are perceived and recognised as legitimate' (Bourdieu 1991:230). In its apparently variant forms, then, symbolic capital is both a form of recognition (fame, accumulated prestige) and the specific 'legitimation' of other conjunctions of capitals which are themselves 'known and recognised as self-evident' (*ibid.*: 238). A possible instance of 'fan symbolic capital' would be Andrea MacDonald's example of those fans who are nominated as spokespeople for their fandom:

[O]utside to fan discourse (such as journalists and academics) will usually be directed either by fans or by production people to fans who have achieved a certain level of recognition or authority.... Only authorities are allowed to speak uncontested to outsiders such as journalists.

(MacDonald 1998:138–9)

Having considered some of the reworkings of Bourdieu, I have suggested in this section that cultural capital has been overly emphasised in later accounts, while other types of capital (social and symbolic) have been underplayed in studies of fan culture. I have also suggested that Bourdieu's work cannot account for non-calculative moments of fan subjectivity such as the fan's initial entry into their fan culture. I will close this chapter by

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examining a particular fan culture—that surrounding psychotronic cinema—and the issues of fan distinction which it gives rise to.

A psychotronic case study

The pages of *Psychotronic Video* (hereafter *PV*) focus on a wide range of films; exploitation, cult film, the *giallo*, mondo, horror, blaxploitation, science fiction, porn, trash, as well as including music reviews. In many ways the readers and writers of *PV* appear to form a textbook example of the processes of cultural distinction analysed by Bourdieu. Here are film fans who contest ‘the notion of “good taste”, which functions as a filter to block out whole entire areas of experience judged—and damned—as unworthy of investigation. The concepts of “good taste” are intricately woven into society’s control process and class structure’ (Vale and Juno 1986:4).³

Vale and Juno’s introductory 1986 statement has rebounded through academic studies of psychotronic cinema. The privileging of such a statement is easy enough to explain. Academic preoccupations with the politics of taste are mirrored in this section of critical popular culture, allowing academic commentary the rare luxury of citing a highly articulate and politicised statement which makes its own arguments for it. However, while proving all too tempting to academics (this account included), Vale and Juno’s statement then presents something of a problem for academic studies of paracinematic fan culture; namely, how can academic work go on to legitimate itself by presenting a meta-account which develops out of ‘psychotronic’ politics? Unless academic work is content simply to announce the discovery of a ‘good’ and critical area of fan culture (Lindner’s ‘moral demand’ all over again), academia must continue to mark out and legitimate its own strategies of distinction. Admittedly, the first strategy is pursued by McLaughlin (1996):

[F]or all of its vigorous bad taste and offensive material, *PV* treats these films in a serious and scholarly way. Its audience is clearly the collector—reviews give straightforward plot summaries, sometimes of amazingly perverse stories, that provide a prospective collector with a good clue about whether the film would interest him.

(McLaughlin 1996:71)

McLaughlin’s account strikes a tone of bemused tolerance: never mind the bad taste, feel the scholarship. By seeking to value *PV* solely for its ‘serious and scholarly’ fan knowledge, he marginalises the issue of ‘amazingly perverse’ taste as if it were faintly embarrassing, or worse, as if it might taint or counteract his own political and moral claim for *PV*’s status as an example of ‘good’ vernacular theory. Given that it could be argued that ‘psychotronic criticism’ runs ‘counter to dominant streams of political correctness in the academy’ (Chibnall 1997:85), McLaughlin’s apparent unease is unsurprising. At the very least, his reading strategy illustrates the interaction of different taste cultures, with the ‘good’ liberal academic seeking to find value in the ‘bad taste’ of

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a subculture which is otherwise seemingly alien to him, and therefore separating out what can be tolerated and counted as a source of value within his own academic culture.

Other critics have not split off 'good' knowledge from 'bad' bad taste. Using Bourdieu's work, Sconce relates his account of the distinctions of trash cinema to the field of academic distinction. Following Fiske and Bourdieu, Sconce considers how alternative forms of cultural capital are likely to appeal to those who either lack official cultural capital, or those who have yet to convert high levels of cultural and educational capital into economic capital: 'fans, as exiles from the legitimising functions of the academy, and many graduate students, as the most disempowered faction within the academy itself, both look to trash culture as a source of "refuge and revenge"' (Sconce 1995:379). This situation could, perhaps, also be linked to Bourdieu's argument that it is (only) the dominated bourgeoisie who look to maximise a return on their cultural capital by making 'risky' investments in new forms of cultural distinction and hence in new fields of cultural value ('trash cinema' in this case). Bourdieu notes that such risky investments bring the greatest rewards, and indeed the earliest explorers of 'psychotronic cinema' seem to have accrued considerable cultural and symbolic capital: 'Michael Weldon, with...his excellent *Psychotronic* magazine, was a trailblazer to whom we are all indebted' (Ross 1993:xii).

Having usefully linked his field of study to the academic field which he occupies, Sconce then goes on to view *PV* as an example of 'paracinematic' distinction:

[P]aracinematic viewers...use [these films' textual] excess as a gateway to exploring profilmic and extratextual aspects of the filmic object itself.... Whereas aesthete interest in style and excess always returns the viewer to the frame, paracinematic attention to excess seeks to push the viewer beyond the formal boundaries of the text.

(Sconce 1995:387)

Sconce argues that it is through a focus on the 'non-diegetic' aspects of 'psychotronic' films—'unconvincing special effects, blatant anachronisms or histrionic acting' (*ibid.*)—that their fans are able to revalue 'bad film'. He consistently contrasts paracinema fans to cinematic aesthetes, suggesting that paracinema fans are dedicated in their opposition to 'legitimate' cinematic tastes. Sconce also notes that this opposition cannot be thought of as static: 'the paracinematic sensibility has recently begun to infiltrate the avant-garde, the academy, and even the mass culture on which paracinema's ironic reading strategies originally preyed' (1995:373). It seems that the challenge of paracinematic taste has been so successful that it is now no longer clearly 'oppositional', while the previously 'legitimate' taste (while still culturally powerful) is certainly not monolithically dominant, if indeed it ever was. This dynamic process formed the subject matter of one of publisher/editor Michael Weldon's *PV* intros:

Have you noticed how many more magazines are out there—all covering the same (new) releases? I saw a whole display of *Scream Queen* magazines in a store recently. Things have changed a lot, haven't they? Who could have guessed when this zine started that we'd see a major movie about ED WOOD

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JR? It's real good too!

(*PV* No. 19 1994:3)

Weldon's use of a single word in brackets here is interesting. His addition of '(new)' marks out one line of cultural distinction; as a 'good' object for academic valorisation, *PV* values psychotronic and trash film history (and for an academic version of this historical valorisation see Schaefer 1999). Film summaries are presented under headings such as '70s Adult', 'Sick 70s', '40s' and '60s NYC', as well as by country ('Australia/New Zealand'), actresses (e.g. 'Bonnet') (all in *PV* No. 19 1994:54–61) and directors (e.g. 'Franco' and 'Woodsploitation' for material relating to Ed Wood Jr. are given in *PV* No. 18 1994:57 and 60). A further category for reviews is 'More Sequels Nobody Wanted', which states *PV*'s anti-commercial ideologies very succinctly, even while the zine's commodity-completist/archivist tendencies are simultaneously evident.

Sconce points out the existence of rival 'trash' aesthetics. He compares *PV* to a competing fanzine-turned-magazine *Film Threat*: 'while *Psychotronic* concentrates on the sizable segment of this community interested in uncovering and collecting long lost titles from the history of exploitation, *Film Threat* looks to transgressive aesthetics/genres of the past as avant-garde inspiration for contemporary independent film-making' (Sconce 1995:375). This difference in emphasis resulted in *Film Threat* depicting a 'typical' reader of *PV* as 'passive, overweight and asexual, with a bad complexion' on one of its subscription forms (*ibid.*). Sconce curtly describes this as an effort 'at generating counter-distinction within the shared cultural project of attacking "high-brow" cinema' (*ibid.*), but promptly displaces this rift by focusing instead on the separation of paracinematic fans and 'the cineastes they construct as their nemesis' (1995:375). The latter separation would be predicted by Bourdieu's model (cleaving along a 'dominated' and 'dominating' axis of the dominant class fraction high in educational capital), but the former bid for 'counter-distinction' remains problematic. It is not clear in this case how the variant 'trash aesthetics' of *Film Threat* and *PV* can be related back to a class or generational differential or to a differential distribution in economic, cultural, social or educational capital. In short, rather like the example of *Doctor Who* fan-scholars that I gave earlier in the chapter, there is a problem here for any interpretation which seeks to ground 'moral dualisms' (the 'hip' us versus the 'geeky' them) either in class differences or in differences of generational trajectory. Sconce does not, in my opinion, sufficiently explore the contradiction that opens up in his account at this point. How can we then account for internal fan-cultural struggles over distinction which would not be predicted by Bourdieu?

Rogers Brubaker has observed that '[h]aving thoroughly "objectified the objectifiers", Bourdieu might now usefully "subjectify the objectifiers"' (1993:225). Although Brubaker is referring to sociologists and their moments of reflexivity and non-reflexivity, this could also be usefully applied to those subjects involved in the *Film Threat/PV* cultural distinction. How can we explain such fine-grained moral dualisms and constructions of an imagined other? Thornton considers an imagined other to be projected outside the subculture or fan community concerned, and I have followed this logic on a number of occasions so far. But here is an example of an imagined other being projected

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within a fan culture or subculture. 'Subjectifying' this distinction—which is in any case inevitable because we have no 'objective' class, cultural, gender or generational differences to hang on to—this resembles what Freud has termed the 'narcissism of minor differences' whereby in the case of 'two neighbouring towns each is the other's most jealous rival; every little canton looks down upon the others with contempt. Closely related races keep each other at arm's length,...the Englishman casts every kind of aspersion upon the Scot, the Spaniard despises the Portuguese' (Freud [1921] 1991:131). Or the 'underground-indie' trash cinema fan despises the 'archivist' trash cinema fan.

The 'narcissism of minor differences' indicates that moral dualisms can be constructed at two levels; both in terms of legitimating one's own cultural practices against other imagined subjectivities, and also in terms of legitimating one's own cultural practices against imagined others whose very cultural proximity also threatens the project of distinction. Cultural closeness and distance can, it seems, both produce mechanisms of cultural distinction. Bourdieu's model seems to be premised only on more-or-less 'distant' mechanisms of cultural distinction, where classes (or fields) defined by their habitus seek to ward off the values of other classes/fields. Such a model therefore cannot account convincingly for the threats to cultural value which are posed by 'close' or culturally proximate mechanisms of distinction.

The moral dualisms produced by cultural proximity are abundant in academic (sub) culture, where intellectual formations fragment along the lines of fiercely defended and supposedly theoretically-pressing 'differences' such as that of 'cultural studies' versus 'political economy'. These fine-grained 'fractal distinctions' (see Abbott 2001:10–21) also operate in fan cultures, which typically segment along the lines of favoured characters, actors, periods in a series, films in a franchise, or according to differences in fans' interpretive strategies (McCormack 2000; Lindlof *et al.* 1998). Frow (1995) and Bennett, Emmison and Frow (1999) have offered a critique of Bourdieu's work which can allow us to make further sense of these types of cultural distinctions. Frow (1995) characterises Bourdieu's work as doubly essentialist: it assumes 'a single class "experience" common to the sociologically quite distinct groups Bourdieu includes in the dominant class' and it 'posits a single aesthetic logic which corresponds to this experience' (1995:31). To counter these problems, Frow introduces the concept of the regime of value: 'every act of ascribing value...is specific to the particular regime that organises it... Regimes of value are relatively autonomous of and have no direct expressive relation to social groups' (1995:145). This raises the possibility that a 'regime of value' may, under specific circumstances, be shared by academic-fans and non-academic fans, or by academics and fans. It also loosens cultural value and moral dualisms from the iron grip of a class determinism. The concept is developed in Bennett, Emmison and Frow (1999) where it designates:

those normative organisations of the proper which specify what counts as a good object of desire or pleasure; a proper mode of access or entry to it; and an appropriate range of valuations.... The concept designates a convergence of lines of force which is discernible in its effects and which can be subsumed within larger conceptual structures or broken down to smaller, more specific

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levels... [A] distinction...can ...always be ramified, according to the context of meaningfulness, into a finer web of distinctions.

(1999:260)

The first part of this definition is not so different from Tony Bennett's concept of the 'reading formation' (see Frow 1995:145). But the second part of this definition means that the concept can account both for culturally 'distant' and culturally 'proximate' moral dualisms. The same 'regime of value' can break down into a fine web of distinctions while retaining effects at the level of 'larger conceptual structures'.

But, as I will demonstrate over the course of the next two chapters, any 'single-lensed' theoretical approach (i.e. 'sociological' or 'psychoanalytic') to fandom remains incapable of accounting:

- 1 for the social and cultural regularities of fan cultures, and
- 2 for fan cultures' dialectic of value, and thus for the fans' intensely felt 'possession' and 'ownership' of their fan object.

The point we have reached thus far tackles point (1) reasonably well, but is unable to address point (2) other than by viewing this fan sentiment as the construction of a specific regime of value. And this ignores the 'experiential chronology' of fan cultures. The generation of a fan community depends on fans from different walks of life gathering together to share their fandoms. In other words, the fans' sense of possessiveness, ownership and textual attachments are already in place *before* 'normative organisations of the proper which specify what counts as a good object of desire or pleasure; a proper mode of access or entry to it; and an appropriate range of valuations' can be said to act on fan interpretation. But all previous approaches to fan culture which stress the 'interpretive community' (Amesley 1989; Jenkins 1992), the 'reading formation' (Bennett and Woollacott 1987; Tulloch and Jenkins 1995) or even the 'regime of value' (as I have done here) are forced—through theoretical necessity—to treat fan communities as already established communal facts rather than accounting for their generation and formation.

Summary

- In this chapter I have examined Bourdieu's model in some detail, suggesting that it offers a significant and important metaphor when thinking about fan cultures. However, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that Bourdieu's complex theoretical engagement is based on one guiding metaphor ('the economy' of culture), and may therefore remain unable to deal with aspects of fandom which do not fit into models of competitive and calculative 'play'.
- I have also examined later readings of Bourdieu which apply his work to fan culture. Although Fiske and Thornton develop Bourdieu's work in helpful ways, both view fan culture as functional. Both also focus on 'cultural capital', I would argue as a result of their places within the academic field.
- Also, neither Fiske nor Thornton reflect on the moral dualisms (us-versus-them) that are

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constructed within their own academic accounts. Fiske pits 'good' popular cultural capital against 'bad' economic capital, and Thornton writes her own bid for cultural distinction out of her account. Bourdieu, it seems to me, is guilty of the same writing-out of the self through his insistence on an *illusio* which is total when 'in' the game and which can be seen as 'illusion' only when one is totally 'out' of the game.

- I have suggested a further problem with Bourdieu's work, which is the highly systematic and ultimately deterministic nature of its 'professional rationality'. This means that Bourdieu and his followers all have a tendency to read moral and aesthetic differences off from the master-grid of class difference, or through a limited 'dominant'/'subordinate' model.
- By examining work on psychotronic film, I have considered how Bourdieu's model is unable to account for the moral dualisms which emerge within class fractions and within fan (sub)cultures.

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