

The Intermedial Practises of Fandom

KAARINA NIKUNEN

Abstract

The article¹ discusses formations of fan cultures in terms of intermediality. It examines the construction and consumption of media in three different Finnish fan groups: the fans of *Xena: The Warrior Princess* (XWP), fans of *Ally McBeal* and the fans of Finnish TV-host Marco Bjurström. The construction of intermedial relations of each fan group interestingly reveals the institutional and technological spaces of shaping the pleasures of media.

The intermedial relations of researched fan groups vary according to a traditional use of media to a use of new media. The intermedial relations in XWP fan culture were produced mainly between television and the Internet. This intermedial connection provided space for fans' self-definition, community and fan production. Intermedial relations in the case of *Ally McBeal* were encouraged by the media companies between television and tabloid papers as well as between television and the Internet depicting the show as topical and trendy. However audiences were mostly engaged with only television and *Ally McBeal* didn't nurture multiple uses of media. Again in the case of Bjurström, the relation between television and tabloids and the particular portrait type of media coverage constructs this fandom as a traditional star-fan relationship.

Key Words: fan cultures, television, intermediality, media convergence, Internet, tabloids

Introduction

Recent developments in media economy and media technology particularly in the field of popular media suggest a shift towards growing intermediality and interactivity in audience practises. This shift resonates with growing interest towards fan communities as new kinds of participatory cultures in the field of audience studies. Fan cultures seem to provide an ideal, active and accessible object for media ethnographers. New studies concerning Internet fan communities and fan practises are frequently being published. Fan cultures seem to be at the very heart of media change, embodying the technological convergence seen now in the parallel use of Internet and television by fan communities thus possibly reshaping audience practises more widely. Fans have even been considered as the pioneers of future audiences, (Bailey 2002; Jenkins 2003; 2004) predicting transformation in audience practises – something that might be referred to as the *fanification* of audiences. This article discusses the supposed transformations and shifts in fan practises in terms of intermediality (Lehtonen 1999, 11; 2000).

Instead of echoing enthusiasm over technological development as revolutionising audience practises this article aims to carefully examine the construction and consumption of media in three different fan groups: the fans of *Xena: The Warrior Princess*

(XWP), fans of *Ally McBeal* and the fans of Finnish TV-host Marco Bjurström.² The varieties and multiple (power) connections of fan practises are being highlighted when tracing down the terms of construction of intermedial relations, thus revealing the institutional and technological spaces of shaping the pleasures of media consumption.

Traditionally media studies have focused more or less on the reception of one singular medium (Morley 1980; Ang 1985; Hermes 1995). Research that examines the reception of television or readership of local newspapers may be useful in offering detailed knowledge on the specific meaning of one particular media. However, this approach tends to emphasise and underline the perspective of media consumption as separate and isolated from the overall media markets and imageries. As various studies have demonstrated the everyday use of media is rather complex, multiple and overlapping. Rarely are meanings made merely through one source. Instead imageries are being interpreted and circulated between various media. Television series are being discussed on the Internet, critiques and blurbs are read from tabloids, magazines, newspapers and so on. As Johan Fornäs (2002) argues, intermediality investigates intersections within differentiated networks of communication stressing plurality and interrelations rather than separate, monolithic and essentialist reductions of media.

Behind the presence of multiple media texts lies the continuously intensifying relation between various media realised through both economical and technological convergence.

A substantial amount of research has discussed for example the intensifying relation between television and the Internet both on the production and reception of media (Bailey 2002; Owen 1999; Baym 2000; Hills 2001; Hu 2005). Possibly due to the nature of the new media as accessible data for media researchers these relations are being brought into discussion specifically after the advent of the Internet. However, preceding the marriage of TV and the Internet there's been a strong alliance between tabloids and television which is being widely discussed in media theory with the introduction of the concepts of tellyland (Connell 1991) and celebrity (Hartley 1996).

New media research focusing largely on the technological innovations and their adoption have redirected the gaze in audience studies towards the structures and relations of media away from the more inward ethnographic gaze of traditional research. Various studies demonstrate the multiple possibilities of interactivity provided by the new media technology. The shift in research focus is resonated by the shift in concepts: instead of audiences research we talk about media users. As Ellen Seiter (1999, 120) aptly describes, the move from the image of passive couch potato to that of the active user illuminates the shift from television to the Internet within media research.

Towards Intermediality

Fan studies do explore the very practise of intermediality yet they rarely recognise or address the issue itself. Intermediality is constantly present in fan research but rarely theoretically or empirically explored as such. A systematic conceptual analysis of intermediality dates back to the discussion on digitalization and the Internet and their impact on media culture, as the German text theoreticians Jürgen Müller and Ernest Hess-Lüttich developed the concept of intermediality in early 1990's as part of their hyper-text theory (Hess-Lüttich 1999, 688-689). Through the idea of intermediality, the theory of intertextuality was expanded to apply to the analysis of new digital, Internet-based textual forms.

Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999) on the other hand introduce the concept of remediation referring to intermedia relations. In their discussion intermedia is understood as the way one media is seen in another and more specifically the way new media is seen as reforming another old media. (Bolter and Grusin 1999, 65). This point is crystallised in the use of the term “refashioning” old media forms to depict remediation in action (Bolter 2002). In this context intermediality refers to medial transformation and the discovery of older forms of media in newer forms of media.

Intermediality has also been defined as intertextuality between media (Lehtonen 1999). Intermediality then means the expansion of textual references and relations from one media to another. This approach emphasises intermediality in relation to horizontal intertextuality, i.e. relations between primary texts that engage genres, characters, plotlines, etc. In this case intermediality is investigated on a textual level in investigations of shaping and changing of texts within various media. Thus intermediality stands for expanded intertextuality rather than for the structures that define and shape the very emergence of these relations.

Johan Fornäs (2002) discusses intermediality as passages across various boundaries and thresholds – not only narratives moving across various media such as television, film, games but also the spatial presence of various media. The comprehensive definition of the concept may not be attainable or even reasonable since we are dealing with multiple and ongoing cultural processes. As Fornäs argues “some relations are intermedial but not intertextual, some are intertextual but not intermedial and some are simultaneously intertextual and intermedial” (2002, 101). From a wider perspective intermediality may be used to address the articulation and re-articulation of the media through the change of social and cultural contexts as for example to examine the formations of intermedial relations and the very conditions of these formations.

Intermediality has been seen as part of or as a result of intensified economical and technological media convergence. Media convergence is understood here as an economic driven process of increased concentration of media ownership followed by consolidation of holdings across multiple industries and strategies of synergy within the divisions of the same company. This process is linked with the development of media technology and especially digitalisation that facilitates the use of ownership based convergence. (Hassan 2000; Croteau and Hoynes 2000; Hesmondhalgh 2002; Herkman 2005)

According to Henry Jenkins (2004; 2003) media convergence alters the relationship between existing technology, industry, markets, gender and audiences – and I might add the obvious – between existing media. Jenkins suggests that convergence is both a top down corporate driven and bottom up consumer driven process (the latter being discussed as participatory culture). Thus it is produced not only by the company strategies but also by the audiences. To Jenkins the new audiences in the era of convergence are active, migratory and disloyal to media companies, socially connected, resistant, and in addition they take the media in their own hands. This is true in the context of certain media and among certain audiences, but it is not the whole picture. There are audiences that are not necessarily active, organised or resistant and may not be involved in the use of new media. The premises of participatory culture theory seems to rely closely on the recent development in media technology and company strategies and ultimately sees audiences through this development and as parallel to it. Or conversely, the development of the new media is seen through the theory of participatory culture and as complementary to it. Thus, in this case the shift of perspective from a micro to a macro level does

not mean the departure from past research but rather the creation of a continuum from the past to the present.

In Jenkins's discussion technology is considered as serving the audiences, but one might also want to pose a question on the limiting effects of technology: technological innovations set certain limits and conditions on how to do things, how to create sites, how to take part in discussions, etc. Technology may actually work against "activity" by narrowing perspectives and the possibilities to act outside of the realm of the computer and it may nurture more repetition, rules and routines than freedom and creativity. Thus such concepts as interactivity should be carefully discussed in terms of to what extent are fans able to influence the environment they are realising in their fandom. As David Morley (2006) points out consumer's ability to choose options from within a preset menu is a very limited form of power.

However, in this article I want to focus on the very emergence of the intermedial relations in audience practises. My aim is to illuminate the various ways intermediality engages the formation of audiences, the emergence of interpretive communities and the interpretive repertoires (Hermes 1995) of these communities. The concept of intermediality enables us to examine among other things what kind of audience practices are connected with certain media and why these particular media are related.

Fan studies provide interesting cases for the investigation of intermediality since the multiple uses of media are an essential part of fan cultures. There are various different kinds of fan cultures and fans that are being organised distinctly around different media and practises. For example Mark Jancovich (2002) has investigated cult movie audiences using Sarah Thornton's (1996) theory of subculture developed from Pierre Bourdieu's work and she shows that cult audiences are part of and in many ways constructed by the media institutions namely, they are neither outside the culture nor outside the media. Indeed media provides the very mechanisms, spaces and systems of communication through which the sense of community and cult is produced. (Jancovich 2002). Steve Bailey (2002) examines fan cultures as something shaped by the development of media technology. According to Bailey technological development, the intertwining of television and computer, has created new audiences and reshaped audience practises. In his discussion on the *Futurama* fan community Bailey (2002) points out that due to technical development, the possibilities to view, edit and circulate a series on the net, to exchange comments and information with others have proliferated. For Bailey fans are indicative of the larger shifts in audience practises. Thus ordinary audiences are expected to adopt fan practises and enlarge their television experience on the Internet. This view of *fanification* of audiences is shared by Henry Jenkins (2003; see also Laukkanen 2003a; 2003b), who points out that "contemporary popular culture has absorbed many aspects of fan culture which would have seemed marginal a decade ago." Since fan studies have relied more on singular case studies this variety hasn't been properly addressed. Instead of looking at the intermedial relations the focus has been on the singular fan communities' active practises enabled by the development of media technology. To investigate the intermedial relations of specific fan cultures it is necessary to follow the various connections and relations constructed within these fan cultures. Fan practises are always situated in particular media with a certain imagery, accessibility and cultural position. They are also interlinked with various temporal and spatial dimensions. The three fandoms researched and introduced in this article formed three different sites to be investigated and juxtaposed. In order to be able to outline and

control the research material I focused on the relations between the experience of fandom and media in each case.³

Next I will move on to discuss in more detail the formation of intermedial relations in the concrete case study of three Finnish fan groups.

XWP: Relations of New Media and Television

Xena: the Warrior Princess (XWP)⁴ is an American television series produced by Renaissance Pictures and MCA/Universal, filmed in New Zealand and which started as a spin-off to the fantasy action series *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* (1994-2000) in 1995 during the wave of the fantasy boom in western popular culture. In the mid 1990s American television production introduced several series with a touch of fantasy, myth and fairy tale such as *Highlander* (1992-1996), *The Adventures of Sinbad* (1996-1998) and *The New Adventures of Robin Hood* (1997-1998). XWP however is linked with another trend namely the advent of the erotic and tough female action hero. Some years after XWP's release several American television series appeared with attractive and powerful women in leading roles: *Buffy the Vampyreslayer* (1997-2003), *Sheena* (2000-2002), *Relic Hunter* (1999-2002), *Alias* (2001-), *Dark Angel* (2000-2002). These figures have their predecessors in the film industry: Ellen Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) of the *Alien*, Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton) of *The Terminator*. Ancestresses (although not quite as muscular) can also be found in television history: *The Bionic Woman* (1975-1978) and *Wonder Woman* (1976-1979) of the 1970s.

XWP is a happy mixture of fantasy, action, comedy and drama introducing a female action heroine in the settings of ancient Greece. Xena (Lucy Lawless) is a warrior princess who used to be evil but has mended her ways. Now she fights to defend the good and the weak. Xena is accompanied by Gabrielle (Renee O'Connor). Sometimes the two women are accompanied by a jester type character Joxer (Sam Raimi), teased and threatened by the god of war Ares (Kevin Smith) or Callisto (Hudson Leick) the arch-villain of Xena. Although Xena's and Gabrielle's journey is depicted in ancient Greece the timeframe is quite flexible. The adventures take place in an indefinite past varying from 1000 BC to the 1940s. The episodes include mythical material from ancient stories, fairy tales and dramas. Therefore the narrative universe is quite flexible and unconnected to any exact time or place. The series uses a mythological narrative which moves between the worlds of the living and the dead, both humans and gods. The multidimensional narrative includes playing with sexuality constructing the relationship between Xena and Gabrielle as a possible lesbian love affair. This *subtext* element has attracted a wide lesbian audience for the series. The subtext interpretation of the series is also heavily debated among the fans.

The visual level of representation is characterised by simulation and exaggeration. There is no intention towards authenticity, instead the representation offers copies with no origin – copies that refer to mythic feelings created by its Roman/Greek type of equipment, outfits, armament and setting. Dressed in leather corselets the figures of Xena and Gabrielle combine a sense of the past with the exaggerated and erotic femininity of action heroines. As Sara Gwenillan Jones (2000, 13) notes XWP "offers a suggestive structure but few rules". XWP seems to be a typical cult text with hyperdiegetic (Hills 2002, 137-138) elements that encourage audiences to explore the world of XWP and produce their own texts. Thus it is an example of the way television series address audiences as fans in specific ways. The textuality of XWP encourages fans to develop

the series further, to write fanfiction and create fan sites. As a multilayered open text it enables multiple interpretations of the story and its characters, such as the subtext reading of the relationship between Xena and Gabrielle.

Moreover the generic elements seem to interlink *XWP* fandom together with the culture of science fiction and fantasy fandom. These fan cultures have traditionally used various media side by side such as films, books and magazines. At present, the Internet is the main platform for fandoms, thus not surprisingly Xena fans gather in the virtual world. Therefore the text and the genre encourage and connect audiences towards certain existing intermedial fan cultures and practises.

In Finland *XWP* was first broadcast on the commercial channel MTV3 in November 1997. After several breaks and shifts in broadcasting time the series was moved to the TV!TV! channel and then to the entertainment based SubTV. *XWP* ran altogether six seasons and the production ended in May 2001. Finnish viewers saw the last episode in March 2004. Although part of the emerging boom of the fantasy series, *XWP* attracted little coverage in the other media in Finland such as TV magazines, tabloids, talk shows, etc. The difference is striking compared to the media publicity in the US where both the figure and actress of Xena have been a topic in magazines and talk shows (Xena's voice appearance in *The Simpsons* and as a guest in *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*).

The first Finnish *XWP* website was established in April 1998. The fan community has slowly grown and is now consisting of around 90 fans, both male and female. The first Finnish web site was extremely important in gathering the *XWP* fans together since there was little coverage of *XWP* in mainstream media publicity in Finland at the time. The discussions on the web site concerned technical advice related to DVDs or VCRs, exchange of information concerning episode details or *XWP* actresses' media appearances, interpretations of the latest episodes and planning of events and meetings. Fans write fan fiction and make fan art thus sharing the practises of many other science fiction and fantasy fan cultures. The fans organised several *XWP* meetings and small conventions during 1999-2003, starting with a modest meeting of two fans. The Internet offered an important space for fans to find information on *XWP*, and most of all to meet and share their experience as Finnish *XWP* fans ("stuck in this un-*XWP* country"). Many of the fans are also members in international fan groups.

These virtual *XWP* fan communities produced an alternative view to the series that had through the scheduling politics of the channel MTV3 constructed *XWP* as a children's show in Finland. From 1998 to 2001 it was broadcast on Saturday afternoon following children's cartoons and other children's programmes. This caused discontent among the fans and the television channel MTV3 on *XWP*'s cultural position and as a result Finnish fans struggled for years to convince MTV3 to move *XWP* to later in the evening.⁵ In the case of *XWP* the scheduling induced contradictory interpretations in media publicity, conflicts between the channel and the fans and considerable frustration among the fan community. Finally at the beginning of 2001 *XWP* was moved to a channel TV!TV! with fairly restricted coverage area and then eventually in 2002 to the subculture sensitive channel SubTV where it was aired on Saturdays at 7 pm⁶. It is clear that the way a series is placed also defines its status. In Finland, *XWP*'s status was heavily defined by the television company MTV3.

All in all *XWP* in Finland meant invisibility in mainstream media and visibility on the Internet websites. Moreover mainstream media, when dealing with *XWP*, defined the series as a children's show whereas the fans saw it more as a cult series. Consequently the role of the international community was quite decisive in the construction of its

fandom. The international fan community established on the Internet offered interpretational guidelines and introduction to *XWP* as a cult series for many Finnish fans. Fans consider the international web community and especially the *XWP* oriented web journal *Whoosh!* as some kind of example of *XWP* fandom and refer to it as an authority on many issues (the popularity of the show, the subtext of Xena's and Gabrielle's lesbian relation, intertextual references). The international fan community has offered interpretive tools and radical readings of the series for the Finnish community thus introducing the fan reading (so called fanon) of *XWP* to Finnish fans.⁷ Besides topics and interpretative practises the impact of the international community can be seen in other details such as in the layout of the fan sites, and in the increasing use of English language. Web sites that aimed to provide space for Finnish discussions on *XWP* offer an increasing amount of information and texts in English. English fan fiction written by the Finnish fans is one example of the presence and impact of the international community. Moreover it is important to remember that most of the material on the web sites is drawn from the production company and as such is far from independent art material, although it is subjected to quite creative interpretations.

As demonstrated in previous studies on Internet communities there are various power relations and hierarchies at play (Baym 1998). The members of the community hold various power positions according to their activity and competence in the web environment. The community as a whole is positioned in relation to other international *XWP* communities and in relation to Finnish media publicity – the latter being realised mainly in the fight against the scheduling politics of MTV3. Internet communities also provide marketing space for producers and space for surveillance of audiences, tastes and trends. In the case of *XWP* the producers made use of the active fan culture and actually hired one of the fans (famous among fan fiction writers) to write two episodes of the sixth season of the series.

The international web sites provided a reference for subcultural experience for the Finnish *XWP* fans and the impact of these sites is incontestable. In the case of *XWP* however the impact of the international community, particularly concerning the lesbian subtext interpretation, provides a radical reading of the series in a country where gay culture has long been silenced. In this sense *Xenaverse* forms a global yet an alternative public sphere that in Nancy Fraser's (1992) words functions as a space for regroupment and withdrawal and on the other hand as a bases for agitational activities directed towards a wider public. However the alternativivity of the *XWP* fandom lies more in the form of activity, in the amateurism, group work and sharing of the experience. It is not initially political but it may contain political potential. *XWP*'s invisibility in mainstream media publicity guarantees a certain subcultural aura for the series and its fans. As Sarah Thornton in her discussion of subcultures states, "subcultures are condemned to and/or enjoy a consciousness of 'otherness' or difference" (Thornton 1997, 5).

To sum up, the intermedial relations in *XWP* fan culture were produced mainly between television and the Internet. The path leading to this relationship originates from the textuality and genre that encourage active fan production and connections with science fiction fan cultures, and from the development of a media technology that provides new possibilities for fan practises. This intermedial connection provided space for fans' self-definition, community and fan production. However it also introduced the guidelines of "proper" fandom such as practises and interpretations established according to the example of the international fan groups.

The intermedial link between television and magazines was created mainly by the institutional agents (journalists) and it was a very different type of publicity than the intermedial relation of television and the Internet that was created mainly by the fans.

Consequently the self made publicity on the Internet, although based on the material accessible from the production company and previous fan production, seemed to provide an active base for fan communities which then again seemed to strengthen the positive sense of fan-identity. *XWP* fans were quite proud and self ironic about their fandom. Referring to themselves as “complete nuts” or “crazed fans” they, as a discursive coup, adopted and inverted the stereotypical representations of fandom.

Trendy and Topical *Ally McBeal*

Unlike *XWP Ally McBeal*⁸ was highly visible in Finnish mainstream media, especially in the evening papers and the series generated a new type of journalism focusing merely on the events of the television show. *Ally McBeal* was therefore widely known and talked about at school and at work. *Ally McBeal* is an American television series produced by David E. Kelley and it began in Finland on MTV3 in September 1998. The show ended in May 2002 and the last episode in Finland was aired 28 January 2003. The main character Ally is in her thirties, single and working in a successful law firm in Boston. The series concentrates on the private life of Ally and her colleagues. Ally McBeal's character is a mixture of confident career success and insecurity and nervousness in her private life. The narrative revolves around Ally's aspiration of finding the perfect man and making choices between family and career. The court cases usually deal with sexual issues like love affairs, marriage and sexual harassment. The cases raise questions about morals and choices as to how far can we control or guide our lives. There is considerable triviality and absurdity in the narrative illuminated by special effects and tricks such as the appearance of imaginary dancing babies, angels and singing groups.

These effects depict the inner urges, pleasures, shame, desires or whims of the characters with animated manipulated images of literally pale faces or shrinking bodies. At the same time they function to disrupt the narrative and break the illusion of realism. This element of absurdity aligns *Ally McBeal* with other genre hybrids also characterised as postmodern series such as *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991) *Northern Exposure* (1990-1995) and *Pickett Fences* (1992-1996) (Hietala 1994, 39, cf. Saresma 1999). These series have been discussed as oblique and ironic returns to the small town idyll. *Ally McBeal* shares aspects of the oblique in absurd, unreal encounters and disruptions of its realistic narrative, however with regard to social points of view *Ally McBeal* seems to emphasise individualism over irony. *Ally McBeal* addresses audiences as reflexive and competent media users who are able to read and distinguish intertextual references. However, staged strictly in the contemporary world, in the genre of skilfully scripted drama comedy the text doesn't seem to leave space for similar productivity as the science fiction of fantasy texts. As a prime time drama series *Ally McBeal* seems to address audiences in terms of fashionable and trendy spectatorship. Fans of Ally tend to watch other American quality sit-coms and drama such as *Friends* and *Sex in the City*.

The character of Ally, her background and future is not filled with similar mythical mysteries as Xena's in *XWP*. The narrative of Ally therefore does not necessarily connect the viewing experience to active, sub-cultural fan practises, rather it links viewers with the mainstream media. The viewing experience is shared in terms of the existing social connections and it does not necessarily produce new social connections.

Ally McBeal fandom emerged in the discussions, the circulation of phrases and jokes, the adoption of looks and fashion in the realm of schools, homes and work, namely within the everyday life fans shared with their friends and family. Exploration of the fan experience through interviews revealed that the circulation of jokes, the verbal fooling about took place in the halls and corridors at school. Thus the humorous side of the fan experience was shared in the realm of public space, whereas the more intimate experiences and emotional moments were reserved to the realms of home and most preferably to one's own room, out of the range of parents' or friends' gaze. As a well known popular media text *Ally McBeal* was easy to refer to.

Ally McBeal was an exceptionally visible series in Finnish media publicity. It was strongly marketed beforehand with posters at bus stops, with trailers and teasers on television and in evening papers and magazines. The show was scheduled in prime time on Tuesday evenings. Media publicity concerning *Ally McBeal* permeated most media but was most visible in tabloids and women's magazines. I suggest that the way *Ally McBeal* was visible in public, how it was marketed and constructed as a trendy comedy series was related to the construction of the viewers and fans of *Ally McBeal*.

The media coverage in Finland and internationally was constructed around and circulated with an aspect of scandal. The alleged anorexia of the actress Calista Flockhart was speculated on in the media in stories full of detailed descriptions of her gaunt, bony body. The discussion of Flockhart's weight was soon followed up by a dispute over the representation of women in *Ally McBeal*. *Ally McBeal* was seen either as the new woman free from feministic pessimism, successful and feminine or as an uncertain, male-dependent woman, representing traditional values in a new package. *Ally McBeal* as the new woman was mainly introduced in women's magazines and stories dealing with singles. The representation of the new woman relates to the discussion of post feminism and the pleasures of popular gender imagery (Dubrowsky 2002).

Yet another trait of the media publicity concentrated on the scandals within the narrative of the series. The topics drawn from the up-coming or past events in the television series speak of the emergence of a relatively new type of journalism⁹. This TV journalism leans on seriality, defined as characteristic of television fiction and soaps (Fiske 1987, 150). Like TV series, it continues the story of the previous headlines and follows the rhythm of the series. With the advent of reality TV and the joint interests of the tabloids and production companies, this type of journalism has clearly proliferated. Episodes containing exceptional or daring sexual encounters were introduced in the headlines of the two competing tabloids in Finland. The plotline and scenes reached the front pages of the tabloids promoting 'the soon to be seen' episode. Media publicity followed the structures of TV production where the beginnings and endings of the season were charged with particularly sensational scenes. The media coverage resorted to scandals and rumours, highlighting teasers from the up-coming scenes such as "the kiss" of Ally and Ling. This type of journalism can be discussed in terms of fanification. It addresses readers as fans, committed to the narrative universe (Jenkins 2003) who are presumably keen to keep up with the latest and forthcoming episodes and interested in web-based competitions, tests and various side products. Channel MTV3 equally addressed viewers as fans and launched various competitions (to collect mcbealisms – special aphorisms in the show) and quizzes as well as encouraged the use of the MTV3 *Ally McBeal* web site.

A close look at the role of the media reveals that *Ally McBeal*'s publicity in Finland was an example of the way a company driven convergence provides motives for estab-

lishing links between television, press and the Internet. *Ally McBeal* was broadcast by the same company that owns one of the two competing tabloids, *Ilta-lehti* and indeed the show was well marketed through the tabloid as argued in other research on *Ally McBeal* (Herkman 2005). So if *XWP* fandom was encouraged by the technological convergence (use of Internet technology, dvd's etc.), *Ally McBeal* fandom was encouraged by the economic convergence (company synergy).

Fans of *Ally McBeal* indeed were quite familiar with the tabloid stories and various tests and quizzes developed around the show. Fans even experimented at school with the famous 'kneecap tickle' after reading about its effect (causing orgasmic pleasure for women) from a tabloid. Female fans especially labelled the tabloid stories on Calista Flockhart's weight as sensationalism, however at the same time they rebuked Flockhart's 'unacceptably skinny figure'. Fans were well aware of the contents in tabloids and indeed used them to follow up the on- and off-stage events of the series.

The series did reach target audiences and sell newspapers, however fanification partly failed since the viewers neither entered the Internet site to discuss nor did they consume *Ally* products. Thus *Ally McBeal* fandom speaks of the borders of fandom and audiences. It is also telling of the way media companies actively take part in shaping the audiences, however not always with success. Interestingly since *Ally McBeal* was widely marketed and positioned as the show you have to watch the popularity created a countermovement, namely the antifans. This may not be so surprising since the media publicity frequently defined *Ally McBeal* as a show that divides opinions, the programme some love while others hate.

Despite the various attempts of media companies and the popularity of the show *Ally McBeal* didn't attract active, productive fan practises realised in fan communities. Fans of *Ally McBeal* shared somewhat reserved attitudes towards referring to themselves as fans. Instead fandom around *Ally McBeal* was loose and temporary, lasting synchronously with the production time and cycled in harmony with media publicity and scheduling. The audience around *Ally McBeal* organised itself according to certain types of topicality and being up to date. The series was something to talk about the next day at school and it was referred to as a 'must see' series. Possibly due to the very fact that *Ally McBeal* was a well known prime time series, popular and accessible to all, there was no interest to create fan communities. *Ally McBeal* fandom more or less faded as the show ended.

From the role of the media institutions the intermedial relations in the case of *Ally McBeal* were constructed between television and tabloid papers as well as between television and the Internet. However audiences were mostly engaged only with television and *Ally McBeal* didn't nurture multiple uses of media as in the case of *XWP*, although this was encouraged vigorously by the media companies. As an American comedy drama *Ally McBeal* addressed audiences within the context of main stream popular culture. The densely written text reflected on topical issues of contemporary culture thus leaving less space for myths, mysteries, futures and pasts.

As argued previously definitions and demarcations of the series as trendy, popular and accessible and representing a certain type of gender imagery may have also influenced the way audience relations were formed in the case of *Ally McBeal*. As Matt Hills (Hills 2002, 136) argues with regard to cult texts "it is decisive whether the text is interpreted as special, calculated or imitation in order to be valued among fan audience". According to Hills the publicity may have a vital role in creating and preventing cults or other formations of audiences, as I think the case of *Ally McBeal* has demonstrated.

Marco Bjurström: Tabloid Celebrity

The third case, the fandom of TV host Marco Bjurström, differs from the other two cases since it revolves around the person and personality instead of the narrative universe of the television programme in question (cf. Dyer 1986, 2-3; Jones 2000; Hills 2002, 131-143). Thus the practises of fandom resemble the traditional fan culture related to movie stars (Barbas 2002). As a performer on television Bjurström is more of a celebrity (Marshall 1997) than a star although the distinction between the two concepts is not always clear cut. As Richard Dyer (1998, 60) argues stars are constructions of various media texts. Some texts are more decisive in terms of the construction of their stardom. In Bjurström's case the decisive text would be the programme *BumtsiBum* which brought him to fame.

BumtsiBum is a musical quiz based on an international format also broadcasted in Ireland, Russia, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Turkey and South Africa. The main idea of the programme is to guess and sing songs based on words or pictures hidden behind numbered squares. There are two teams with three competitors each (one regular pianist, two visiting singers or actors) and the idea is to get the participants to sing spontaneously while guessing the hidden song. The show poses as the host and the centre of it all and the star of the show. This structure emphasises his position as the object of admiration, as extra-ordinary (Dyer 1998, 43). *BumtsiBum* was broadcast on Saturday evenings, addressing family audiences in the frame of television music entertainment. The composition of the show establishes intertextual links with popular music stardom and quiz shows emphasizing Bjurström's role as a master of both.

Marco Bjurström, a dancer and a choreographer, was not very well known before this show. *BumtsiBum* made him instantly famous nation wide and he appeared on the cover of both competing tabloids, *Ilta-lehti* and *Ilta-Sanomat*, throughout the fall. Bjurström has his own dance school and dance group, *Step up* (founded in 1987) and he is also a communications consultant marketing positive thinking for companies and organisations (R&M Consulting Oy). Clearly Bjurström's public performances as a host, presenter and trainer focused on his persona, not merely his role in *BumtsiBum* as the object of fandom.

The media publicity surrounding Marco Bjurström consists mostly of large portraits and interviews in evening papers. In the media he is portrayed as the messenger of positivity, health and happiness. His image is an interesting mixture of femininity and masculinity. His physical masculinity (short hair, tall physique) is combined with feminine elements such as dance, fashion and relationship discourse. He tends to play with his looks and clothing, dressing in spectacular outfits (the golden tail-coat) or role costumes (Indian chief). This differs from the cultural norm of Finnish modesty and plain masculinity that denies the possibility of individual styles and dressing up (Hänninen 1996). Bjurström's excessive style is enhanced with the special slogan 'naminami' (a Finish word referring to the essence of the good things in life) which he reiterates in the programme, on the pages of the tabloids and in his courses on positive thinking.

Bjurström's publicity follows the lines of this positivity, portraying him as a hero, an example of a successful and genuinely happy person. The positive attitude towards life is the dominant discourse in Bjurström's publicity although there are ruptures in this publicity as well. Moments of irony, sarcasm and of jealousy in journalistic texts can be seen as typical elements of celebrity journalism (Connell 1991, 252). Bjurström's sexuality is also under constant speculation especially by male columnists. Obscure references and gossip about his relationships with other men were recurrently brought up.

Distress caused by the uncertainty of his sexual orientation and the urge to close the issue illuminates the difficulties in our culture to tolerate any open questions on a celebrity's sexual orientation.

The decisive site for the construction of fandom in the case of Bjurström are the programme *BumtsiBum*, the media texts, interviews and portraits on Marco Bjurström mainly in mainstream media. Bjurström doesn't have a fan club or a web site, and his fans are examples of so called silent fans (Harrington and Bielby 1995) that experience fandom on their own, possibly sharing it with their closest friends or relatives. Fan practises as read from the letters take place mostly in the realm of the private and they consist of writing fan letters, collecting interviews, taping the *BumtsiBum*, episodes, composing poems and songs about Bjurström, dancing and playing *BumtsiBum* with friends at home and sometimes at Christmas parties. The lack of community is evident both in the longing for other fans displayed in fan letters and in the contradictory experiences of fandom. The understanding of fandom for these fans seems to depend on the stereotypical representation of it as madness, crowd and nuisance, thus many fans in their letters distance themselves from the concept of fan (cf. Nash and Lahti 1999). Although many of the fans use the Internet to find information the new media doesn't really figure as a relevant site for practises of fandom in this case. The fans tend to turn to the more traditional media to realise their fandom.

Since Bjurström is performing on the MTV3 channel the company driven convergence serves as an interesting point for examining media publicity. He has been widely promoted by the evening paper *Iltalehti* of the same company, however, the amount of coverage on Bjurström as a persona seems to equate with the coverage of the other competing evening paper. As a *celebrity* (Hartley 1996) he is profitable for both tabloids.

In order to further examine the interaction of media publicity and the fan experience I analysed both the fan mail (623 letters written in 1997-1999, 2001) and the media texts of the two tabloids from the same period and focused on the relation between these two types of texts – the dynamics, contradictions and repetitions in them. The case of Bjurström reveals various functions of media publicity in the construction of both stardom and fandom. Clearly media works as a map of fandom. First of all it sets a pace for the letters as the fan mail is connected to various time frames such as the timetable of the programme and the appearance of interviews and stories in evening papers which encourage fans to write. Media publicity also follows the annual cycle of events. There are stories for Christmas, Easter and summer where celebrities pose and tell their plans for the holidays. In this way media publicity takes celebrities in the cycle of the everyday lives of the audience and fans as they respond by sending him Christmas cards and the like. Also Bjurström's birthday was a day for many letters and gifts.

As Lisa Lewis (1990) has pointed out the gathering of detailed information is one essential part of being a fan as it serves to build fan-identity and self confidence. Thus the media functions as a guide for being a better fan by teaching practices of fandom and offering material for such practises. Fan knowledge in this sense builds on subcultural capital using media publicity as its main source. Extensive interviews and portraits serve this aspect of fandom particularly well in offering the fans detailed information concerning the stars' hobbies, favourite things, the colour of the eyes etc.

In the case of Bjurström the dominant element of his star image constructed in the media (interviews and his other appearances including the *BumtsiBum* programme, highlighted in close-ups of his smiling face) is the positive, life embracing attitude. Not

surprisingly this element is also highlighted in fan letters thus demonstrating the way media defines the object of fandom and offers angles for interpretation.

The letters are constructed as if in dialogue with the star image, the media-Bjurström. There are various references to interviews where fans comment on his answers. Some of the letters are diary like chats about the ups and downs of everyday life. Thus the star image seems to serve as a source of identification and as a figure of a distant friend. Letters, following the forms of a fan letter, contain colours, pictures, poems and decorations describing the affective dimension of fandom. This the type of activity could be seen as the textual productivity John Fiske (1992) describes as typical of fan cultures.(cf. Pasquier 1999).

As a Finnish television star Bjurström addresses exclusively Finnish fans. At first the fandom seems to be isolated on this local level. There is however a connection to global media culture through the programme *BumtsiBum* which is based on an international TV format. The Swedish version of the same show is available in some parts of Finland and there is often comparison of the two versions of the show in the fan letters. The existence of another version of the programme seems to draw national interpretations of the show and on the role of Bjurström as a national figure. Bjurström's dancing and smiling persona seem to challenge the stereotypical image of Finnish masculinity. He's often referred to as the sun of Finland and a messenger of positive thinking. Fans talk about his positive attitude as something denied and exceptional in Finnish culture thus positioning them selves and Bjurström as outsiders, even as radicals.

Thus the global media culture is present in Bjurström's star image however on the practises of fandom the global Internet fan culture seems to have had little impact. The case of Bjurström speaks of the lonely fans who communicate with media Bjurström rather than with each other although there is a strong longing for the possibility to share fan experience.

Thus the intermediality around Bjurström is constructed mainly between tabloids and television (television global format/local version). The new media does not really play a substantial part in the fan practises. Interestingly the intermediality of tabloids and television in this case seem to lean more towards traditional practises of fandom such as collecting pictures and interviews for scrap books, writing fan letters and collecting autographs. I argue that the particular portrait type of media coverage emphasises the Bjurström as a star, inherent in the structure of *BumtsiBum*, thus constructing the fandom as a traditional star-fan relationship. It depicts the star as distant yet familiar and emphasises the extra-ordinariness of the star. At the same time the admirers are depicted as a crowd (of ordinary people). The media publicity does not encourage fans to form communities, however the longing for such a community is evident.

Intermediality – Just a Coincidence?

Various intermedial relations are palpable part of media reception. Meanings are rarely produced through one isolated text. Rather texts are read and produced side by side in reference to each other. One text in one media may indeed emphasise and lead to another text in another media. Clearly audiences differ in terms of how essential intermediality becomes in practise. As argued above fan cultures seem to nurture particularly intense intermediality. To be a fan means an affective and active relationship towards the media: fans collect, interpret, circulate and re-write media texts.

In this research, focused on television reception, intermedial relations were primarily formed between television and the Internet and between television and tabloids.

I decided on choosing fans of *XWP*, *Ally McBeal* and Bjurström for further research since all of these shows were quite new at that time in Finland (1999) and each contained interesting gender perspectives. The shows were quite different from each other, *Ally McBeal* and *BumtsiBum*'s Bjurström being constantly in the headlines of the tabloids and *XWP* quite unknown, marginal or subcultural, an off prime time show. I suspected they may attract different types of fan cultures – as they did. And although tabloids formed an essential part of both *Ally McBeal*'s and Bjurström's media publicity they did it in strikingly different ways. *Ally McBeal* was related with sensationalism and the narratives of the series whereas Bjurström was introduced through detailed portraits that encouraged a traditional star-fan like relationship between the entertainer and the audience. Thus each of these fan cultures had their own specific strategic sites (Marcus 1986, 171-173) and they vary according to the accessibility and visibility. This difference as such is already telling of the specific intermedial relations in each case.

The way *Ally McBeal* and Bjurström were introduced and discussed in media publicity has defined and shaped the fan communities as well as fan practises. The attachment to distinct public spaces, *Ally McBeal* fandom in the hallways and coffee rooms; Bjurström fans at the side of the stage; *XWP* fans on the virtual space of the Internet, seem to bear consequences. *XWP* fans seem to be active and self-assured in their fandom. Their fandom is realised in the realm of subculture and gender politics whereas Bjurström fans tend to relate more to Bjurström than other fans and feel themselves as 'lonely'. *Ally McBeal* fans, distancing themselves somewhat from the term 'fan', appear trendy consumers who are aware of existing popular culture's taste. However tempting it may be, my intention is not to evaluate different fandoms according to their activity or productivity (cf. Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998). All of these fandoms are part of consumer culture but they engage it in very different ways. As *XWP* emphasises the subcultural aspect of media reception, *Ally McBeal* discusses popular culture as a socialising aspect in everyday life. Bjurström brings out the private pleasures of fandom and the longing of community.

As this research demonstrates intermediality is not something that just occurs – it is actively promoted, encouraged and defined by different instances. First of all intermediality may be actively produced by television companies and producers. An example of this is the launching of specific web sites for television programmes. Actively produced intermediality may also be an inherent part of television textuality. Internet comments or voting by mobile phone may be a part of the television narrative as in the case of various reality TV shows such as the *Big Brother* (Hill 2002; Van Zoonen 2005, Hautakangas 2006). Textual structures and generic characteristics may also nurture specific audience practises such as writing fan fiction on the Internet.

Again, intermediality may be produced by accident or as a by product of selling tabloids. Media convergence on the other hand speaks of the intentional intermediality (Bolter and Grusin 1999, 45): a conscious company strategy of using one media to strengthen the position of another within the same corporation.

Intermediality is of course also produced and encouraged by fan groups. Individual fans are encouraged to use various media to express their fandom and build their fan status. Thus for media companies fans seem ideal audiences (Jenkins 2003) since the gathering of fan knowledge, collecting and taping programmes, clips and photographs speak of the commitment towards one narrative universe across media. Fandom also

leads to specific fan cultures with specific intermedial relations related to Internet use (as in *XWP*) or live performances (as in case of Bjurström).

Thus there may be various intermedialities at play that place and interpret the same text in quite distinct ways. These multiple layers of intermediality may at times collide and cause contradictions between the fans and mainstream media, bringing out existing power relations as in the case of *XWP*.

The formation of fan cultures at present seems to be especially connected with the process of mediation and the development of media technology. The popularity of the Internet with its new global networks is one indication of this. Furthermore it seems that because of the new media technology fan cultures are more public than before which entails intermingling and increasing of fan practises and fanification of media audiences. Television fan cultures in Finland have clearly increased in the course of the 1990s, a development that is also been realized by the producers and television companies (Nikunen 2005; Laukkanen 2003a; 2003b).

It appears that new media technology in providing possibilities for self made publicity is related to activity and communities whereas tabloid publicity is more related to an experience as one in the crowd. Television and the Internet are the most successful in establishing the intermedial relation that activates audiences, however this may not be the whole truth. Intermedial use of television and the Internet may indeed be based on the repetitious use of ready made, standardised formations such as mere voting. As Ien Ang (1996, 10-14) has aptly pointed out there's a growing demand on behalf of cultural production that audiences should be more active, however, this activity may not have anything to do with being radical.

Moreover in the actual fan practises the old and new seem to live side by side: fan letters are still written by hand on ordinary paper even though the stars' addresses may be checked from the Internet. As this article has showed the intermedial relations of audience practises vary from the new technology determined use to the more traditional use of media. Intermediality may be established more or less systematically or by accident. Thus the formation of intermedial relations is not necessarily a straight forward process but rather inconsistent and complex, one that needs to be researched further especially from the point of production.

It may be tempting to regard intermediality as established from the grass root level, by the fans, as more radical and productive than the one established from a high level of cultural production, by the institutions. The production-led intermediality may fail as partly happened in the case of *Ally McBeal*, but at the same time it may create space for social networks and political disputes. It seems however that fans who establish their own publicity, as is the case of the *XWP* fans, do have a certain sense of creativity and self definition in their fandom. *XWP* fandom stands out as an especially radical fan culture due to their own publications and gender politics produced within their fan practises. However, we should not be blinded by the technological hype and refrain from researching further the terms of activity, its political and radical potential. We should also look at the consumerist logics and power relations behind the Internet based fan activities as well as extend our consideration of activity and politics to other more private, instant and less literate pleasures of fandom.

Notes

1. This article is based on my dissertation on television fan cultures published by the University of Tampere Press 2005.
2. Italics are used when referred to the show. Characters of Xena and Ally McBeal are referred to without italics.
3. The empirical data consists of fan interviews, letters, fan mail, Internet fan sites, discussion groups and various journalistic texts. First I gathered letters through advertisements in two Finnish TV-magazines (*Katso*, *TV-maailma*) and one youth magazine (*Fani*). From these letters I chose two cases for further research: the Finnish fan community of *Xena: Warrior Princess* (XWP)⁴ and the fans of *Ally McBeal*. I completed the material with a third case, the fans of Marco Bjurström, popular host for a Finnish music quiz *BumtsiBum*. The method was applied was multiperspective, multi-sited research as introduced and discussed by Marcus (1986) and developed further by Saukko (2003).
5. In the case of XWP six members, three men of ages 14, 52, 62 and three women of ages 17, 23 and 37 of the Finnish "Xenite" community were interviewed twice (in 1999 and 2001). The core of the Finnish XWP fandom is the Internet fan community that was observed from 1998 to 2004 (Internet discussion group 1998-9/ 2003) and I took part in one of their fan meetings in 2003. The international web sites such as the Whoosh! journal forms an important reference for the Finnish XWP fandom thus the international sites were examined in relation to Finnish fandom.
6. As suggested by Matt Hills (2002, 197) cult series often share this type of double reading position. They contain both adult and child audiences which raises possibilities that the adult audience may be considered as infantile or the series may be considered as too violent for children.
7. However not all fans were satisfied since SubTV has a limited coverage area and half of the fans I interviewed couldn't watch XWP on TV.
8. Some Finnish fans may of course have taken part in the international communities right from the beginning. However, since XWP was first broadcast in Finland a few years later than in the US, it became evident that most Finnish fans joined these discussions late and adopted to their views and practises.
9. The data in the case of *Ally McBeal* consists of 12 letters from both fans and "haters" of the series written to a local newspaper *Aamulehti* and 16 interviews. The majority (11) of those interviewed were selected by a survey conducted in a local school from among 72 13-15 years old high school students. The media coverage of *Ally McBeal* in two tabloids (*Iltalehti*, *Ilta-Sanomat*) and two women's magazines (*Anna*, *Me Naiset*) in 1998-2001, and in the newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* 1998-2002 were analysed. In addition the international *Ally McBeal* fan web sites were explored with regards to their reference to the Finnish MTV3 *Ally McBeal* web site.
10. One of the earliest examples of this being tabloids reporting on the coming up episode of Dallas in which JR was shot.

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KAARINA NIKUNEN, D.Soc.Sc., Researcher; Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, FI-33014 University of Tampere, kaarina.nikunen@uta.fi