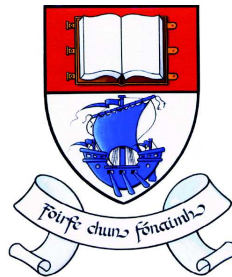


***LIFE AS A JENA MALONE FAN:
AN INTROSPECTIVE STUDY OF
A CONSUMER'S FAN RELATIONSHIP
WITH A FILM ACTRESS***

BY

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A Thesis Submitted for the Completion of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)



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Submitted on 17 June 2011

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that, except where duly acknowledged and referenced, this study is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for any degree or other qualification in the Waterford Institute of Technology or any other third level institution in Ireland or abroad. While six publications form the core of this thesis, none of the papers contained in this submission for the award of PhD has been presented for any other academic or professional distinction.

All six publications have been co-authored. In case of the five papers that have been co-authored by my supervisor Dr. Susan Whelan, I was the principle author and hold the intellectual contribution. In case of “*Getting Lost ‘Into the Wild’*”, the intellectual contribution is jointly and equally held (see Dr. Wided Batat’s statement below).

Markus Wohlfeil, June 2011

Statement of author’s contribution

I hereby declare that I am aware that the work in the paper “Getting Lost Into the Wild: Understanding Consumers’ Movie Enjoyment Through a Narrative Transportation Approach” of which I am a co-author, will form part of PhD dissertation by Mr. **Markus Wohlfeil** who made a proportional contribution to the work in the conception and design, analysis and interpretation, data collection, writing the article, critical vision of the paper and critical revision of the article.

Wided BATAT, PhD
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I dedicate this thesis to my parents, my late grandma, my brother Sven, my sister Katja, my niece Hannah, my nephew Felix and, in particular, to Ms Debbie Malone and Ms. Jena Malone.

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In the academic literature, conducting a research project is often compared to going on a journey of discovery in order to advance the knowledge in a specific area of study. Even though this may be true, in many cases this type of journey will also take the researcher on a quest of self-discovery through which s/he ultimately becomes a different, more enlightened person at the end. However, as with any other journey, the researcher has to acknowledge that he would have lost his path on so many occasions, if it weren't for the support, help, encouragement, wisdom or simply the comfort of some important people along the way.

First of all, and most importantly, I would like to acknowledge the major academic and personal support, commitment and trust I have received from my supervisor Dr. Susan Whelan over the last 8 years (2 years MBS and, now, 6 years PhD). I would like to thank Susan for accompanying me on my journey that went from uncharted territory into the complete unknown, for making sure that I did not get stuck somewhere along the way and/or distracted by some other adventures; and for giving me the intellectual freedom to explore, develop and establish my own path into academia. But most importantly, I would like to thank Susan especially for putting up with such a difficult, thick-headed and moody weirdo like me. I'm quite sure that it isn't always easy, as I know that I can be a real pain in the ass sometimes.

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ABSTRACT

Ever since the dawn of the Hollywood star system in the early 1920s, consumers have always been fascinated by the works and private lives of film stars and any other celebrities (Dyer 1998; McDonald 2000). In fact, the public demand for celebrities is so strong these days that they have without any doubt become an essential part of our everyday culture (Gabler 1998; Turner 2004) and market economy (McCracken 1989; Thomson 2006). Yet, some consumers experience a significantly more intensive level of interest and admiration for a particular celebrity and, subsequently, become what are commonly known as '*fans*' (Henry and Caldwell 2007; O'Guinn 1991) or '*celebrity worshippers*' (McCutcheon et al. 2003). And I'm one of them! Ever since I, by chance, bought the DVD of the film *Saved!* (US 2004) back in April 2005, I have been the devoted fan of the talented young actress Jena Malone, who features primarily in lesser known, but much more interesting and challenging indie-films. But what is it exactly that attracts an ordinary consumer like me to become and remain the devoted fan of a film actress? What does the lived experience of being the fan of a film actress (or any other celebrity for that matter) actually mean for the individual consumer? And how does celebrity fandom express itself in everyday consumer behaviour?

While these are interesting questions, surprisingly little academic research has sought to address them. In fact, the existing fandom literature even lacks a coherent understanding of what actually constitutes fandom in the first place, and the interpretation of what fans are often seems to depend on the underlying agenda of the researcher investigating the phenomenon. What is clear, though, is that both academic literature and popular media have placed fans consistently on the receiving end of ridicule, negative stereotyping and *bad press* (Jenson 1992). As desired, fans are portrayed either as mindless numbs, who are manipulated by popular mass culture (Fiske 1992; Schickel 1985), or as subversive and creative rebels against the corporate establishment (Jenkins 1992; Shefrin 2004). Some authors viewed fans as members of neo-religious cults, who worship celebrities like gods through shared rituals and the sacralisation of associated items within like-minded communities (Kozinets 1997; O'Guinn 1991). Others described them as geeks and alienated, lonely social misfits, for whom fandom is a means of compensating for experienced deficits in their social lives (Jenkins 1992; Kozinets 2001). Finally, some

social psychologists have in recent years set out to confirm sensationalist media reports by portraying fans as cognitively inflexible, dull and uncreative people (McCutcheon et al. 2003) or as delusional, pathological-obsessive stalkers (McCutcheon et al. 2006).

But maybe there is much more to a consumer's fan relationship with a film star than previous studies have uncovered so far. Thus, in order to answer the earlier questions, this thesis aims to develop an understanding of what meaning(s) the everyday lived fan relationship with an admired film actress has for individual consumer and how it expresses itself in everyday consumer behaviour. By using subjective personal introspection (Holbrook 1995) and taking an existential-phenomenological perspective (Thompson 1997), I examine my own personal everyday lived fan relationship with the actress Jena Malone by drawing on narrative transportation theory. In doing so, the research is also looking for any evidence that either supports, questions or even contradicts assumptions about fandom held by previous studies. The introspective data were collected as contemporaneous data over a period of 15 months and recorded as hand-written notes in a specifically assigned diary (Patterson 2005). The emphasis, thereby, is placed less on factual behaviour, but much more on my emotional experiences such as personal feelings, thought, fantasies and daydreams as *the* essential elements of real-lived fan experiences.

While a number of interesting findings have emerged from the introspective data that contribute to the interdisciplinary literature on fandom, stardom and film consumption, the main contribution is a re-conceptualisation of fans that puts the emphasis back on what should matter the most – a fan's emotional attachment to one's admired film star, which revolves primarily around the film star's creative work and private persona. As the consumer is unlikely ever to meet one's admired film star in person, one's personal impression of the film star's personality is essentially a selective intertextual reading of relevant and '*reliable*' media texts based on one's own life experiences, ideals, dreams and inherent desires. A continuous process of introjection and projection (Gould 1993), thereby, strengthens the fan's feeling of '*knowing*' the celebrity like a personal friend, despite actually having never met the real person behind the image. Nevertheless, this experienced '*bond of emotional closeness*' can at times be strong enough to elicit within the consumer a feeling of '*personal friendship*' or '*love*' towards the admired film star, which can take the form of a parasocial relationship.

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CHAPTER 1

CONFESSIONS OF A FAN

1.1 Introduction to the Study of a Consumer's Fan Relationship with a Film Star

Until recently, little academic research has sought to develop a deeper understanding of how a consumer's fan relationship with one's favourite film actor or actress expresses itself in everyday consumption experiences and practices (Thomson 2006; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008a, 2011a). This scant attention is quite surprising, because since the dawn of the Hollywood star system in the 1920s consumers have always been fascinated by the creative performances and private lives of film stars or any other celebrities (Barbas 2001; Dyer 1998; Geraghty 2000; McDonald 2000). Indeed, we encounter consumers, who indulge themselves in the latest creative works, stories, gossip and scandals of their favourite celebrities, virtually every time we open our daily newspaper, turn on the TV, browse the Internet, read magazines at the dentist, walk down the street, shop in the local supermarket or just talk to our friends, peers or colleagues at school, university or work (Hermes 2006; Schickel 1985). Thus, it is only fair to say that film stars, directors, rock/pop stars, athletes, novelists, artists and even models have without any doubt become an essential part of our contemporary everyday culture (Barbas 2001; Evans and Hesmondhalgh 2005; Gabler 1998; Turner 2004) and market economy (McCracken 1989; Thomson 2006). Of course, most people tend to have only a fleeting interest in celebrities per se and thereby enjoy primarily the exchange of gossip with other like-minded individuals (Hermes 2006; Stacey 1994). However, some consumers experience a significantly more intensive level of interest and admiration for a specific film actor or actress (or any other celebrity for that matter) and, subsequently, become what are commonly known as *fans* (Henry and Caldwell 2007; Leets, de Becker and Giles 1995; O'Guinn 1991) or *celebrity worshippers* (McCutcheon, Ashe, Houran and Maltby 2003; McCutcheon, Lange and Houran 2002).

And as it so happens, I'm one of them. Indeed, ever since I by chance bought the DVD of the indie-film *Saved!* (US 2004) in a 3-DVDs-for-€20-sale back in April 2005, I have been a devoted fan of the young, attractive and very talented film actress Jena Malone, who features primarily in lesser known, yet much more interesting and challenging independent films such as *Donnie Darko* (US 2001), *The United States of Leland* (US

2003), *Four Last Songs* (UK 2007), *The Go-Getter* (US 2007), *Into the Wild* (US 2007), *The Ruins* (US 2008), *The Messenger* (US 2009), *Five Star Day* (US 2010) or *Sucker Punch* (US 2011). What hereby is quite curious is that I have never really experienced this kind of admiration and devotion for a specific actor/actress or any other celebrity before; though, like probably most other people, I have enjoyed watching films since my early childhood for the hedonic pleasure value that they provide (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Kerrigan 2010). But for me, films are much more than merely another form of entertainment. In fact, my fascination with them meets Bloch's (1986: 539) definition of *product enthusiasm*, where the product (here: *films*) '*plays an important role and source of excitement and pleasure along sensory and aesthetic dimensions in a consumer's life*'. This enthusiasm for films has often expressed itself in consumer behaviour that goes well beyond the obligatory visit to the cinema, renting a DVD or watching a film on TV. For more than 26 years, I have been engaged in the large-scale collection (Belk, Wallendorf, Sherry and Holbrook 1991) of films first on VHS and then on DVD formats. Similar to enthusiastic collectors of art (Chen 2009), literature (Brown 2006a) or records (Holbrook 1987), I also take care and pleasure in displaying my '*little treasures*' for the eyes of the occasional visitor, but even more importantly for my very own private enjoyment (Chen 2009; Holbrook 1987). Nevertheless, their collection as cherished possessions (Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry 1989) is only of minor relevance compared to the contribution that films make for me on a higher emotional level.

The experiential consumption of films has always provided me with both an exciting way to escape the everyday reality of a lonely, routinised and boring life and a source of inspiration for pursuing a '*better way of life*' (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008b). Therefore, instead of being merely a passive form of short-term entertainment, my film enjoyment actually derives from the active immersion into the film narratives (Batat and Wohlfeil 2009; Green, Brock and Kaufman 2004) and the identification with film characters (Cohen 2001; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008b) that give me the opportunity to live out my hopes, dreams and fantasies in my imagination. Yet, despite all those years of engaging emotionally with the fascinating world of films and filmmaking, I never really viewed or described myself as a fan. I also have never felt any real devotion for a particular film star either. Surely, there were certain moments in my life, when I felt briefly attracted to a certain talented and/or sexually appealing actress like Winona Ryder, Sandra Bullock, Neve Campbell, Alyssa Milano, Claire Danes and Natalie Portman, whose films I

preferred to watch on those particular occasions more often than others. My interest in them was often awoken by my enjoyment of a specific film or TV show they were just featuring in. But it usually involved little more than merely watching the respective actress in a few other films and/or TV shows, and downloading some free sexy photos from the Internet. However, just like my passing interest in certain film genres, none of them left me with the personal desire for developing a more intensive emotional feeling for her beyond the performances in those selected films and, at the end, my interest in each of them evaporated again within just a few months. Moreover, I paid virtually no attention to their private lives or anything else outside their on-screen performances. At least, that was the case until, by chance, a young, talented and very attractive actress called Jena Malone unexpectedly crossed my path and captured my heart...

Indeed, ever since I first saw her, I experience this completely different and much more intense emotional relationship with Jena Malone. While *Saved!* (US 2004) has become one of my all-time favourite films, I actually love to watch all of her films endlessly. No surprise then that I obviously have every single one of them added to my private DVD collection as soon as they are released and become available for purchase (Belk 1991). But in addition to having all her films in my personal collection, I also feel this constant desire in me to learn more about her as both a creative performer and a private person (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2011a). Yet, because she is less known and/or doesn't follow the typical, widely expected *career path* of parties, scandals and tabloid publicity like many other (wannabe) celebrities (Gabler 1998; Geraghty 2000; Schickel 1985; Turner 2004), good interviews, articles or websites with up-to-date information about her (as a result?) are quite rare. Hence, I go to great lengths to satisfy my needs by buying them on eBay even for above-retail prices. Nevertheless, my most cherished treasures are Jena Malone's original hand-signed photo autographs – especially those ones that she has in person dedicated to me personally. In some strange way, I feel that Jena Malone has actually *Saved!* (US 2004) me from a lonely and frustrating life as an unwilling single by filling it with meaning and a sense of purpose (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2009, 2011b, c). However, my emotional attachment to Jena Malone has also presented me with some truly interesting questions that, in my opinion, warrant further investigation. For instance, what is it exactly that attracts an ordinary consumer like me to become and remain the devoted fan of a film actress (or any other celebrity for that matter)? Why does a consumer like me experience such a strong emotional attachment to one

particular film actress, but remains indifferent to other equally talented and/or sexually attractive ones? What does the everyday lived fan relationship with one's admired film actress mean to the individual consumer? And how does it manifest itself in everyday consumer behaviour?

Yet, because these are indeed some valid and interesting questions, it is quite surprising and also disappointing that so little academic research has previously sought to address them. In fact, while a growing interdisciplinary body of literature from such diverse academic disciplines as cultural anthropology, sociology, social psychology, sports and leisure research, media studies, marketing and consumer research has been dedicated to the study of fandom in recent years, earlier studies have focused mainly on the symbolic (and sometimes obsessive) consumption practices of certain, more '*extreme*' subgroups of fans usually associated with media text enthusiasm (Brooker 2005; Jankovich 2002; Jenkins 1992; Kozinets 2001; Shefrin 2004) or sports spectatorship (Derbaix, Decrop and Cabossart 2002; Murrell and Dietz 1992; Richardson 2004; Richardson and Turley 2006, 2008). Researchers have thereby limited themselves methodologically to an *outsider-looking-in* perspective (Smith, Fisher and Cole 2007) that has provided them primarily with the opportunity to establish and reinforce an ideological distinction between '*US*' (the normal, rational, mainstream and socially desirable) and '*THEM*' (the abnormal, irrational, deviant and socially undesirable) by looking down from some obscure *morally superior* high ground on the non-conform '*OTHER*' within culture and/or society. But because the interpretation of what a fan is seems only too often to be highly dependent on the underlying agenda of the respective researcher investigating the phenomenon (Smith et al. 2007), it is no wonder that the present literature still lacks even a coherent understanding of what exactly constitutes fandom in the first place (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008a, 2011b, c). What is clear, though, is that both academic literature and popular media have placed fans consistently on the receiving end of ridicule, negative stereotyping and '*bad press*' (Barbas 2001; Jenson 1992; Lewis 1992; North, Bland and Ellis 2005; Redden and Steiner 2000; Schickel 1985; Thorp 1939).

As desired, fans are thereby conceptualised either as uneducated, gullible, dull and vulnerable '*numbs*', who are easily controlled and manipulated by a dangerous and '*evil*' popular mass culture (Boorstin 2006, Fiske 1992; Gabler 1998; Schickel 1985), or as subversive and creative rebels against the corporate establishment, who poach and

utilise commercial media texts to create their own new textual products (Barbas 2001; Jenkins 1992; Shefrin 2004; Turner 2004). Some scholars portray fans as members of neo-religious cults, who worship celebrities like gods through shared rituals and the sacralisation of associated profane items within like-minded communities (Jindra 1994; Kozinets 1997; O'Guinn 1991). Others describe them as geeks and alienated, lonely social misfits, who experience for various reasons deficits in their social skills and/or networks (Horton and Wohl 1956). While often being well-educated, creative and very successful in school or at work, these consumers feel in their private lives lonely, rejected and stigmatised especially by those others, who may be less imaginative and intelligent, but are much more privileged in terms of social skills, status and/or physical attractiveness (Cusack, Jack and Kavanagh 2003; Kozinets 2001). Thus, fandom would provide them with a means of compensation and social interaction with similarly isolated individuals. In following Munsterberg's (1916) legacy, however, a small group of social psychologists have recently set out again on a deliberate quest to confirm the century-old and sensationalist popular stereotype that fans essentially are cognitively inflexible, gullible, dull and uncreative individuals (McCutcheon et al. 2003; North et al. 2005) or, even worse, delusional, pathological-obsessive stalkers (Maltby et al. 2004; McCutcheon, Scott, Arugate and Parker 2006). In fact, McCutcheon et al. (2002, 2003, 2006) have even gone so far to imply that *celebrity worship* would actually constitute a 'serious mental illness'; although their own published statistical data strongly contradict every single one of their arguments.

In light of such devastating views of fans, admitting publicly to my infatuation with the film actress Jena Malone and risking to be branded with one of the common stereotypes or, even worse, to be declared as cognitively inflexible, dull, gullible and obsessive – at least if the findings by McCutcheon et al. (2003, 2006) are anything to go by – may seem to be a very unwise move. But as none of these conceptualisations either describes or fully captures many facets of my own everyday lived fan consumption experiences, I can't stop wondering whether there is maybe much more to a consumer's fan relationship with one's admired film actor/actress (or celebrity) and any subsequent consumption practices than previous research has uncovered so far. This suspicion is further strengthened by the fact that all earlier studies have conceptualised fandom from an *outsider-looking-in* perspective, whereby scholars have imposed their own preconceived abstract ideas onto the phenomenon (Smith et al. 2007). Moreover, they

all share two main commonalities. Firstly, previous research has only investigated certain, more '*extreme*' subgroups of fans on specific occasions such as Star Trek Conventions (Jenkins 1992; Kozinets 2001), fan-clubs (Henry and Caldwell 2007; O'Guinn 1991; Richardson 2004) or fan-blogs (Kozinets 1997, 2007; Richardson and Turley 2006, 2008) while paying little attention to the ordinary everyday lived fan experiences of the '*normal*' fan in one's daily life. Secondly, all the previous studies have focused either on the symbolic relationships and social dynamics that consumers experience with other fans within their respective consumption subcultures (Henry and Caldwell 2007; Jenkins 1992; Kozinets 1997, 2001, 2007; Richardson and Turley 2006, 2008) or on the psychological well-being of '*gullible, pathological-obsessive*' celebrity worshippers (Leets et al. 1995; McCutcheon et al. 2003, 2006) instead of actually exploring the nature of fans' personal relationships with their objects of admiration in the first place. This inadvertently meant that, in the process, the admired fandom objects have often been reduced to the mere status of an interchangeable commodity.

The interesting questions raised by my brief autobiographical account above, however, suggest a need for an alternative conceptualisation of fandom that instead focuses on the fan's dyadic relationship with the fandom object. Thus, my own research path has become a journey to explore the phenomenon of celebrity fandom in more detail from the fan's point of view that has not been looked at previously. Yet, addressing those earlier questions appropriately requires a first-person approach that gives the consumer a voice (Stern 1998) and allows an examination from a *genuine insider* perspective (Levy 1996; Smith et al. 2007) what it really means for the individual consumer to be the devoted fan of a film actor/actress (or a celebrity in general). This present thesis, therefore, contributes to the literature by developing a genuinely holistic understanding of what meaning(s) the privately experienced fan relationship with one's admired film actress has for the individual consumer and how it manifests itself in everyday consumer behaviour. In taking an existential-phenomenological perspective (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Thompson, Locander and Pollio 1989) and using a narrative form of subjective personal introspection (Gould 2008a, b; Holbrook 1995, 2005a), I describe and critically examine through a narrative transportation approach (Gerrig 1993; Green et al. 2004) how my own personal fan relationship with the film actress Jena Malone has developed and expressed itself in everyday lived consumption experiences over a period of 20 months (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2011b, c). The emphasis is hereby placed

less on the factual recollection of observable consumption practices that could have been obtained through less controversial research methods, but much more on how my everyday lived experiences (i.e. inner feelings, thoughts, sensations, daydreams and fantasies) derived from or translated into my fan relationship with Jena Malone.

1.2 Origin of My Research Journey

While the issues and questions in relation to celebrity fandom that I have raised in the previous section are clearly of interest, my research journey didn't actually commence with the aim of investigating them, but instead emerged from my initial research idea by a fortunate coincidence. Inspired by Holbrook's autoethnographic writings about his personal consumption experiences stemming from an enthusiasm for jazz music (1986, 1987, 1995, 1998a) and photograph collections (1998b, 2005, 2006), my initial research back in spring 2005 started off by studying the experiential consumption of films from an individual consumer's insider perspective (Batat and Wohlfeil 2009; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2006a, 2008b). As I have enjoyed watching and collecting films since my childhood for the hedonic pleasure value of losing myself in their imaginary worlds, I felt back then that this would make for an interesting and insightful contribution to consumer research (and I still do). In contrast to conventional product or service brands, films must hereby be viewed as composite artistic brands that consist of a complex tapestry of various other brands, which include among others the participating actors and actresses, the director, the producer(s), the scriptwriter(s), the cinematographer(s), the editor(s) and the soundtrack composer(s) as individual human brands in their own rights (Kerrigan 2010; Kerrigan and O'Reilly 2008; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2006a). The film's brand image and success influences and is simultaneously influenced by the personal image and value of each participating human brand (Albert 1998; Beckwith 2009; Elberse 2007; Levin, Levin and Heath 1997; Wallace, Seigerman and Holbrook 1993). Hence, I initially considered the phenomenon of film star fandom merely as one of many relevant factors contributing to a consumer's enjoyment of films (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008b).

With my own personal admiration for the film actress Jena Malone intensifying during the summer of 2005, however, it emerged that the phenomenon of celebrity fandom would provide a beautiful opportunity that was just too good to ignore. In fact, a number of questions intrigued me due to my own personal fan experiences in particular and just

begged for closer examination. For instance, why do I feel so emotionally attached to Jena Malone instead of any other (i.e. a more *popular* and *media-friendly*) celebrity? What is it about Jena Malone that fascinates me so intensely, while I usually remain rather indifferent towards any other celebrity or celebrity culture in general? Moreover, although I describe myself openly as a Jena Malone fan, what exactly does it actually mean to be a fan in the first place? These are indeed some pretty interesting questions that due to their nature and relevance to our (post)modern consumer culture also lend themselves to a holistic examination. Therefore, the emphasis of my research project has shifted towards understanding the widespread phenomenon of celebrity fandom – with a special view on film actors/actresses – as its central focus. By using subjective personal introspection, I have recorded and examined my own personal everyday lived consumption experiences as a Jena Malone fan as primary data to provide some insights into celebrity fandom from a fan’s insider point of view. All insights emerged thereby iteratively from the introspective data themselves without prior knowledge of the relevant interdisciplinary academic literature on fandom and stardom. Obviously, the research’s new focus and overall approach has presented in some way a gamble on two fronts that could have easily backfired under unfortunate circumstances.

First of all, there has always been the danger that my fan interest in Jena Malone and my admiration for her could have evaporated at any time as quickly as it began. In other words, I could have ended up with insufficient introspective data and had to start all over again. Fortunately, my emotional attachment to this film actress has persisted and even intensified not only throughout the period of data collection, but also continues to this very day. Secondly, and maybe even more crucially, my knowledge of both the fandom and the stardom literature was virtually non-existent at the time of data collection. In fact, I only read up on the fandom and stardom literatures after I had completed the 16 months of contemporary self-observation and started to transcribe the recorded diaries. The obvious advantage of this approach is that I would neither consciously nor unconsciously be able to influence the recording of introspective data in the diary in favour of or against certain current conceptualisations of celebrity fandom in the present literature, if I didn’t know them in advance. The major downside to this approach is that all findings emerging iteratively from the introspective data could have failed to make a contribution to the literature, because they might have already been addressed in detail by previous studies. Fortunately, celebrity fandom has turned out to

be still a largely neglected field of research within the interdisciplinary study of fandom longing for closer academic investigation and my own research is already making a first significant contribution to enhance our understanding of the meanings that a fan relationship with a celebrity may have for the individual consumer, as evidenced by the papers included in this thesis. By coincidence, in heeding also Smith et al.'s (2007) call for a genuine insider perspective into a consumer's real-lived fan experiences with the subject of one's admiration, my introspective research is not only leading to an urgently needed re-conceptualisation of fans and fandom, but has also become an important part of the emerging *Consumer Introspection Theory (CIT)* paradigm (Gould 2011).

1.3 Overall Aim(s) and Purpose of the Thesis

The general idea of conducting academic research is to contribute to the growing body of knowledge in a specific area or discipline of interest by investigating phenomena that call for scholarly explanation. The romantic imagery that we hereby usually have is that of a *journey of discovery*, where a researcher ventures into unknown territory to explore observed phenomena of interest and after some time returns back home again to report the findings. But if this travel metaphor is accurate, then it seems that most researchers select the phenomena they investigate akin to package tourists walking sightseeing on the beaten path from one tourist attraction or landmark to the next highlight of the tour. In some cases (the so-called '*armchair scholarship*'), scholars even seem to be content enough to review merely the existing literature in order to theorise about certain distant phenomena without ever actually leaving the safety of their desks – which is pretty much the scholarly equivalent of writing a travel book without ever having been in the country or culture in question. And as it happens, this is particularly true regarding the study of fandom. Indeed, with the exception of a handful of ethnographic studies, where the researcher has at least temporarily visited a group of (often hardcore) fans within the special context of conventions (Jenkins 1992; Kozinets 2001), fan-clubs (Brooker 2005; Henry and Caldwell 2007; O'Guinn 1991; Richardson 2004) or fan-blogs (Kozinets 1997, 2007; Richardson and Turley 2008), the vast majority of scholars have theorised fans and fandom without ever actually engaging in person with the very people and phenomenon they sought to investigate. Under the pretext of objectivity and scientific rigour, all of them have tended to occupy a detached *outsider-looking-in* position, from where they could describe and examine fans and their behaviour by imposing their own preconceived, abstract, one-sided and only too often prejudiced meanings onto this

phenomenon (Smith et al. 2007) that would allow for differentiating fans as the '*deviant other*' from what is considered to be normal in society. In the process, all those previous studies have treated the consumers' object of admiration merely as an interchangeable commodity of no further relevance for one's fandom other than providing a social link to other fans (Jenkins 1992; Henry and Caldwell 2007; Kozinets 2001; Nayar 2009).

It should therefore come as no real surprise that, when I started my research journey, a review of the fandom literature has presented clear evidence that we still lack a genuine understanding as to why and how a consumer really experiences this special emotional bond to a specific film actor/actress (or any other celebrity) that s/he admires and what meaning this personal devotion carries for the individual(s) involved in one's everyday life. Hence, the overall aim of this thesis is to push the frontiers of knowledge and to re-conceptualise celebrity fandom by providing some genuine holistic insights from the perspective of a real insider into what meaning(s) a consumer's private fan relationship with one's admired film actor/actress has for the consumer and how it manifests itself in everyday consumption practices and experiences (Smith et al. 2007; Stern 1998). Thus, in taking an existential-phenomenological perspective (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Thompson 1997; Thompson et al. 1989) and using a narrative subjective personal introspection approach (Gould 2008a, b; Holbrook 1995, 2005a; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008b, 2011b, c), I have been occupying the dual role of both the researcher and my sole informant by describing, examining and interpreting my own private everyday lived experiences as a devoted fan of the film actress Jena Malone and how they manifest themselves through my consumption of her films, autographs and other collectible items. In other words, my research journey required me to explore the uncharted territory of celebrity fandom as a native backpacker with an open mind and as little baggage of preconceived abstract ideas and prejudices as possible in order to investigate the phenomenon from a genuine insider's point of view. Furthermore, the reader has thereby been invited to join me on this journey as a side-participant and to experience celebrity fandom as it is experienced by a real-living fan. In doing so, the research journey and, subsequently, the present thesis commenced with the following initial objectives in mind that reflect the questions raised earlier by my autobiographical experiences as a Jena Malone fan:

- To explore the nature and extent of a fan's emotional attachment to one's favourite film actor/actress (or any other celebrity). By gaining first-hand insights into what it

is exactly that attracts an ordinary consumer like me to become and remain the devoted fan of a film actress like Jena Malone, we would be able to understand why a consumer experiences such a significant level of interest, admiration and devotion for one particular celebrity, while not experiencing similar feelings of attraction and attachment towards other equally talented and/or sexually appealing celebrities.

- To develop a genuine understanding of what meaning(s) the everyday lived fan relationship with one's admired film actor/actress has for the individual consumer within the context of one's personal life-world (Thompson 1998). In examining the meanings that being a devoted fan of Jena Malone has for my personal subjective quality of life experiences, this thesis seeks to provide a true insider perspective to understand in particular what it really feels like for an individual consumer to be the fan of a film actor/actress. Furthermore, by giving a real fan his own voice of representation (Stern 1998), it would be interesting to explore through his eyes how and in what different forms the experienced emotional relationship with one's admired film actor/actress is occupying both a mental and a physical space with the consumer's everyday life.
- To examine how a consumer's emotional attachment to one's favourite and admired film actor/actress expresses itself in everyday consumer behaviour. As it is highly unlikely that an ordinary consumer like me would ever get to know one's admired film actor/actress as the real private person behind the public persona in the media (Dyer 1998), this thesis aims to enable a deeper understanding of how the individual consumer may express one's emotional fan relationship with the admired film actor/actress through the acquisition and consumption of tangible possessions such as autographed photos, posters, DVDs, articles and other collectibles to create or enhance the personal feeling of the respective celebrity's physical presence in one's everyday life (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2011a, b, c).

Still, it must be noted that these initial objectives have merely served as early points of departure and were not intended to be imposed as foundation for some preconceived, deductive hypotheses. Instead, all insights obtained during the research have emerged iteratively from the introspective data through a lengthy and thorough hermeneutical analysis (Gadamer 1989; Thompson 1997) of the diary transcripts, which were only

brought into context with the relevant existing fandom and stardom literature during the analysis process. Nonetheless, first readings during the hermeneutic analysis of the introspective data have made it apparent that drawing on narrative transportation theory (Gerrig 1993; Green and Brock 2000; Green et al. 2004; Rapp and Gerrig 2006) and, by extension, parasocial interaction theory (Alperstein 1991; Horton and Wohl 1956; Rubin, Perse and Powell 1985; Rubin and McHugh 1987) as conceptual frameworks from the social psychology and communication research would in particular benefit our understanding of a consumer's emotional attachment and devotion to a film actor/actress as a fan. Indeed, by drawing on these two theories during the hermeneutic analysis (Thompson 1997), my research and, hence, this thesis looks at whether the introspective data into a genuine insider's everyday lived fan relationship provide any evidence that might support, question or even challenge pre-established stereotypes, assumptions, (mis)conceptions and beliefs about consumers' fan relationships with film actors/actresses (or other celebrities) that scholars have in the past imposed on fans while theorising the fandom phenomenon from the convenience and safety of their distant outsider positions.

1.4 Epistemological and Methodological Foundations of the Research

As a research methodology provides the road map for an academic journey of discovery into a phenomenon that calls for scholarly explanation, the question arises as to why I have taken an existential-phenomenological perspective and chosen subjective personal introspection (SPI) as the research methodology for this research and thesis rather than any other, more established and less controversial one. While I discuss and justify my research methodology and its philosophical foundations in Appendix A in much more detail, I address the question here briefly. The film *Into the Wild* (US 2007), in which Jena Malone also features in a support role, offers hereby an excellent analogy for the existential-phenomenological approach that has guided my research journey. Just like the lead character Chris McCandless, we need to get out of the comfortable trap that is the established path in academic scholarship, leave the *old* (= what is known and/or how it became known) behind and walk with an open mind into '*unknown territory*' to obtain genuine insights into the human condition (Batat and Wohlfeil 2009). Indeed, by studying only individual elements of consumption phenomena in isolation, the scientific methodologies that still dominate most marketing research on consumption experiences, including my earlier studies (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2006b, c, 2007), have usually failed

to appreciate their holistic context and complexity. Moreover, the research methods that have informed much of the fandom and stardom literature tend to examine film stars and their fans purely as isolated texts by imposing preconceived, ideology-informed and often prejudiced meanings onto them from a detached outsider-looking-in position (Evans and Hesmondhalgh 2005). Yet, in order to gain a truly holistic understanding of a consumer's fan relationship with one's admired film actor/actress, the consumer must be given a voice by focusing from a real insider perspective on the consumer experience in the way it presents itself to consciousness (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Thompson et al. 1989). If we, like Chris McCandless, look thereby into our own individual subjectivity, we might learn a few things about ourselves as human beings (Gould 1991, 2006a). But while he eventually met his doom at the unforgiving hands of Mother Nature, I hope that, at the end of my journey, I may be spared a similar fate at the hands of academia.

As phenomenology is essentially a philosophy, a paradigm and a research methodology, it is often hard to describe. Husserl (1985, 1986) developed it as an anti-foundationalist approach to knowledge that is centred in the certainty of conscious thought and rejects all the foundationalist notions of Cartesian duality, absolute truth and its criteria of evaluating knowledge claims (Hirschman and Holbrook 1992; Thompson 1990). Key to understanding phenomenology is Husserl's (1985) argument that material objects, despite their real physical existence in the external material world, only appear to the individual person in one's conscious thought as '*intentional objects*' rather than being perceived correctly as the things they are. By regarding objects not as things in themselves but as '*phenomena of consciousness*', he concluded that '*all consciousness is consciousness of something*' and that all thoughts are always directed at some phenomena of interest (Husserl 1985, 1986; Waldenfels 1992). Thus, Husserl proposed to '*go back to the things themselves*' in order to understand the true '*essence*' of a particular phenomenon in its ideal form and the context of its appearance. But to grasp knowledge with certainty, researchers would be required to bracket out their own preconceptions of the external world and to focus only on the contents of consciousness, which Husserl (1986) called the '*lived experience*'. Hence, the role of the researcher is to interpret the everyday meanings and structure of the world as '*lived*' by the individual person – the so-called '*life-world*'. The foundation of human understanding emerges thereby from an underlying field of pre-reflected lived experiences such as emotional experiences, practical knowledge and an intuitive understanding of one's socio-cultural

way of life (Husserl 1986; Thompson 1998; Waldenfels 1992). Other phenomenological scholars such as Heidegger (1927, 1935), Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Gadamer (1989) built on Husserl's thoughts by injecting existentialist ideas and proposing that the life-world is the structure of fundamental relationships that shape an individual's everyday lived experiences and private meanings s/he ascribes to them (Thompson 1997).

The proponents of existential-phenomenology argue that the life-world is a hermeneutic construct that provides an analytical framework through which holistic understandings of phenomena arise iteratively from the interpretive interaction between the developing understanding of consumers' life narratives and life-world categories (Thompson 1998). In borrowing from Gestalt psychology, Heidegger (1927) proposed that knowledge manifests itself in its existential '*Gestalt (figure)*' or '*Dasein (being there)*' and should provide insights into human life experiences as the individual's '*being-in-the-world*'. Merleau-Ponty (1962) suggested that the pre-reflected perceptual experiences serve as the foundation for conceptual knowledge claims and have to be understood as a process of '*seeing-as*' metaphors. Human experiences that have traditionally been viewed as unconscious are hereby described as both reflected and unreflected and as being located only in the present life-world rather than as being determined by historical antecedents (Merleau-Ponty 1962). As reflective meanings thereby emerge from the background of unreflected experiences, their relationship to each other can be explained through the figure/ground metaphor (Lai, Dermody and Hamner-Lloyd 2008). Human experiences must therefore be seen as a dynamic process, where certain aspects stand out as a figure from the ground at one point in time, while receding back into the ground at another point in time when other aspects become figural instead (Thompson et al. 1989). Hence, the figure is never independent from its contextual ground, as they constitute each other and neither can exist without the other (Heidegger 1935). All human experiences such as thoughts, feelings, fantasies, memories, perceptions and imaginations, furthermore, are intentional phenomena that are directed towards some focal point of interest (Lai et al. 2008; Merleau-Ponty 1962). This means that because consumers' behaviour patterns can't exist in isolation, they also shouldn't be studied independently of their social and environmental contexts. Existential-phenomenology, therefore, seeks to describe human experiences in the very way they are '*lived*' within the context they emerge from, whereby the world of lived experience doesn't necessarily have to be identical with the world of objective observation and description (Gadamer 1989; Thompson 1997).

In taking an existential-phenomenological perspective, the aim of my research project and thesis is to obtain holistic insights into a consumer's everyday lived fan experiences with one's admired film actor/actress through this particular individual's eyes (Gadamer 1989; Heidegger 1927; Merleau-Ponty 1962). But due to the perceptual and experiential differences that naturally exist between the researcher and the informants, the ultimate form of understanding human experiences within their situational and personal contexts would be achieved by a fusion of horizons (Gadamer 1989) that involves the researcher taking on the dual role of the researcher and the informed subject. And this is also the reason why I have been using a narrative form of subjective personal introspection (SPI) as the research method for data collection. SPI was introduced to consumer research by Holbrook (1986, 1987, 1995, 2006) 25 years ago and has been advanced further in particular by Gould (1991, 1995, 2006a, b), Brown (1998a, b, 2006b), Patterson (2005, 2009), Shankar (2000), Rambo (1992, 1996, 2005) and, lately, by myself to form what Gould (2011) is calling the emergent paradigm of *consumer introspection theory (CIT)*. In its purest form, SPI is an '*extreme form of participant observation that focuses on impressionistic narrative accounts of the writer's own private consumption experiences with a phenomenon from the viewpoint of an informed and deeply involved insider*' (Holbrook 2005a: 45), where the researcher is also the sole informant. While I discuss the history and controversy surrounding this research method (Renu 2011, Wallendorf and Brucks 1993, Woodside 2004, 2006) in Appendix A, one of its major advantages is that it allows the researcher an unlimited 24-hour access to an insider's everyday lived experiences with the investigated phenomenon without having to wrestle with ethical concerns regarding the informant's privacy (Brown 1998b). Moreover, SPI enables the researcher to explore the subjective nature of human feelings, daydreams, sensations and streams of consciousness related to consumption (Gould 1993, 2008b) in the very way they are experienced by the individual, but have remained inaccessible through traditional scientific and qualitative research methods (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2011b, c).

For this research, I have thus provided some introspective insights into my own private lived consumption experiences as a devoted fan of the film actress Jena Malone in the form of a narrative essay (see Appendix B), which summarises in detail the different types of introspective data that were collected over a total period of 21 months of self-observation. My lived fan experiences in the period from April to 10th September 2005

were obtained as retrospective data in a 36,000-words essay, which was written in early September 2005 to describe how I became a fan of Jena Malone in the first place. Then, in the following period from 11th September 2005 to 31st December 2006, I collected all my personal everyday lived fan experiences with Jena Malone as raw contemporaneous data while they occurred in real time in order to ensure a high degree of '*data accuracy*' (Wallendorf and Brucks 1993). Contemporaneous introspective data field the unique advantage of providing a large pool of pure emotional data on consumption experiences that would be inaccessible to any other scientific or qualitative research method that is based on retrospective recall or pure observation and, therefore, inevitably lost forever (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008a, b, 2011b, c). To collect them, I used thought-watching exercises that are relatively similar to the ones described by Gould (2006a, 2008a), whereby I observed within me how my thoughts, fantasies or feelings in response to Jena Malone-related stimuli – both external (i.e. film performances, interviews, photos or articles) and internal (i.e. daydreams and imageries) – developed, progressed, receded and even resulted in different emotional responses and physical reactions. Yet, my own approach is much closer to the narrative introspection espoused by Holbrook (1987, 1995, 2005a) or Rambo (1996, 2005), where autobiographical stories provide us with a lens for looking into the human condition of our mundane everyday lives. To ensure data accessibility for external review, I have recorded all the contemporaneous hand-written data systematically, unfiltered and on the spot in a specifically assigned diary (Patterson 2005). In total, I obtained more than 150,000 hand-written words as raw data, which were also supplemented by 50 photographs taken during the same time to provide further holistic insights, for a thorough hermeneutic part-to-whole analysis.

In line with the existential-phenomenological tradition, I have used a data interpretation process that largely draws on Thompson's (1997) proposed hermeneutical-narrative model of understanding. In his opinion, the phenomenological process of hermeneutic circles involves a part-to-whole analysis of each informant's accounts through an interactive process, whereby five key aspects of consumer stories need to be analysed. First, individuals structure narrative contents by plotlines that present events according to a temporal movement to highlight goals, motives and envisaged outcomes. Second, the consumer narratives reflect symbolic parallels between the meanings of different events. Third, they also present us with intertextual relationships, in which the meanings of different consumption stories become integrated in consumers' narratives of personal

history (Thompson, Pollio and Locander 1994). Fourth, consumer narratives express existential themes by which consumers negotiate their self-identity through reflections on consumption experiences, rituals, treasured possessions and life choices (Thompson, Locander and Pollio 1990). Finally, consumer narratives reflect and draw from socio-cultural codes of shared meanings and conventionalised viewpoints (Thompson 1997). But as such hermeneutic analysis normally works with retrospective data that has been obtained in a number of interviews from various informants (Thompson et al. 1990), I have had to make a few adjustments to meet the unique requirements of this research and thesis. Firstly, despite being merely a sample of one, I have generated a large data set of more than 190,000 words in total rather than several small data units. Secondly, only the retrospective essay would meet the plot criteria of a consumer narrative (Boje 2001). While the contemporaneous data represent the accurate chronological sequence of events, a structured plot is subsequently absent. Nevertheless, the contemporaneous data can still be considered as a collection of smaller interlinked narratives. Also, to get some distance between my role as researcher and my role as informant, the hermeneutic data analysis first began a year after completing the data collection and approximately four months after finishing the data transcription. The temporal, mental and emotional distance also enabled me to bracket out preconceptions that I have had about myself.

The first step of the hermeneutic analysis involved a repeated full reading of the entire introspective data transcripts to gain a first sense for the overall picture. Due to the '*plotless*' nature of the individual instances that I collected over the full 21 months of self-observation, I summarised the introspective data in an extensive consumer narrative presented in Appendix B that reflects the chronological order of events while staying true to the emotional consumption experiences and feelings to gain a better overview. Based on the early impressions, I broke the contemporaneous data set down into more manageable, logically coherent chunks to be examined individually as *parts*. Thereby, I discovered that the identification of different phases, through which the fan relationship has moved, was the best way of achieving it. On the surface, all identified phases seemed to share issues like the search for the latest information about Jena Malone, the enjoyment of her acting performances in films, the purchase and collection of Jena Malone-related items (i.e. DVDs, magazine articles, posters and autographs) and her constantly experienced presence in my everyday life. Yet, their nature, the importance and emphasis placed on them and, most of all, the experienced emotional intensity

seemed to differ significantly within the context of each identified phase. A further part-to-whole reading supported the chosen breakdown of the data into (in themselves conclusive) temporal phases. The next step involved acquiring a feeling for any ideas expressed within the accounts of the individual phases in order to understand them fully in their contextual complexity. In the third step, I started to '*extract key statements*' (Goulding 2005) within the context of each individual fandom phase by identifying key sentences, specific phrases, terminology and even metaphors I used as an informant to describe a particular situation and/or fan experience with Jena Malone. In doing so, I examined whether the extracted statements would indicate certain themes by grasping them as the outcome of figure-ground relationships within their respective situational contexts. The emerging meaningful key themes were then put in context of each other and the overall consumer narrative to be scrutinised further in order to identify key patterns of meaning (Thompson 1997).

However, despite iteratively clustering recurrent significant statements into meaningful themes, I also aimed to prevent the emerging emic themes from being abstracted and generalised into etic constructs, which would only inhibit us from understanding the true essence (Gadamer 1989; Husserl 1986) of an individual consumer's everyday lived fan experiences with one's admired film actor/actress. Instead, I sought to integrate the emerging emic '*surface level*' themes into a coherent, thick and meaningful description (Goulding 2005) of my everyday lived fan relationship with Jena Malone as an emic '*higher level*' theme based on identified intertextual linkages between my own life text and the mediated Jena Malone text (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008a, 2011b, c). An aim was thereby to reduce the thick description to the essential structure that would offer an explanation for the experienced fan relationship within the socio-cultural context of the individual's (= my) life-world, which includes my private perceptions of the cultural settings, the lived body, the historicised self and my relationship to other people such as family, friends, colleagues and, obviously, Jena Malone in particular (Thompson 1998; see also Appendix A). But any interpretations that emerge iteratively from the data through a hermeneutic analysis never represent the final and absolute findings, but can only be viewed as one set of possible explanations and as a snapshot of the phenomenon at a particular moment in time, which evolves further with every new reading and knowledge obtained thereafter (Thompson 1990). Hence, with the exception of paper 2, each paper presented in this thesis emerged at and reflects a different stage in an on-

going hermeneutic process by focusing either on a specific data set (paper 1 and 3) or on a different theme emerging iteratively from the overall consumer narrative (paper 4, 5 and 6) and building gradually on each other. Paper 2, instead, followed up on paper 1's earlier theme through an interactive introspection, where Wided Batat and I each wrote and compared a retrospective essay in January 2008. Either way, the emphasis is placed less on the factual recollection of observable consumption practices, but much more on how my everyday lived experiences (i.e. inner feelings, thoughts, fantasies and daydreams) derived from or translated into my emotional attachment to Jena Malone.

1.5 Content of Collected Publications and Their Contribution to the Literature

As mentioned in the previous section, each of the following six publications that form this thesis have emerged from the hermeneutic analysis of the introspective data collected first retrospectively and then contemporaneously in the period from April 2005 to 31st December 2006 – with the exception of the second publication that is based on the exchange and comparison of two introspective essays written in January 2008 by Wided Batat and I in order to expand on the area of experiential film consumption that has opened up with the “Confessions of a Movie-Fan” paper.

1. Wohlfeil, Markus and Susan Whelan (2008), “Confessions of a Movie-Fan: Introspection into a Consumer’s Experiential Consumption of *‘Pride & Prejudice’*”, *European Advances in Consumer Research*, 8, 137-143.

This paper could be regarded as an early point of departure from my initial research idea of studying film consumption towards the study of celebrity fandom and was praised by Patterson (2009) as an *‘impressive contribution to SPI’*. Yet, more importantly, this exploratory paper was also the first publication to call for a turn towards interpretive methods in order to examine in a truly holistic way how consumers actually consume films (Kerrigan 2010). Indeed, previous research on film consumption has exclusively focused on economic dimensions by relying on some rather simplistic assumptions and quantitative modelling approaches to assess what impact individual variables (i.e. film stars, film critics or word-of-mouth) may have on the commercial success of films at the box office (see Albert 1998; De Vany and Walls 2002; Eliashberg and Sawhney 1994). At the same time, film studies have relied purely on audience-response theory, whereby the scholar as an *‘expert viewer’* seeks to show how an imagined, idealised viewer would respond to film texts and the cinematic experience by making ideology-informed

assumptions about probable motives, expectations and prior knowledge (see Hirschman 1999; Mulvey 1975; Phillips 2007). Instead, based on a narrow subset of introspective data collected in the period from July to October 2005 in relation to my consumption of *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005), which happened to be the first film with Jena Malone I had watched in the cinema, this paper argues that a complex tapestry of interconnected factors contributes to a consumer's film enjoyment. In doing so, this was – as Kerrigan (2010) points out – the first publication to '*distinguish between film consumption as a collective and an individual act*', to provide evidence that film consumption begins long before and ends long after the actual viewing, and to explore the phenomena of repeat viewing and building up film collections; all factors that weren't considered by previous studies at all. Moreover, in proposing narrative transportation theory as an alternative framework for explaining film enjoyment, this paper found that a consumer's personal engagement with the film narrative and its characters is of particular importance. This personal engagement not only allows for a momentary escape from reality into the imaginative film world, but is even further enhanced through intertextuality, by which the consumer connects the film to one's personal life experiences.

2. Batat, Wided and Markus Wohlfeil (2009), “Getting Lost *‘Into the Wild’*: Understanding Consumers' Movie Enjoyment Through a Narrative Transportation Approach”, *Advances in Consumer Research*, 36, 372-377.

Despite featuring Jena Malone in a support role, the film *Into the Wild* (US 2007) didn't play a role in my 21 months of self-observation, as it only had its cinema release nearly a year after I completed my introspective data collection. Hence, this paper is the only one presented in this thesis that is based on a different introspective dataset, which was collected at a later time – even though it builds on a theme that emerged from the actual research. Indeed, apart from providing the opportunity to work with Wided Batat, this paper was actually inspired by some comments I received in relation to earlier drafts of the “Confessions of a Movie-Fan” paper. Several academics questioned the findings' merits, as they felt uneasy with the paper's reliance on a single informant as data source and implied that introspective accounts from several informants needed to be compared analytically in order to substantiate the knowledge claims in a '*more objective, reliable and generalisable*' fashion. Thus, to put this suggestion's merits to the test, this paper uses a different type of SPI called interactive introspection, whereby Wided and I wrote, exchanged, compared and interpreted retrospective essays of our personal consumption

experiences with the film *Into the Wild* (US 2007), which we both just happened to have watched at that time. While the comparison and analysis of both introspective essays clearly supported the previous paper's findings, they also revealed some interesting similarities and differences in how each of these factors is actually experienced by the individual consumers. This is particularly true for the consumer's personal engagement with the film narrative, its characters and underlying message that was found once again to be of particular importance to one's enjoyment of the film, as it enables the consumer to experience temporarily a complete immersion into the film's imaginary world. This paper thereby found that the nature and intensity of a consumer's immersion experience is determined solely by one's private motives, interests and inherent desires. This makes it close to impossible to describe, measure and explain it by any quantitative means. As a side-effect, this paper made it apparent that with a growing number of informants any data interpretation would focus more and more on the similarities (while ignoring the differences) and, by reducing it to the smallest common denominator, disenfranchise the human experience inadvertently of its very essence in the process.

3. Wohlfeil, Markus and Susan Whelan (2008), “The Book of Stars’: Some Alternative Insights into Celebrity Fandom”, *Proceedings of the 2008 Academy of Marketing Annual Conference at Aberdeen Business School, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen: Academy of Marketing, on USB.*

This conference paper has received the Best Paper in Arts & Heritage Marketing Award at the 2008 Academy of Marketing Annual Conference. The exploratory paper reflects my personal disappointment with the manner, by which the fans of film stars and other celebrities have been represented in both the academic literature and popular media so far. In particular, I felt frustrated with how fandom studies were primarily designed to confirm century-old stereotypes and to reinforce commonly-held prejudices either by means of self-fulfilling experiments (McCutcheon et al. 2003) or by imposing certain ideological views onto fans (Sandvoss 2005). However, the voices and views of actual fans, whom they generally treated as being dull, gullible and abnormal, never really featured in those studies at all. Even the handful of ethnographic studies often tended to study fans as ‘*the other*’ in society by looking only at a narrow subset of fans at very special occasions (see Henry and Caldwell 2007; O’Guinn 1991). Hence, I felt that the present conceptualisations of fans failed to describe and fully capture my own fandom with a film actress. This exploratory paper, therefore, is the first publication on fandom

that takes a true insider perspective to provide genuine insights into a consumer's everyday lived fan experiences with a celebrity. Moreover, this paper represents a first attempt in demonstrating how a deeper and more genuine understanding into the nature of celebrity fandom could be gained by drawing on narrative transportation theory. But as narrative transportation theory was initially developed to explain the phenomenon of 'getting lost in a book', it was exclusively aimed at understanding the mental activities of reading, whereby the reader mentally immerses oneself into a book's narrative world (Gerrig 1993). In drawing on Dyer (1998) and the stardom literature, which views film stars as a specific type of film texts that are constructed through an intertextual accumulation of various media texts, this paper presents a conceptual argument in outlining why this theory is also suitable for understanding consumers' everyday lived fan experiences with a celebrity. In doing so, this paper found that a consumer's fan experiences with a film star derive from one's personal engagement with the celebrity's creative work and public persona, which is essentially the consumer's personal intertextual reading of what s/he perceives to be relevant and reliable media texts.

4. Wohlfeil, Markus and Susan Whelan (2011), "There's Something about Jena Malone: New Insights into How Celebrities Appeal to Consumers", *Proceedings of the 2011 Academy of Marketing Annual Conference at the University of Liverpool, Liverpool: Academy of Marketing, on USB.*

Although this conference paper is the most recent publication presented in this thesis, it looks at a key theme that already came relatively early on in the hermeneutic analysis to stand out from the contextual ground and has proven ever since to be essential for really understanding a consumer's emotional attachment to an admired celebrity. The paper explores the actual substance of a celebrity and how it appeals to the individual consumer. In doing so, this exploratory paper also reflects my personal frustration with the extremely simplistic and superficial way, in which the stardom literature within both film and media studies (see Dyer 1998; King 1991; Watson 2007a) and also the present human brands discourse within marketing and the ACR (see Fischer 2011; McCracken 1989; Thomson 2006) have examined film stars and celebrities only as one-dimensional textual constructs that embody and personify cultural archetypes. In fact, due to the researchers' lack of personal engagement with celebrities and their audiences, it seems that those simplistic conceptualisations of film stars and celebrities are primarily grounded in ideological and/or methodological concerns rather than in any actual real-

life observations. Hence, while celebrities have been presented as semiotic systems that reflect a coherent, firm and recognisable canon of on- and off-screen media texts, it became already apparent in early stages of the hermeneutic analysis that this conceptualisation would be ill-equipped in explaining my emotional attachment to the actress Jena Malone presented in the earlier “The Book of Stars” paper. In drawing on my collected introspective data and on consumer voices cited in Stacey (1994), Barbas (2001), O’Guinn (1991) and Henry and Caldwell (2007), this exploratory paper looks in particular at how and why consumers become emotionally attached to one celebrity, but remain indifferent to other equally talented, interesting and attractive ones – a question that previous positivist and ideology-based studies have conveniently overlooked. This paper found that the actual substance of a celebrity consists of four key human brand attributes through which s/he appeals to the individual consumer as a) a performer and artist, b) the ‘real’ person underneath the performer, c) the tangible manifestation of both the performer and the ‘real’ person through products, and d) the social link to other consumers; depending on the consumer’s personal interests, values and inherent desires.

5. Wohlfeil, Markus and Susan Whelan (2011), “The Book of Stars’: Understanding a Consumer’s Fan Relationship with a Film Actress Through a Narrative Transportation Approach”, *European Advances in Consumer Research*, 9, (in press).

The paper was initially presented as a competitive paper at the 9th European Association for Consumer Research Conference at Royal Holloway. This publication reflects a more advanced stage in the hermeneutic analysis process and builds directly on the findings of the earlier, similarly titled conference paper. Due to my continuing dissatisfaction with the current fandom and stardom discourse in the academic literature and popular media, this exploratory paper takes an introspective ‘insider’ perspective and draws on narrative transportation theory to explore the nature of a consumer’s fan relationship and emotional attachment to an admired film star. Once again, the paper found that a consumer’s fan experiences with a film star derive from one’s private engagement with the celebrity’s creative work and public persona based on the consumer’s personal interests, values and inherent desires. This strongly contradicts the stardom literature’s proposition that celebrities appeal to all consumers equally as media-managed semiotic image systems that personify the cultural ideals of glamour, success and even the divine in society. Dyer (1998) and the stardom literature have also theorised that fans would

admire film stars as *'flawless, superior'* human beings, who present a consistent human brand image both on- and off-screen by only portraying a canon of virtually identical film characters that mirror their *'true'* real-life personality and life-style. In other words, the film star and his/her portrayed characters are inseparably intertwined as one and the same – a view shared by much of the celebrity endorsement literature in marketing (McCracken 1989; Thomson 2006). This exploratory paper, however, found that the consumer clearly distinguishes between admiring the film star's acting performances on screen and adoring the actual person. It is, therefore, the first publication ever to focus in particular on the consumer's fan relationship with the film star as an actual living person. But because it is unlikely that we will ever meet the real person behind the public media image, this paper argues that a fan's image of the celebrity's private persona is actually the consumer's own mental construction that evolves from an ongoing personal intertextual and selective reading of what s/he perceives to be relevant and *'reliable'* media texts, which is determined by the consumer's inherent desires and may even result in the feeling of actually *'knowing'* the film star like a personal friend.

6. Wohlfeil, Markus and Susan Whelan (2011), “'Saved!' by Jena Malone: An Introspective Study of a Consumer's Fan Relationship with a Film Actress”, *Journal of Business Research*, 64, (in press), doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.02.030.

This very recent paper reflects an even more advanced stage in the hermeneutic analysis process as well as a further development of the themes presented in the earlier two “The Book of Stars” papers. Gould (2011) also praises it as making a significant contribution to the emerging paradigm of consumer introspection theory (CIT) by being *'in many respects a “tour de force” in terms of its sheer audacity and self-revelation'*. Although both the stardom and the celebrity endorsement literature suggest that consumers would admire film stars and celebrities as *'flawless, superior'* human beings that personify the cultural ideals of glamour, success and even the divine in society, Gould (2011) points rightfully out that I *'was not so much into her glamour as (I) was into her ordinariness'*. Indeed, following up on the previous papers' findings that the fan engages with the film star's private off-screen persona through a personal intertextual and highly selective reading of relevant and *'reliable'* media texts, this exploratory paper as well found that drawing on narrative transportation theory can explain in more detail how and why fans often develop and experience the feeling of *'knowing'* the film star personally, including his/her private thoughts, feelings, personality and way of life, despite having actually

never met the real person. As this experienced '*bond of emotional closeness*' can at times be strong enough to elicit within the fan a feeling of '*personal friendship*' or even a feeling of '*love*' towards the admired celebrity, this paper explores in particular the parasocial nature of a consumer's fan relationship with an admired film actress and how this emotional attachment to her develops and manifests itself in everyday consumer behaviour. The paper's real contribution, as Gould (2011) suggests, is '*the description of the actual process of encounter with the film actress that, despite being a parasocial relationship, resembles and is recognisable in any traditional social relationship... (and)... has some bearing on the attraction and relating process*'. Just like a traditional social relationship, a consumer's parasocial relationship with a film actress is a dynamic process that evolves over time in response to situational circumstances and emotional feelings. Moreover, this paper also found that the parasocial relationship with a celebrity can actually provide lonely individuals with a cathartic experience that helps to restore their emotional well-being in times of psychological distress.

1.6 A Brief Structural Map to the Thesis

As the objective of the present research project is to provide some truly holistic insights into the phenomenon of celebrity fandom from a genuine insider's point of view (Smith et al. 2007), this thesis describes and examines, in the form of the six above-mentioned publications, how a consumer's everyday lived fan relationship with an admired film actress develops, evolves and expresses itself over a period of time and what meaning(s) the emotional attachment to the celebrity may have for the respective individual(s). As this thesis, in doing so, reflects in essence also a symbolical and literal journey of (self-) discovery, I first provide you with a brief travel map through the rest of the thesis, because the best way to start a journey is to know where we are at the moment. Therefore, before diving head over heels into the six publications presented in this thesis and their respective individual examinations of different facets in a consumer's everyday lived fan relationship with an admired film actress, it would be beneficial to clarify how each of the papers individually and as the combined thesis are positioned with respect to the current interdisciplinary fandom and stardom literature.

Hence, I provide you in Chapter 2 and 3 with a detailed overview of how and to what extent the academic fields of consumer research, marketing, film studies, media studies, social psychology, sociology, sports and leisure research have already covered the

phenomena of celebrity fandom, stardom and celebrity culture. But because previous fandom research has focused mainly on fans of cult TV shows or films, graphic novels/comics and sports spectatorship, research investigating celebrity fans has remained quite scarce. Thus, I look in Chapter 2 at fandom in general. Following a brief introduction to the role of the creative industries, celebrities and fans within our contemporary culture, I start this chapter by critically examining the overall fandom literature across various academic disciplines with a view of approaching a thorough and truly interdisciplinary taxonomy of all the contemporary conceptualisations of fans and fandom in the present literature. In doing so, I also explore to what extent those contemporary understandings of fans and their consumption practices have not only been informed by, but have also been the immediate outcome of the traditional *outsider-looking-in* perspective (Smith et al. 2007) that all previous studies have exclusively relied on. Based on this review, I suggest a need for an alternative conceptualisation of fandom that focuses instead on the intricate relationships that consumers form with their fandom objects.

Due to the lack of literature that looks directly at celebrity fandom, I provide a detailed review in Chapter 3 of the celebrity and stardom literature with a specific regard to what is already known about the consumption of film stars as human brands and the precise role that celebrities would play in our (post-)modern society and culture. Besides marketing and consumer research, I thereby pay particular attention to film and media studies. But because the study of film actors, actresses and celebrities in those academic disciplines is intrinsically intertwined with and conceptually determined by the study of film and media texts, I start this chapter by reviewing what is already known on the consumption of films and how it has been studied to-date. Then, I examine how film stars and other celebrities are primarily constructed and investigated as textual consumption objects by the film studios, managers/agents, film and media scholars, the media, consumers and the celebrities themselves rather than as real human beings. I conclude this chapter by proposing the use of narrative transportation theory as an alternative approach to gain a genuine understanding of the lived meaning(s) that the personal engagement with a film actor or actress has for the individual consumer.

In Chapter 4, I present the six publications in full that form the core of this thesis and have already been briefly introduced in the previous section. Papers 1 and 2 focus on a consumer's experiential consumption of a film. And while papers 3 and 4 look at how a

consumer engages with a film actress as a textual media construct, papers 5 and 6 explore how a fan develops and maintains a relationship with the film actress as a *'real'* person. Based on the findings of paper 4 that a celebrity would appeal to a consumer as a) a creative performer (incl. character portrayals), b) the *'real'* private person behind the public image, c) the tangible manifestation of the performer and/or the *'real'* person through products, and d) as a social link to other like-minded consumers, the order of the papers also reflects a logical transition from an initial focus on the fan's admiration for the film actress as a performer and her portrayed character in films (paper 1 and 2) via the fan's engagement with the film actress' off-screen persona as a textual construct with a personal appeal (paper 3 and 4) to the fan's parasocial relationship with the film actress as a living person (paper 5 and 6). In doing so, the meaning that the everyday lived fan experiences with the admired celebrity apparently have for the individual consumer differ quite significantly depending on the underlying needs they serve. Each publication is thereby given the opportunity to speak for itself both individually and in context to the other papers.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I conclude this thesis by, first, summarising the combined findings of the presented papers and, then, discussing their overall contribution to the fandom, stardom and film consumption literature. In doing so, I draw suitable conclusions from the obtained insights and recommend an urgently needed re-conceptualisation of fans by making relevant suggestions for further research and offering an invitation to further debate. Due to the controversial nature of its chosen research method, I critically assess the research project's methodological advantages, contributions to literature, potential and also shortcomings. Limitations of the research are addressed as well.

In Appendix A, I outline in more detail the philosophical and methodological issues that underpin the research project. Following the introduction of existential-phenomenology as the philosophical foundation for this research and thesis, I provide a comprehensive overview of subjective personal introspection as a research method, the controversy that still surrounds it and how its application in consumer research would nonetheless enable or even benefit us in gaining insights into phenomena that are not accessible through other more traditional research methods. In discussing how I have employed a narrative form of SPI to examine the phenomenon of celebrity fandom as experienced from a

fan's genuine insider perspective, I hope to vindicate my choice of this controversial methodology, whereby I occupy the dual role of the researcher and the sole informant. In Appendix B, I present you with the extensive consumer narrative that summarises the entire retrospective and contemporaneous introspective data of my everyday lived fan relationship with the film actress Jena Malone collected between April 2005 and 31st December 2006. As the introspective data underlie all but one of the presented papers in this thesis, the aim of this extensive consumer narrative is to enable you to experience a consumer's fan relationship with the admired film actress through the eyes of the fan and, subsequently, to gain a raw personal impression of what the phenomenon of celebrity fandom really feels like for an insider without having already been inundated by the researcher's provided preconceptions and prejudiced explanations. In doing so, I hope to allow the reader to judge independently whether the findings discussed in each of the presented papers in this thesis, which have emerged at different stages of the hermeneutic analysis and interpretation process, would indeed provide some plausible and insightful explanations – even if some alternative interpretations may equally be possible as well.

CHAPTER 2

THE DANGEROUS LIVES OF FANS

2.1 Introduction

Before we delve deeper into the different facets of a consumer's emotional attachment to one's admired film actress and how this fan relationship manifests itself in everyday consumer behaviour, as examined by the six papers presented in this thesis, I thought that it might be good idea to provide you first with a critical review of what is already known about celebrity fandom in the current literature – especially with regard to fans of film actors and actresses. But as incredible as it may sound, it actually turns out that surprisingly few academic publications are looking into celebrity and film fandom in the first place. Indeed, although film stars – and celebrities in general – have played a crucial role in our popular culture by capturing the attention of their fans for more than a century (Barbas 2001; O'Guinn, Faber and Rice 1985), the vast majority of the fandom literature's interdisciplinary body is instead devoted either to sports fans or to the fans of specific cult TV shows, films, soap operas or graphic novels. Hence, I have divided the following literature review into two separate chapters. While I review the stardom literature in Chapter 3 with a particular emphasis on film and media studies, I take in the present chapter a closer look at what is already known in the academic literature about fandom in general. The chapter starts with a brief introduction to the role of the creative industries, celebrities and fans within contemporary culture. In critically examining how fans have been conceptualised across various academic disciplines so far, my overall aim is to contribute to the fandom literature by approaching a thorough and genuinely interdisciplinary taxonomy of the contemporary conceptualisations of fans and fandom in the present literature for further discussion. In doing so, I also explore to what extent these conceptualisations of fans have not only been informed by, but have actually been the result of the traditional *outsider-looking-in* perspective that virtually all previous fan studies have exclusively relied on (Smith et al. 2007). Finally, I conclude this chapter by suggesting a need for an alternative conceptualisation of fandom that focuses instead on the intricate relationships that consumers form with their fandom objects.

2.2 Creative Industries, Celebrities and Fans in Contemporary Culture

The observed scarcity of academic literature dedicated to film star and celebrity fandom is quite surprising in light of the broad attention that celebrities and their fans generally receive in our popular media discourse these days (Nayar 2009; Turner 2004). After all, for more than a century, the creative industries have not only played an essential role as acculturation agents in many societies' popular culture (Barbas 2001; Hirschman 2000a; Kochberg 2007; O'Guinn et al. 1985), but have also continuously been some of the commercially biggest and most successful industries in the world (De Vany 2004; Finney 2010; Fraser 2005; Hennig-Thurau 2004a, b; O'Reilly 2005). And in addition to their very own production outputs, these industries have also spawned, feed in and depend on a network of other billion dollar industries, which range from glossy gossip magazines and publicists over various kinds of merchandising products to theme parks and tourism and which have all prospered from satisfying our general public interest in the '*glamorous and scandalous*' lives of film stars and starlets, rock/pop stars, athletes, models and any other celebrities (Gabler 1998). Celebrities, subsequently, perform not only a very important role as the creative industries' most visible faces, but can also command a substantial space within our contemporary culture for themselves as well (Geraghty 2000; Giles 2006; Marshall 1997). Moreover, in contrast to Boorstin's (2006) much-cited derogatory definition that celebrities are merely '*people who are only famous for being famous*', their respective claims to fame are in fact pretty diverse and can derive from either their artistic-creative talent, their professional occupation, their personal relationships with (other) famous people (i.e. as a spouse, offspring, relative or love affair) or their mere notoriety for an '*outrageous*' and '*scandalous*' public lifestyle, such as an excessive social party life, having extra-marital love affairs, posing for nude photographs in the tabloids or having a home-made porn '*leaked*' onto the Internet (Evans and Hesmondhalgh 2005; McDonald 2003; Turner 2004). But whatever their personal claim to fame may be, each individual celebrity's popularity is still dependent on the symbolic relationship that they form with their most loyal admirers – their fans.

The strong media presence of celebrities should therefore give us a good indication as to how important to our contemporary culture they have actually become. Yet, what most consumers really enjoy while engaging with celebrity culture is primarily the exchange of gossip with other like-minded individuals (Hermes 2006). As a result, they tend to have merely a fleeting interest in the glamour, scandals and private lives of film stars

and celebrities per se rather than investing any strong feelings in the admiration for a specific celebrity. Nevertheless, some consumers do indeed develop and experience a stronger emotional attachment to their favourite celebrity and, subsequently, become what are commonly known as *fans* (Leets et al. 1995; O'Guinn 1991; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008a, 2011b, c). However, despite a certain tendency in the popular discourse to stigmatise fans as 'gullible' and 'odd' (Jenson 1992), celebrity fandom is in fact quite a common social phenomenon. We just need to take a careful look around us to find the fans of film actors/actresses, rock/pop stars, TV personalities, athletes, models or even novelists virtually everywhere and across all walks of contemporary life. They have the audacity to admire the creative works of their favourite celebrity in broad daylight and full public view, share the latest information and gossip obtained from the media, wait for hours at premieres to catch a glimpse of their idol and passionately collect the beloved celebrity's hand-signed autographs and any other memorabilia (Ehrenreich, Hess and Jacobs 1992; Henry and Caldwell 2007). Furthermore, these consumers don't hesitate to come to the aid of their adored celebrity in '*times of need*' such as the receipt of bad reviews, relationship problems, illnesses, addictions, court hearings and even to protect them against the threat of abusive stalkers (!) – as we could recently witness in the cases of Michael Jackson, Britney Spears, Heath Ledger, Jade Goody, Owen Wilson, Lindsay Lohan, Anne Hathaway, Cheryl Cole or Maire Brennan to name just a few. Hence, it's only fair to suggest that fans may play an equally important role in our popular culture as the very film actors, musicians, athletes, models or novelists that they so enthusiastically, if not at times even obsessively admire (Schmidt-Lux 2010a, b).

2.3 Fans: The Rise of Evil?

It should therefore come as no real surprise that fans have also become a '*soft target*' for the very same cultural critics (i.e. Adorno and Horkheimer 2006; Boorstin 2006; Gabler 1998; Giles 2006; Hyde 2009; Schickel 1985; Thorp 1939) and their many followers, who have pretty much since the creative industries' early days been on a tireless crusade to portray popular media consumption and, especially, celebrity culture religiously as the apocalyptic embodiments by which today's '*excessive capitalist consumer culture*' is dulling our minds and, thereby, threatening our freedom and the very fabric of our social, cultural, intellectual and psychological well-being. Their efforts in convincing us of the popular mass culture's inherent perils have been so relentless, especially over the past 40 years, that we could easily be persuaded into believing that we are about to face

another Sodom and Gomorrah, if we don't repent our ways towards a more '*natural*' and puritan mode of consumption that ideally takes place outside the '*exploitative*' capitalist marketplace (Gabler 1998; Hyde 2009; Schickel 1985). Thus, the very notion that there are actually consumers out there, who would voluntarily decide to forfeit the educated '*spiritual-intellectual*' appreciation for the high arts and devote instead a large amount of their mental energy, time and financial resources to the '*primitive, dull and tasteless*' popular mass culture (Boorstin 2006; Bourdieu 1984; Moran 2006; Winston 1994), must really be a terrifying idea for these critics. For them, the only acceptable logical explanation to make sense of such '*irrational*' behaviour, therefore, is that the consumers in question (= fans), due to their '*inherent gullible nature*' and overall '*lack of critical awareness*', must obviously have fallen prey to the manipulative powers of the popular mass media (Adorno and Horkheimer 2006; Gabler 1998; Giles 2006; Hyde 2009; Schickel 1985). Underpinning their line of argument is thereby the concept of the '*vulnerable audience*', which implies that consumers would be highly susceptible to the influence of media images and the '*false values*' they provide (Boorstin 2006) and that, with increasing consumption, they would even no longer be able to distinguish between the '*fictive media content*' and the '*real world*' (Gabler 1998; Munsterberg 1916).

Given that cultural critics have expressed such vocal disgust and contempt for celebrity culture, fans and the popular media overall, it seems quite ironic, if not even strange, that much of their critical discourse is disseminated via the very same popular media they despise – often with the aim of enhancing their personal reputation (= '*fame*'). Yet, at the same time, the popular media have also welcomed, embraced and promoted, if not even often initiated these derisive images of celebrities and their fans as well in an effort to increase their circulations with sensational stories about celebrity-obsessed teenagers screaming in front of hotels and at premieres, childish nerds at ComicCons or SciFi conventions, violent football fans or psychopathic stalkers (Barbas 2001; Jenson 1992); even though they are in the process criticising and ridiculing in essence (parts of) the very audiences on which they commercially depend (Evans and Hesmondhalgh 2005; Hermes 2006). Thus, while the tabloids and entertainment press regularly slam popular media, celebrity and fan cultures self-righteously as anti-social and dangerous to society, they also stimulate, feed and profit heavily and quite openly from them. But the tabloids and gossip media are not the only popular media that have embraced these representations of fans, as the very same stereotyped images of fans often serve as story

or character material for the film and TV industries, whose entire commercial existence, ironically, is largely dependent on the fans' enjoyment and admiration for their products (Barbas 2001; Jenkins 1992; Shefrin 2004). Apart from the much-cited *Saturday Night Live* sketch, in which guest host William Shatner was pestered with Star Trek-related questions by some exaggerated, stereotypical nerdy 'Trekkers' (= Star Trek fans), who seem to live in their parents' basements, know even the most irrelevant miniscule detail of every episode and buy everything related to the show, until he responded with the famous phrase "Get a life!" (Jenkins 1992), Lewis (1992) points out that several film stories have portrayed fans as childish nerds (i.e. Jerry Lewis's gullible Anita Eckberg fan in *Hollywood or Bust*, 1956), as social misfits whose fandom severely interferes with a romantic love life (i.e. Jimmy Fallon's baseball fan in *The Perfect Catch*, 2005) and much too often as dangerous psychopaths (i.e. Desiree Nosbusch in *Der Fan*, 1982, Robert de Niro in *The Fan*, 1996, or Kathy Bates in *Misery*, 1990).

Either way, a particularly interesting and dominant feature of this critical discourse is that cultural critics seek to present a dichotomy between what they view as the 'worship of false heroes' in today's excessive, corrupted and sexualised capitalist consumer culture and a past, where consumer behaviour was guided by puritan moral values and where public acknowledgement was granted based on great achievements and special skills (Boorstin 2006; Giles 2006; Schickel 1985). Both academic literature and popular media have thereby discussed fandom and the obsession with celebrities always as quite recent, contemporary social phenomena that pose a menace to our culture and society. However, contradicting this common belief, fandom is, historically seen, anything but a new phenomenon and, actually, at least as old as most creative industries themselves (Barbas 2001; Schmidt-Lux 2010a). Indeed, ever since the film industry began in the mid-1890s to show motion pictures that depicted convincing impressions of life on the silver screen, consumers across the world have cherished it as a dream factory, where nothing seems impossible and even the wildest dreams may come true (Gaines 2000; Faulstich 2005). Although their enthusiasm may have shifted over time from an early technology-focused curiosity¹ over a fascination with the art of filmmaking to an

¹ The very early years of cinema – the so-called *cinema of attractions* – revolved exclusively around a consumer interest in the film technology's visual possibilities in representing 'reality' on the silver screen rather than on the film contents themselves. While approx. thousands of new films were produced every month to meet the growing demand, the first films until 1897 were essentially very short (1-2 min.), non-narrative depictions of vaudeville performers, ordinary people and reports of newsworthy events.

obsession with the glamour of Hollywood, film fans also have in all those years felt enchanted by the magical worlds and aesthetic images that films provide them with (Barbas 2001; Kreimeier 1996; Thorp 1939). Moreover, though consumers have had a keen interest in the acting performances and private lives of film stars since the very early days of the Hollywood star system (Kerrigan 2010; McDonald 2000), leading theatre actors on Broadway or the London West End have already enjoyed in the mid-19th century the support of loyal and enthusiastic followers, while novelists, poets, opera singers, stage actors, composers or the infamous castrati were adored by audiences in Germany, France, Austria and Italy throughout the 18th and 19th century (Gabler 1998; Schmidt-Lux 2010a). But although the film industry was still in its infancy, it were in particular film audiences that social reformers, such as the Christian Temperance Union in the US, were picking as a *'soft target'* in their desperate attempt to stem the tide of socio-cultural change that came with economic progress in industrialised societies.

To support their condemnation of films as an *'evil menace'* that corrupts people's souls and their moral integrity, the social reformers cited numerous news reports, in which films supposedly tempted young women into a life of promiscuity and vice, dissuaded young men from *'doing the right thing'* and literally frightened *'decent folk'* to death with their realistic images on the screen (Balio 1985; Barbas 2001). But even though it turned out that the Christian Temperance Union, in absence of any real evidence, made most of these reports up and planted them in numerous local newspapers themselves, their claims gained credibility by having some prominent psychologists amongst their ranks, such as the renowned Harvard Psychology Professor Hugo Munsterberg (Barbas 2001; Faulstich 2005). In order to provide *'scientific support'* for the social reformists' ideological views, Munsterberg (1916) proposed and advanced his theoretical concept of the *'vulnerable audience'* by which he portrayed all film audiences² indiscriminately as impressionable, uneducated, uncritical and passive viewers that, like children, would easily be deceived by films into mistaking the fake film realities for the real world; a view that has dominated the critical discourse on media audiences and fans in particular

² Up to 1920, films catered mostly for audiences from society's lower social classes, such as the working-classes and the new immigrants in the cities at the US East Coast (Kochberg 2007; O'Guinn et al. 1985). Underlining this point is the fact that the first films were shown as special attractions in travelling vaudeville shows before moving by 1896/7 into more fixed locations – the nickelodeons that were mostly found in the poorer working class areas of town (Kerrigan 2010). For the middle- and upper classes, films and cinema only became an attractive and acceptable leisure activity with the rise of Hollywood cinema (and the UFA studios) since 1919 and the subsequent growth of theatre-like film palaces (Faulstich 2005).

ever since. Munsterberg (1916) was thereby convinced that films are *'like a drug'* that heighten emotions, reduce inhibitions, alter senses and cause pathological delusions among the *'addicted'* viewer. The historical evidence, however, clearly shows that even the very first film audiences were already well aware of how the films' visual effects work, actively exchanged their knowledge on film technology and discussed how visual effects or other facets in the filmmaking process could be improved (Balio 1985; Barbas 2001). In doing so, they laid the foundation for some of today's highly regarded film journals and the academic field of film studies. Yet, while there has actually never been any empirical evidence to support the vulnerable audience concept, it hasn't stopped cultural critics from taking up its central ideas and reiterating them with astonishing regularity ever since (Adorno and Horkheimer 2006; Boorstin 2006; Schickel 1985; Thorp 1939). And because of their constant repetition, these ideas are by now taken for granted as proven fact in our contemporary academic and popular discourse and have shaped our stereotypical views and conceptualisations of celebrity culture and fandom.

2.4 Fan or Fanatic: What Actually Is a Fan?

While the media applies the term *'fan'* quite liberally to cover all audiences, spectators or even buyers of music-CDs, concert- or cinema tickets these days, it is the devastating picture of fans, which the academic and popular discourse has historically painted, that is still dominating the common public image of fans. Because of the stigma attached to fandom, it is hardly surprising that consumers often feel the urge to distance themselves from this fan image (Cusack et al. 2003). Indeed, when asked to describe, explain or justify their personal dedication to a certain TV show, film or music or their strong emotional attachment to a particular celebrity or sports team, many consumers tend to reply immediately with statements like *"I'm not one of THOSE fans who..."* in an effort to highlight their *'normality'* in opposition to the *'other, abnormal fan'* (Brooker 2005; Grossberg 1992). And, as the introspective data in this research indicates, I responded in a similar way on several occasions – especially in the first year. Even the fact that I'm *'confessing'* to my own fan relationship with the film actress Jena Malone shows some resemblance to a *'coming out'* or attending an AA meeting. However, during the course of my research so far, I have also received a number of *'well-meaning'* comments from reviewers, who felt so uneasy with this study's topic, content and approach that they advised me, for my own good, to close this research rather sooner than later, leave my *'fannish inclination'* behind and devote myself instead to *'proper'* and more *'worthier'*

academic pursuits. Because these kinds of responses can partially be explained by the negative connotations that seem to come with the term '*fandom*' itself, it is necessary at this point to clarify what a fan actually is and what the etymological origins of the term are. The widely shared public belief, as Leets et al. (1995) pointed out, is that the term '*fan*' is an abbreviation of the word '*fanatic*', which in return derived from the Latin word '*fanaticus*' – meaning '*inspired by a deity*'. This view seems to gain additional credibility by the fact that the Greek translation of fanatic is '*entheos*', from which the contemporary word '*enthusiasm*' originates (Redden and Steiner 2000). And as the term '*fanatic*' refers since the 1650s to individuals who subscribe to extreme religious and/or political views with zealous and intense uncritical devotion (Thorne and Bruner 2006), it requires little imagination to see where our negative pictures of fans come from.

The only problem with this popular association between '*fan*' and '*fanatic*', however, is that it isn't historically accurate, but was actually introduced and spread by the Christian Temperance Union in the late-19th century with the aim to discredit, first, spectators at baseball matches and, later, film audiences (Barbas 2001). The origin of the term '*fan*', seems to be instead the English word '*to fancy*', which means '*to experience an intense liking for someone or something*', as in the early 19th century boxing aficionados among the English and Irish working-classes were often called '*fancies*' or '*fances*' – meaning people who fancy to watch boxing fights (Dickson 1989). During the mid-19th century, Irish immigrants brought the term '*fances*', which shortened over time to '*fans*', to the US by referring, at first, to boxing spectators and, then, expanding its use to supporters of popular theatre productions as well. A particular group of such theatre supporters, the Bowery Boys, may have in light of the so-called Astor Palace riots of 1849 the dubious honour to be probably the first hooligans in history³ (Gabler 1998). Still, the concept of a '*fan*' (or '*fandom*' in general) in its contemporary interpretation originated in the late 19th century to describe, at first, enthusiastic supporters of the new US sport baseball (Dickson 1989; Leets et al. 1995) and, soon thereafter, all other team sport supporters around the globe – especially in relation to soccer. It is at this stage that social reformers of the Christian Temperance Union sought to establish an association between fans and fanatics – and succeeded, as even the Oxford Dictionary has accepted this definition for fact. With the emerging film industry in the 1890s and the arrival of the Hollywood star

³ But as the Bowery Boys also constituted a leading element in New York's 19th century gang culture and were deeply involved in organised criminality, it would be unfair to equate their behaviour with fandom.

system in the 1920s, the term '*fan*' expanded from sports spectators also to enthusiastic admirers of the performing arts, popular culture and even celebrities (Gabler 1998). By now, it is even fair to say that everyone has, basically at least once in their lifetime, been a fan of something – be it a particular sports team, an athlete, a rock/pop star, a film star, any other celebrity, a particular TV show, film or another kind of leisure pursuit (Barbas 2001; Jenkins 1992; Thorne and Bruner 2006). Many consumers are fans of specific novelists like Stephen King or JK Rowling (Brown 2005, 2007), while even literary icons such as Jane Austen, James Joyce or Lewis Carroll, who passed away a long time ago, are still admired by devoted fan communities (Brooker 2005).

Yet, due to their adherence and sense of belonging to high-brow culture coupled with an inherent '*snobbish*' disdain for popular culture, these committed devotees of literary icons prefer to view themselves as connoisseurs or aficionados that meet each other in serious societies (Brooker 2005). In doing so, they clearly seek to distant themselves from those fans that belong to low-brow culture and come together in gullible fan-clubs or at conventions (Kozinets 2001), despite actually engaging in quite similar behaviours such as the devoted collection of cherished works, artefacts and memorabilia associated with the sacred subject of desire (Belk et al. 1989), a hunger for gathering and updating one's knowledge on the subject and even going on a pilgrimage to homes, landmarks or other sites associated with the writer and his/her work (Brooker 2005). In light of such a dispersed terminology and negatively loaded public image, Thorne and Bruner (2006: 53) provided some excellent definitions that help to differentiate between fans, fandom and fanatics. A '*fan*' is defined as '*a person with an overwhelming liking or interest in a particular person, group, trend, artwork or idea, whose behaviour is typically viewed by others as unusual or unconventional but does not violate prevailing social norms*'. In sharp contrast, a '*fanatic*' is defined as '*a person with an overwhelming liking or interest in a particular person, group, trend, artwork or idea that exhibits extreme behaviour viewed by others as dysfunctional and violating social norms*'. Finally, they defined the overarching concept of '*fandom*' as '*a subculture composed of like-minded fans, typified by a feeling of closeness to others with a shared interest*'. Interestingly, unlike Barbas (2001), Kozinets (2001), Richardson and Turley (2006, 2008) or myself (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2011b, c), Thorne and Bruner (2006) interpreted fandom as a subculture rather than as fan activities, practices and experiences. It is also important to note that they interpreted fandom as a subculture of fans and NOT of fanatics. Either

way, this leaves the question as to why fans, despite the clear distinction between them and fanatics and the fact that we all are fans to some degree, still are consistently on the receiving end of ridicule, stereotyping and bad press within the academic and popular discourse. Thus, besides the terminology and historical public discourse, the nature of how academic fields have studied fans and fandom may also provide some explanation.

2.5 Fans and Fandom as Subjects of Academic Research

Despite having been such a widespread, global consumption phenomenon for more than 140 years that should have been of particular interest to a variety of academic fields, academia had until recently shown little interest in the study of fans with the exception of a handful of theoretical publications by psychologists and cultural critics that sought to build on Munsterberg's (1916) concept of the vulnerable audiences and focused on media audiences or sports spectators in general (i.e. Adorno and Horkheimer 2006; Boorstin 2006; Thorp 1939). However, in response to the rise of hooliganism in British football and the murders of John Lennon and Mexican singer Selena Quintanilla as well as the attempted assassination of Ronald Reagan by self-proclaimed fans in the early-1980s, scholars from various academic disciplines such as sociology, forensic sciences, social psychology, sports psychology, sports and leisure research, media studies, marketing and consumer research suddenly began to pay much closer attention to the study of fans and fandom and a growing interdisciplinary body of literature that is investigating in particular sports and media fans has emerged ever since (Dietz et al. 1991; Jenson 1992; Thorne and Bruner 2006). And due to their diverse backgrounds in terms of areas of expertise and academic schools of thought, researchers have obviously not only looked at the phenomenon from very different perspectives with very different agendas in mind, but have also brought with them a variety of different investigative approaches that are dominant in their very own specific academic fields and that range from literary criticism and discourse analysis over scientific inquiry to ethnography. Nevertheless, because the conceptual understanding of fans seems only too often to be driven by the underlying agenda of the respective researcher studying the phenomenon (Smith et al. 2007), the growing interdisciplinary body of literature still lacks a coherent interpretation of what actually constitutes fandom in the first place. Furthermore, to describe the current body of fandom literature as '*interdisciplinary*' only pays justice to the fact that fans are a subject of study in various different academic disciplines, but fails to acknowledge that very little cross-referencing is actually happening between the

current literatures of the various different academic disciplines, as most fan scholars have primarily the discipline-specific research agenda of their academic fields at heart.

For example, it is no secret that marketing and business researchers' primary interest in fandom revolves around the economic value that fans provide as consumers (Thorne and Bruner 2006). Hence, marketing research is studying fans merely as homogeneous, very brand loyal and commercially attractive market segments that represent ideal target audiences for a host of marketing activities (Hunt, Bristol and Bashaw 1999; Redden and Steiner 2000). Within the field of social psychology, on the other hand, the research interest in fans closely follows up on Munsterberg's (1916) work on the vulnerable audiences and pays very close attention to a very specific type of celebrity fans. Indeed, following the assassination of John Lennon in 1980 and, shortly after, John Hinckley's attempt on President Ronald Reagan, who claimed that it was an effort to prove his love for the actress Jodie Foster (Krämer 2003), social psychologists started to develop an interest in exploring, assessing and profiling the rationales of psychologically disturbed fans for approaching, harassing and causing either bodily or mental harm to celebrities in order to prevent potential future threats or attacks (Dietz et al. 1991). But while these original studies went to great lengths to differentiate between this miniscule minority of psychotic, delusional fanatics and the absolute majority of normal fans (Dietz et al. 1991; Leets et al. 1995), the later research on '*celebrity worshippers*' within the field of social psychology failed to make such distinctions and generalised their findings instead to all fans indiscriminately (McCutcheon et al. 2002, 2003, 2006). Researchers, thereby, suggest that becoming and being a fan constitutes the individual's inherent character trait that would reflect some form of mental illness and may even be genetic (Maltby et al. 2004). In doing so, these (rather doubtful) studies catered for the century-old popular stereotypes of fans as either gullible nerds or as pathological-obsessive psychopaths presented by the popular media (Jenson 1992) and even promoted by the film industry itself (Lewis 1992). Now, due to the long history of sports fandom, the obvious interest of sports and leisure research as well as sports psychology is to study sports fans. While earlier research focused on hooligans and other fans that displayed violent behaviour, most contemporary studies are interested in the motivations and social dynamics among either sports participants or sports spectators (Allen 2003; Murrell and Dietz 1992).

It may seem strange that film studies have paid virtually no attention to the fans of films and film stars so far, as the discourse between the early film fans more than 100 years ago laid essentially the ground for the birth of film studies as an academic discipline (Barbas 2001). This would normally suggest a certain research interest in the fans of films and film stars as a particularly dedicated subgroup among film audiences. One possible explanation for this scant interest might have been the aim of film scholars to get film finally included in the canon of high-brow culture and, subsequently, to be seen as being equal in terms of aesthetic status and cultural value to literature, theatre, opera and the arts. And as fandom has traditionally been viewed as being only a working-class phenomenon strongly linked to the 'tasteless' consumption of popular mass culture, an interest in such 'uneducated' audiences would therefore be counter-productive to this overall goal. Now, while film studies are purely interested in studying films within the context of the cinematic experience, media studies is primarily concerned with popular mass media and television (programs). Thus, fandom research has in its entirety been 'handed over' to the 'unwanted offspring' of media studies. Much of the earlier debate on fans and media audiences was dominated by the derisive work of cultural critics (i.e. Adorno and Horkheimer 2006; Boorstin 2006; Bourdieu 1984; Schickel 1985; Thorp 1939) that portrayed them as gullible nerds, deprived working-classes and vulnerable victims of popular culture. Inspired by Horton and Wohl's (1956) concept of parasocial interaction, media scholars have by the mid-1980s developed a strong research interest in the relationships that TV viewers form and maintain either with newscasters and TV personalities (Houlberg 1984; Rubin et al. 1985) or with TV shows and soap characters (Bielby, Harrington and Bielby 1999; Brower 1992; Rubin and McHugh 1987). Since the early-1990s, media scholars tend to focus on the social dynamics of participatory media fandom in relation to specific cult-TV shows and cult films due to the special and unique nature of expressed fan behaviour, whereby *Star Trek* has attracted most of the interest (Jankovich 2002; Jenkins 1992; Jindra 1994) rivalled only by *Star Wars* and *The X-Files* (Hills 2002; Jankovich 2002; Shefrin 2004)

It is however interesting to note that, despite celebrity culture being the central area of research within media studies, studies focusing on fans of celebrities have remained to be extremely rare (Turner 2004). Instead, fans are usually portrayed as engaging and relating virtually exclusively with the media characters rather than the actual actors who portray them (Jenkins 1992; Hills 2002; Rubin and McHugh 1987). In contrast to film

scholars' complete reliance on critical theory approaches to study film and stardom, media scholars have been open to a variety of investigative approaches, of which critical theory in particular and also, to a lesser extent, ethnography are the most common ones. Due to this diversity of approaches, media scholars have therefore investigated fandom from different perspectives that, based on their primary emphasis, can be grouped into the four categories *fandom-as-cultural-deprivation*, *fandom-as-subversion*, *fandom-as-neo-religiosity* and *fandom-as-community-of-misfits* (Gray, Sandvoss and Harrington 2007). At the same time, consumer researchers have developed a limited interest in both sports and media fans that followed similar patterns as sports and leisure research or media studies and even integrated those literatures, but with a much stronger emphasis on fans as participatory consumption subcultures (Derbaix et al. 2002; Kozinets 1997, 2001; Richardson 2004) that is influenced by a growing interest in brand communities (Cova 1997; McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). But the ethnographic studies by O'Guinn (1991) and Henry and Caldwell (2007) as well as my own publications presented in this thesis have been the only research that has looked at fans of celebrities such as film or pop stars.

2.6 Approaching a Taxonomy of Fans

As the aim of my research project is to provide holistic insights into what meaning(s) the emotional attachment to one's beloved film actress has for the individual consumer and how this fan relationship is experienced in everyday life, my research project calls not only for an interdisciplinary examination beyond the narrow confines of marketing and consumer research that draws on the fan literature from a broad range of academic fields such as film studies, media studies, social psychology, sociology and sports and leisure research, but also inadvertently adds to the very same as well. Indeed, despite being located within the paradigms of consumer culture theory (CCT) (Arnould and Thompson 2005) and consumer introspection theory (CIT) (Gould 2011), the significant overall contribution of the papers presented in this thesis is to the interdisciplinary fandom and stardom literature in particular by offering an alternative conceptualisation of fandom that puts the emphasis back on what should normally matter the most – the special bond fans form, experience and maintain with the subject of their admiration. However, as we have seen in the previous section, the major problem is that, despite the interdisciplinary nature of the phenomenon, the majority of the scholars investigating fans (maybe with the exception of consumer researchers) have limited themselves to the

literature within their own respective academic disciplines and shown very little interest in crossing the boundaries to the literature of other academic fields. Subsequently, the few existing taxonomies of fandom tend to be restricted to specific academic disciplines such as marketing (Hunt et al. 1999) or media studies (Gray et al. 2007) and usually limited to either ranking the different intensity levels of fan commitment (Hunt et al. 1999; McCutcheon et al. 2002) or providing a historical summary of discipline-internal paradigm developments (Gray et al. 2007). But due to their primary concern with the ideological views of their respective academic fields, none of those taxonomies has so far paid any attention to the essential differences of how fans have been conceptualised. Thus, this thesis's first contribution to the fandom literature is the development of a detailed, truly interdisciplinary taxonomy of contemporary academic conceptualisations of fans. The following is a critical discussion of those seven conceptualisations of fans that I have identified across the various different academic disciplines.

2.6.1 Fans as Target Markets

Marketing and business research has always acknowledged the existence and economic value of fans as consumers (Thorne and Bruner 2006), despite having historically paid very little attention to the study of film consumption, film actors and other celebrities. Nevertheless, marketing practitioners and academics alike tend to regard fans merely as commercially attractive, homogeneous and very brand loyal market segments that would provide ideal target audiences for a host of marketing activities (Hunt et al. 1999; Redden and Steiner 2000). Indeed, fans are not only seen as extremely brand loyal to their objects of obsession, but also as willing to invest large amounts of time, money and other resources to their devotion (Thorne and Bruner 2006), which would involve the continuous and indiscriminate hunt for and acquisition of relevant material objects (Bloch 1986; Derbaix et al. 2002). The consumer, then, tends to cherish and sacralise these material possessions as a physical link to the adored celebrity, to the supported sports team or to the fictional world that constitutes the particular object of desire (Belk 1991). With regard to celebrity fans, therefore, the primary focus of marketing research is to identify opportunities for positioning a human brand's (Thomson 2006) products in a way that meet the needs of his/her fans (Brown 2005; Hede and Thyne 2010; Hunt et al. 1999). For example, in the case of a new film's forthcoming release, the fans of cast members or the director should be made aware well in advance through strategic media coverage (i.e. film trailers, official websites, press releases, cast interviews on TV and in

magazines, etc.) to arouse their interest and expectations, so that they don't want to miss watching the film in the cinema (Kerrigan 2010; Marich 2009). Furthermore, marketers are constantly reminded by these studies that they must never forget to tie-in the film with appropriate merchandising to be sold across various retail outlets (Brown 2002, 2005; Brown and Patterson 2010; De Vany 2004; Marich 2009).

However, the vast majority of marketing and business scholars still find it extremely difficult, if not impossible to conceive of films and celebrities as brands in themselves – and not only as convenient promotion vehicles. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that most marketing and business studies focusing on fans as target markets are primarily interested in utilising consumers' emotional attachment to their favourite film actors or human brands for the marketing of other, completely unrelated products (Escalas 2004; McCracken 1989, 2005; Thomson 2006). Their primary hypothesis, thereby, is that fans show such a high predispositional involvement in their favourite film actor or celebrity that they are constantly and indiscriminately searching for any information connected to their subject of admiration (Redden and Steiner 2000; Thorne and Bruner 2006). Hence, marketing researchers assume that fans also happily process any product information that is either directly or indirectly brought into context with their admired celebrity in a favourable light (Thomson 2006). While the direct approach of bringing products into context with celebrities is through endorsement (Ang and Dubelaar 2006; McCracken 1989, 2005), the indirect approach usually involves product placement in films or TV shows (Russell and Stern 2006; Stern and Russell 2004; Wiles and Danielova 2009). The general problem with academic studies that conceptualise fans merely as target audiences is that they provide no real insights into fandom as a consumption experience, an individual consumer's intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to develop an emotional attachment to a particular film actor or celebrity and how fandom expresses itself in consumer behaviour. By focusing instead solely on managerial implications, marketing research has primarily been interested in the commercial exploitation of fandom and, thus, in the segmentation of fans in specific categories based on general demographic and psychographic variables (Hunt et al. 1999; Redden and Steiner 2000). Thorne and Bruner's (2006) investigation of the characteristics of consumer fandom and fanaticism in general, which involved both qualitative and quantitative analysis, and Thomson's (2006) study on the antecedents of consumers' emotional attachment to human brands

have been the only exceptions to the rule to-date – though both, nonetheless, looked at fans and fandom from a managerial perspective.

2.6.2 Fans as Spectators and Sport Team Supporters

Public media discourse has always had the habit of using the terms fans, supporters and spectators synonymously for all audiences attending sports events or rock/pop concerts, listening to a musician's records or reading a novelist's books. But because of the long historical link between sports audiences and team supporters, scholars within sports psychology as well as sports and leisure research were the first to equate spectators with fans. Sports fandom is thereby understood as a strong predispositional interest in a specific sport or sports in general, which is expressed either in active participation from grassroots to elite levels or the spectatorship of professional sports or any combination of these two (Dietz-Uhler, Harrick, End and Jacquemotte 2000). Although hooliganism and other violent sports supporters commanded at the beginning the most attention from academics, the emphasis changed by the early-1990s and quickly shifted towards two more '*normal*' forms of sports fandom – sports participation and sports spectatorship. In the process, fan behaviour in relation to sports spectatorship, but also to a much lesser extent in relation to sports participation, has already been receiving growing attention among marketing (Dionisio, Leal and Moutinho 2008; Hunt et al. 1999) and consumer researchers (Derbaix et al. 2002; Fisher 1998; Richardson 2004; Richardson and Turley 2006, 2008) as well – although often only from a managerial perspective. While sports and leisure studies are usually more interested in the personal and social facets of active sports participation (Allen 2003; Jackson 1996), the literature on sports participation as an expressed form of fandom is surprisingly scarce. The few studies that do exist are mainly interested either in another dark and harmful side of fandom that is compulsive exercising or in how gender differences among sports fans express themselves in terms of sports participation (Dietz-Uhler et al. 2000; James and Ridinger 2002).

With regard to compulsive sports participation, research has investigated motivations and reasons for sports fans to engage obsessively in specific sports like weightlifting, aerobics and jogging, which have enjoyed a great popularity since the global fitness craze in the early-1980s (Lehmann 1987). In doing so, particular attention has been paid to those sports fans, who are so extremely involved in their sports activities that they seem to have become addicted to their specific fitness regimes and exercises (Shank and

Beasley 1998). While academic research into hooliganism explored the different forms and underlying motivations for causing harm to others, these studies have looked at the self-harm brought about by the fan's obsessive participation and interest in one's favourite sport(s) and often investigated it in association with the abuse of performance-enhancing drugs and/or rigorous dieting (Lehmann 1987; Shank and Beasley 1998). A common theme in these studies, therefore, is that of the individual as a fanatic, who – similar to drug addicts – only lives for one's sport or exercise regime while losing any grip of reality. However, an increasing number of sports fandom studies have adopted a more neutral point of view. Their interest mainly lies in the gender distribution among sports fans. The research questions that these studies focus on look at whether the age-old myth that sports fandom is gender-biased in favour of men is true or whether male and female sports fans differ in their favour for particular sports, in the intensity with which they commit themselves to their sports or in terms of their intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Dietz-Uhler et al. 2000; James and Ridinger 2002). Interestingly, Dietz-Uhler et al. (2000) found that male and female sports fans primarily differ in terms of the sports they prefer to engage in, but couldn't identify any significant differences in relation to commitment or motivations.

The overwhelming number of studies on sports fandom, however, has been devoted to sports fans as spectators and, more often, as devoted supporters of professional sports. Having left the extremism of hooligans behind, scholars are nowadays interested in the motivations of sports fans for supporting particular sports and teams, in the influence of gender differences on the support of specific sports and teams, in the way fandom is expressed towards insiders and outsiders or manifests itself in consumer behaviour. Hunt et al. (1999) found that sports and especially team support develops at an early age through acculturation and is influenced by a child's exposure to specific sports, by a child's ability to play the sport, by the preferences of parents, siblings and/or friends and by local media attention to the sport. As sports fandom seems to continue through most of an individual's life (even up to seniority and retirement), sports scholars have proposed two main theories to explain and predict different levels of identification and passion among fans. The first theory involves consumers' attachment to sports teams as an extension of a consumer's self (Richardson 2004; Richardson and O'Dwyer 2003). Identification with a specific sport team, often from the local area where the individual has grown up, is essentially a means for fans to prove among others their belonging to a

certain social group within a region (i.e. AC Milan supporters come from Milan's middle-class, while Inter Milan supporters come from Milan's working-class) and their loyalty to their hometown represented by the team (Murrell and Dietz 1992; Richardson and Turley 2006, 2008). The identification with the team is subsequently signalled to other supporters as well as outsiders through the wearing of team-related merchandising such as scarves, flags, official replica team-jerseys and the sacralisation of the team's colours (Derbaix et al. 2002; Richardson and O'Dwyer 2003; Theodoropoulou 2007).

The strong identification with a sport team, which expresses and even enhances one's self-concept, involves a certain degree of self-monitoring, whereby the fan perceives the success or failure of the supported sport team as a reflection of one's own self-identity (Hyman and Sierra 2010; Richardson 2004). Hence, the second (and widely popular) theory is the double concept of *BIRGing* and *CORFing* (Hunt et al. 1999; Murrell and Dietz 1992). BIRG stands here for '*basking-in-reflected-glory*', which means that fans identify themselves with successful teams or athletes to enhance their own self-esteem. As fans view themselves and their support as an extension to the team or athlete, which gives the players strength and courage on the field to fight on and to try even harder (in soccer often called '*the 12th man*'), they experience and celebrate positive outcomes for their team as their personal successes as well and associate themselves even more with the team (Murrell and Dietz 1992; Richardson and Turley 2006). Indeed, many great sport teams often attract a strong following of supporters at times of success, which are nonetheless highly despised as '*gloryhunters*' by hardcore fans (Derbaix et al. 2002; Richardson and Turley 2008). If the team suffers negative outcomes, fans who aim to enhance their self-esteem are engaging in '*cutting-off-reflected-failure*', which means that they disassociate themselves from the losing team or athlete due to disappointed expectations like rats leaving a sinking ship (Murrell and Dietz 1992). But although the idea of BIRGing and CORFing sounds somewhat logical, Richardson and Turley (2006, 2008) have shown that it hardly reflects the fandom of true supporters, who often stand by their team in good times and in bad times. In fact, sports fans, who strongly identify with their team as an extended part of the self, are unlikely to CORF on their team and feel even closer to other hardcore fans due to a shared commitment (Richardson 2004).

Whether fans now identify with their favourite team to express their self-identity and social belonging or whether they identify with the team to nourish their self-esteem

through BIRGing strongly depends on the nature and intensity of their fandom. Being a team supporter either as an expression of one's extended self or attaching oneself to a successful, widely popular team, obviously, is not only driven by different motivations (the former intrinsic, the latter extrinsic) but also reflected in different types of fans. Hunt et al. (1999) distinguished between five categories of sport fans: temporary fans, local fans, devoted fans, fanatical fans and dysfunctional fans, which would all reflect different motivations and levels of attachment to their team. Temporary fans, who are strongly disliked by hardcore fans (Derbaix et al. 2002; Richardson and Turley 2008), don't regard '*being-a-fan*' as important to their self-identification and show only a high situational involvement in the team or sport, which only lasts for the time of the match (incl. the media build-up to an important event). Afterwards, these fans return to their ordinary behaviour patterns (Hunt et al. 1999). Therefore, internalising a team's success through BIRGing seems to be coming natural to this type of fans, who would have no difficulties in case of failure to distance themselves from the team again, which is why they are despised by hardcore fans as '*gloryhunters*' (Richardson and Turley 2008). On the other hand, local fans are bound by geographic constraints and the fan support for the local team is essentially an expression of loyalty towards one's hometown. While Hunt et al. (1999) argue that leaving the area would lead to a diminished enthusiasm for one's home team, I would rather suggest that the longer the distance and time away from one's hometown the stronger would the consumer's identification with one's home team be part of a nostalgic trip down memory lane back to one's roots (Holbrook 1993).

Devoted fans have a strong attachment to their favourite team and like to communicate this passion to others. Because of the high predispositional involvement in the favourite team and the sport in general, devoted fans enjoy the search for and discussion of new and old information with like-minded fans in public (Dionisio et al. 2008; Richardson 2004). Furthermore, material possessions associated to the team and their systematic collection play an important role in the devoted fan's life (Belk 1991; Fisher 1998). While BIRGing may to some extent occur, devoted fans are highly unlikely to engage in CORFing (Hunt et al. 1999; Murrell and Dietz 1992). Fanatical fans go even a step further than devoted fans. While devoted fans place their fandom within the context of having an everyday life beyond the team or sport, the team, sport and fandom form the central focus in the fanatical fan's existence (Hunt et al. 1999; Richardson and Turley 2006). Fanatical fans not only buy and collect fan-related memorabilia, but also dedicate

shrines to their devoted team or often an entire room is turned into a fan museum (Holt 1998; Richardson and O'Dwyer 2003). In doing so, fanatical fans are willing to invest substantial amounts of time and money into their fandom in order to obtain relevant or even rare items. While the consumer behaviour of fanatical fans can be called obsessive and out of the ordinary, they are unlikely to cause any harm other than putting maybe some strains on their social relationships with less enthusiastic family members and friends (Hunt et al. 1999). Dysfunctional fans, however, virtually build their entire existence around their favourite sport team as their only method of self-identification, so that this strong identification seriously interferes with their ability to perform in an everyday life outside fandom (Hyman and Sierra 2010). Hence, Hunt et al. (1999) differentiate between fanatical and dysfunctional fans not so much by the degree to which they engage in fan behaviour, but more by the degree to which the behaviour is anti-social, disruptive, deviant or even violent. Indeed, as dysfunctional fans readily justify their disruptive behaviour under the pretext of their fan support for the team, they pose a serious threat to other fans and non-fans (Thorne and Bruner 2006).

While these studies have been aimed at examining different categories of fans with the intention either to identify market segments for targeted marketing purposes (Dionisio et al. 2008; Fisher 1998; Hunt et al. 1999) or to identify potential troublemakers at an early stage to prevent similar tragedies like the Heysel Stadium disaster in 1985, sports and leisure research also investigates whether gender differences among sports fans exist and how they might express themselves. Dietz-Uhler et al. (2000) found that, although male fans identify themselves much stronger as being sports fans, males and females are equally likely to view themselves as sports fans. However, the underlying motivations differs slightly, as male fans' interest in sports often derives from an active interest in also participating (or wishing to participate) at some level in the favourite sport, while females favour the social environment and atmosphere at sport events much more (Dietz-Uhler et al. 2000). James and Ridinger (2002) also found that males and females differ in terms of the teams and sports that they support. Male fans tend to prefer men's sports and teams, while female fans tend to support teams of both genders equally. Furthermore, the motives for sports spectatorship in relation to both men's and women's basketball were found to differ in relation to their aesthetic appeal (James and Ridinger 2002). Male fans appreciate the athletic and graceful beauty of both men's and women's basketball more, while female fans find women's basketball aesthetically

more appealing. Yet, fans of both genders have named the action of the sport as their prime motivation for their sports fandom.

Although academic studies into sports fandom have provided a good blueprint for the research into film fandom, there are nonetheless some shortcomings that prevent their transferability to studying the fans of celebrities. First and foremost, while scholars have looked at sports fans' emotional attachment to their favourite team or sports in general, scant research has examined as to why fans attach themselves to one sport/team rather than another – especially when the team is not a local one. Furthermore, of particular interest to my research of a fan's emotional attachment to a film actress is to understand what meaning(s) the everyday lived fan experiences have for a consumer and how they are expressed in everyday consumer behaviour from an insider's point of view. Yet, studies on sports fandom have so far neglected the subjective, personal experience of the individual '*on the ground*' in favour of abstract generalisations. Subsequently, items and scales often measure what researchers deduct from a scant literature and think to be potentially relevant rather than what has actually been observed in the field (Dietz-Uhler et al. 2000; Hunt et al. 1999; James and Ridinger 2002; Murrell and Dietz 1992; Shank and Beasley 1998). Though some consumer researchers used ethnographic approaches involving participant observation and in-depth interviews (Derbaix et al. 2002; Hyman and Sierra 2008; Richardson 2004; Richardson and Turley 2006, 2008), they provided primarily an outsider perspective into a more extreme subset of sports fans within the special context of fan-clubs, fan-blogs and supporting the team live from '*fan-blocks*'.

2.6.3 Fans as Victims of Popular Culture

While sport teams, creative industries and the media these days refer to all audiences indiscriminately as fans, ever since social reformers such as the Christian Temperance Union have singled them out as their prime target, the most popular conceptualisation of fans is still the one portraying them as uneducated, gullible, dull and vulnerable '*numbs*' that have fallen victim to the manipulative powers of the dangerous and '*evil*' popular mass media culture (Fiske 1992; Gabler 1998; Jenson 1992; Thorp 1939). The bulk of literature relating to this conceptualisation of fans is primarily located within the field of media studies and sociology, which are dominated by an ideology-informed critical discourse that builds on Munsterberg's (1916) concept of the vulnerable audience and those cultural critics that followed (i.e. Adorno and Horkheimer 2006; Boorstin 2006;

Bourdieu 1984; Schickel 1985). Just like films and film stars by film scholars, media scholars view fans and their fandom as texts that can be read, analysed and interpreted in order to explore the triangular dynamics between fan texts, the social culture as their author and society including the scholar as their reader (Sandvoss 2007). The difference to critical approaches in film studies or sociology lies in the position of the fan within the triangle. While traditionally the fan is seen as the reader and, hence, consumer of the text, the critical approaches on fandom view the fan – much like the film actor in the stardom literature – as the text that is produced and given meaning by broader cultural forces within society (Sandvoss 2005). As such, the fandom literature is, apart from Munsterberg's vulnerable audience, strongly influenced by the neo-Marxist ideology of the Frankfurt School (Adorno and Horkheimer 2006; Lowenthal 2006; Sandvoss 2005; Weber 2006) and, especially, by Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) work on cultural capital (Browne 1997; Fiske 1992; Jankovich 2002). In essence, Bourdieu (1984) transferred Marx's theory on the economic and social relationship between access to capital, production, consumption and worker's alienation to the area of contemporary culture.

According to Bourdieu (1984), culture represents a capitalist economy in which people invest and accumulate capital in the form of socially and institutionally legitimated cultural products (Fiske 1992). The cultural system, however, promotes and privileges certain cultural tastes and artistic competences (*'high culture/arts'*) over others (*'low'* or *'popular culture/arts'*) through a society's cultural institutions such as the education system, museums, art galleries, state theatres and concert halls. The value of any individual cultural product is therefore determined by its compliance with the legitimated cultural taste and competence (Grossberg 1992) and inclusion in the *'canon'*, which is the set of privileged texts from music, art, literature and the performing arts that is considered to be *'worthy'*, *'valuable'* and *'tasteful'* (Bourdieu 1984; Fiske 1992). Popular culture, on the other hand, is vehemently rejected and derided as inherently *'unworthy'*, *'worthless'* and *'tasteless'*. Yet, as with the economic system, access and resources within the cultural system are unequally distributed and, thus, lead to a class distinction between the privileged and the deprived (Bourdieu 1984; Fiske 1992; Jankovich 2002). Hence, high culture can only be *'properly accessed'* by those privileged ones, who possess cultural taste and, subsequently, are in the position to appreciate its true value (Browne 1997). Furthermore, because the possession of taste and the access to high culture also produces a social return in the form of enhanced

social prestige, access to political influence and better jobs, Bourdieu (1984) argued that social mobility can only be achieved by obtaining cultural taste through personal investment in and acquisition of education. But because the privileged elite with access to cultural capital regard themselves as the guardians of '*proper*' cultural taste (Browne 1997; Fiske 1992; Winston 1995), they not only demonstrate their strong contempt for popular culture, but also attempt to deny those people access to the canon, who are deemed as lacking the ability to appreciate and judge the true aesthetic pleasure and value of high culture appropriately (Grossberg 1992; Winston 1995). In fact, as the access to cultural capital and education go hand in hand with the access to economic capital, the culturally rich elite even attempt to protect their privileges by suppressing the masses through meaningless popular culture.

Given their critical Marxist overtones, it is ironic that scholars in literature, film, media and cultural studies have often relied on Bourdieu's (1984) theory to justify or even advance the distinction between high-brow and low-brow culture, whereby they cherish the former and despise the latter. While high culture is seen as unique, tasteful, beautiful and of aesthetic value, popular culture as its binary opposite is mass-produced, tasteless, ordinary and only of functional value (Gabler 1998; Winston 1995). With regard to the critical discourse analysis on fandom, this translated essentially in two main points of view. The first point of view looks at fans from the scholarly perspective of high culture and, subsequently, portrayed them in line with the social reformist and Munsterberg's (1916) tradition as a bunch of uneducated, tasteless and mindless numbs, who are (un-)willingly manipulated by the contemporary popular mass media culture (Adorno and Horkheimer 2006; Boorstin 2006; Fiske 1992; Schickel 1985). Following Marcuse's Marxist criticism of rational industrialism as a one-dimensional society void of any prospect for change, Sandvoss (2005) and Winston (1995) claim that popular culture would only provide consumers with the illusion that a genuine polysemy of meanings could be discovered in popular texts. In reality, however, consumers would only be distanced from the true meaning of cultural capital by the promise of simple pleasures and instead fed with meaningless entertainment (Bourdieu 1984; Sandvoss 2005, 2007; Winston 1995). Popular culture, according to this point of view, is understood as a means of turning consumers into passive, often addicted and mindless media zombies (Munsterberg 1916; Schickel 1985). Hence, the fact that media fans are even willing to devote themselves on their own accord to some particular popular media is a frightening

thought for media scholars, sociologists and cultural critics adhering to the high culture perspective. Their common explanation for such behaviour is that media fans, because of their low education and subsequent lack of taste, must have innocently fallen victim to the evil trappings of popular culture (Gabler 1998; Hyde 2009; Thorp 1939).

While the first perspective is based on a disdain for '*capitalist consumer culture*' and, subsequently, for fans as consumers of inferior popular culture, who are accused of a deliberate devotion to '*tasteless banality*' and an unwillingness to better themselves through the '*tasteful devotion*' to the artistic canon of true cultural and aesthetic value (Gabler 1998; Hyde 2009; Thorp 1939; Winston 1995), the alternative perspective holds that the privileged elite deliberately deprives the majority of consumers of their rightful access to cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984; Browne 1997; Fiske 1992; Jankovich 2002). As a consequence, fandom is thereby seen as the (sub-)culture of the society's culturally alienated and disempowered masses, who have created for themselves a cultural shadow economy within the official cultural system through the sacralisation and aesthetic appreciation of profane mass commodities (Belk et al. 1989; Browne 1997; Fiske 1992; Jankovich 2002). Being denied the legitimate access to education as a mobility agent to true cultural capital, media fandom becomes a means for the society's deprived masses to express their sense of self and their communal relations to others by constructing an alternative cultural world out of superficial popular mass media texts that to some extent is as rich and intricate as the official cultural system (Fiske 1992; Jankovich 2002). In doing so, fan communities develop and establish their own cultural value system, which in its structure mirrors pretty much the dominant cultural system by privileging certain popular texts (i.e. specific films, TV shows, musicals, comics or popular literature) as being of higher aesthetic value than others (Browne 1997; Jankovich 2002). While true social mobility and prestige is unattainable, the individual fan is still enabled to grow one's reputation and social prestige among peers through the devotion, knowledge and systematic accumulation of certain popular media texts that within the community are deemed to be of aesthetic value (Fiske 1992; Jankovich 2002; Wegener 2008).

That sounds like an interesting discourse, but does this conceptualisation of fans hold up in the context of real everyday life? Personally, I think that this whole idea of fans being mindless victims of popular mass culture – be it enforced by a cultural elite or by the individual's own stupidity – is preposterous and seriously flawed; and not only because

of its dodgy origins within the fanaticism of the Christian Temperance Union and other self-proclaimed social reformers (Barbas 2001). Firstly, none of the media scholars and cultural critics behind this conceptualisation of fans has actually ever engaged in any form with actual '*real*' fans, fan culture and their fan behaviour in real everyday life contexts, which is strongly reflected in their theoretical writings that clearly emerged from behind the safety of their desks without ever having personally been in the '*actual field*'. Instead, they seem primarily to be interested in advancing their personal ideology regarding both high and popular culture by applying abstract social theories, such as the vulnerable audience (Munsterberg 1916), to specific contemporary phenomena without providing any empirical support from studies of real-existing fans, fan cultures and fan behaviour. Secondly, the idea that popular culture is per se aesthetically and culturally inferior to high culture – or even a menace to society – appears not only to be arrogant, but also pretty ignorant of our cultural-historical heritage, as most of today's canon of high culture, such as Shakespeare, Schiller, Goethe, Lord Byron, Mozart, van Gogh, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Ravel or the performing arts in general, were originally little more than popular entertainment and only gained their high culture status at a much later time – usually posthumously. To say, therefore, that the consumption of and even devotion to popular culture is a sign of the individual's stupidity and lack of taste resulting from a lack of education and subsequent access to cultural capital is rather narrow-minded – to say the least.

Finally, while fans are prejudiced as being dumb and uneducated due to their emotional devotion to tasteless and '*unworthy*' popular media texts, Brooker (2005) found in his ethnographic study that members of the cultural elite express a very similar emotional devotion and behaviour patterns towards high-brow cultural icons such as James Joyce or Lewis Carroll, which involves the systematic collection of authentic or relevant items and the ritualistic pilgrimage to associated sites and homes – a finding also shared by Hede and Thyne's (2010) ethnographic research. Yet, despite those factual similarities in consumption practices and experiences, media scholars and cultural critics still tend to describe the latter as aficionados or connoisseurs, whose devotion to high culture icons and their creative works would derive from a rational, educated appreciation, rather than as fans, whose devotion to popular media icons and their creative works would be irrational, emotional, uneducated and tasteless (Bourdieu 1984; Fiske 1992; Winston 1995). However, the biggest irony is that the blind devotion of cultural critics

and media scholars to the works of philosophers and social critics like Freud, Derrida, Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Bakhtin, Foucault, Baudrillard, Boorstin, Campbell or Bourdieu constitutes – in a way – a form of fandom as well...

2.6.4 Fans as Subversive Rebels

While the conceptualisation fans as victims of popular culture portrays celebrity and media fans as oppressed consumers, who are content with the inferior social status and prestige that their fandom reflects, Jenkins (1992) proposed, by drawing on De Certeau (1984), an entirely different and revolutionary conceptualisation of fans and fandom that caused in the process a deep rift within the disciplines of media and cultural studies. Being strongly influenced by the postmodernist movement, this new conceptualisation of fandom completely rejects the traditional stereotype of fans as passive and mindless cultural idiots, who are manipulated by the popular mass media, and instead argues that quite the opposite would in fact be true. Indeed, fans are thereby portrayed as creative, highly imaginative and subversive rebels against the corporate establishment (Jankovich 2002; Jenkins 1992), who engage with media texts by '*making them their own*' (Bielby, Harrington and Bielby 1999) and creating their own new textual products. Instead of consuming popular media texts merely within the boundaries of pre-authored meanings and contexts, fans are seen as being active producers and creative, skilled manipulators of media texts (Shefrin 2004; Wegener 2008). As consumers in postmodern societies are seen as the producers of their own self-images by utilising the fragmented meanings of diverse products as their raw materials, media fandom involves the fragmentation and reconstruction of media images according to the consumers' individual needs to design their self-identities. As a consequence, fan behaviour within this conceptualisation is usually associated with the two terms '*participatory fandom*' (Brower 1992; Roose and Schäfer 2010; Shefrin 2004) and '*textual poaching*' (De Certeau 1984; Jenkins 1992), which essentially refer to the same underlying idea of fragmenting and reconstructing media texts. In contrast to the commonly held view that fans would just mindlessly consume media texts and, at best, imitate characters, they actually assign their very own personal meanings to them and, subsequently, claim ownership of these media texts (Bielby et al. 1999; Hinerman 1992). This idea that fans claim ownership of media texts has already received empirical support from a number of ethnographic and structuralist studies (i.e. Bielby et al. 1999; Jenkins 1992; Shefrin 2004; Wegener 2008).

Fans' claim to ownership of media texts has been found to take two distinct forms that can both be witnessed in today's YouTube and (illegal) file-sharing culture (Giesler 2008; Hennig-Thurau, Henning and Sattler 2007). On a basic level, fans feel that they are entitled to have a say on the content, structure and narrative development of the media text as 'co-producers' because of their devotion and commitment towards the media text (Bielby et al. 1999; Shefrin 2004). Their argument, thereby, is that fans, due to having become closer to the media text, its characters and the plot than any of those film studio or TV executives holding the legal rights ever will, would be much better positioned to judge the authenticity and credibility of narrative developments or new character introductions (Bielby et al. 1999; Brower 1992). In order to express their opinions publicly, fans have ever since the film industry's early years interacted with other fans and the producers of media texts by writing fan-letters to the film/TV studios and official publications, leaving comments on websites, setting up their own fan-sites or publishing fanzines (Barbas 2001; Jenkins 1992; Turner 2004). During the golden years of Hollywood from 1919 to 1950, the major film studios had set up departments, whose job it was to screen fan letters for feedback on their films and stars as well as for ideas and suggestions for new projects. In fact, studio bosses like Jack Warner, Cecile de Mile, Samuel Goldwyn or David Selznick were known to have spent one day per week reading fan mail to stay in touch with their audiences (Barbas 2001) – a practice that today's studio executives would do well to reintroduce rather than putting their faith in the obscure advice of economists (De Vany 2004) and accountants. Hence, the issue of media text ownership has not only sparked academic debates, but also resulted in a number of legal disputes between media producers and media text's devoted audiences. Shefrin (2004) examined hereby how different film studios in the age of the Internet dealt with participatory fandom in relation to the productions of *Lord of the Rings* and *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace*. While the latter attempted to discourage participation beyond competitions on their official website and even waged copyright lawsuits against individual fans, the former actually invited fan participation by asking for opinions in relation to storylines that differed from the original novel as well as networking with unofficial fan-sites via links from the official website (Shefrin 2004).

Jenkins's (1992) concept of textual poaching, however, goes even a step further than the fan's feeling of entitled ownership. In his intensive ethnographic study of various fan communities from *Star Trek* to *Twin Peaks*, Jenkins (1992) found that the fans of media

texts behave similar to nomadic poachers with regard to constructing their very own cultures by borrowing storylines, characters, ideas and images from commercial media texts to create their own fictional media products. In doing so, fans not only interpret their own meanings into a given media text, but actually produce new creative texts out of fragmented media images, which feature known characters and environmental or situational contexts participating in self-imagined narratives (Turner 2004). One of the oldest forms of poaching, which developed as early as 1900, is the writing of fictional stories that involve the characters, sceneries and plot of an existing, admired media text, which are often published in specific unofficial fanzines. The emergence of Super 8 film cameras in 1960s/70s and video cameras in the 1980s has enabled creative fans to shoot their own films, which is nowadays made even much easier with the availability and affordability of the digital camcorders, editing software such as Windows Movie Maker, PowerDirector Express or Apple Final Cut and YouTube as a free distribution platform (Turner 2004). The amateur writers and filmmakers either have new story ideas or feel that the official story solution of the original media text is insufficient and needs to be altered (Hinerman 1992; Jenkins 1992). Due to the growing popularity of queer theory as a critical approach within media studies, the so-called '*fan slash*' genre has received a particular interest in recent years. '*Fan slash writings*' are fictional erotic, sometimes pornographic stories that take the popular media text, its characters and situational context as their point of departure and develop a romantic/sexual relationship between the lead characters (Cicioni 1998). While most fan slash is about imagined homosexual relationships between male characters, i.e. Kirk/Spock, they are nearly exclusively written by females (Cicioni 1998; Jenkins 1992). Another form of fan expression that Jenkins (1992) encountered at Star Trek conventions is '*filking*', where fans perform self-written songs with lyrics about media characters within their fan community. Many songs follow the melody of familiar folk or pop songs, but some are self-composed.

2.6.5 Fans as Members of Neo-Religious Cults

Because several US TV shows and films that have attracted particularly devoted fan communities, such as *Star Trek*, *Bonanza*, *Star Wars*, *Twin Peaks*, *Picket Fences* or *The X-Files*, have had strong religious overtones, it comes therefore as no surprise that some scholars have investigated fan culture and fan communities as neo-religious cults (Hills 2002; Jindra 1994; Rojek 2006). Though these studies, in Hill's (2002) own words, represent '*voices in the wilderness*', several ethnographic studies in consumer research

have also identified some forms of (neo-)religious behaviour within fan communities (Caldwell and Henry 2005; Henry and Caldwell 2007; Kozinets 1997, 2001; O'Guinn 1991). Furthermore, research of fan communities as neo-religious cults is thereby not only limited to TV shows, films or novels (Hills 2002; Jindra 1994; Kozinets 1997), but is also one of the conceptualisations of fans that extends to celebrities as well (Caldwell and Henry 2005; Henry and Caldwell 2007; O'Guinn 1991; Rojek 2006; Schau and Muniz 2007). The conceptualisation of fans as neo-religious cult members suggests that, like organised religion, fan communities form a canon of textual elements in relation to the admired media text or celebrity, which are deemed to be true and authentic, lay out regularised rituals and practices that determine the '*right way*' of appreciating the media text or celebrity and form a member hierarchy (Hills 2002; Rojek 2006; Schmidt-Lux 2010c). By sacralising the otherwise profane media texts or celebrities through shared meanings (Belk et al. 1989), fans give them a special status in their life and even define their self through them (Henry and Caldwell 2007). As with sports fandom described earlier (Holt 1998; Richardson 2004), the sacralisation of a media text or celebrity can reach such an extent, where fans devote a shrine in their living space (or even an entire room) to their admired TV show, film or celebrity (Caldwell and Henry 2005; Henry and Caldwell 2007; Kozinets 2001; O'Guinn 1991). Within this context, fans of celebrities are also often overheard saying that they '*worship*' their favourite idols and in some cases even credit them with some air of divinity – as recorded by O'Guinn (1991) and Henry and Caldwell (2007) in their ethnographic studies of Barry Manilow and Cliff Richard fan-clubs. After all, we have nowadays become used to refer to film and rock/pop stars as '*gods*' – though obviously not in a literal sense (Rojek 2006).

Besides the private sphere, the conceptualisation of fan communities as neo-religious cults focuses in particular on the communal and pseudo-institutionalised facets of their expressed fandom. In this context, fan-clubs are essentially seen as the equivalent to the traditional churches (Caldwell and Henry 2005; Hills 2002; Jindra 1994), which might also explain the contempt voiced by religious social reformers. Both institutions are in essence set up for the purpose of worshipping the divine; whether it's a god, a hero, a celebrity or any other media text doesn't really matter (Hills 2002; Jindra 1994). While the fan community defines and celebrates the canon that lays out the true content of authentic faith through ritualised practices (Kozinets 2001), another function is to share stories with each other that attribute divine qualities to the worshipped celebrity or

media text (Henry and Caldwell 2007; Kozinets 1997; O'Guinn 1991; Schau and Muniz 2007). Acquired and sacralised merchandise and other authenticated memorabilia are collectively cherished like sacred relics, especially when the celebrity or a genuine media text representative (i.e. an actor of the TV show) has blessed them through their personal presence, such as a hand-signed autograph, a personalised item or a used towel (Henry and Caldwell 2007; Kozinets 2001; O'Guinn 1991). Ethnographic studies by O'Guinn (1991), Henry and Caldwell (2007) or Schau and Muniz (2007) have also found evidence of a missionary spirit among devoted fan community members. Like the followers of most religions seeking happiness and salvation through serving their god, fan communities regard it as their duty to recruit new members, to protect their idol, media text and faith from the harm of bad press and/or 'bad fans' and to 'be there' for the subject of their fandom at all times. Despite being an atheist and having a certain dislike for religion of all sorts, I can't deny that the behaviour expressed by many fans and fan communities shows in some circumstances a resemblance to religious practices. Also, in contrast to some other fan conceptualisations, this one is actually backed up by a wealth of ethnographic data. However, most of the research merely studied a specific subgroup of fans for a limited period of time under very special circumstances, i.e. Star Trek conventions or fan-clubs. Hence, there is currently little data available on whether and how these findings also translate to a fan's ordinary, everyday lived experiences.

2.6.6 Fans as Alienated Social Misfits

While I have some personal difficulties as an atheist to associate myself with the idea of fandom being a form of neo-religious expression, I feel quite the opposite inclination towards the conceptualisation of fans being lonely geeks and alienated social misfits. The German satirist Wiglaf Droste (1995) once said that the problem with stereotypes and clichés is that they are always, at least, partially true. His observation seems to ring especially true with regard to the idea of fans being loners, nerds, geeks and other social misfits, which also is how they often tend to be portrayed within media texts (i.e. *The Big Bang Theory*, where science geeks are also gullible comic and science-fiction fans). As it happens, this is probably one of the oldest and most established stereotypes within both popular media and academic literature in relation to fans and, hence, has strongly influenced most of the contemporary conceptualisations of fans. After all, there must be something wrong with fans, when they devote so much time, money and effort in mass produced media commodities, such as TV shows (Jenkins 1992; Kozinets 1997, 2001),

video games (Cova, Pace and Park 2007), music (Ehrenreich, Hess and Jacobs 1992; Holbrook 1987), literature (Brooker 2005; Brown 2006a), films (Barbas 2001; Shefrin 2004) and even celebrities (Henry and Caldwell 2007; O'Guinn 1991; Stacey 1994), instead of *'doing more worthy things'* like *'normal people'* (Jenson 1992). And, indeed, the data from ethnographic research by Jenkins (1992), Kozinets (2001), Cusack et al. (2003) or O'Guinn (1991) provide striking evidence that media fans, in sharp contrast to sports fans, are very often not the most popular guys in school or at work. In fact, most fans in these studies reported that they *'somehow don't fit in with the mainstream'*, feel themselves to be misunderstood by others, have hardly any friends, report feelings of loneliness and isolation, and only too often experience various forms of stigmatisation, discrimination and bullying (Cusack et al. 2003; Kozinets 2001). Moreover, there is also evidence that many of them don't exactly do well in sport, are regularly shunned by the *'in-crowd'* and rarely invited to parties or dates.

However, sharply contradicting the popular stereotype of fans being rather unintelligent, gullible, dull and boring individuals, who consistently fail to succeed in real life and, thus, escape to popular culture fantasies (Gabler 1998), the majority of fans encountered by Jenkins (1992), Kozinets (2001), Cusack et al. (2003) or Stacey (1994) have actually turned out to be highly intelligent people, who usually are quite successful in school or in their professional careers (just like the characters in *The Big Bang Theory*). But it is primarily in their private and social lives, where these fans experience deficiencies in their social skills and acceptance and tend to be frustrated by a lack of social interaction with others that make them feel lonely and isolated (Cusack et al. 2003). Furthermore, several fans in Kozinets's (2001) study reported that they even feel being stigmatised and isolated especially by those, who are less intelligent, imaginative and creative than they are, but who are much more privileged or blessed in terms of social skills, status and physical attractiveness. Hence, fandom provides these individuals with a means of escaping their socially isolated environments and frustrating, lonely everyday lives for awhile by engaging in the deliberate search and collection of media texts of interest (i.e. films, TV shows, theatre performances, magazines articles, books, music, games or even celebrities) and, in the process, keeping their minds occupied. In relation to this context, Horton and Wohl (1956) observed already during the early days of television in the 1950s that TV audiences would often develop an emotional attachment to media personalities, TV anchormen or soap characters. Moreover, they also suggested that in

particular TV personalities such as anchormen and show masters would in fact actively encourage such an attachment by interacting indirectly with TV viewers through the camera as if they are in an actual face-to-face dialogue. Horton and Wohl (1956) have referred to this illusionary and/or simulated dialogue as '*parasocial interaction*'.

Once individual audience members, however, extend their parasocial interaction with their favourite TV personalities far beyond the initial TV show (i.e. by watching their appearances in other shows or media, by reading about them in magazines, etc.) over a longer period of time, they begin to engage with the media personality in a '*parasocial relationship*' (Horton and Wohl 1956). Since then, Horton and Wohl's work has not only become one of the most influential papers in media studies and social psychology with regard to celebrity fandom and audience research (Alperstein 1991; Cole and Leets 1999; Giles 2002; Houlberg 1984; Rubin and McHugh 1987; Rubin et al. 1985), but unfortunately also one of the most misinterpreted ones (as we will see in the following conceptualisation of fans). Indeed, the latter has led to the widely-held view that the parasocial relationships that fans form with their favourite celebrities are clear evidence for the individuals' inherent social deficiencies or even for their pathological-obsessive mental disorders (McCutcheon et al. 2002, 2003); although Horton and Wohl (1956) actually viewed and described them as being very healthy and complementary to normal social life. In fact, Horton and Wohl (1956) argued that parasocial relationships with TV personalities, soap characters, film stars and other celebrities would serve as particularly beneficial, compensatory emotional substitutes for those people, who experience only a rather restricted social life for various reasons, such as being geographically or socially isolated, timid, elderly, physically or mentally disabled, inept in forming social bonds or because they feel otherwise unpopular and rejected by others. In their own words:

"Nothing could be more reasonable or natural than that people, who are isolated and lonely, should seek sociability and love wherever they can find it. It is only when the parasocial relationship becomes a substitute for autonomous social participation, when it proceeds in absolute defiance of objective reality, that it can be regarded as pathological" (Horton and Wohl 1956: 223).

In other words, celebrity and media fandom provides consumers with a healthy means of compensating for experienced emotional deficits; as long as it doesn't turn into an addiction and the individual's sole purpose of life (Leets et al. 1995). And this is exactly what fans have reported as their personal emotional experiences in several ethnographic, structuralist and naturalistic studies (i.e. Barbas 2001; Cusack et al. 2003; Henry and Caldwell 2007; Jenkins 1992; Kozinets 2001; O'Guinn 1991; Schau and Muniz 2007).

In fact, fandom has offered many of those otherwise lonely individuals the opportunity to interact socially with other like-minded consumers, who not only share with them a similar interest in a certain media text or celebrities but also similar feelings of social isolation, alienation and rejection (Cusack et al. 2003; Kozinets 2001). With increasing social interactions and the exchange of media text knowledge or private experiences among like-minded media or celebrity fans, so-called fan communities emerge, develop and provide these media or celebrity fans with a place, where they can come together and share their interest with each other. These fan communities can thereby take various shapes and forms ranging from infrequent, informal gatherings over Internet chat-rooms and fan-sites to highly organised conventions and institutionalised fan-clubs (Barbas 2001; Hamilton and Hewer 2010; Henry and Caldwell 2007; Jenkins 1992; Kozinets 1997, 2001, 2007; O'Guinn 1991; Richardson and Turley 2008). Either way, fans of media texts or celebrities, who would normally experience themselves as social misfits (*'not fitting in with the mainstream'*), find within these fan communities the very kind of social acceptance, companionship, status and appreciation that they have been craving for in their private lives, even if they are only of a temporary or virtual nature (Cusack et al. 2003; Henry and Caldwell 2007; Kozinets 2001; O'Guinn 1991). Furthermore, the fan communities provide individual fans as well with the opportunity to share their own creative, self-designed outputs, such as fanzines, fan-sites, poems, songs, paintings or self-directed home-made films, with a supportive and appreciative audience of like-minded peers (Barbas 2001; Cusack et al. 2003; Hamilton and Hewer 2010; Kozinets 1997, 2001, 2007; Stacey 1994). In contrast to another conceptualisation of fans, the production, presentation and exchange of self-made creative outputs (including the re-sampling of commercial media texts) is not understood as a liberating exercise in *'sticking it to the Man'* (Jenkins 1992), but as a liberating means of gaining other fans' approval and even admiration by paying a loving homage to a shared interest (Barbas 2001; Kozinets 2007; Otnes and Maclaran 2007; O'Guinn 1991).

And this behaviour is not only limited to fan communities devoted to popular media texts or celebrities, but also to those devoted to the high arts (Chen 2009). Indeed, while they may call themselves aficionados and connoisseurs, admire high-brow cultural texts or icons and meet in societies rather than fan-clubs, at the end of the day, members of James Joyce, Lewis Carroll or Jane Austen societies have often joined them in the same way and engage in similar practices and rituals as the members of media, sports or celebrity fan-clubs (Brooker 2005; Hede and Thyne 2010). But irrespective of whether these fan communities centre around a celebrity, popular media text or high-brow culture, each of them can in essence be understood as a brand community (McAlexander et al. 2002; Muniz and O’Guinn 2001) or at least as a consumer tribe (Cova 1997). It is therefore not surprising that in particular the participation and social dynamics within fan-clubs, conventions and fan-sites have already received special attention from consumer researchers associated with the consumer culture theory (CCT) paradigm (Arnould and Thompson 2005). This particular research focus on fan communities, unfortunately, has reached such a level of exclusivity in the discourse that *‘being-a-fan’* is automatically conceptualised as participatory fandom and solely about the social interaction between community members, as evidenced by Thorne and Bruner’s (2006) definition of fandom (see p. 37 in this thesis). In fact, I was told on several occasions during the course of my research project that I can’t be a fan of Jena Malone, simply because I don’t participate in a dedicated fan community, where I could share my knowledge and appreciation for her with others! My admiration for her acting performances and my infatuation with her as a private persona would be irrelevant!

2.6.7 Fans as Irrational, Pathological-Obsessive, Delusional Stalkers

Unfortunately, the interpretation of fans as lonely, alienated social misfits has also (re-) invited the much more extreme conceptualisation of fans as pathological-obsessive and delusional stalkers that has always been very popular with the tabloids – and at fictional level with the film industry as well (Jenson 1992; Lewis 1992). Indeed, ever since the late-1890s, when social reformers such as the Christian Temperance Union created, planted and began to popularise the image of fans as gullible, dull, irrational, deviant and hysterical lunatics (Barbas 2001; Gabler 1998), the academic and popular literature on fans and fandom is haunted by popular and sensationalist stories and images of the socially inept and deviant fanatic, whose excessive, deranged behaviour clearly borders on the mentally insane (Jenson 1992). On the one hand, this conceptualisation of fans

has enjoyed a renewed academic interest since the 1980s due to its widespread coverage in the tabloids and popular media; especially after Mark David Chapman's assassination of John Lennon, the murder of Selena Quintanilla by the chairperson of her official fan-club and John Hinckley's attempted assassination of Ronald Regan in order to impress the film actress Jodie Foster (Gabler 1998; Krämer 2003) as the most infamous, often cited (but also largely the only!) real-life examples. While academic literature normally tends to shun the popular literature as unscientific and subjective, cultural critics and some scholars within media studies and social psychology seem, nonetheless, to have a disproportionately strong interest in the darker and extremist sides of fandom (Maltby et al. 2004; McCutcheon et al. 2002, 2003, 2006) – even though it merely represents an exceptionally tiny minority of individuals, and most of whom aren't actually fans at all (Dietz et al. 1991; Leets et al. 1995). On the other hand, this renewed academic interest, which follows closely in the footsteps of Munsterberg (1916) and builds on his theory of the vulnerable audience, was also strongly inspired by a serious misinterpretation of Horton and Wohl's (1956) parasocial interaction theory.

As discussed in 2.6.6, Horton and Wohl (1956) portrayed fans' parasocial relationships with their favourite celebrities as complimentary to normal social relationships, which provide a healthy alternative for those individuals who experience a deficit in social relationships for various reasons. Only when an individual becomes so obsessed by the parasocial relationship with a particular celebrity that s/he loses one's grip of reality and can no longer differentiate between fact and fiction, they argued, can such fan behaviour be regarded as pathological and delusional – but only then. However, especially within the field of social psychology, many scholars seem to have ignored Horton and Wohl's (1956) original distinction and focused right from the start purely on the pathological side of fandom – sometimes seemingly with the purpose of having a term or concept like the '*celebrity worship syndrome*' credited to their name (see Maltby, McCutcheon, Ashe and Houran 2001). Nevertheless, both media studies and social psychology look at pathological fandom from slightly different perspectives based on their underlying research paradigms. Media studies emphasises two different images of pathological fans, which can be characterised as a) the hysterical member of a crowd, and b) the obsessive, stalking loner (Jenson 1992) – both of which highlight quite clearly their social reformist heritage. The study of fan pathology in relation to frenzied crowd members emerged in response to the crowds gathered at the funeral of the actor

Rudolph Valentino in 1925 (Barbas 2001; Hansen 1991) and has ever since been associated with (mostly female) fans of film and rock/pop stars (Ehrenreich et al. 1992; Gross 2005; Lowenthal 2006; Thorp 1939).

Indeed, the popular press aren't the only ones to connect the images of screaming, weeping and hysterical teenagers, who gather in large crowds at premieres, hotels, airports or concert halls to catch in person a glimpse of their idols (even if it is merely for a second), rigorously to the dangers of violence, alcohol, drugs, free sexual and, especially in the US, racial mingling to this very day in an effort to warn concerned parents of the '*devilish temptations*' their kids are getting themselves into by listening to rock 'n' roll, punk, heavy metal and hip hop, watching science fiction and horror films, playing video games or admiring a particular celebrity (Barbas 2001; Jenson 1992). Media studies and cultural critics have followed suit, once the Elvis and Beatles phenomena of the 1950s and 1960s in particular have caused worldwide chaos because of hysterical teenage crowds gathering randomly in large numbers (Ehrenreich et al. 1992). While nearly all early research appeared to be self-fulfilling prophecies designed to lend similar academic support to popular prejudices that Munsterberg (1916) previously gave to the Christian Temperance Union, later research like Ehrenreich et al.'s (1992) study of Beatlemania have looked at the meaning that such hysterical behaviour may have had for teenage girls within the context of their contemporary cultural circumstances. They concluded that their hysterical fandom had enabled young girls to open an internal pressure valve and to release the cultural burden of sexual oppression that society had placed upon them without having to risk losing their female virtue and '*honour*'. Recent studies into hysterical teenage fan behaviour with regard to boy groups or teenage film actors have come to similar conclusions and view fandom among young girls as an expressed emotional transition into sexuality and womanhood (Karniol 2001), which is only a temporary state that would require parents to provide their daughters with '*proper*' guidance and moral support (Giles and Maltby 2004).

In either case, research on fan pathology regarding hysterical crowd members has also inspired and influenced the study of football hooliganism with sports fandom discussed earlier (Jenson 1992). Yet, it particularly is the image of the weird, alienated, obsessive and fanatical loner, who has '*lost his marbles*' (they mainly happen to be male) and threatens to go over great length to satisfy his delusional belief of having a romantic,

sexual or merely a *'friendly'* relationship with a certain celebrity, that has always caught the imagination and interest of social psychology researchers and the tabloid media (Dietz et al. 1991; Leets et al. 1995; McCutcheon et al. 2002, 2003). Nevertheless, due to their strong philosophical grounding in (neo-)behaviourism and the scarcity of pre-existing academic literature, most of their hypotheses and research designs derived from the stereotypes generated by the popular media and the (unproven) theories of cultural critics rather than observations of actual real-life fandom in the field. The fact is that most social psychological studies have simply ignored any prior ethnographic research (i.e. Jenkins 1992; Jindra 1994; Kozinets 1997, 2001; O'Guinn 1991; Stacey 1994) as being inferior or of no academic value (Maltby et al. 2001, 2004; McCutcheon et al. 2002, 2003), while popular media and tabloid reports, in contrast, must supposedly be trustworthy. This is not to say that there is enough evidence for the opposite (Dietz et al. 1991), but that a number of those studies have quite clearly been conducted on *'pretty shaky'* grounds and have mainly been ideologically motivated – or at least influenced.

Following the above-mentioned murders of John Lennon, TV actress Rebecca Schaeffer and Mexican singer Selena Quintanilla or the attempted assassination of Ronald Reagan as well as hundreds of threatening letters sent to celebrities worldwide on any given day by apparently mentally unstable individuals, a need for research was recognised in the early 1980s to prevent potential attacks on famous people in the future by understanding the mind of the obsessive stalker as well as by identifying various types of pathological-obsessive fans and the nature and extent of their delusion (Dietz et al. 1991). The most comprehensive study in this regard was the longitudinal research conducted by Dietz et al. (1991) in cooperation with a major specialised Hollywood security consultant agency, which involved a content analysis of 1800 inappropriate and/or threatening letters written to celebrities by 214 individuals⁴ with regard to their content and the differences between approach and non-approach risks. Interestingly, despite identifying 16 variables that would describe pathological fandom (though mainly in their very extreme and excessive variation), Dietz et al. (1991) couldn't really find any typifying differences between *'approachers'* and *'non-approachers'*. Strongly contradicting the popular stereotype, however, they found evidence that those fans, who are obsessed with fantasising about a romantic or sexual relationship with an adored celebrity, turn

⁴ 107 of the subjects were deemed a *'non-approach risk'*, while 107 had approached their *'target'*.

out to be actually the least likely candidates for seeking real-life encounters with their object of desire. Instead, the most extreme and dangerous pathological-obsessive '*fans*' among both approachers and non-approachers seem to be less fixated on a particular celebrity as a person but more on celebrity fame in general by writing simultaneously to various celebrities at any given time (Dietz et al. 1991). Furthermore, their obsession with celebrities, in fact, is often little more than the mere extension to much broader mental delusions that were primarily expressed in a radical, often incoherent religious (but sometimes also political) fanaticism (Dietz et al. 1991).

Most importantly, Dietz et al. (1991) always pointed out in no uncertain terms that they were studying only a microscopic minority, who must not be confused at any time with the vast majority of ordinary, mentally '*normal*' everyday media and celebrity fans – and, thus, strengthening Horton and Wohl's (1956) initial argument. Still, even though Dietz et al.'s (1991) research was very thorough, detailed and informative, it still fails to determine in what ways the dangerous pathological-obsessive minority exactly differs from the normal everyday celebrity fan in terms of how their fandom is practised and experienced. Leets et al. (1995), therefore, followed up by comparing the motivations of '*normal*' consumers to write or contact celebrities, which they obtained through both a survey of university students and a content analysis of fan letters received and provided by an unnamed celebrity, with Dietz et al.'s (1991) earlier findings. In their student sample, Leets et al. (1995) have identified curiosity/information seeking followed by expressing one's admiration (or criticism) for the celebrity and his/her creative work and the intent to associate oneself or express one's self-identity with the celebrity (often BIRGing) as the primary motivations. These findings were largely confirmed by their content analysis of the fan letters as well – with one exception. Asking the celebrity for favours or requests – i.e. appearing at a for the writer important private (birthday, marriage, anniversary) or social event (prom night, fan-club meeting, conference, social party), visiting a terminally ill relative, giving donations in kind or money, signing a personal autograph or forwarding the writer's own creative work to the celebrity's agent or producer – has turned out to be the biggest motivator identified from the actual fan mail (Leets et al. 1995)⁵. Compared to Dietz et al. (1991), there is nothing out of the

⁵ The finding also highlights once more the qualitative difference between data reflecting hypothetical intentions (i.e. student samples) and actual real-life observations obtained in the field (i.e. fan mail) in accurately reflecting or describing a phenomenon under investigation.

ordinary even though some minor similarities could be recognised. Both groups have expressed their admiration and devotion to the celebrity, requested some kind of favour and often enclosed one or more items with the letter as a personal gift (i.e. a poem, tape, photo or a small present).

Where the normal fans have differed from their pathological-obsessive counterparts has been the extent and excessiveness of their devotion as well as in their perception of the relationship they have with the celebrity. Even though normal fans may fantasise about a romantic and/or sexual relationship with a particular celebrity (especially in absence of a real-life relationship), they are always fully aware that this fantasy is exactly that – a fantasy – and often expressed in the open question section of Leets et al.'s (1995) survey some embarrassment about their '*foolishness*'. Subjects in Dietz et al.'s (1991) study, on the other hand, were mostly under the delusion of actually being in a mutual romantic relationship with the celebrity and that their feelings have been undoubtedly reciprocated, which often also meant that they view the celebrity's real-life partners as adulterous intruders. Furthermore, they differed significantly in terms of the items they have enclosed in their letters. While normal fans have enclosed mostly Christmas and birthday cards, personal photos and self-written poems, self-mixed tapes, CDs or home-made video films (Leets et al. 1995), the enclosed items from pathological-obsessive fans have ranged from the innocuous to the extremely bizarre, such as bibles, half-eaten candy bars with lipstick on them, bed pans, excrements, blood syringes, '*fresh sperms for impregnation*', medical photos of corpses with the celebrity's face pasted on, etc. (Well, you get the picture!). According to Leets et al. (1995), normal fans won't really go to extreme lengths of getting in contact with their favourite celebrities beyond or other than fan mail (or, these days, networking on Facebook and Twitter), attending their shows, premieres and public autograph signings or pure chance encounters on the street. As the works of Dietz et al. (1991) and Leets et al. (1995) have provided such good general insights into the psychological distinction and behavioural differences between the tiny minority of pathological-obsessive, delusional individuals and the vast majority of normal, mentally healthy fans, it is quite incomprehensible that a group of social psychologists has since 2001 set out on a deliberate quest to confirm the popular, stereotypical conceptualisation of fans empirically by ignoring or, alternatively, quite liberally reinterpreting all those previous findings in order to advance their own dodgy agenda of painting a very different theoretical picture of fans (Maltby et al. 2001).

In their research of *'celebrity worshippers'*, McCutcheon, Ashe, Houran, Maltby and their various other co-authors have argued that every person, who admires a particular celebrity and his/her creative work or celebrities in general, would clearly suffer from a serious inherent mental illness (which they named the *'Celebrity Worship Syndrome'* or short CWS) that may even be hereditary (Maltby et al. 2001, 2004; McCutcheon et al. 2002, 2003, 2006). In fact, they propose that celebrity fandom, as a form of parasocial interaction, constitutes a psychologically abnormal behaviour that could be categorised as a type of erotomaniac delusional disorder. They, therefore, believe that fans are not only obsessive and pathological-delusional in their adoration of celebrities, but must also be expected to *'exhibit verbal, visuospatial, intellectual and cognitive deficits related to flexibility and associative learning'* (McCutcheon et al. 2003). In other words, Maltby et al. (2001, 2004) suggest that the admiration and adoration of their favourite celebrities is a clear indication that celebrity fans, in sharp contrast to *'normal'* people, are generally less intelligent, dull, unimaginative, unable to cope with or even enhance their daily lives and even suffer from a potential learning disability (McCutcheon et al. 2003). This idea, obviously, both derives from Munsterberg's (1916) original idea of the vulnerable audience and feeds into the popular interpretation of fans as deprived (but this time of intellectual cognition rather than cultural capital), gullible and mindless numbs put already forward by social reformers and cultural critics (i.e. Boorstin 2006; Cashmore 2006; Gabler 1998; Gross 2005; Hyde 2009; Thorp 1939). Hence, every notion, suggestion and even genuine empirical evidence from the field that fandom is actually providing lonely and socially isolated, but otherwise normal individuals with both a platform to interact with other like-minded people and an outlet for creative self-expression – be it subversive (Jenkins 1992) or constructive (Kozinets 2001, 2007) – has been rejected or ignored.

While the theory that McCutcheon, Maltby and their colleagues have put forward is highly debatable, if not dodgy and questionable, it might warrant further exploration, if these researchers – who are deeply embedded in logical empiricism and committed to scientific inquiry – had actually provided some valid scientific evidence in at least one of their nearly a dozen published papers. But as it so happens, the data they presented in support of their hypotheses actually proved the exact opposite and supported not a single one of their propositions (see, for example, Maltby et al. 2004; McCutcheon et al. 2003, 2006). It is therefore quite a scary thought that researchers, who are so committed

to logical empiricism, not only reject any data that have been obtained in ethnographic research or through actual celebrity fans' verbal statements in their entirety as unreliable and unscientific, but also misinterpret or even bend their very own data in an effort to present the results that would support their theory. While reading their body of work, I was left with the impression that either McCutcheon and Co. must lack a fundamental knowledge or experience with regard to multivariate data analysis and interpretation of statistical results or they have been so obsessed with finding empirical support for their hypotheses that they deliberately ignored or misread the real findings of their data. But it is even more worrying that some of their papers have actually passed the peer review in highly rated publications such as the Journal of Psychology or the British Journal of Psychology, suggesting that the respective reviewers don't understand multivariate data analysis either or failed to compare the authors' findings with the provided data. As I'm aware that this is a very *'harshly worded'* judgement, I will now discuss some of the most serious flaws within their work and urge the reader to have a look for yourself to make up your own mind – especially as some of their findings have already made their way into the popular media (Cashmore 2006; www.irishhealth.ie).

First of all, as devoted neo-behaviourists, McCutcheon et al. (2002, 2003) believe that verbal statements of subjects are generally unreliable and can't be trusted (Nisbett and Wilson 1977). Consequently, they reject all previous literature based on ethnography or discourse analysis for the development of their own hypotheses and measurement instruments. Surprisingly, though, the unsupported claims by Munsterberg (1916) and other theorists or popular media reports haven't been questioned in a similar way. But McCutcheon et al. (2002) did challenge earlier celebrity appeal scales (i.e. Stever 1991), despite their high construct validity and reliability ratings, as unsuitable measurements for identifying and measuring the extent of celebrity worshipping. In their opinion, these scales are either too *'specialised'* for specific types of celebrities, such as TV personalities and newscasters (Rubin and McHugh 1987; Rubin et al. 1985) or focused *'too much on emotional'* (Stever 1991) rather than *'rational'* dimensions by including *'irrelevant and distracting'* items relating to liking, sexual attraction or romantic appeal (McCutcheon et al. 2002). Using a Rasch scaling approach, McCutcheon et al. (2002) proposed the Celebrity Attitude Scale (CAS) as a superior and universally applicable alternative. However, due to rejecting out of hand any knowledge of fandom obtained by previous research and having little other literature to build on, the original 32 items

for the scale were derived from the popular discourse and selected by the researchers based on common-sense, but were then reduced to 17 items with the deliberate purpose to cover three theorised levels of fandom (McCutcheon et al. 2002). At the basic level, celebrity worship has an '*entertainment-social*' value for the individual, who has been attracted by the celebrity's ability to capture attention and entertain. The intermediate level of celebrity worship is characterised by '*intense-personal*' values, where fans develop and are driven by intense and compulsive feelings towards the celebrity. And, finally, '*borderline pathological*' behaviour is the most extreme expression of celebrity worship, where the individual is so obsessed with one's favourite celebrity that s/he would be willing to spend one's entire fortune on items that have been used or owned by the celebrity and/or to engage in anti-social behaviour (McCutcheon et al. 2002).

In doing so, McCutcheon et al. (2002, 2003) imply that the more an individual worships the admired celebrity, the more would s/he experience a decline in one's psychological well-being, cognitive flexibility and intellectual functioning. But the very nature of the CAS scale, despite the reported internal validity and reliability, means that applying it to any sample merely confirms a self-fulfilling prophecy. Yet, at the same time, they also argue that celebrity worship would under no circumstances be related to an individual's feelings of loneliness, isolation and shyness⁶ (Maltby et al. 2004; McCutcheon, Arugate, Scott and von Waldner 2004), which contradicts the findings generated by virtually all ethnographic research to-date. But even though the CAS scale was set up in this way, as described by McCutcheon et al. (2002), the authors insist in each of their other papers that these three factors would emerge from the data during the factor analysis rather than from the very design of the scale (Maltby et al. 2001, 2004; McCutcheon et al. 2003, 2004, 2006). Nonetheless, this '*minor*' issue might have been acceptable, if the CAS actually delivers consistent results across a wider sample range, as the researchers reported in every publication. But, curiously, that has NOT been the case. While the CAS has held up in the main samples drawn from the students at their own universities in Florida and Georgia (McCutcheon et al. 2002, 2003, 2006), a sample collected at a Georgian university (McCutcheon et al. 2004) and data collected from working class samples in the UK have turned out to be all over the place or presented very different factor constellations (Maltby et al. 2001, 2004). Yet, each time the authors have praised

⁶ The lack of correlation is hardly surprising, as the CAS scale fails to measure or account for such or any other emotional variables in the first place.

the universal applicability of their CAS scale, they have conveniently failed to mention those irregularities. However, it is when the CAS has been applied and the findings are discussed that a flawed research design turns into a highly questionable exercise.

A perfect example is provided in McCutcheon et al. (2003), in which the authors claim to have presented strong empirical evidence that celebrity worshippers' inherent cognitive deficits result from erotomania. The CAS is thereby said to correlate strongly with six cognitive measures reflecting verbal creativity, crystallised intelligence, spatial abilities, arithmetic skills, creative thinking and need for cognition (i.e. enjoyment of solving intellectual problems) adopted from various relevant psychological studies. The problem is that the provided table (McCutcheon et al. 2003: 317) clearly shows that the arithmetic skills and need for cognition measures are NOT statistically significant ($p > 0.05$) in the bivariate regression analyses! Thus, although McCutcheon et al. (2003) argue that fans are less intelligent and creative than 'normal' people and have serious difficulties in associative learning, it's quite interesting to learn from the data that they, nonetheless, show no differences to other people in terms of '*relishing the opportunity to solve complicated puzzles and enjoying challenges posed by intellectual problems*' (McCutcheon et al. 2003: 314), which are so characteristic for the need of cognition or arithmetic/mathematical abilities. Furthermore, the other four dimensions may have been statistically significant, but their practical significance has turned out to be of little to no relevance at all, as each of them explains merely between 9.6% and 17.6% of the variance. And while the multiple regression analysis correlated with an adjusted $R^2 = 0.25$, which explains just 25% of the variance, it's even more curious that not a single one of the six measures scored a statistical (never mind a practical) significance in their β values. Multiple regression analyses also show similar results in predicting the three factors as independent subscales, which achieve statistical significant ($p < 0.1$) adjusted $R^2 = 0.17, 0.23$ and 0.16 respectively, but again with no statistically significant β values. The only exception is the mildly significant ($p < 0.05$) verbal creativity measure with regard to the borderline-pathological subscale ($\beta = -0.34$). Nevertheless, McCutcheon et al. (2003) has had no hesitation to interpret these findings as '*strong evidence*' for the support of their hypotheses and theory. Their explanation for the complete absence of any statistically AND practically significant β values is that '*the six cognitive measures only contribute to the CAS and its subscales 'collectively' rather than individually*'.

2.7 The Need for an Alternative Conceptualisation of Fans

In light of these overall devastating views of fans, it may seem that admitting in this thesis to my own private infatuation with the film actress Jena Malone and risking to be branded with one of those common stereotypes in the academic and popular discourse would be an unwise move (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2011c). But while the presented truly interdisciplinary taxonomy provides the first detailed overview of how fans and fandom have been conceptualised across the contemporary academic literature of various fields, it also highlights a number of conceptual deficits and limitations within every single one of the seven fan conceptualisations that have their origins in the respective researchers' own agendas and prejudices (Smith et al. 2007). Indeed, even though the introspective consumer narrative of my own fan relationship with Jena Malone (see Appendix B) may seem to lend empirical support to any of the seven fan conceptualisations when looking at them through the respective theoretical lenses, this support usually involves focusing merely on individual consumption practices and experiences (i.e. the enthusiastic and aesthetic appreciation of the media text or the celebrity and his/her creative work, the admired subject's elevated role in the fan's private life and/or the dedicated collection and treasured possession of associated items) in isolation by taking them often out of their holistic situational context. As a result, the introspective data of my research seem, at the same time, to confirm AND to contradict the preconceptions about fans held by each of these interdisciplinary conceptualisations of fans and fandom in the literature – to the extent that each of them leaves most of my personal emotional attachment to Jena Malone unexplained. Hence, as none of these contemporary conceptualisations of fans either describes or fully captures many facets of my own everyday fan consumption experiences, I can't stop wondering whether there is maybe much more to a consumer's personal fan relationship with a celebrity (or other media texts) than what previous studies have uncovered and discussed so far.

This suspicion is further strengthened by the fact that all previous research that provided the conceptual foundation for each of the taxonomy's seven fan conceptualisations share in essence three major commonalities. Firstly, without any exception, all previous studies have investigated fans and fandom primarily from an outsider-looking-in perspective by imposing their own preconceived abstract ideas onto the phenomenon, which originate from sharing and building on the same original sources such as Munsterberg's (1916) theory of the vulnerable audience (Smith et al. 2007). As much of

the current body of fan literature, apart from a few ethnographic studies, has developed without scholars ever actually engaging directly with the subjects of their investigation, many preconceived conceptual ideas and theories have been passed on without ever being challenged or confronted with reality. Secondly, previous research has concentrated only on certain, more '*extreme*' subgroups of fans often under very special, extraordinary circumstances like Star Trek conventions, football or celebrity fan-club meetings or on dedicated fan-blogs (Jenkins 1992; Kozinets 1997; Richardson 2004; O'Guinn 1991) for two obvious reasons: a) They are easily identifiable and '*readily available*' for scholarly observation, and b) their '*extreme*', out-of-the-ordinary behaviour makes it easier for the researcher to present them as the '*deviant other*' in society. However, this also meant that researchers have paid very little attention to the ordinary everyday lived experiences of the '*normal*' fan in one's daily life. Thirdly, all previous studies have focused either on the social dynamics and symbolic relationships that consumers experience with other fans within the context of their respective consumption subcultures (Henry and Caldwell 2007; Jenkins 1992; Kozinets 2001) or on the psychological well-being and mental states of fans (Leets et al. 1995; McCutcheon et al. 2003, 2006). As a result, neither a single one of the seven conceptualisations of fans nor any single previous study has actually explored the nature of fans' emotional attachments to their admired objects in the first place. In fact, the fandom object has always been treated as an interchangeable commodity of no further relevance throughout the entire body of fan literature. This also explains why I was told on occasions that, despite my obvious strong emotional attachment to Jena Malone, I wouldn't be a fan simply because I'm not participating in a fan community.

I, therefore, feel that an alternative conceptualisation of fans is needed, which puts the emphasis back on what is normally the most important factor in any consumer's fandom and, subsequently, should matter the most – the special, emotional bond that fans form, experience and maintain with the subject of their admiration. Hence, my own research journey into the phenomenon of celebrity fandom has taken an introspective turn in order to address the conceptual and methodological limitations that restricted previous studies of fans and fandom. My aim is thereby to obtain truly holistic insights into a consumer's personal everyday fan relationship with a film actress and how it manifests itself in everyday consumption practices and experiences from a genuine insider's point of view (Smith et al. 2007). In doing so, a deeper and much more honest understanding

of what meaning(s) such a fan relationship has in an ordinary consumer's daily life can be gained that is much better equipped to capture and explain the many facets of a fan's emotional attachment to a film actor or actress (and, by implication, any other celebrity, sport team or media text) in their holistic complexity. But due to the scant literature that has been dedicated to the study of celebrity fandom and fans of film stars in particular, it is necessary at this point to draw in more detail on the stardom literature. And because film stars perform a vital role within the film industry (Barbas 2001; De Cordova 1991; Gamson 2006; Kerrigan 2010; McDonald 2000), this means that the discourse on film stardom is conceptually and methodologically tied very closely to the study of film texts (Dyer 1998; Hollinger 2006; King 1991; Krämer 2003). This is one reason as to why it is required to have a better understanding of the relevant literature on film consumption first. The second reason is that a major part in a consumer's fan relationship with one's admired film actress obviously involves the enjoyment of her films.

CHAPTER 3

THE MESSENGER

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I have not only provided you with a genuinely interdisciplinary taxonomy of how fans have been conceptualised in the present literature, but also made the case for a necessary re-conceptualisation of fandom towards a stronger emphasis on the emotional bond that consumers actually experience with the admired subjects. Thus, the time has come to have a closer look at the subject of fandom that is at the heart of my research project and, subsequently, this thesis – film actors and actresses. As already mentioned earlier, the academic literature has paid scant attention to celebrity fandom in general and to the emotional attachment that consumers develop, foster and cherish towards their favourite film actors in particular. This lack of academic research interest is pretty disappointing; not only because of the film industry's size and commercial potential, but also because the consumer-human brand relationship between film actors and their fans makes for such an exciting phenomenon to explore. In absence of a relevant fan literature, I take in this chapter a closer look at the current stardom and celebrity literature in order to provide you with a detailed overview of what is already known on how film actors and actresses appeal to consumers. But because the study of film stars, by its very nature, is intrinsically linked to the study of film, I first discuss how different academic disciplines have studied the consumption of films so far. Then, I examine how film stars and other celebrities are primarily constructed and investigated as textual consumption objects by the film studios, managers/agents, film and media scholars, the media, consumers and the celebrities themselves rather than as real human beings. I conclude this chapter by proposing the use of narrative transportation theory as an alternative approach to gain a genuine understanding of the lived meaning(s) that the personal engagement with a film actor or actress has for the individual consumer.

3.2 For Love of the Movies

For more than a century, the film industry has continuously been one of the world's commercially biggest and most successful industries (De Vany 2004; Eliashberg and Sawhney 1994; Ravid 1999), which plays an essential role in many societies' popular culture (Kochberg 2007; McDonald 2000; O'Guinn et al. 1985) and which has spawned

a number of major sub-industries from merchandising and theme parks to glossy tabloid magazines that satisfy consumers' relentless fascination with the glamour of film stars, starlets and even minor celebrities (Gabler 1998; McDonald 2003; Turner 2004). Thus, ever since its very early beginnings in the 1890s, the film industry has been engaged, for better or worse, in a symbiotic relationship with film audiences (Barbas 2001; Faulstich 2005). The essential role of film stars in the process, especially during the Hollywood studio era from 1919 to 1950, has thereby been to encourage consumers to participate as film-goers, enthusiastic film fans and/or loyal followers of particular film stars actively in this relationship with the film industry (McDonald 2000; Stacey 1994). This suggests that the film industry and film consumption provide a *'fruitful research domain for scholars in marketing and other disciplines'* (Eliashberg, Elberse and Leenders 2006). It is therefore pretty disappointing that the marketing and consumer research literature, when I started my research journey back in 2005, has paid very little attention to the marketing and consumption of films and film actors as artistic brands in themselves, which only since 2006/7 began slowly to change following a few special issues in top journals. Nevertheless, while marketing academics have only recently become at least aware of the economic potential offered by films, film stars and film audiences, film scholars have traditionally had an interest in investigating how film viewers perceive and respond as individuals as well as collective audiences to films and the cinematic experience (Jenkins 2000; Mulvey 1975; Phillips 2007). And because film stars are in essence a product of the film industry as much as the films in which they perform (Luo, Chen, Han and Park 2010; Watson 2007a), they have over the past 20 years received the critical-theoretical attention of film scholars as well. Yet, as the same methodological approaches that dominate the study of films are also applied to the study of film stars, it is essential to have first a look at how film consumption has been studied before we can move on to the stardom literature.

3.2.1 The Study of Film Consumption in Marketing and Consumer Research

Although the consumption and enjoyment of films has worldwide never been so popular as in the last three decades (Aft 2006; Eliashberg et al. 2006; Finney 2010), neither the marketing nor the consumer research literature has paid much attention to the marketing and consumption of films and film stars as artistic brands (Batat and Wohlfeil 2009; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008b); at least until very recently. But even when marketing scholars have actually directed their research interest towards films, then merely as a

medium for promoting and selling other products within a marketing communications framework (D'Astous and Chartier 2000; DeLorme and Reid 1999; Stern and Russell 2004; Wiles and Danielova 2009) rather than as products in themselves. One possible explanation for this blunt lack of interest might be that films, in contrast to conventional manufacturing and service brands, are essentially composite artistic brands that consist of a complex tapestry of various other artistic or human brands (Kerrigan 2010; Kerrigan and O'Reilly 2008; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2006a). Indeed, the participating actors, director, producer(s), scriptwriter(s), composer(s), director of photography and editor(s) are individual human brands (Thomson 2006) that create the film together as an artistic brand in its own right and, in the process, impact on each others' brand image and value in the public and media either positively or negatively (Albert 1998; Elberse 2007; Luo et al. 2010). And if the film is the screen adaptation of a novel or the spin-off of another film, then this artistic or cultural brand is even a sub-brand of another artistic brand (Basuroy and Chatterjee 2008; Brown 2002, 2005). The difficulty in addressing the complexity and unpredictability of film brands accurately might have scared many marketing and consumer researchers away, who rather prefer to remain in the comfort zone of the simpler and much more '*straightforward*' traditional, mass-manufactured consumer goods, industrial products and services. The few marketing and consumer researchers that study film consumption and film audiences tend to do so from different points of departure with marketing scholars favouring an economic perspective while consumer researchers look at the different forms of consuming and enjoying films.

3.2.1.1 The Study of Film Consumption in Marketing

As already mentioned earlier, up until as recent as the late-1990s, the primary interest of marketing scholars in film consumption has been concerned with the question of how the popular appeal of films can be utilised to position a particular brand favourably in the minds of consumers. Product placement, in particular, has thereby captured the interest and imagination of marketing academics as the '*latest thing*' (D'Astous and Chartier 2000; DeLorme and Reid 1999; Stern and Russell 2004; Wiles and Danielova 2009). The only problem, however, is that product placement isn't exactly anything new. In fact, a strong cooperative relationship between the major Hollywood studios and the producers of consumer brands from fashion and cars over beverages to electronic equipment was a common practice throughout the Hollywood studio system and can be traced back to as early as 1918 (Barbas 2001; Herzog and Gaines 1991;

Stacey 1994). Hollywood studio executives, moreover, consider product placement since the 1980s as a welcome source of additional income to cover the rising costs of modern blockbuster film productions (De Vany 2004; Eliashberg et al. 2006; Hennig-Thurau 2004a; Wasko 2008). But even though product placement has been a constant feature in the Hollywood film industry, marketing scholars seek to investigate in particular a) whether consumers could memorise and recall brands placed in films, b) how consumers evaluate products placed into a film's art decoration, and c) what forms of product placement would be most beneficial for a brand (D'Astous and Chartier 2000; Gould, Gupta and Grabner-Kräuter 2000; Russell and Stern 2006). The films themselves, however, are generally treated as irrelevant and interchangeable. In fact, despite having been multi-billion dollar industries for nearly a century, the film and media industries have until very recently received only very little attention from marketing scholars, who tend to prefer nurturing their research interest in the traditional consumer industries instead.

Following Eliashberg and Sawhney's (1994) pioneering research, the '*fruitful research domain*' of film business and marketing (Eliashberg et al. 2006) has only since the late-1990s begun to capture the attention of a very small handful of scholars in marketing and economics, who have identified a great research potential within the field of media management in general and the film industry in particular beyond their mere usefulness for product placement (i.e. Ainslie, Dreze and Zufryden 2005; Basuroy and Chatterjee 2008; Chang and Ki 2005; De Vany 2004; Eliashberg, Hui and Zhang 2007; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2007; Hennig-Thurau, Houston and Heitjans 2009; Kerrigan 2010; Swami, Eliashberg and Weinberg 1999). Obviously, the limited marketing research that has been and is still conducted so far in relation to films (and to an even lesser extent in relation to film stars) is primarily interested in the economic dimensions of film consumption. Hence, these studies usually focus on measuring and evaluating the profitability of films in terms of box office performances (Basuroy and Chatterjee 2008; De Vany and Walls 1999, 2002; Hennig-Thurau and Wruck 2000; Liu 2006) and the sales and rentals of VHS, DVD or media files (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2007; Lehmann and Weinberg 2000). Particular emphasis is thereby paid to how a film's profitability could be enhanced through managing an efficient film production process (De Vany and Walls 2002; Eliashberg et al. 2007; Finney 2010; Morawetz, Hardy, Haslam and Randle 2007) and an efficient distribution channel in domestic and global markets (Hennig-

Thurau et al. 2007; Hennig-Thurau, Walsh and Bode 2004; Kerrigan 2010; Lehmann and Weinberg 2000; Swami et al. 1999). Research dedicated to understanding the impact of critical reviews (Basuroy, Chatterjee and Ravid 2003; D'Astous 1999; Desai and Basuroy 2005; Eliashberg and Shugan 1997) and word-of-mouth (Duan, Bin and Winston 2008; Liu 2006) on a film's short- and long-term profitability also enjoys increasing popularity. While most research looks merely at Hollywood and the US film industry, a few selected studies also explore opportunities for European (and other non-US film) industries to position themselves successfully on domestic and global markets without sacrificing their artistic value (Cooke 2007; Delmestri, Montanari and Usai 2005; Jansen 2005; Kerrigan 2010; Kerrigan and Özbilgin 2002, 2004; Steele 2004).

Film consumption, in either way, is thereby reduced to the mere purchase of individual tangible media formats, such as cinema, VHS, DVD or digital downloads, by specific consumer segments (Ainslie et al. 2005; Basil 2001; Cuadrado and Frassetto 1999; Krugman and Gopal 1991; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2007; Simonton 2009) rather than seen as the consumption of the film as an intangible brand in itself (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2009; Kerrigan and O'Reilly 2008; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2006a, 2008b). Furthermore, films are usually treated as identical and interchangeable products that consumers select for a on-off viewing based on some informed, economic-rational decisions (De Vany 2004; Eliashberg and Shugan 1997; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2007; Liu 2006; Sawhney and Eliashberg 1996) rather than as unique cultural artworks (Batat and Wohlfeil 2009; Kerrigan 2010; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008b). This obviously means that virtually all academic studies measure the success of films based on purely economic criteria such as their box office performances, while ignoring their cultural value, artistic merits and entertainment value. As a logical consequence, many of these studies suggest some, for film fans, quite dubious, dodgy and highly questionable managerial recommendations. Unfortunately, if we take a closer look at the output of the major Hollywood studios over the past 10 years, then it seems that some of those – sometimes quite ridiculous – recommendations must have fallen on attentive ears. After all, the times when the film studios were headed by competent managers with an enthusiasm for as well as practical experience in filmmaking – as it was generally the case before, during and immediately after the Hollywood studio system or with the UFA studios prior to the takeover by the Nazis (Barbas 2001; Kreimeier 1996; McDonald 2000) – are by now a thing of the past. Instead, most of today's senior film studio executives are accountants, economists and

lawyers, who have been brought in by hedge funds from outside the film industry and who often tend to have very little to virtually no prior industrial background, personal experience and/or interest in film production and the art of filmmaking.

In a series of these studies, for example, De Vany and Walls (2002) make the case that the typical family-friendly PG-rated film would tend to generate statistically three times more revenues than R-rated films. Hence, they argue that it would be economically and managerially irresponsible for film studio executives to continue green-lighting a four times higher output of R-rated film titles⁷. Now, what at first glance might sound logical to the ignorant ones would essentially mean in practice that thriller, horror films and the vast majority of dramatic, intellectually challenging and much more demanding films are no longer produced (including most Academy Award winners and nominations of the past 20 years!), if the major film studios start heeding De Vany and Walls's (2002) call. What film audiences would instead be left with is a stable popcorn-diet consisting entirely of Disney films a la *Highschool Musical*, some stereotypical romantic comedies and CGI-animated family-friendly blockbusters. In other words, cinema as mentally dull, unimaginative and boring as it can get! But what is only a nightmare vision at this moment in time has the potential to come true, if the film business continues to be left in the hands of accountants and economists. A case in point that is relevant to my research is the severely mismanaged cinema release of Jena Malone's latest film *Sucker Punch* (US 2011). The film is an exciting audio-visual tour de force with a challenging narrative, whose complexity is clearly unsuited to any audiences under 15. But instead of targeting the proper audiences, Warner Bros. made some last minute cuts in order to get a PG-rating for the film and, due to Vanessa Hudgens's involvement, to tap into the prepubescent female audience of her *Highschool Musical* fame. The predictable results were confused audiences and a relatively poor box office performance. And if you still believe that I may exaggerate a little bit, then have a look at another recommendation by business consultants, which is one of many that seem to have already found the listening ears of today's film studio executives. As producing a film is an investment-intensive business that, on the one hand, promises high returns on investment, if the film succeeds at the box office, but, on the other hand, also holds a high failure risk (De Vany 2004;

⁷ By 2011, the major Hollywood film studios do indeed tend to produce slightly more PG-rated rather than R-rated films and settle instead with obtaining the distribution rights for R-rated films that are produced by or in cooperation with independent production companies (Goodwin 2011).

Eliashberg et al. 2007; Hennig-Thurau 2004a; Wasko 2008), it is hardly surprising that studio executives would like to reduce the financial risks of their film projects.

Fact is that only three out of 10 film releases manage to recoup their investment directly at the domestic box office, while most films' profitability depends on auxiliary incomes from DVD sales, rentals and legal downloads (Ainslie et al. 2005; Swami et al. 1999). Thus, in an attempt to reduce this risk of box office failures, several academic studies have drawn on the old concept of brand extensions from the mass-manufactured FMCG industries and, subsequently, recommend urgently a much stronger reliance on familiar stories, faces, titles and the strategic development of film brand franchises that we have increasingly witnessed in the last decade (Desai and Basuroy 2005; Eliashberg et al. 2007; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2009; Sood and Dreze 2006). The brand extension concept, thereby, suggests that consumers are always faced with the internal fear of making a wrong decision, when having to choose a particular film for consumption, and, hence, seek to reduce the level of uncertainty as much as possible (Eliashberg and Sawhney 1994; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2009). The application of the brand extension concept, therefore, reassures film audiences that the film's quality meets their expectations and reduces their risk and anxiety of making a bad decision (De Vany and Walls 2002; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2009; Sood and Dreze 2006). The problem is that the concept implies two underlying assumptions: a) consumers make film choices based on purely rational cost-benefit criteria by seeking the familiar and avoiding the novel and surprising, and b) consumers always watch a film only once and never twice. Both are highly unlikely to occur in real consumer behaviour, as the excitement and enjoyment of films (like other art) usually derives from their novelty, uniqueness and surprising twists, while films made according to standard formulas are received as dull (Batat and Wohlfeil 2009). Nevertheless, some executives at the major studios must have heeded their call in recent years, as Hollywood's current obsession with releasing an ever-rising number of sequels and prequels to previously successful blockbusters, the growing trend to producing trilogies since the success of *Lord of the Rings* and the increasing number of remakes of foreign films or film classics would suggest. Fortunately, some executives at the bigger independent film studios, such as Harvey Weinstein or the late Bernd Eichinger, still tend to buck the trend with substantial commercial success.

3.2.1.2 The Study of Films in Consumer Research

Taking a humanistic point of view, a small number of consumer researchers discovered in the mid-1980s the value of studying films as a means of enhancing our understanding of consumption in general (Hirschman 1986; Holbrook 1988; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982, 1993). Inspired by Mick's (1986) work on how semiotics could provide insights into the understanding of advertising, films are thereby investigated primarily as carriers of consumer symbolism (Holbrook 1988; Holbrook and Hirschman 1993) rather than as consumption objects in themselves. Thus, in their seminal paper, Holbrook and Grayson (1986) examined how the depicted forms of consumption in the film *Out of Africa* are used to describe the development of individual characters in the film and to carry the film narrative visually. While accepting that works of art represent a cultural mirror to our society and, therefore, can teach us something about consumption, the authors make instead a case for using consumption symbolism to understand the meaning of artworks in general and films in particular. In fact, Holbrook, Bell and Grayson (1989) repeated the exercise shortly after in relation to the theatre play *Coastal Disturbances* in order to demonstrate how such a semiological approach could provide much deeper insights into aesthetic consumption experiences than any traditional quantitative methodology would ever allow. Hirschman (1987, 1988, 1992, 1993; Hirschman and Stern 1994), has taken the opposite point of view and made it part of her life's work to learn from films more about the meaning of consumption in our societies. In doing so, she has also sought to uncover how the semiotics of film narratives reflect and represent a society's underlying myths and culture (Hirschman 2000a, 2004). In either case, expert viewers trained in literary criticism or critical theory watch and deconstruct films in order to analyse their semiotic content from a particular ideology-informed position (i.e. Marxism, feminism or queer theory) with the aim of deriving critical insights into their underlying meanings for society and the human condition (Dalli and Gastri 2006; Hirschman 1988, 1999).

The questions, however, that consumer researchers weren't addressing, when I started my research journey, were how consumers actually enjoy the consumption of films as experiential products and what subjective contribution film consumption makes to an individual's quality of life. A few studies have looked at how consumers make purchase decision when selecting an experiential product such as a film (Cooper-Martin 1991, 1992) and their preferences for particular types of films (Chuu, Chang and Zaichkowsky 2009; Cuadrado and Frasquet 1999; Gazley, Clark and Sinha 2010), while others focus

on comparing whether one media format would be more attractive for the consumption of films than others (Basil 2001; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2007; Krugman and Gopal 1991). Holbrook (1999, 2005b) has also explored how ordinary consumers judge the quality and popular appeal of a film in comparison to the judgements of expert viewers. Hence, I felt the need to take a very different approach by observing my own lived consumption experiences with the film *Pride & Prejudice* (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008b)⁸. Although the introspective data clearly suggest that a complex tapestry of interconnected factors contributes holistically to a consumer's film enjoyment, my research also finds that a consumer's mental immersion into the film narrative and personal engagement with its characters is of particular importance. This personal engagement not only allows for a momentary escape from everyday reality into the imaginary world of the film, but is even further enhanced through out-of-text intertextuality (Hirschman 2000b; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008b), by which the consumer connects the film to one's own private life experiences. In a follow-up study⁹, in which my friend Wided Batat and I compared our personal consumption experiences with the film *Into the Wild*, we were not only able to confirm the earlier findings, but also found that the nature and degree of a consumer's experienced immersion into the film narrative is determined by one's very own private motives and desires (Batat and Wohlfeil 2009). While a few quantitative studies have in the meantime also looked at how consumers' identification and immersion experience results in film enjoyment (i.e. Fornerio, Helme-Guizon and Gotteland 2008), they tend to be rather superficial due to the methodological shortcomings discussed by Holbrook et al. (1989). The positive exception is the detailed study by Addis and Holbrook (2010) that, by coincidence, also shares and confirms a number of my own previous findings.

3.2.2 The Study of Films in Film Studies

If the critical theory approach that consumer researchers employ to examine, analyse and interpret films for the meaning(s) of their semiotic contents sounds familiar, then this is the case because Hirschman, Holbrook and those, who follow in their footsteps ever since (i.e. Dalli and Gastri 2006; Friend and Westgate 2008; Pantzalis 2001; Stern, Russell and Russell 2005), have adopted this approach from the scholarly discipline of film studies. Following its humble origins within the film fan discourse during the film industry's early years (Balio 1985; Barbas 2001; Faulstich 2005; McDonald 2000), film

⁸ See 1.5 and 4.2 in this thesis.

⁹ See 1.5 and 4.3 in this thesis.

studies emerged as an academic discipline in the 1930s out of the scholarly tradition of both literature and art studies, which also meant that literary criticism has become well-established as their primary mode of inquiry. Literary criticism or discourse analysis, thereby, represents a linguistic approach from the humanities, which sets out to explore the triangular dynamics between the author, the text and the reader(s) and examines how the various textual elements are likely to reflect and affect audiences (Stern 1989, 1995; Stern and Schroeder 1994). And as any text also acts as a mirror for the contemporary social and cultural structures of society from where it originates (Alberoni 2006; Dyer 2000; Holbrook 1988; Marshall 1997), the researcher examines the text from a specific ideological perspective in order to uncover and identify the hidden power relationships within the cultural contexts that it represents (Alberoni 2006; Evans and Hesmondhalgh 2005; Hirschman 1988, 1999; Stern 1989). The most popular ideologies, which are of particular interest to critical film and media scholars as well as cultural critics, are a Marxist theory informed by the philosophers of the Frankfurt School (i.e. Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Lowenthal, Boorstin, Habermas, Bourdieu or Thornton), a feminist theory that incorporates some elements of Freudian psychoanalysis and, increasingly, a queer theory that adapts and expands feminist theory towards homosexual contexts.

Due to emerging from the scholarly tradition of literature and art studies, film scholars have absorbed and incorporated their dominant mode of inquiry, as described above, as well. However, the 1930s also were the heydays of the vertically integrated Hollywood studio system, which was characterised by industrialised mass production of films through a strong division of labour that resembled more the assembly line at a factory (Bakker 2008; Balio 1985; Kerrigan 2010; Kochberg 2007) rather than a haven for artistic creativity (Kreimeier 1996; Steele 2004). Thus, while film scholars regard *'films as art and appreciate its artistic value, which is an expression of artistic creativity that needs to be consumed by ordinary individuals for their own merit'* (Dyer 2000: 7), film is at the same time also seen as an art form that is endlessly reproducible through factory-like mass production and, hence, caters for a supposedly passive mass audience (Adorno and Horkheimer 2006; Benjamin 2006; Lowenthal 2006). But even though the film industry itself has in the meantime gone through several significant structural changes (Canterberry and Marvasti 2001; Jaeckel 2003; Kerrigan 2010; Lampel and Shamsie 2003), this early heritage and legacy in film studies has nonetheless continued to have a major influence on how film scholars examine, analyse and interpret films and

film consumption to this very day (Dyer 1998, 2000; Lovell 2003; Speidel 2007). This heritage of film studies has also had another outcome that could be considered ‘*strange*’ from an outsider position. Although film studies as an academic discipline aim to cover a broad spectrum from filmmaking as an expressive art form to its impact on audiences, I find it quite curious that film scholars pay by far less attention to the actual process of film production (Jaeckel 2003; McDonald 2000) than to identifying and examining through ideology-informed critical theory the underlying cultural meanings of films as works of art (Dyer 1998, 2000; Nowell-Smith 2000; Phillips 2007). As a result, critical approaches in film studies, quite similar to literary criticism, can thereby be divided into three major schools of thought depending on whether the primary focus lies either on the film text, the auteur (= creative author) or the audience (Watson 2007b).

3.2.2.1 The Study of Films as Film Texts

Ever since the birth of their discipline in the 1930s, film scholars have continuously focused on the educated criticism of *film texts*, which also provides the foundation for the critical reviews of new film releases in the press and the expert judgements on those films’ quality (Dyer 2000; Holbrook 1999, 2005b; Perkins 2000). Particular attention is hereby paid to the inherent and formal qualities of the film such as acting performances, narrative flow, mise-en-scene (= props and art decoration), cinematographic framing of the film picture, lightning, sound, editing, etc. by deconstructing, examining and analysing through explication or close ‘*reading*’ (actually watching!) how the film, for example, adheres to – or, alternatively, violates – audio-visual conventions and cultural expectations in the narrative development (Nichols 2000; Nowell-Smith 2000; Speidel 2007). However, because of widespread public convictions in popular discourse that films would have a powerful effect on the viewers’ social beliefs, values and consumer behaviour (Adorno and Horkheimer 2006; Munsterberg 1916; Thorp 1939), which has been heavily promoted by social reformists, cultural critics and the media (Barbas 2001) alike, critical theory in film studies has been informed and even driven by different ideologies (Branston 2000; Lovell 2003; Perkins 2000; Speidel 2007). And in light of the highly industrialised nature of the Hollywood studio system and its close association to a capitalist consumer culture (Herzog and Gaines 1991; Nichols 2000), it should therefore come as no surprise that many film studies (especially those until the 1970s) have followed a (neo-)Marxist ideology inspired by the writings of Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Althusser, Lowenthal, Boorstin, Habermas and Bourdieu. The aim is

to uncover how the narrative and character depictions in specific films reflect or even justify a society's cultural norms, values and underlying power structures as a means of maintaining the status quo (Austin 2003; Dyer 2000; Perkins 2000; Speidel 2007)

3.2.2.2 The Study of Creative Authorship in Films

While the focus on film texts remains relatively popular within film studies and has also been introduced to consumer research through the works of Holbrook and Hirschman (1993), the emphasis on the '*auteur*' (= '*creative author*') has already proven to be a rather delicate and difficult issue for film scholars and, subsequently, receives only little academic attention. The main reason for it lies in the problem of identifying the *auteur*. Indeed, creative authorship either in literature, art or music can easily be credited to the respective writer, artist, composer or musician (Bradshaw, McDonagh and Marshall 2006; Schroeder 2005; Winston 1995). But due to the earlier outlined complexities of films and film production as a cooperative artwork that combines creative inputs from various contributing sources, film scholars are faced with a number of complications when trying to associate a film's creative authorship with any one particular individual (Watson 2007b). Indeed, who can honestly claim authorship for a film? During the old Hollywood studio system from 1918 to 1950 (and probably also prior to that by the film companies attached to the MPPC¹⁰), all creative decisions regarding a film project were exclusively made by the studio executives, which is also the reason why the Academy Awards for Best Film are awarded to the film's producer(s) to this very day (Goldsmith and O'Regan 2005; Squire 2006). After all, the producer is responsible for getting the film green-lighted and made in the first place by selecting the appropriate script and getting it financed while controlling the budget (Dekom 2006; Finney 2010; Eliashberg et al. 2006). But does this qualify for creative authorship? The idea, plot and script are essentially the product of the scriptwriter(s) (Ferguson 2009). Yet, scriptwriters have very little influence on the audio-visual realisation of their scripts once the film is green-lighted and goes into production (unless the scriptwriter is also the film's director) – and on the final product. The director of cinematography is usually the one responsible for

¹⁰ The Motion Picture Patent Company (MPPC) trust with its headquarters in New York was a quasi-monopoly of the 10 biggest film companies, which held all the film technology patents and which sought to control the US film industry and market from production over distribution to exhibition by forcing the nickelodeons to screen only MPPC-produced and -approved film stock while excluding independent filmmakers from access to the distribution and exhibition sector. It is ironic that the very independent film producers that brought down the MPPC in 1914 became within barely 5 years the major film studios that formed the Hollywood studio system and largely lead the global film industry ever since (Kerrigan 2010).

the visual element of the film by capturing and framing the scene and the performance of the actors with the camera in the best aesthetic light (Speidel 2007). But in doing so, s/he is essentially implementing the director's ideas and vision by following the given instructions in the very same way as the actors and actresses also bring their portrayed characters to life under the guidance of the director (Kerrigan 2010; Squire 2006).

It is therefore no coincidence that most of the auteur theory in film studies has focused on the director as the film's creative author by deconstructing and examining especially the works of famous directors like Sergei Eisenstein, John Ford, Howard Hughes, Billy Wilder, Alfred Hitchcock, Bernardo Bertolucci, Claude Chabrol, Sergio Leone, Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese, Steven Spielberg or James Cameron for some kind of '*creative fingerprint*' as evidence of their artistic genius (Faulstich 2005; Staiger 2003; Watson 2007b). The problem with this approach is that during the Hollywood studio era directors were only another division of labour within the film production process, who were assigned to individual projects by their studio executives (Kochberg 2007). And even though a number of directors have since the 1950s become well-known or even famous for their creative works, most directors today are still hired by film producers via talent agencies as creative labour for a specific film project rather than being the initiators and creators of their own films (Finney 2010; Kerrigan 2010; McDonald 2000; Squire 2006). The only exception to the rule seem to be the increasing number of low-budget independent and world cinema films that in recent years enjoy both critical acclaim and a growing popularity among ordinary film festival audiences and film-goers (Batat and Wohlfeil 2009; Chuu et al. 2009; Kerrigan and Özbilgin 2002; Unwin, Kerrigan, Waite and Grant 2007). Young filmmakers ('*first-timers*') or art film directors often try to realise thereby a film project dear to their own creative vision and heart (Kerrigan 2010; Watson 2007b). However, the paradigmatic reading of singling out the director as the creative author of film text – just because of being the individual in charge – has also posed some serious questions to be asked within film studies.

First of all, identifying only the director as the film's sole creative author devalues the artistic work and contribution of all the other individuals that are involved in the film production process (Watson 2007b). For example, to what extent can the impressive and beautiful landscape pictures of *The Lord of the Rings* be attributed to Peter Jackson, the ones in *Brokeback Mountain* to Ang Lee or the ones in *Into the Wild* (US 2007) to Sean

Penn rather than to their respective directors of cinematography? Secondly, the research of film scholars on creative authorship has been limited to the selected work of a few rather exceptional directors. Not surprisingly, this has often led to the charge that much of amateur theory is biased, because the respective film scholars are kind of star struck (Lovell 2003; Watson 2007b). For example, while many film scholars tend to accredit the creative authorship of the famous court room scene in *A Few Good Men* to the acting performances of the two lead actors Jack Nicholson and Tom Cruise rather than to director Rob Reiner, it is quite curious that not a single one of them has ever doubted Martin Scorsese's creative authorship of *Goodfellows*; even though the film features a cast of exceptional method actors like Robert de Niro, Ray Liotta and Joe Pesci. Why exactly do film scholars now find Martin Scorsese more worthy of being considered an auteur than someone like Rob Reiner? As a result of these and similar questions, film scholars largely tend to side-step the issue of creative authorship by turning away from the practice of filmmaking towards the critical-theoretical analysis of film text described earlier or towards the theoretical and critical examination of spectatorship and audience responses (Hirschman 1999; Jenkins 2000; Mulvey 1975; Phillips 2007).

3.2.2.3 The Study of Audience Responses to Films

Ever since the first pictures began to move, the first films were shown in vaudeville shows in 1895 and later in the nickelodeons, there has always been an academic interest in understanding how films affect their audiences (Barbas 2001). Having initially drawn on Munsterberg's (1916) idea of the passive and vulnerable audience, film scholars seek to explain the effects of films on viewers critically through the conceptual approach of '*audience-response theory*'. But before reviewing the academic film studies literature on '*audience-response theory*', I need to point out that film scholars have the curious habit of equating film consumption exclusively with the cinematic experience, while completely ignoring the basic fact that consumers watch the same films on TV, DVD or even as downloads on their iPods and iPhones as well. Yet, even though film scholars have traditionally shown a critical-theoretical interest in the effects that films may have on their audiences (Dyer 2000; Gaines 2000; Thorp 1939), a genuine consideration for the film audience's role in co-creating meaning in films through a personal dialogue with the film text has only developed slowly since the early-1970s in conjunction with similar developments in literary criticism (Phillips 2007; Stern 1989). Due to the focus on how film viewers interact in theory with film texts, audience-response theory would

seem to be a critical theory approach that may also be of particular interest to consumer researchers to gain insights into the phenomenon of film consumption. Incidentally, Scott (1994) has already introduced reader-response theory to marketing as a conceptual approach that could be useful to examine, analyse and interpret the effects of advertising on consumers from a cultural-critical perspective. This introduction has been followed up by Hirschman (1999), who applied audience-response theory in its original sense to examine how consumers may interpret TV shows as consumption objects in themselves. Thus, instead of the ordinary film audience member like you and me, whom Hirschman (1999) calls '*common-culture readers (viewers)*', a selected group of '*expert readers (viewers)*' formally trained in Marxist and/or feminist critical theory have thereby been asked to examine critically how a pilot TV show would be read by its audiences.

But despite the interesting insights that this critical approach may generate, I have some serious doubts regarding the practical value of audience-response theory in providing a genuine understanding of how ordinary consumers as common-culture viewers respond and interact with films as part of their everyday lived consumption experiences (Batat and Wohlfeil 2009; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008b). Indeed, audience-response theory usually involves only expert viewers trained in critical theory, who seek to demonstrate in theory how an imagined, idealised viewer would respond as an individual spectator and/or audience member to the film text and the overall cinematic experience (Jenkins 2000; Phillips 2007). In doing so, these trained expert viewers assume, based on their own underlying ideology-informed critical agenda, what prior knowledge, motives and probable expectations their imagined audience member¹¹ supposedly has (Hirschman 1999; Stern, Russell and Russell 2007; Mulvey 1975). A synthesis of ideas from linguistics, semiotics, Marxism, feminism and, in particular, psychoanalysis has hereby created and often (re-)confirmed the image of a gullible, passive spectator, who is often vulnerable to the manipulative qualities of the cinematic experience and takes over the ideological '*look of the camera*' without questioning (Munsterberg 1916; Phillips 2007; Stern et al. 2005, 2007; Thorp 1939). Alternatively, the passive spectator is through the ideological '*look of the camera*' engaged in the personal satisfaction of one's (sexual) voyeuristic pleasures (Hansen 1991; Jenkins 2000; Mulvey 1975; Tan 1994). Due to its

¹¹ The imagined, fictional audience member is usually the critic's own alter ego and acts as proxy for his or her personal opinion that is often abstracted and generalised as given fact (see Austin 2003; Mulvey 1975; Kirkland 2003; Tan 1994).

development primarily in times of social unrest in the US, the problem with audience-response theory is that it has in the process become essentially a study of ideology through the medium of film (Lovell 2003), where expert viewers often discuss assumed audience responses as a means of advancing their very own personal political-ideological agenda (Phillips 2007). Influenced in the early-1970s by the US women's liberation movement, feminism in strong connection with a psychoanalytical criticism has thereby become the predominant mode of critical inquiry of film and media scholars in relation to today's audience-response theory (Mulvey 1975).

For example, Mulvey's (1975) famous paper on the supposed role of the '*male gaze*' in the pleasure of the cinematic experience is primarily aimed at supporting her personal ultra-feminist ideological views rather than exploring film enjoyment itself. By drawing quite '*liberally*' on Freudian psychoanalysis, Mulvey (1975) argued that cinematic film viewing pleasure derives exclusively from the (*male*) viewer's sexual exploitation of the female figure on screen. Not only is the female figure subject to '*his*' voyeuristic desires by being solely displayed in her exhibitionist role as a '*decorative sexual (lust) object*', but she is then further sexually consummated through '*his*' identification with the male lead protagonist as '*his*' screen surrogate (Mulvey 1975). Now, apart from lacking any supporting qualitative or quantitative evidence from the actual responses of real film audiences, the major problem with Mulvey's (1975) theory is that, by simply ignoring the existence of female audiences in their entirety (Hansen 1991; Phillips 2007), it fails to explain why and how female film viewers actually experience the cinematic viewing pleasure. But if Mulvey (1975) is right, wouldn't that mean that all female film viewers must be either lesbians or masochistically disposed? Instead, is it not equally possible that female viewers derive their viewing pleasure from the sexual exploitation of the male figure and his sexual consummation through her identification with the female lead as her screen surrogate? Yet, while feminist scholars have no problem accepting Mulvey's thesis, they tend to deny the outlined possibility out of hand. Interestingly, Hansen (1991) found out in interviews with senior citizens that female audiences from the early 1920s onwards have already enjoyed satisfying their very own romantic and sexual fantasies through the consummation of male film stars like Rudolph Valentino, Errol Flynn or Clark Gable as sexual objects. In absence of real-life alternatives, male film stars seem to provide female audiences with the only culturally acceptable way of living out their sexuality in a morally strict society (Hansen 1991). Stacey (1994) has

come to a similar conclusion in her review of female fan letters from the 1950s. And even though my own introspective data (Batat and Wohlfeil 2009; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008b, 2011c) suggest that some form of sexual attraction and consummation of the actress as a person does occur at times, this actually happens never during the consumption of her films and always in form of romantic, non-exploitative fantasies.

3.3 The Book of Stars

After this detailed review of the academic literature on both the film industry and film consumption, we can now finally turn to the very part of the film industry that is the subject of celebrity fandom and, thus, at the heart of my research project and this thesis: film actors and actresses. As already mentioned earlier, film actors and, especially, film stars¹² are not only the very profession that consumers associate most with films, but in essence are also a product of the film industry as much as the films they are featuring and performing in; and which sometimes even make them famous in the first place (De Cordova 1991; Gamson 2006; McDonald 2000). Even though, historically, the first film studios and the MPPC in particular initially tried to keep the names of their film actors anonymous as a means of keeping their salaries and costs at a minimum (Barbas 2001; Gabler 1998), the Hollywood studios sought instead since the very early days of the vertically integrated studio system to manage their leading actors as capital investments that attract film audiences in their numbers and, thereby, ensure the profitability of their films at the box office (Barbas 2001; Faulstich 2005; Kerrigan 2010; McDonald 2000). From 1918 to the late-1940s, therefore, Hollywood studios employed an entire division of publicists, whose sole responsibility it was to develop attractive images for potential film stars that would meet the demands of the film-going public (Barbas 2001; Gabler 1998; Thorp 1939). And even years after the enforced break-up of the mighty studio system, it is still common practice that film actors build, develop, position and maintain recognisable images for themselves to ensure their own employability within today's global film industry – or the '*almighty agencies*' do that for them (McDonald 2000; Squire 2006). Consequently, the study of film stars is determined by the same scholarly interests and modes of inquiry as the study of films described in 3.2. However, while the stardom literature has developed within film studies by the late-1980s to investigate the semiotic symbolism of film stars as textual images in film (Dyer 1998; Gledhill

¹² According to film scholars, there is huge conceptual difference between film stars – the objects of desire – and film actors – the film industry's '*faceless*' on-screen labour force – (Dyer 1998).

1991; King 1991; Staiger 1991), marketing and consumer research have primarily paid attention to the role that these *'human brands'* (Thomson 2006) could play as celebrity endorsers for other commercial brands (Ang and Dubelaar 2006; McCracken 1989).

3.3.1 The Study of Film Stars in Marketing and Consumer Research

When the former independent film companies began between 1912 and 1918 to settle in the Los Angeles region and formed the vertically integrated studio system, they also gave birth to what should be become known as the Hollywood star system (Barbas 2001; De Cordova 1991; McDonald 2000). And ever since those early days, film actors have essentially been managed as *'human brands'*, whose on- and off-screen images, personal identities and reflected values are carefully designed and positioned formerly by the Hollywood studios and these days by powerful talent agencies to suit market needs (Gamson 2006; Levin et al. 1997; Luo et al. 2010; Thomson 2006). As film stars are such big business, it is quite surprising that scholars in marketing and consumer research have, until very recently, paid so little attention to the study of film stars as *'human consumption objects'*. This scant academic interest is the more disappointing, as film stars, starlets and even minor celebrities have by now captivated the imagination of consumers for nearly a century and, subsequently, become a vital part of our everyday culture (Evans and Hesmondhalgh 2005; Gabler 1998; Geraghty 2000; Turner 2004). Instead, the only interest that most marketing scholars seem to have in film actors or any other celebrities is whether and how they are potentially suitable for endorsing other consumer products (Ang and Dubelaar 2006; McCracken 1989, 2005). In doing so, particular attention is paid to the positive and also the negative image transfer between the celebrity endorser and the commercial consumer brand (Johnson 2005; McCracken 2005; Thomson 2006). McCracken (1989), thereby, defines film stars¹³ as complex and individualised sets of culturally constructed meanings that they accumulate through their portrayal of virtually identical fictional characters on screen. Moreover, the little business research that is conducted regarding film stars themselves is merely interested in measuring their brand value (Levin et al. 1997; Luo et al. 2010; Wei 2006) and/or general economic contribution to the commercial success or failure of films at the box office (Albert 1998; Beckwith 2009; De Vany and Walls 1999; Elberse 2007; Wallace et al. 1993). Yet, the overall inconclusive and contradicting findings of these studies

¹³ Even though McCracken (1989, 2005) never draws on or references film studies' stardom literature, his view and definition of film stars is, nonetheless, quite similar to that of Dyer (1998).

usually stem from their conceptual failure to clarify who is a film star in the first place – or, more precisely, when exactly is a film actor or actress a film star and when not.

While Wallace et al. (1993) have selected the winning of an Academy Award as their main criterion, other studies operationalise film stars based on the actors' track records of their previous films' box office performances (Albert 1998; Basuroy et al. 2003; De Vany and Walls 1999; Elberse 2007; Ravid 1999; Wei 2006). Hence, it should be quite obvious that, apart from being a convenient proxy measure for quantitative modelling, neither of these common criteria is of any practical value to distinguish film stars and their contribution to a film from that of any other film actors. Firstly, the Academy Awards honour the artistic merits of an actor's performance in portraying a specific character as one's professional achievement rather than the film's commercial success (Wallace et al. 1993). Indeed, most Academy Award winners and nominees are rewarded for their acting performances in films that earn high critical acclaim but often achieve only limited box office success (McDonald 2000). Moreover, many actors tend to receive their Academy Award nearly at the end of their career. Does this now mean that those actors aren't film stars for most of their professional lives, only to have their 'starhood' awarded posthumously, so to speak? Furthermore, it is well-known that the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, from time to time, hands out awards for internal political reasons rather than true artist merits. Secondly, there are also a number of problems with focusing on a film actor's box office track records. First of all, this narrow focus leads us back to the murky waters of creative authorship, as the credit for a film's commercial success is given only to the one or two lead actors, while the entire contributions of all other cast members and the complete film crew are ignored. Many famous film actors, furthermore, choose from time to time to play only a support role in a film rather than the lead role. Finally, participating in successful blockbusters doesn't necessarily earn you stardom. For instance, while the literature generally discusses Will Smith as a film star due to his track record of commercial successes with films like *Independence Day* and *Men in Black* (King 2003), Jeff Goldblum isn't given the same recognition despite having starred in *Jurassic Park*, *Lost World: Jurassic Park* and *Independence Day*. In fact, many blockbusters in recent years, such as *Jurassic Park*, *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings* or *Avatar*, haven't really featured any famous film stars in the lead roles at all and still have – or because of it – been commercial successes.

Until recently, Derbaix and Sjöberg (1994) and Thomson (2006) have been the only marketing studies that aren't interested in the economic dimension of film stars. Yet, for Derbaix and Sjöberg (1994), film stars have served merely as a means to challenge the marketing research practice of operationalising affective reactions as preferences and cognitive representations as similarities, whereby similarity spaces would usually act as a starting point for the mapping of preferences. By having 176 subjects to judge 14 well-known film actors in terms of similarities and preferences, Derbaix and Sjöberg (1994) have found that similarity and preference judgements differ the more from each other the higher subjects are involved with a particular film actor and, therefore, recommend marketing practitioners to avoid external preference analysis strategies. But if one seeks to understand how and why film stars are consumed as individual human brands by their fans, then this study is of no help. Thomson (2006) hasn't addressed this question either. By viewing celebrities merely as human brands, he focuses instead on identifying the nature and extent of consumers' attachment to those human brands from the narrow perspective of the recent consumer-brand relationship literature (Fournier 1998; Patterson and O'Malley 2006). His aim, thereby, is to utilise the consumer-human brand relationship for targeted celebrity endorsements (Thomson 2006). Either way, the results suggest that consumers feel more strongly attached to a celebrity, when the human brand doesn't suppress a person's *'feeling of competence'* but rather enhances feelings of relatedness and autonomy, and that a strong attachment indicates a satisfied, trusting and committed relationship with the human brand (Thomson 2006). Yet, I can't say that feelings of competence and/or autonomy have ever been an issue of any sorts in my emotional fan relationship with Jena Malone. Instead, Thompson's (2006) findings are the direct result of his scientific approach, whereby he not only operationalises the measurement items based on economic cost-benefit criteria taken from the literature on consumer goods branding, but also fails to distinguish between very different types of relationships (i.e. professional, social, family, romantic or sexual). In doing so, he also sidesteps the question why a consumer may feel emotionally attached to one particular human brand, but remains indifferent to another one that appears to be similar in terms of appeal and market positioning (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2011a, b, c).

3.3.2 The Study of Celebrities in Media Studies

While it is pretty disappointing that the literature in marketing and consumer research has paid such scant attention to film stars and celebrities beyond their mere potential as

product endorsers for consumer products (McCracken 1989, 2005; Thomson 2006) or their contribution to a film's commercial success at the box office (Beckwith 2009; Elberse 2007; Luo et al. 2010), the audience appeal of film stars and celebrities has, nonetheless, caught the interest of film and media scholars. Subsequently, the result is the two significant bodies of literature on stardom within film studies and on celebrity culture within media studies. But even though the stardom and celebrity literatures often tend to supplement each other, they have, nonetheless, very different conceptual points of departure because of the two academic disciplines' very different scholarly interests and agenda. While the stardom literature centres exclusively on the study of film stars as film texts (Dyer 1998), the focus of the celebrity literature has traditionally been on the '*bigger question*' of what meaning fame and celebrity have in our contemporary culture (Giles 2006; Levy 1989; Marshall 1997; Moran 2006). In incorporating and building directly on the earlier work of the cultural critics (Adorno and Horkheimer 2006; Boorstin 2006; Lowenthal 2006; Thorp 1939; Weber 2006) that were influenced by the ideological agenda of social reformers like the Christian Temperance Union, media scholars look at '*how the media portrayal and construction of celebrities shape the way in which audiences understand and make sense of the social world*' (Evans and Hesmondhalgh 2005: 14). In doing so, the field of media studies investigate celebrities as an abstract concept, which mirrors our quest for fame and the desire to stand out of the crowd (Giles 2006), rather than how consumers relate to individual celebrities. As a result, film actors and actresses feature in this discussion merely as just another group of famous people. Either way, for several decades now, media scholars and cultural critics have quarrelled among each other as to whether celebrity culture would really represent the serious cultural decline predicted in the academic and popular discourse (Adono and Horkheimer 2006; Boorstin 2006; Schickel 1985; Thorp 1939) or whether it would in fact constitute a truly democratic process of social levelling (Alberoni 2006; Evans and Hesmondhalgh 2005; Marshall 1997; Turner 2004).

3.3.2.1 Celebrity as Cultural Decline

The proponents of the traditional '*celebrity-as-cultural-decline*' perspective (i.e. Davis 2006; Gabler 1998; Giles 2006; Holmes 2006; Hyde 2009; Moran 2006; Schickel 1985) are influenced by Munsterberg's (1916) idea of the vulnerable audience, which implies that, as passive and defenceless recipients of media texts, consumers would be incapable of differentiating fictional media images from factual reality. Cultural critics such as

Adorno and Horkheimer (2006), Barthes (2006), Baudrillard (2006) and Thorp (1939) have then elaborated on this theory further and theorised that the sole purpose of the creative industries and, by extension, celebrity culture is to divert people's attention away from the important things in life and direct them towards orchestrated, superficial pseudo-events instead. But it was Boorstin (2006) in particular, who has informed the current '*celebrity-as-cultural-decline*' discourse (Evans and Hesmondhalgh 2005) and inspired contemporary media scholars like Cashmore (2006), Gabler (1998), Holmes (2006), Hyde (2009) or Schickel (1985) by going even a step further. According to him, fame was only attributed in the past as a public (usually posthumous) acknowledgement in recognition of a person's special skills and heroic achievements; and, subsequently, had scarcity value (Boorstin 2006). Celebrity, on the other hand, is awarded without the requirement of any talent or heroic achievement. Hence, Boorstin (2006) argued that celebrity stands for a culture that seeks instant gratification and that values '*surface image*', narcissistic self-obsession and '*fame-for-its-own-sake*' over substance and the personal striving for a '*greater good*'. His conclusion that celebrities are merely '*people who are only famous for being famous*' has dominated the celebrity discourse within media studies and the popular media ever since. But while his much-cited, derogatory definition of celebrities may be fitting in some cases such as the current reality TV craze (Giles 2006; Holmes 2006), overall it is nonetheless quite unfair, as the respective claim to fame of celebrities can be pretty diverse. Indeed, celebrities can be famous for their artistic-creative talent, their professional achievements, their personal relationships with (other) famous people (i.e. as a spouse, offspring, relative or love affair) or, well, their notoriety for an '*outrageous*' and '*scandalous*' public lifestyle, such as an excessive social party life, having extra-marital love affairs, posing nude for photographs in the tabloids or having a home-made porn '*leaked*' onto the Internet (Turner 2004).

3.3.2.2 Celebrity as Social Levelling

While the proponents of the traditional '*celebrity-as-cultural-decline*' perspective view celebrity primarily as the evil manifestation of an excessive capitalist consumer culture that corrupts our minds and souls (Gabler 1998; Schickel 1985), the proponents of the more recent '*celebrity-as-social-levelling*' perspective (i.e. Levy 1989; Marshall 1997; McDonald 2003; Nayar 2009; Shefrin 2004; Turner 2004) take a more optimistic point of view by using Alberoni's (2006) work as their conceptual point of departure. In their opinion, celebrity culture is the natural end-point in a long process of democratisation in

capitalist consumer cultures (Evans and Hesmondhalgh 2005; Turner 2004). But while Alberoni (2006) still theorised that film stars and celebrities constitute a '*powerless elite*', who can commend the attention and reverence of their audiences and the media alike but do not have any real political power, Levy (1989) and Marshall (1997) argued that, even though celebrities may not have the power to make political decisions, they are still in the position to attract the public's attention to a certain cause or to mobilise the masses for or against particular policies. Furthermore, Marshall (1997) suggests that celebrities are also the visual representations of social mobility in democratic societies, where fame is ultimately the reward for one's effort in self-improvement. Celebrities, therefore, express the democratic values and personal freedom that capitalist consumer cultures offer each of us through the widely available access to media technologies and consumer products (Evans and Hesmondhalgh 2005; Turner 2004). But even if we, as consumers, don't manage to rise to fame ourselves, we are still empowered as audiences to determine through our consumption preferences which celebrities succeed in a highly competitive marketplace (Marshall 1997); be it through buying or downloading music songs or albums, watching films in the cinema, on DVD or TV or just voting for certain candidates on reality TV shows. In fact, consumers are even given the power to make and break celebrities and to indulge in their private lives through the exchange of gossip in popular media outlets (Hermes 2006). Yet, while the two dominant perspectives in media studies may differ in their views on the meaning of celebrity in contemporary culture, both their focus is centred on the shared idea that celebrity reflects the human desire for being famous and recognised (Giles 2006; Turner 2004), but offer no genuine insights into why consumers feel emotionally attached to a particular celebrity.

3.3.3 The Study of Film Stars and Actors in Film Studies

Because marketing and consumer researchers tend to pay such scant interest in studying the consumption of film actors, it seems to be a pretty good idea to take a closer look at the one academic discipline that you would expect to be dedicated to the study of film stars: film studies. And, indeed, the stardom literature has become an academic sub-discipline with film (and media) studies that is exclusively dedicated to the study of film stars. However, it is quite interesting to note that the scholarly study of film stardom is a rather recent development within film studies. This is particularly surprising, as film is a performing art form (like theatre) that has from its early beginnings relied on the work of professional actors (Allen 1999; De Cordova 1991; Gamson 2006; McDonald 2000).

In fact, without actors, if you exclude documentaries and animation films, there wouldn't be any films at all. Nonetheless, until the late-1970s, film scholars have shown surprisingly little interest in the art of acting (De Cordova 2006; Thompson 1991) or in the study of film actors themselves (Dyer 1998; Ellis 1999; King 1991; Staiger 1991). This initial lack of interest among film scholars in the study of film actors and screen acting was the direct outcome of the discipline's obsessive preoccupation with the critical examination of film texts while simultaneously ignoring the actual practice of filmmaking in its entirety. Indeed, for most of the time, film studies have treated actors only as a division of labour within the film production process and, therefore, unworthy of any scholarly attention (Allen 1999; De Cordova 1991, 2006). As a consequence, the acting performances of film stars have only been examined as another inevitable part of the film text just like the *mise-en-scene*, the sound, the lighting or the camera frames (Dyer 1998; King 1991; Thompson 1991). Even though there were a few earlier, largely unnoticed studies, this traditional point of view only changed with the publication of Richard Dyer's seminal book *'Stars'* in 1979, which has conceptually and ideologically defined (with very few exceptions) the study and understanding of film stardom within the field of film studies to this very day (Dyer 1998; Ellis 1999; Gledhill 1991; King 1991; Lovell 2003). Nevertheless, it still took until the early-1990s, before the study of film stardom could finally establish itself as a scholarly sub-discipline in its own right.

3.3.3.1 Dyer's Distinction between Film Stars and (Common) Film Actors

By now, you have probably noticed that I try to avoid using the term *'film stars'* and refer to *'film actors and actresses'* instead. My intention, hereby, is to get around some connotative difficulties that arise from the conceptual question as to when exactly a film actor can be called a film star and when not. For me personally, film stars are simply ordinary film actors, who just happen to be famous for being very successful performers either commercially or artistically or even both. And I'm sure that you or many other consumers would largely agree with my definition. Film scholars, on the other hand, propagate a very different understanding of the term *'film star'* by making very clear conceptual distinctions between *'film stars'*, *'film actors/actresses'* and other *'ordinary celebrities'* (Ellis 1999; King 1991; King 2003; Krämer 2003) grounded entirely in Dyer's (1998) original interpretation. Firstly, film scholars have developed the general habit of viewing stardom as an exclusively cinematic phenomenon (Dyer 1998; Ellis 1999; Haskell 1999; King 1991), which is primarily tied to the glamour of Hollywood.

In doing so, the status of stardom is essentially denied to famous performers from other creative industries such as rock/pop musicians, stage actors, TV personalities, athletes and, especially, those actors, who feature mainly in TV films or soap operas (Lacey 2003; McDonald 2003). Thus, it is hardly surprising that film scholars tend to complain on regular occasions that the term '*star*' is becoming almost meaningless due to its constant '*overuse*' in the public discourse (Dyer 1998; Gledhill 1991; King 1991; see also Geraghty 2000 and Watson 2007a for more detail). The major problem with this argument, however, is that the star system isn't really an invention of the film industry in the first place (Barbas 2001; De Cordova 1991; Gamson 2006).

For example, the Italian opera had already a century earlier spawned a number of tenors, who became internationally famous – at least within the culturally developed European societies – for their singing voices and interpretations (Gabler 1998). In the 18th and 19th century, their fame was only outshined by the infamous castrati, whose claim to fame, however, came at a very heavy price that wasn't really encouraging at all¹⁴. Moreover, at the outgoing 18th and early 19th century, a number of British theatre actors earned a popular reputation for their individual acting styles and stage performances and went regularly on sold-out tours throughout the US (Gabler 1998; Gamson 2006; McDonald 2000). This led to the development of a home-grown star system within the US theatre industry long before the arrival of film (Barbas 2001). New York's Broadway should thereby become and remain to this very day the undisputed epicentre of US theatre industries, while a number of so-called stock companies toured the vast US countryside (Gabler 1998; Gamson 2006; McDonald 2000). Interestingly, the first actors in the film industry's early days were usually those stage actors, who were only cast by theatre companies in minor support and chorus roles or were even '*in-between*' jobs – meaning unemployed (Barbas 2001). Furthermore, because the promotional emphasis of the MPPC members was still on their patented film technology, the actors in the early narrative films from 1900 to 1913 were not even credited (Barbas 2001; Faulstich 2005; McDonald 2000). This only changed slowly from 1913 onwards, when the independent film producer Carl Laemmle and his company IMP (now Universal Pictures) began to promote the former Biograph-girl Florence Lawrence as the main audience attraction of their films (Barbas 2001). From then on, the independent film companies that should

¹⁴ Castrati were initially talented choir boys, whose testicles were violently destroyed, when they were barely 7-9 years old, in order to '*preserve*' their beautiful soprano voices forever.

later become the major Hollywood studios started to credit film actors as a means of differentiating their films from the competition (McDonald 2000). Nevertheless, only after the quasi-monopoly of the MPPC had been dismantled and the independent film companies developed between 1916 and 1920 into the major global players of today was the foundation laid for the Hollywood star system (Barbas 2001; McDonald 2000).

Secondly, and more interestingly, Dyer (1998) argued that film stars can never be film actors, because they are special! In his opinion, film stars reflect a glamorous artistic elite that by its very nature is different from the '*common film actors*', who are nothing else but merely the professional labour force within the film industry (Allen 1999; Ellis 1999; Gamson 2006; King 1991). This distinction is firmly grounded in the conceptual idea that film actors are just a division of labour within the filmmaking process, in which film studies as an academic discipline has had little interest in the first place, while film stars are seen as another form of cinematic texts that can be examined through the same critical approaches that are already used in the study of film texts or audience-response theory (Ellis 1999; Geraghty 2003; King 1991; Krämer 2003; Watson 2007a). Of course, this discourse was helped by the organisational structure of the vertically-integrated Hollywood studio system from 1915 to the late-1940s, where employees had their accommodation assigned on the studio grounds according to their hierarchical status. Only the studio's leading directors, producers and film stars were accommodated in their own houses in proximity to the studio. Anyway, the interpretation of film stars as texts within film studies shows a strong resemblance to Thomson's (2006) concept of celebrities as human brands and McCracken's (1989) definition of celebrities. In all three cases, film stars are considered to be different from other film actors, because they are NOT humans, who work as professionals in the performing arts, but living semiotic images, whose signification is realised through a diversity of media texts and public discourses (Dyer 1998; Ellis 1999; Hansen 1991; Haskell 1999; Hollinger 2006).

While Dyer (1998) acknowledges that film stars are real-living human beings, we are unlikely ever get to meet and know them in person as the real people they are in private. Instead, we are essentially forced to settle with what we learn about them in various on- and off-screen media texts – in other words, the public image and private identity that they signify to the audience. That is why Dyer (1998) describes film stars generally as systems of semiotic images that personify the consumer society's cultural ideals of

success, glamour, the extraordinary and even the divine. In fact, despite being literally embodied by real human beings through their name, physical appearance, voice and acting skills, Dyer (1998) theorised that film stars are to us only accessible through their semiotic on- and off-screen manifestations in various film and other media texts, in which they portray a firm, stable and recognisable canon of virtually identical characters (cultural archetypes) that personify particular cultural values and desires (Geraghty 2003; Haskell 1999; Hollinger 2006; Huffer 2003; King 1991; King 2003; Redmond 2006). Moreover, drawing on selected examples from the Hollywood studio era of the 1920s to early-1950s, Dyer (1998) also argued that film stars are always admired as '*flawless, superior*' human beings, who display a consistent mediated public image both on- and off-screen by portraying only those characters on film that mirror their own '*true*' personality and life-style in their private lives (Hollinger 2006; King 1991). Thus, he identified two ideological concerns as the major reasons for studying film stars, which he broadly characterised as the sociological and the semiotic. The former centres on film stars as a social consumer culture phenomenon in a capitalist society, where films are of interest purely because they have film stars starring in them (Dyer 1998; Haskell 1999; Huffer 2003). The latter, on the other hand, views film stars as a representative system of cultural symbols, where film stars and what they signify only exist within the context of film and media texts (Dyer 1998; Hollinger 2006; King 1991). As a result, critical approaches in the study of film stardom have developed broadly into three principle schools of thought by focusing on '*stars as commodities*', '*stars as texts*' or '*stars as objects of desire*' (Watson 2007a). It is only too obvious that the three principle schools essentially mirror the three traditional schools in film studies in relation to the auteur, the film text or the audience.

3.3.3.1.1 Film Stars as Commodities

The first (and oldest) critical school of thought on film stardom essentially views film stars as commodities within the economic contexts of film production and marketing (Watson 2007a); and, thus, shares some commonalities with the very recent marketing literature on films and film stars (Albert 1998; Elberse 2007). Film stars, thereby, act as a mere mechanism for selling films to both exhibitors and audiences by guaranteeing them certain cinematic pleasures and enacting a commercial strategy for the marketing of films (Allen 1999; Gamson 2006; McDonald 2000; Watson 2007a). However, this already weakly represented critical school has lost even more significance with the

publication of Dyer's (1998) book in 1979; until its revival in the late-1990s in the work of McDonald (2000, 2003, 2008) in particular. During the Hollywood studio era from 1916 to the late-1940s, any creative and technical personnel were tied through long-term contracts as labour force to a particular film studio, which was holding all the legal rights and sole control over the production, management and commercial exploitation (incl. celebrity endorsements) of film star images and identities (Barbas 2001; Gamson 2006; McDonald 2000; McLeod 2006). Thus, film star identities were manufactured, promoted and managed by the Hollywood studios according to their specific market needs, while the individual actors and actresses in question had virtually no say in it at all (Allen 1999; Barbas 2001; De Cordova 1991). Basically, the aim of the Hollywood star system was to provide film audiences with '*guarantees of predictability*' in relation to a film's quality by embodying or personifying a clearly-defined set of specific expectations and '*promised pleasures*' (Watson 2007a). And in order to ensure exactly that, the Hollywood studios arranged for film stars to portray continuously a certain, clearly recognisable type of characters in similar, if not even identical film genres (De Cordova 1991; McDonald 2000). Moreover, the film studios also attempted to align the (publicly known) private lives of their film stars with that of their respective on-screen persona (Barbas 2001; McDonald 2000; Watson 2007a). Hence, the creative authorship of the film star's on- and off-screen persona lay exclusively in the hands of the studio executives and not in the hands of individual actors (Allen 1999; Staiger 1991).

Since the enforced break-up of the vertically-integrated Hollywood studio system in the early-1950s¹⁵, film actors are nowadays hired as free labour by producers on a project-by-project basis (Christopherson 2008; McDonald 2008). Even though their interests in dealing with film producers and studios are represented and managed by talent agencies (Christopherson 2008; McDonald 2000, 2008; Turner 2004), the creative authorship of film actors' public on- and off-screen persona, these days, lies largely with them or, at

¹⁵ In a twist, the 5 major Hollywood studios, which as former independent film companies brought down the quasi-monopoly of the MPPC in 1914, were in 1947 brought to court for anti-competitive behaviour of their own. As vertically-integrated corporations, they controlled not only the film industry's three industrial sectors (production, distribution and exhibition), but also ensured through the practice of block-booking (In order to show a particular film, an independent cinema had also to book and screen between 12-20 other films of the studio for a certain time.) that independent film production companies were denied access to the exhibition sector (Pendakur 2008). The Paramount Act of 1948 ordered the major Hollywood studios to divest of one of the three sectors, while the long-term employment contracts with creative talent were banned. But as many Hollywood studios have since the 1980s been taken over by bigger conglomerates, which also hold substantial interests in the various multiplex chains and media retailers, the big studios have gained control of the mainstream exhibition sector again (McDonald 2008).

least, with their personal managers (Geraghty 2000; McDonald 2003, 2008). As a vital part of the *'package-unit'* around which films are nowadays produced and that are often put together by the major talent agencies (Kerrigan 2010; McDonald 2000), film stars have been upgraded from a former commodity to a capital investment that increases the producers' certainty of return, which is reflected in the high salaries that leading film stars can demand for their films these days (McDonald 2000, 2008; Ravid 1999; Wasko 2008). Indeed, as producers tend to invest more money into films that feature the latest film star, film stars can attract financial backing for a film that wouldn't be available otherwise and ensure with their involvement and sheer on- and off-screen presence the necessary promotional buzz for the film (Kerrigan 2010; Watson 2007a). The industrial role of film stars first as commodities and later as capital investment, thus, touches and highlights a number of issues in relation to the power structures with the film industry, which has invited a number of film scholars to study this particular side of film stardom from a mainly Marxist ideological point of view. By drawing on the writings of Adorno, Althusser, Marcuse, Boorstin, Gramsci, Lowenthal, Alberoni, Bourdieu and Thornton, film scholars seek to uncover how the production, management and consumption of film stars reflect and justify the underlying power structures and struggles with the film industry in relation to creative authorship and, subsequently, ownership of film star texts (McDonald 2000, 2003, 2008). But as with contemporary media studies, attention is also paid in recent years to the idea of film stars being a democratic elite (Levy 1989), which addresses the presumed paradox that film stars constitute a social elite, who in contrast to the majority of film actors can both demand high salaries for their creative work and also advance film projects that are dear to their heart, but who nonetheless still lack any real political or social power within society (Dyer 1998; Levy 1989).

3.3.3.1.2 Film Stars as Film Texts

While interesting to read when you enjoy gaining an ideologically-informed perspective into the industrial side of Hollywood's dream factory (Gaines 2000), film stardom itself is generally investigated as a rather generalised abstract concept. Individual film stars (usually from the Hollywood studio era) are only referred to, if a fragmented element of their on- and off-screen persona suits a particular study as an example for advancing a certain ideological proposition. The question regarding the creative authorship of the film star text is therefore discussed in rather simplistic terms as to who has the power, while ignoring a variety of other factors that may influence a film star's identity and

image, i.e. the film scripts, directors, tabloid journalism and private life-styles (Lovell 2003). As an alternative, the second critical school of thought has derived from and is strongly influenced by Dyer's (1998) original work on film stardom. His specific blend of semiotics, sociology and critical theory focuses on the film star as a text and seeks to understand film stars as a system of signs, or more precisely as an image, constructed through an intertextual network of various film and media texts (Dyer 1998, 2000; King 1991; Watson 2007a). Central to this critical school is the idea that film stars cannot be viewed as real living people, because the audience will never meet or get to know them privately in person, but instead must be seen as complex semiotic persona made up of the film texts, in which they feature, and the off-screen texts that can be found in other media texts (Beltran 2006; Dyer 1998; Kirkland 2003). Although film stars are literally embodied by real human beings through their name, physical appearance, voices and specific acting skills, they are accessible to us only through their manifestation in film appearances as well as *official* (interviews, official Facebook and Twitter sites, press releases, publicity events, websites, official biographies, etc.) or *unofficial* (tabloid news and other gossip, fanzines, fan-sites, etc.) media texts (Dyer 1998; McDonald 2003). Dyer (1998) differentiates film stars, thereby, from all other 'ordinary film actors', who only exist within film texts without having virtually any presence in external media texts at all and, thus, remain unnoticed by film audiences due to their insignificance.

As defined by Dyer (1998) and all those that followed in his path ever since (i.e. Austin 2003; Beltran 2006; Carnicke 2003; Haskell 1999; Hollinger 2006; Huffer 2003; King 1991; King 2003; Kirkland 2003; Krämer 2003; Redmond 2006; Williams 2006), the aim of the stardom literature, therefore, is '*not to peel away these layers of textuality in order to reveal the true self of the star, but to analyse the explicit and implicit meanings of precisely that mediated image and to read it in the context of wider ideological and social discourses*' (Watson 2007a: 130). In doing so, the study of film stars investigates in particular the duality between a film star's on-screen and off-screen personas with an emphasis on identifying homogeneities and discontinuities between them (Baker 2003; Beltran 2006; Dyer 1998; Geraghty 2000; Hollinger 2006; King 1991; Redmond 2006). But despite being the dominant mode of inquiry within stardom research, from the perspective of a film scholarly outsider like me, this critical school exposes a number of major weaknesses in its study of film stars that are also shared by McDonald (1998) and Lovell (2003) in their critical retrospections on the last 30 years of academic research

in this sub-discipline. First and foremost, this conceptual understanding suggests that the film star as text is clearly recognisable across a variety of film texts by portraying a canon of virtually identical characters (an archetype), which feature certain individual traits and characteristics that are also representative of the film star's private off-screen persona (Barker 2003; Dyer 1998; Hollinger 2006; King 2003; Krämer 2003; Redmond 2006; Williams 2006). Film scholars, thereby, tend to provide evidence for this view by discussing in particular those film stars highly selective that fit their conceptualisation best. And because this conceptual understanding is a true reflection of the Hollywood star system, many film scholars, subsequently, focus their attention on film stars from this specific era or, at least, from the immediate aftermath of its collapse in the 1950s (i.e. Allen 1999; Dyer 1998; Ellis 1999; Hansen 1991; Haskell 1999; Staiger 1991).

Yet, faced with the need to discuss contemporary film stardom as well, the stardom literature aims to substantiate its critical approach and conceptualisation since the late-1980s by looking at those selected contemporary film stars for investigation that portray in essence the same archetypes as their counterparts during the Hollywood star system (Hollinger 2006; King 2003; Lovell 2003; Redmond 2006). For example, the archetype of the romantic hero established in the Hollywood studio era by charming film stars like Rudolph Valentino, Errol Flynn or Clark Gable and taken over by Cary Grant and Rock Hudson in the 1950s is nowadays discussed in the form of Warren Beatty, Richard Gere and George Clooney, while Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone represent the modern versions of John Wayne's asexual action hero (i.e. Austin 2003; Huffer 2003; McDonald 2000). In addition to the selective choice of suitable film stars as texts, film scholars also were and still are highly selective in terms of the film and media texts they discuss in relation to a particular film star (i.e. Beltran 2006; Hollinger 2006; King 1991; King 2003; Kirkland 2003; Redmond 2006; Williams 2006). In doing so, they tend to include only those film characters in the discussion that support their ideological argument while they simultaneously exclude all those other film characters that do not (i.e. King 2003; Kirkland 2003; Redmond 2006; Williams 2006). Hence, the ultimate consequence of this critical approach is the implied and often-cited argument that film stars – as opposed to the '*ordinary, insignificant character actor*' – can't really act and, instead, only play themselves (Lovell 2003; McDonald 1998). As a matter of fact, Dyer (1998) himself argues that it is impossible for a '*real*' film star to play any characters other than oneself, as the film audience, due to their prior knowledge of the film star's

other film texts, will always identify him or her as the film star s/he is. This critical approach and argument, however, fails to acknowledge the key issues that a) most film stars actually have a substantial professional background as experienced theatre and/or film actors before '*becoming*' film stars, and that b) film audiences may actually enjoy the acting skills and convincing character performances of film stars rather than merely consume their textual presences (Lovell 2003). Furthermore, it also fails to recognise that film actors, whether they are film stars or not, essentially portray their characters by following a pre-written script under the supervision and guidance of a director.

3.3.3.1.3 Film Stars as Objects of Desire

The third critical film school views film stars as objects of desire, which is essentially an offspring of audience-response theory. Subsequently, it is entrenched in the feminist-psychoanalytic ideology; even though queer theory has also gained some momentum since the mid-1990s (Austin 2003; Huffer 2003; Weiss 1991). Yet, while being strongly influenced by Mulvey's (1975) concept of the '*male gaze*' and the exploitation of the female figure on screen as a (visual) sex object, this critical school in stardom research is nonetheless associated mostly with the works of Hansen (1991), Haskell (1999) and Stacey (1991, 1994). Its stated aim, thereby, is to look at the film audience's explicit role in (re-)constructing the meaning of the textual film star image through the act of reading the film and media texts, the politics of spectatorship and the '*pleasures of stargazing*' (Hansen 1991; Stacey 1991, 1994) to theorise on the ideological nature of the film star-spectator relationship (McDonald 1998; Watson 2007a). In doing so, the film star is primarily seen as an '*object of desire*' and, therefore, studied in relation to how audiences engage with and find meaning in film star texts by interacting with them, identifying with them, gaining some feeling of fulfilment from their textual images or even experiencing moments of erotic pleasure through them (Dyer 1998; Hansen 1991, Haskell 1999; Lacey 2003; Stacey 1991; Weiss 1991). In terms of my current research project and this thesis, this critical approach seems at a first glance to be predestined for actually providing some theoretical background on how the relationship between a film actress, her fan and the subsequent lived fan experiences expresses itself in everyday consumer behaviour. Unfortunately, for many of the (few) studies within this critical school of stardom research, advancing the scholar's own ideological agenda through the theoretical examination of film star texts appears to be much more important than providing any genuine insights into the actual relationships that real film audiences have

with film stars (see Austin 2003; Ciecko and Lee 2007; Haskell 1991; Kirkland 2003; Krämer 2003; Lacey 2003; Weiss 1991).

Following Mulvey's (1975) feminist psychoanalytic ideology on gender roles in relation to audience responses, the role of female film stars is primarily presented as sexualised spectacles that are solely designed to '*disrupt film narratives with "moments of erotic exhibitionism"*' (Ellis 1999; Haskell 1999; Stern et al. 2005, 2007), which have very little to do with the story development - other than being '*eye-candy*'. Male film stars, on the other hand, provide the central mechanism for identification for the film audience by being the heroes in full control of the film narrative (Ellis 1999; Watson 2007a). To support their argument, film scholars provide theoretical evidence again by discussing a highly selective staple of film stars as well as highly selective film and media texts, which are usually from the heydays of the Hollywood studio era and, subsequently, well-suited to advance the underlying feminist agenda of exposing female exploitation rather than allowing for genuine insights into actual spectator-film star relationships (see Haskell 1999; Mulvey 1975; Krämer 2003; Redmond 2006). The rise of critical queer theory in film studies since the mid-1990s, has added a new twist to the feminist-psychoanalytic critical approach by examining spectator-film star relationships for an explicit interpretation of the underlying homosexual meanings that they assume to be hidden in film star texts with wider social contexts (Austin 2003; Huffer 2003; Weiss 1991). But to be quite frank, as a film scholarly outsider, most of the studies and their findings sound to me like being a whole lot of pseudo-elitist nonsense, whereby the respective film scholar's own personal ideological agenda, ideals and assumptions are projected onto individual film stars as a general truth; even though there is never any real-life or empirical evidence to support those ideology-informed conceptualisations. Instead, as already with Mulvey's (1975) feminist psychoanalytic criticism, I often have this justified feeling that they must be talking about very different film stars (or films) than the ones I know under those names...

Refreshingly different within stardom research and film studies in general, therefore, are the studies by Hansen (1991), Stacey (1991, 1994) and Barbas (2001) in terms of both methodology and conceptualisation. As the only studies in the field of film studies that I have come across, Barbas (2001) used a historical-structuralist approach, while Hansen (1991) and Stacey (1991, 1994) followed an ethnographic approach to investigate and

conceptualise the relationship between film stars, spectatorship and pleasure holistically within the actual context of real-living film audiences. As a consequence, these are the only studies, whose findings are actually based on empirical data and genuine field observations involving interviews, fan-letters, diaries and footage of news reports. The studies have found that female film audiences, in identifying with the female film star and enjoying the (more direct) sexual objectification of the male film star on screen, actually engage in a similar, but reversed behaviour that feminist-psychoanalytic critics, for ideological reasons, accredit exclusively to male audiences (Barbas 2001; Hansen 1991). Stacey (1994) has managed not only to catalogue the different ways by which female film audiences respond to and identify with textual film star images, but also to distinguish between various modes of identification and the subsequent types of experienced pleasures that derive from them. In addition, both Stacey (1991) and Barbas (2001) have critically examined in detail fan letters that film audiences have posted from 1900 to the late-1960s either to the film studios or directly to their favourite film stars in person. Their findings confirm not only the ethnographic observations in both Hansen's (1991) and Stacey's (1994) research, but also find very little empirical support in the real world of film actors, film audiences and the actual relationships between them for the assumption and conceptualisations that critical film scholars have espoused in the past. Hence, Barbas (2001) has criticised in particular how cultural critics as well as film and media scholars have abused their own elitist powers as influential academics to discriminate against those legitimate interests and relationships that film fans form with film stars merely for the purpose of advancing their own political-ideological agenda, their scholarly positions within academia and their cultural perspectives without any empirically and methodologically valid and/or reliable justifications.

3.3.3.2 Geraghty's Alternative Understanding of Film Stardom

After having now reviewed the stardom literature within film and media studies in more detail, I'm not quite sure to what extent it actually provides any insights that would be useful in examining and explaining why I admire and feel so emotionally attached to the film actress Jena Malone and/or how I enjoy watching her films and her acting talent. If I apply Dyer's (1998) widely accepted distinction between film stars, who are famous as much for their glamorous publicised private lives as for their on-screen persona, and ordinary character actors, who disappear completely into the personification of their characters, then Jena Malone is definitely '*just*' a character actress and not a film star.

This means that, according to Dyer (1998), I should actually neither notice her in films nor pay any attention to her; not to mention feeling captivated by her. Yet, it is exactly her flexibility to play different characters and her ability to make each of them appear to be '*real people*' that I admire in particular about her on-screen performances. In fact, as Lovell (2003) brilliantly points out, many film stars such as Orson Welles, Marlon Brando, Al Pacino, Robert de Niro, Dustin Hoffman, Anthony Hopkins, Sean Penn, Katherine Hepburn, Meryl Streep, Susan Sarandon, Sissy Spacek, Jodie Foster or Emma Thompson are often excellent character actors, who have become famous film stars first and foremost because of their acting skills. Furthermore, very little is publicly known about their private lives, which clearly contradicts in particular Dyer's (1998) definition that emphasises the importance of the duality between the on- and off-screen personas for the film stardom concept. On the other hand, several rather mediocre (if not poor) film actors are primarily famous for their well-publicised and mediated off-screen persona rather than any substantial on-screen performances (Gabler 1998; Geraghty 2000; McDonald 2003, 2008; Turner 2004). Does this make them now film stars? For example, in contrast to Lindsay Lohan, Jessica Alba or Megan Fox, who are more known for their off-screen shenanigans and scandals than for any acting performances, Jena Malone as well as Ellen Page or Scarlett Johansson have chosen to play character roles in critically-acclaimed, low-budget independent films rather than featuring in mediocre teen-comedies that the major film studios produce and market in their dozens.

Because Jena Malone has also resisted Hollywood's glamour, gossip-publicity and party-life in favour of understanding her acting as art and refuses to become sexualised by meeting any fashion and beauty ideals (Alt 2007; Brink 2008; Calhoun 2003; Chan 2007; Hastings 2004; Lyon 2008; Pachelli 2011; Rems 2004), very little media texts exist about her off-screen persona. But even though there are many more popular, more publicised, more beautiful and more sexualised film actresses out there, it is still Jena Malone who fascinates and captivates me – and not the Nicole Kidmans, Angelina Jolies, Lindsay Lohans, Sienna Millers or Katherine Heigls of the world. However, film scholars and the stardom literature have failed to address this important issue as much as they fail to acknowledge that there are many film stars and actors out there, who are famous for portraying a very diverse set of film characters that differ significantly from their public image and who don't fit the film star stereotype that the stardom literature describes (McDonald 2008). As Lovell (2003) repeatedly points out, film stars are first

and foremost professional actors, who play both lead AND support roles by following a pre-written script under the guidance of a director. As a result, Geraghty (2000) finally called for a much needed rethinking of film stardom and how it should be studied within the context of the modern digital age. Hence, she proposes a new approach that takes Dyer's (1998) original idea of film stars as semiotic texts with an on- and off-screen persona as much into account as the, within film studies largely neglected, profession and art of acting. Geraghty (2000), thereby, differentiates between the three categories '*stars-as-celebrities*', '*stars-as-professionals*' and '*stars-as-performers*' in a way that makes much more practical sense to me and is also much closer to my personal naïve interpretation and understanding of film stars. In general, all three categories have in common that they represent film stars as real '*living-and-breathing*' professional actors, so that Geraghty (2000) no longer makes any conceptual distinctions between film stars and film actors, but views as them one-and-the-same differing only in their degree of fame. The distinction between the three categories, thereby, reflects less their varying degree of acting talent and abilities, but more the nature of their primary claim to fame and popular success (Geraghty 2000, 2003; Lovell 2003; Watson 2007a).

3.3.3.2.1 Film Stars as Celebrities

While the '*stars-as-celebrities*' category is based on Dyer's (1998) traditional duality between the film stars' on- and off-screen persona, the emphasis is thereby put entirely on the film actor's private biography (Turner 2004; Watson 2007a). However, Geraghty (2000) does no longer make the classical distinction between film stars and any other film actors. In her opinion, film stars are professional film actors, who just happen to be more famous and/or successful at a particular moment in time than the majority of their colleagues. Anyway, celebrity is hereby conceptualised as a mode of stardom that has nothing to do with the person's professional excellence, acting talent and ability, critical acclaim and/or commercial success as a film actor (Geraghty 2000; McDonald 2003; Turner 2004). Instead, celebrity as a mode of stardom is exclusively sustained by the individual's displayed level of infamy and notoriety in relation to the private sphere that is enough to ensure a regular presence in the tabloid media – especially on the important front pages (Evans and Hesmondhalgh 2005; Gabler 1998; Hermes 2006). Celebrity, thus, privileges true and false biographical information about a film actor or film star to the extent that their stardom is entirely rooted in and constructed through gossip, press and TV reports, magazine articles and publicity (Geraghty 2000; Watson 2007a), which

means that the professional performance as a film actor is of little to no relevance to the celebrity's fame (Geraghty 2000; Turner 2004). Indeed, many film actors and especially (former) film stars are still able as celebrities to command public and media attention for themselves – even after they suffer a series of box office failures or receive negative reviews for acting performances (Barbas 2001; Geraghty 2000; McDonald 2003; Turner 2004; Watson 2007a). Often, celebrity is the only way left for some film actors such as Lindsay Lohan or Corey Feldman to stay in the public eye and to be cast for new roles.

3.3.3.2.2 Film Stars as Professionals

'*Stars-as-professionals*', on the other hand, is a stardom category, where the emphasis is strongly shifted towards the film actor's on-screen persona of Dyer's (1998) conceptual film star duality. For Geraghty (2000), the film star as a professional performer makes particular sense when a specific film star image is intentionally combined with specific film texts, which was a common feature within the Hollywood studio system and still appears to be a popular concept in certain film genres (i.e. action, comedy, science fiction, horror). In practice, this involves the film star's identification with a specific genre as much as consumers' pre-established expectations that an actor's presence in the film actually corresponds with his or her professional role identity and textual image as an actor (Geraghty 2000; Huffer 2003; Watson 2007a). In other words, the respective film actor portrays only a very specific set of virtually identical film characters, whose personality traits and physique seems to match the actor's own private personality, in the same or, at least, similar film narratives within the same genre – though some minor genre variations are thereby possible due to crossovers (i.e. a modern-day Italo-western like *Desperado*, *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* or *Kill Bill* or an action film that plays in the future like *Total Recall*, *The Fifth Element* or *I, Robot*). Some of those film stars are actually talented actors like Clint Eastwood, Sylvester Stallone, Harrison Ford, Bruce Willis, Bette Davis, Audrey Hepburn, Michelle Pfeiffer or Vanessa Hudgens, who just tend to be typecast by producers, the media and casting agents (Geraghty 2000; Huffer 2003; Lacey 2003). However, the majority of male and female film actors in the stars-as-professionals category have come to film from a different field of popular interest (i.e. music, sports, modelling, celebrity relations or family connections) with virtually no formal acting training and very little acting talent, i.e. Johnny Weissmueller, Chuck Norris, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Russell Brand, Zsa Zsa Gabor, Pamela Anderson, Paris Hilton or Jessica Alba (Geraghty 2000).

Despite having been the common form of film stardom during the Hollywood studio system, the film star-as-professional actor category has once again gained significance within the contemporary film industry for three main reasons. Firstly, the emergence of video stores in the early 1980s brought about a major change in film distribution and promotion, whereby particular attention is paid to the film's genre as a means of product identification rather than product differentiation due to the tendency of video and, these days, DVD stores to display films according to broad genre categories (Geraghty 2000). The film star-as-professional concept, thereby, is strongly supporting this categorisation by providing simple clues to sellers and customers (Watson 2007a). Secondly, although they are not film stars in the classical sense that was laid down by Dyer (1998), several film actors have gained a substantial following within the B-movies markets for action, horror or science fiction films or within the TV movie sector (Huffer 2003; Jenkins 1992; Lacey 2003; Stern et al. 2005, 2007). And, thirdly, the blockbusters of the 1980s and 1990s have brought about a wave of film stars, who have become associated with specific genres – mainly action and adventure, but also erotic thrillers – and, hence, have guaranteed the film studios some box office successes by being seen as essentially playing themselves (Geraghty 2000; Watson 2007a). The often cited examples include Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone, Bruce Willis, Will Smith, Kim Basinger, Sharon Stone or Demi Moore (Huffer 2003; King 2003). A consistent, homogeneous film star image, thus, is of vital importance for the film star-as-professional (Geraghty 2000). Nevertheless, the consistent image also carries with it the serious problem that their audiences rarely allow for any change or development in their image to happen (Ciecko and Lee 2007; Huffer 2003), which means that the shelf-life of these film stars is rather limited and that their star usually falls as quickly as it has risen. Indeed, when the film actor loses his/her appeal for a particular genre due to increasing age as well as decreasing beauty and fitness, film stars-as-professionals often face a serious decline in their fortunes. In fact, only a very few of these film stars – usually the ones with actual acting talent – such as Clint Eastwood or Sean Connery manage to revive their careers with a changed film star image (Ciecko and Lee 2007; Geraghty 2000; Watson 2007a).

3.3.3.2.3 Film Stars as Performers

The third category of '*film stars-as-performers*', finally, pays particular attention to the actual work of all film actors, which is '*acting*'! In doing so, the emphasis is on the film actors' ability and skill to impersonate any given character in a truly realistic and

believable way (De Cordova 2006; Geraghty 2003; Hollinger 2006). According to Geraghty (2003), it also is no coincidence that the film star-as-performer is strongly associated with method acting, which is described as a pre-eminently realistic, natural style of acting that emphasises the significance of the character's inner emotional life and its authentic expression by the film actor/actress (Carnicke 2003; Geraghty 2000). Method acting, therefore, highlights the craft, talent and art of a film actor or actress in merging one's self with the character (Watson 2007a). As a consequence, this stardom category focuses in particular on the film star's track record in selecting specific film projects and delivering remarkable, but believable character portrayals in both lead and support roles (Geraghty 2000, 2003), which Dyer (1998) has conveniently neglected in his original film stardom conceptualisation. While the hierarchy between film stars and the rest of the cast was quite clearly and visibly structured within the Hollywood studio system (i.e. in terms of allocated accommodations on the studio grounds), whereby the film star was surrounded by lesser sidekicks, the method actor tends to view oneself much more as an ensemble member and is also willing to play a support role to a lesser known actor (Geraghty 2000), if the respective character is creatively challenging enough. Furthermore, in a complete reversal to the '*film star-as-celebrity*', the film star's off-screen persona and private life are largely irrelevant for the claim to stardom in the '*film star-as-performer*' mode of film stardom (Watson 2007a). In fact, it appears that the film stars-as-performers, and the method actors in particular, seek to reclaim a degree of cultural prestige by demonstrating a disdain for the '*trappings of celebrity*' and vulgar commercialisation in favour of artistic integrity and critical acclaim (Geraghty 2000, 2003; Watson 2007a). Well, even though she has not been formally trained as a method actress (Brink 2008; Miller 2006), Jena Malone can undoubtedly be categorised as film star-as-performer; even though she would probably reject the notion of '*star*' and view herself instead as an artist and/or actress (Lyon 2008; Pachelli 2011).

3.4 Understanding a Consumer's Fan Relationship with a Film Actor/Actress

After my detailed review and discussion of the current literature on film stardom within the context of both the film industry and the academic discipline of film studies, I haven't been sure whether it actually provides us at all with any genuine understanding of how and why consumers often experience such a strong emotional attachment to their favourite film actors and what meaning the consumption of films and film actors has for them. While I have to admit that Dyer's (1998) work has surely been groundbreaking in

the sense that it has at last managed to direct the attention of film scholars towards film stars as exciting subjects for academic investigation and also makes for some interesting reading, the theoretical insights gained from his film stardom theory and its underlying conceptual thoughts are nonetheless flawed, as I have already outlined in 3.3.3.2. Due to his and other film scholars' narrow ideology-informed theoretical concerns with the sociological and, especially, semiological dimension of film stars, the important human dimension of film stars and their relationship with consumers has never been addressed. Not only have film stars been dehumanised to mere semiotic systems of textual images, but film audiences have also been reduced to abstract constructs that suit primarily some ominous ideological agenda of a respective cultural critic or film scholar (Dyer 1998; Ellis 1999; Krämer 2003; Mulvey 1975). Even when critical film scholars purport to discuss individual film stars and/or viewers, they often only do so in order to generalise on all film stars and audiences (Hollinger 2006; Williams 2006). The dehumanisation of film actors and their audiences is even more evident in the underlying assumption that consumers are interested equally in all film stars and, thus, respond to them in the same way (Dyer 1998; King 1991; Redmond 2006). What the stardom literature, however, doesn't explain at all is why a consumer is emotionally attached to one film actor or actress, but not to another one, who is equally attractive, talented and represents a similar image or type of person. Therefore, a major contribution of my research project (and this thesis) to the literature on film stardom and celebrity fandom is proposing a narrative transportation approach as an alternative way to gaining genuine insights into consumers' actual emotional relationships with the particular film actor or actress and also into why they may often feel differently towards other equally talented film stars.

3.4.1 Taking a Narrative Transportation Approach

Narrative transportation theory was initially designed by the social psychologist Richard Gerrig (1993) in order to gain insights into the mental imagery processes that consumers generally experience while reading fictional literature. His aim, thereby, is to understand in particular the previously unexplained phenomenon of '*getting lost in a book*', where a reader becomes so absorbed in a story that s/he is temporarily even unaware of his or her surroundings. In doing so, Gerrig (1993; Polichak and Gerrig 2002) has paid close attention to how readers immerse themselves mentally in the fictional story and relate emotionally to the individual characters, whose narrative fates they are following. Using the metaphor of a journey to a foreign country, whereby the reader is '*transported*' into

the fictional world of books, Gerrig (1993) called this mental process of immersion '*narrative transportation*' (Green and Brock 2000, 2002; Rapp and Gerrig 2002). In recent years, narrative transportation theory is also presented as an exciting alternative to understanding media enjoyment (Green and Brock 2000, 2002; Green et al. 2004; Rapp and Gerrig 2006) and advertising effectiveness (Escalas 2004; Escalas and Stern 2003; Wang and Calder 2006) within the context of textual and visual print media. Of particular interest, thereby, is the underlying idea that '*media enjoyment can benefit from the experience of being immersed in a narrative world through cognitive, emotional and imagery involvement, as well as from the consequences of that immersion*' (Green et al. 2004: 311). So, how does narrative transportation actually work? In general, Gerrig (1993) describes narrative transportation as a psychological process, whereby the reader seeks to be taken away from one's ordinary life and, thus, ventures mentally to a distant narrative world by some means of transportation (i.e. the book or fictional story) and by actively performing certain cognitive and emotional actions such as imagining the story, characters and sceneries. In doing so, the reader travels some distance away from one's daily life, which even becomes temporarily inaccessible, in order to experience a different self and to connect empathetically with fictional characters as if they are real friends (Argo, Zhui and Dahl 2008; Cohen 2001; Oatley 1999). But as with any other journey to foreign countries, the reader eventually returns after some time back home again; though '*somewhat changed*' by the emotional experience of the journey (Gerrig 1993; Green et al. 2004).

The biggest problem with narrative transportation theory to-date, however, is that it has only been tested empirically in controlled laboratory experiments by researchers strictly embedded in the behaviourist paradigm (Argo et al. 2008; Green and Brock 2000; Rapp, Gerrig and Prentice 2001). The artificial setups of their controlled experimental research designs have thereby not only shown very little resemblance with consumers' real-lived reading experiences, but also been surprisingly similar (if not identical) to the ironic *pseudo-study* that Holbrook et al. (1989) conducted to criticise the use of quantitative methods in studying aesthetic consumption experiences as pointless and non-sensical. For instance, Rapp et al. (2001) as well as Rapp and Gerrig (2002, 2006) have provided two groups of participants with a self-written 8-sentence text. The difference between the groups was that two sentences of the control group text were changed to prevent the immersion experience by sounding more rational than the original text. This research

design is particularly strange, as Gerrig (1993) himself originally argued that the reader must first get to know the characters ‘*over time*’ in order for an immersion experience to occur. But this would be hardly possible in the course of 8 sentences! Green and Brock (2000, 2002), on the other hand, have tried to prevent the control group from losing themselves in a short story by giving them non-sensical tasks to do like counting certain words. Personally, I find it rather questionable, if not doubtful, that people can or cannot lose themselves in a story just because some researchers tell them either directly or indirectly to do so. Still, the theory has already been sound enough for Escalas (2004; Escalas and Stern 2003) to provide an alternative explanation for consumers’ personal engagement with advertising by using similar experimental research designs. Wang and Calder (2006) even confirmed Escalas’ findings in what has virtually been a copycat of her previous studies. In either case, these studies have tried to measure consumers’ narrative transportation experiences in relation to print ads by using in their laboratory experiments nearly the same artificial research designs as Rapp and Gerrig (2002, 2006) or Green and Brock (2000) – with the same questionable results emerging. The biggest conceptual problem, thereby, is that consumers are unlikely to spend enough time on a mere print ad in order to lose themselves in the depicted story (usually a picture) and develop an emotional bond with the character(s) over time.

But although the methodological shortcomings of those previous studies mean that there are still some question marks regarding its applicability to consumers’ real lives, in my opinion, Gerrig’s (1993) original narrative transportation theory has a lot of conceptual value and potential to offer. Because Gerrig (1993) designed narrative transportation theory to understand the phenomenon of getting lost in a book, one of the original ideas has been that it can only work in relation to written texts like novels, short stories or poems, as the immersion experience is strongly dependent on the personal relationships that the reader develops with the fictional characters (Green et al. 2004; Radway 2002). According to Oatley (1999) and Cohen (2001), readers’ very personal engagement with literary characters and their stories can express itself with a growing level of narrative immersion in broadly three different forms. On the weakest level, the reader merely sympathises with the characters (= feels *with* them) as a side-participant who *likes* them. On the next level, the reader feels empathy for the character (= *shares* the character’s emotions) because of perceived *similarities* to one’s own private life experiences. Finally, the consumer identifies and ‘*merges*’ with the character (= *feels the character’s*

emotions as one's own) in a similar way as an actor playing a role. In doing so, Cohen (2001) distinguishes strongly between '*identification*' and '*imitation*'. While imitation means that a person extends one's self-identity by copying a character's behaviour and appearance, Cohen (2001) interprets identification as a momentary mental role-play, where the consumer (just like an actor) imagines being a character in the story. Once the story ends, s/he moves on to experience the next character role. Although Oatley (1999) views identification as the ultimate goal of losing oneself in a book, he denies this level categorically to consumers' enjoyment of films. Both Oatley (1999) and Gerrig (1993) argue that the viewer is always aware of the fact that another actor is already playing the character and, hence, can only sympathise with the character/actor as a side-participant. In my own research project that forms the basis for this thesis, I have therefore not only taken a very different conceptual point of view, but also a very different methodological approach to explore the narrative transportation experience in relation to film enjoyment (Batat and Wohlfeil 2009; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008b).

On a conceptual level, I argue that it is indeed very well possible for consumers to lose themselves in a film narrative and enjoy the narrative immersion as a major part of their film consumption experience; just like any other media text. After all, film scholars have always been studying films as texts (Phillips 2007). Thus, in order to explore film enjoyment through the proposed narrative transportation approach, I have conducted a subjective personal introspection into my own private experiential consumption of the film *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005) (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008b). While I have thereby identified a complex tapestry of interrelated factors that contribute to an individual's film consumption experience, the major finding of the study is that my enjoyment of *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005) derives in particular from my ability to lose myself fully in the film's audiovisual imagination. Thus, the introspective data provide indeed strong support for the extension of narrative transportation theory to film narratives. Although I have to admit that it is difficult to '*become*' the film character, the introspective data still suggest that I strongly empathise and, on some occasions, even identify myself with several characters (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008b). My personal engagement is thereby enhanced further through a perceived out-of-text intertextuality (Hirschman 2000b) by which I connect the film to my own personal life experiences (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008b). The findings are also confirmed in my follow-up study, in which my friend Wided Batat and I compare through interactive introspection our private consumption

experiences with the film *Into the Wild* (US 2007) for similarities and differences (Batat and Wohlfeil 2009). The main finding of this study is that consumer enjoyment of films results from their potential for allowing consumers to lose themselves in their narrative worlds, where they can experience a different self, engage with fictional characters like friends and escape temporarily from their everyday lives. But while a consumer's personal engagement with the narrative, its characters and underlying philosophy is of particular importance, we also find that the nature and intensity of the consumer's experienced immersion into the film narrative is determined not by age or gender, but by one's very private interests and desires (Batat and Wohlfeil 2009).

3.4.2 Fan Relationship with a Film Star as a Narrative Transportation Experience

Nevertheless, while a strong argument can be made for using a narrative transportation approach in order to gain some genuinely holistic insights into a consumer's personal engagement with a film, its melodramatic narrative, its lead and support characters and even its underlying philosophy or message, one essential question that is of vital importance to my research project and, hence, this thesis remains: How can drawing on narrative transportation theory explain a consumer's fan relationship with a film actor or actress? This is, indeed, a very good and valid question! After all, Gerrig (1993) has initially designed the theory in order to understand the phenomenon of readers mentally '*getting lost in a book*'. A film actor or actress, on the other hand, is a living person and not a fictional book or a film. The rationale behind my proposed narrative transportation approach, however, becomes clear when we are going back to consult the film stardom and celebrity literature within film and media studies. As a reminder, Dyer (1998) and film scholars in general view film stars and any other celebrities in essence as living textual images or human brands, whose on- and off-screen persona, personal identity and reflected values are carefully designed ('*authored*'), positioned and managed in the media by talent agencies (or previously by the Hollywood studios) to suit particular market needs (McDonald 2008; Thomson 2006). A consumer's interest and admiration for one's favourite film star could therefore be interpreted as a kind of '*immersing*' oneself into the factual melodramatic narrative (Argo et al. 2008) that is the film star's public and private life as depicted by various media texts, which may include portrayed film characters, TV and press interviews, magazine articles and gossip (Hermes 2006). In doing so, the consumer may sympathise (= feel as an observer with the film star), empathise (= share the film star's feelings due to similar personal life experiences) or

even identify (= feel the film star's feelings as one's own) with one's favourite film actor/actress as if s/he is a media character (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2011b, c). After all, it is extremely unlikely that we are ever given the chance to meet and get to know the real, private person behind the film star's public on- and off-screen image in the media (Dyer 1998). In the next chapter of this thesis, therefore, I present in six published papers how the use of the proposed narrative transportation approach provides new holistic insights into film consumption and a consumer's emotional attachment to a film actress.

CHAPTER 4

LIFE AS A JENA MALONE FAN

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I finally present in full those six publications that form the core of this thesis. As a film actress can appeal to consumers as a performer, private person and social link that can all be made tangible through products, the order of the following papers follows a logical transition from the consumer's admiration for film actress's creative work to the adoration of her private person. Hence, paper 1 and 2 look at the consumer's personal engagement with film actress as a performer (aka '*actress*') and, hence, with her performances (aka '*acting skills*') and creative work (aka '*films*') by investigating through an narrative transportation approach how the consumer enjoys the film consumption experience. Paper 3, then, shows how a narrative transportation approach can also generate insights into a consumer's engagement with the film actress's textual off-screen persona, while paper 4 deconstructs the substance of the film actress's textual persona into four main areas of consumer appeal. Finally, the papers 5 and 6 explore how the consumer develops an emotional attachment to the film actress as a private person that can even take the form of a parasocial relationship. As I have already discussed their individual contribution to the literature in 1.5, each publication is now given the opportunity to speak for itself without any further comment.

4.2 Paper 1 – Confessions of a Movie-Fan: Introspection into a Consumer's Experiential Consumption of '*Pride & Prejudice*'

As people enjoy movies for various reasons, this paper is taking an existential-phenomenological perspective to discuss the consumption of movies as a holistic personal lived experience. By using subjective personal introspection, the author provides hereby insights into his personal lived consumption experiences with the recently released movie *Pride & Prejudice*. Although the introspective data suggest that a complex tapestry of interconnected factors contributes to a consumer's movie enjoyment, this study found a consumer's personal engagement with the movie narrative and its characters to be of particular importance. This personal engagement not only allows for a momentary escape from reality into the imaginative movie world, but

is even further enhanced through intertextuality, by which the consumer connects the movie to one's personal life experiences.

4.2.1 Introduction

Probably like most other people, I have enjoyed watching movies since my early childhood for the hedonic pleasure value that they provide (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982). But for me movies are much more than merely another form of entertainment. In fact, my fascination with movies meets Bloch's (1986: 539) definition of *product enthusiasm*, where the product (in this case: *movies*) *plays an important role and source of excitement and pleasure along sensory and aesthetic dimensions in a consumer's life*. The experiential consumption of movies provides me with an exciting way to escape the everyday reality of a routinised, boring and lonely life. In addition to giving me the chance to live out my hopes, dreams and fantasies in my mind (Green et al. 2004), movies present me with a source of inspiration for pursuing a *better way of life*. Indeed, an individual's consumption and subsequent enjoyment of movies can therefore vary from mere short-term entertainment to the experience of complete immersion into the movie narrative (Green et al. 2004) and identification with movie characters (Cohen 2001).

Yet, when reviewing the literature on movie consumption, one must inevitably conclude that the subjective contribution the consumption of movies makes to an individual consumer's life is still not fully understood. This scant attention may result from marketing's primary interest in the economic dimensions of movie consumption, where the focus is often limited to box office performances or the sales and rentals of DVDs in specified markets (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). In doing so, movie consumption is usually reduced to the mere purchase of individual tangible media formats (the "packaging") rather than investigated as the actual consumption of the movie as an intangible brand in itself (Basil 2001; Krugman and Gopal 1991). Although film studies have always shown a theoretical interest in the effects that movies may have on their audiences, audience-response theory usually involves expert viewers trying to show how an imagined, idealised viewer would respond to movie texts and the cinematic experience by assuming probable expectations, motives and prior knowledge (Hirschman 1999; Mulvey 1975). A synthesis of ideas from linguistics, semiotics, psychoanalysis, Marxism and feminism has hereby created the image of a passive

viewer, who is vulnerable to the manipulative qualities of the cinematic movie experience (Phillips 2007). Furthermore, expert viewers have also often discussed audience responses as a means to advance their own political-ideological agenda (see Mulvey 1975 as a good example).

Narrative transportation theory (Green et al. 2004; Rapp and Gerrig 2006), however, has presented in recent years an exciting alternative in media studies for understanding media enjoyment. Despite being primarily applied to reading, this theory suggests that *enjoyment can benefit from the experience of being immersed in a narrative world through cognitive, emotional and imagery involvement, as well as from the consequences of that immersion*, which include emotional connections with characters and self-transformations (Green et al., 2004: 311). Transportation is hereby seen as an active process by which the consumer seeks to be taken away from the everyday life into narrative worlds, where one could experience a different self and connect empathetically with media characters like real friends (Green and Brock 2000). However, by following strictly the behaviourist paradigm, the theory was only tested in controlled laboratory experiments (Green and Brock 2000; Rapp and Gerrig 2006), whose artificial designs showed little resemblance to consumers' real life experiences. Thus, the question remains whether there is any evidence for transportation theory in consumers' real movie consumption experiences. My aim is therefore to provide alternative insights into a consumer's holistic movie consumption experience from an existential-phenomenological perspective. By using subjective personal introspection, I will describe and examine my own personal lived experiences in relation to the movie *Pride & Prejudice* (Dir.: Joe Wright, UK 2005) and how I connected the movie to my personal life experiences.

4.2.2 Methodology

Unfortunately, I have to disappoint all those readers who are now expecting hard, scientific evidence on movie consumption that has been obtained in hypothetical-deductive methods. But in order to understand movie consumption as a holistic phenomenological experience (Thompson et al. 1989), it requires a research method that allows for an easy, unlimited 24-hour access to an insider's ongoing lived experience with the phenomenon, while not having to wrestle with ethical concerns regarding the informant's privacy (Brown 1998b; Holbrook 1995). Therefore, I will provide insights

into my own lived consumption experiences with the recently released movie *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005) by using subjective personal introspection (SPI). Holbrook (1986, 1987, 1995) introduced SPI 20 years ago as an approach in consumer research that, as an extreme form of participant observation, *focuses on impressionistic narrative accounts of the writer's own private consumption experiences* (Holbrook 2005a: 45). SPI, therefore, lends itself perfectly to the purpose of this paper, as it allows me to obtain first-hand data of one particular consumer's experiential consumption of a movie (in this case *Pride & Prejudice*) from the privileged perspective of a "real" insider. Although SPI has been criticised in the past by neo-positivists and several interpretivists alike in a heated debate about its *scientific justification* (Brown 1998b; Gould 1995; Holbrook 1995; Wallendorf and Brucks 1993), I will not add further to the philosophical debate on SPI's virtues and limitations at this point in time. However, I will address some of the concerns voiced by Wallendorf and Brucks (1993) that are of particular relevance to the current study.

Wallendorf and Brucks (1993) argued that the reconstructive nature of long-term memory would distort the retrospective recall of events due to knowledge obtained in the intervening time. They also feared that data specificity is compromised by the danger of reporting generalised inferences rather than specific instances and voiced concerns about the extent to which the introspective data are recorded and accessible to others. For this research, I have collected my lived experiences as contemporaneous data while they occurred in real time to ensure high accuracy of the data. Contemporaneous introspective data field the unique advantage of providing a large pool of emotional data, such as personal feelings, thoughts, daydreams, fantasies and creativity, that would be inaccessible to any other research method that is based on retrospective recall or pure observation and, as a result, inevitably be lost forever. To ensure data accessibility for external review, I have recorded the data systematically, unfiltered and on the spot in a specifically assigned diary (Patterson 2005) as part of a much larger introspective data collection. The following essay represents a summary from the diary based on a total of approx. 20,000 relevant hand-written words as raw data collected from July 2005 to February 2006. Taking an existential-phenomenological perspective (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Thompson et al. 1989), the emphasis is placed hereby less on the recollection of factual behaviour during my consumption of *Pride & Prejudice* but much more on my private lived experiences (i.e.

feelings, thoughts, fantasies or daydreams) as THE essential elements of my experiential consumption of this movie. My co-author reviewed the diary separately to ensure that my essay and the subsequent interpretations truly reflect the recorded data. But because some of the emotional data were recorded in the “heat of the moment”, I took the liberty to rephrase them in order not to cause unnecessary offence.

4.2.3 My Experiential Consumption of Pride & Prejudice

Over the summer of 2005, I became a fan of the very talented, young actress Jena Malone. While browsing through her film listings on the IMDb website, I learned that she is playing the role of Lydia Bennet in the forthcoming new cinema version of Pride & Prejudice. The film was due to be released on 16th September and would present me with the opportunity to see Jena Malone for the first time on the big screen. As she primarily features in high quality independent movies such as Donnie Darko or Saved, whose releases for commercial reasons are often restricted to arthouse cinemas (especially in Europe), I was so far only able to watch her movies as DVDs on my laptop. However, I must admit that I would probably not have cared about Pride & Prejudice at all, if Jena Malone had not played a role in it. In fact, back then I was never even tempted to read Jane Austen’s famous novel, because, a long time ago, I had the misfortune to watch the highly praised and critically acclaimed BBC TV version with Colin Firth. While many people still regard it as the *ultimate screen version of Jane Austen’s beloved novel* and as the *benchmark for all screen versions yet to come*, my own opinion differs slightly. To be honest, I think it’s rubbish! Like most British period dramas (especially those made for TV by the BBC), I found this film to be a completely clichéd glorification of a nostalgic past that for sure has never existed in this form – except maybe in the imagination of a desperately bored housewife. But, who knows, that might be the reason why so many female viewers saw in Colin Firth the ultimate personification of *their* Mr Darcy? The acting standard is on par with that of *Coronation Street* (a popular British TV soap opera), while the characters are so one-dimensional that the only thing missing is a sign on the shoulder stating their name and dominant personality trait – just in case the viewer hasn’t noticed. Personally, I couldn’t care less about any of the portrayed characters.

On Sunday, July 31st, I saw that the Sunday Times featured an article about the forthcoming Pride & Prejudice movie in its *Culture* supplement. In the hope of also

finding something written about Jena Malone I bought the Sunday Times for the first time ever. But to my big disappointment, there wasn't one single word about Jena – just about leading actress Keira Knightley and director Joe Wright! The article itself, though, was actually very well and interestingly written by Joanna Briscoe (2005). First of all, she shared my opinion of the BBC TV version and ensured me that I'm no longer the only one with a strong inherent dislike for it. But more importantly, by placing Jane Austen's novel in the context of her time, Briscoe argued that all previous small and big screen versions have placed the novel in the wrong period for mainly stylistic and glamorous reasons (One that is more in line with a romanticised nostalgic past rather than with the lived reality of Jane Austen's time!) and subsequently altered inevitably the understanding of the narrative and its societal background. In contrast, Briscoe (2005) regarded the coming movie as much more realistic than any of its predecessors, because it *bypasses all the previous traditional Regency-lite conventions of a painterly tableau of empire-line dresses, sotto voce ballroom squeals and high-ceilinged elegance* of the annoying BBC version. In fact, rather than in 1813, when the book was published, director Joe Wright located the new movie in the Georgian time of 1797, when Jane Austen actually wrote the initial draft of the novel, and recreated the rural life of the gentry accordingly. More impressively, in order to ensure realism, Joe Wright prohibited the actresses from wearing any make-up that wasn't available in the 1790s. Surely, this decision must have pissed off Hollywood's MaxFactor make-up artists, who are famous for their stylistic involvement in all glamorous, pseudo-historic Hollywood blockbusters. But I had no doubt in my mind that the actresses would look more beautiful in their natural appearance than any of the MaxFactor-styled glamour girls from the ads!

All in all, the article captured my interest for the movie. In fact, an internal excitement and expectation was mounting up. As a form of release, I went to the local bookstore the next day and bought a newly released copy of Jane Austen's novel, which "by coincidence" already featured the coming movie's poster artwork on the cover. As I read the book over the coming weeks, the story and its many characters grabbed me more and more. However, it must be noted that my personal reading of the novel differed increasingly from the stiff and over-indulged interpretation of the dreadful BBC TV version I saw before. I couldn't wait any longer for the movie's release and started counting the days down to September 16th. In early September, something else

happened in my personal life. After several months of struggling, I finally had the courage to ask a certain girl out for a date. Due to a string of bad experiences in the past, I'm very shy and have a low self-esteem when it comes to making the first step and *conversing easily with women* I'm attracted to. Thus, this was a very big step for me. I wanted to make the date as romantic and memorable as possible. And what could be more romantic than sitting next to each other in a dark cinema and watching a romantic movie like *Pride & Prejudice*, whose story has been loved by women for centuries? While I was looking in excitement forward to our date on next Saturday, TV ads were announcing the Irish and UK wide release of the movie for coming Friday. On Sunday, September 11th, I bought the Sunday Times a second time, because the *Culture*-magazine featured this time a detailed article about Jena Malone (see Photo 1). As this is the first "real" article on Jena in an Irish/UK publication I'm aware of, I was totally delighted! On Wednesday, I watched the news enthusiastically in order to see glimpses from the *Pride & Prejudice* Dublin premiere. Jena Malone even appeared for 30 seconds on a short TV3 news report! Overall, the critics for the movie were surprisingly good. Not that I care much about them, but it's reassuring...

But then followed the major disappointment! The Irish-wide release of *Pride & Prejudice* was for some mysterious reasons restricted to Dublin, Cork and Limerick only. After all the promotional build up, my growing personal expectations and my internal excitement, this no-show was very frustrating! With the initial plan for my first date in shatters, we both went on to see *Cinderella Man* instead. I was so frustrated that I spent half the movie wondering whether there is too much salt in the popcorn or too less popcorn in the salt. After some careful deliberations I came to the conclusion that the latter must have obviously been the case. Unfortunately, the date didn't work out the way I was hoping for either. As I returned to my usual, unexciting daily life as an unwilling, lonely single, I was hoping that *Pride & Prejudice* would be released the next week in my town as well. After all, it was just topping the box office. And indeed, the movie was finally released in all other areas in Ireland with only one exception – the area where I lived in. As I tried phoning the cinema to enquire their plans for showing *Pride & Prejudice*, I was only connected to a tape that gave me the current programme I already knew and allowed for automated bookings, but not for human enquiries. The website provided exactly the same information. Have they never heard of customer service? Thus, I tried to enquire directly at the cinema and experienced real-life

relationship marketing in practice. Instead of being treated as a valued customer, I was just unfriendly repudiated by a bored, disinterested employee behind safety glass who told me that “they don’t know because all decisions are made by the Dublin headquarters” and that “there is no way of finding out”. In fact, he claimed that they don’t even have a contact number to call their headquarters! Obviously, I was already extremely disappointed that I couldn’t watch the movie. But this openly expressed disregard for their customers frustrated me even more. I felt so angry and helpless that I couldn’t concentrate on anything for the rest of the day!

One week later, *Pride & Prejudice* was finally released in Waterford as well. An exciting kind of happiness mixed with anticipation or even joy to finally see Jena Malone on the big screen went through my entire body and filled it with a kind of warmth. I couldn’t wait any longer and needed to see the film! Thus, I packed up all my things and went off to the cinema. It was worth the wait, because *Pride & Prejudice* is simply a magnificent movie that you can watch over and over again. And for the record this movie is by far superior to all its predecessors and in particular to the dull but popular BBC TV version. The movie never gets boring and is just a joy to watch - beautiful landscape pictures a la *Lord of the Rings* combined with nice camera frames that outline the England of the 1790s. All actors did a great job in making every single character appear to be real and believable. Deep in my heart I can feel the way they feel and know why they do what they do. It doesn’t even matter whether you sympathise with them or dislike them. In fact, *Pride & Prejudice* as a story really plays with judgement errors made by first impressions (the original title of the novel). At the end, there aren’t really any good or bad guys – only humans.

The only exception is Mr Wickham who represents the typical handsome, smooth talking guy girls are always falling for. Men like him know how to be the centre of attention and how to attract women. But behind their pretty masks and smooth words, those “mercenaries” (Ironically, Wickham is a lieutenant with a travelling regiment.) are often shallow, arrogant and selfish cowards, who don’t care for anyone else but themselves. Yet, while decent, honest men (like me) can easily look through their fog of deception, women still always seem to fall for them and simply turn a blind eye to the falseness in their cheap words. Obviously, I’m a bit jealous of their permanent, undeserved success with the ladies. Every time when a girl that I fancy ignores me and

instead falls for the false charm of another *Wickham*, I have this painful feeling of heartache and powerlessness simultaneously running through my entire body. But it just hurts even more, when the same girls, once *their Wickham* leaves them in misery, are then quick to blame ALL men instead of their own self-imposed ignorance. Poor Lydia will soon learn this lesson as well! Maybe this is also why I sympathised rather than laughed at Mr Collins? Because Tom Hollander did an excellent job in portraying Mr Collins exactly as I have imagined him while reading the novel, seeing him on screen made me feel much better about myself. I know that I'm not very handsome and women usually don't notice me, but I'm pretty sure that I can never be THAT dull and boring for anyone! I got a confidence boost just realising that! Nevertheless, I also felt empathy for him, as I have experienced many times how it feels like to find yourself being ignored or even laughed at by the females you fancy – just because you are unable to make interesting conversation.

I empathised even more with Mr Darcy, the central male character, because like me he is uncomfortable in interacting with people he doesn't know – especially with women. And similar to my personal experiences, his introvert behaviour and insecurity is interpreted by the ladies (and other people) as arrogance, pride and incivility, which leads to their prejudices and dislike of him. In his excellent portrayal, Matthew Macfadyen lets his Mr Darcy look dislikeable in an involuntary and passive fashion, whose real character must be discovered by the audience in the same way as Elisabeth does by looking behind the prejudices that resulted from first impressions. His interpretation differed significantly from Colin Firth's rather theatrical performance. I could especially identify myself with Darcy's internal struggle in trying to talk to Elisabeth and to show his affections to her, which always results in forced mimics and in saying the wrong words at the wrong time. Of course, this only supports her prejudices against him. It happens to me all the time and only reinforces my personal insecurities. Thus, I share Mr Darcy's loneliness, his inner struggle and disappointments, but also his hopes and dreams to be seen as the person he really is – at least by the woman he loves. However, Mr Darcy has two advantages that at least attract some female interest: he is rich and handsome and I'm neither! But otherwise the internal similarities in character are striking. I just hope that at one point in time I will be rewarded like he was at the end.

As a male consumer I'm obviously much more interested in the female characters and the actresses who personify them. The main female characters are Elisabeth (Keira Knightley) and Jane Bennet (Rosamund Pike). Jane is the good-hearted oldest daughter who always sees the best in anyone and is said to be the most attractive girl in the county. Although she surely is beautiful, she isn't really my type. Elisabeth would be more interesting to me due to her wit and free spirit. Keira Knightley delivers probably her best performance to-date in bringing this character to life. I was particularly stunned by how closely Elisabeth resembles many women I have met so far in the way she responded to the different types of men represented by Mr Darcy, Mr Collins and Mr Wickham. To each of them she responded with prejudice that was based on her first impression of their physical and social appearances rather than on their actual personalities. I find it quite ironic that women, in my personal experience, always criticise men for judging them on their physical beauty (Which is true!), while they do exactly the same thing (Which is only fair!). Yet, they still claim to look only for the *inner values* in men. However, Elisabeth at least tries to change her prior judgements.

As a Jena Malone fan, I obviously paid particular attention to her character of Lydia Bennet, the youngest daughter. Although I must admit that I'm biased, Jena did an outstanding job in portraying Lydia as a rather wild, over-romantic 15-year old girl with an obsession for fashion, dancing and officers – in short as the typical spoiled teenager of today and back then. Lydia is young, naïve and just romantically in love with love itself rather than any particular man, which ultimately leads her into trouble, when Wickham tempts her into having underage sex outside marriage. Though Wickham is forced to marry her, she is too naïve to see that he only wanted to exploit her youthful beauty and innocence for little more than a one-night stand. I feel really sorry for Lydia when she finds out that Wickham never cared for her. He will soon treat her badly and betray her with other women. However, Jena Malone looks incredible beautiful and sexy in her Georgian-style dresses. She is a real natural beauty to fall in love with and doesn't need any MaxFactor styling. But then again, I'm biased!

Still, Mary Bennet (Talulah Riley) is the female character I most emphasised with, as she is very shy, introvert and lonely – just like me. She is also said to be only ordinary looking and less beautiful than Jane and Elisabeth. Yet, I find her to be much more attractive than her sisters. In order to find her place, Mary consistently tries to be the

perfect daughter to her parents by wanting to fulfil all the cultural expectations that society has held for women in that time. But no matter how hard she tries, all her efforts go unnoticed by her parents, sisters, relatives and men alike. Thus, Mary seeks her happiness in playing the pianoforte and singing. While in one particular scene the whole Bennet family is gathered for breakfast at the table, Mary takes hers at the pianoforte. Subsequently, she is very enthusiastic about grasping her chance to shine by singing and playing at Mr Bingley's ball. Unfortunately, while she is a relatively good player on the pianoforte, Mary's voice can't hold a note and her performance ends in a total disaster. Everybody's laughing at her until her father finally stops her. I could really feel how hurt and heartbroken she is. So much that I would have liked to comfort her! But instead I've to sit lonely in the cinema and watch her left on her own crying and feeling sadly alone again. On the next day it got even worse for Mary, because she was probably the only person in the family who would have settled for marrying Mr Collins. As Jane was "unavailable" and Elisabeth rejected him, Mary was sure that, as the third daughter, it would now be her turn. Although anything wasn't said either in the film or in the novel, I could read it in her face (Excellent acting by Talulah Riley!). Instead, Mr Collins ignores her by marrying Elisabeth's friend Charlotte Lucas.

All in all, watching *Pride & Prejudice* was a really great experience, which exceeded my expectations and was worth the wait and excitement. The only bad thing was that I had to change my perfect seat in the cinema because two middle-aged ladies couldn't keep their mouths shut for just one single minute and stop commenting every single scene. Why is each time I go to the cinema, at least one ignorant person somehow determined to ruin my movie experience? Nevertheless, I simply knew that I would watch the film soon again, which was already the case during the following week. As I'm an involuntary single for years and don't have any hope of being in a loving relationship in the nearer future, I felt lonely, sad and depressed and were simply unable to concentrate on my work. Thus, I left my desk early and drifted towards the cinema. My choice fell on *Pride & Prejudice* once again, because I knew that it would be good for rescuing my emotional well-being. This time there wasn't anybody around trying to spoil it for me, which was really great! Although my impressions from the first viewing were all confirmed, this time I paid even more attention to Jena Malone, who really owns the screen with her charm, even when she is only in the background of the frame. Despite her young age, she has already shown that she is an excellent actress with a

great future. It just required her smile, her eyes and her presence to raise my spirits and to make me feel warm and happy. The film itself also made me feel much better about myself and relaxed again. I think I was even smiling for the first time that day...



Photo 1: Articles in *Culture* Supplements

Photo 2: My *P&P* Collectibles (i.e. Book, DVD, CD-Rom Press-Kit, Original Autographs, etc.)

But my experiential consumption of *Pride & Prejudice* didn't stop with the two visits to the cinema. In fact, they were just the beginning. Over the next months, I started to acquire a number of collectibles on eBay (see Photo 2). However, as a devoted Jena Malone fan, I have focused my financial resources on purchasing autographed movie photos of her as Lydia, which she has personally signed while performing in the Broadway play *Doubt*. Although my whole Jena Malone collection is very dear to me, her originally autographed photos are my most valued treasures. The only thing missing for most of the time was the opportunity to add *Pride & Prejudice* to my movie (and my Jena Malone) collection. I waited impatiently and nervously for the official DVD release, which finally came on February 6th 2006. The advantage of DVDs lies not only in the picture and sound quality, but also in the extra bonus features. On the *Pride & Prejudice* DVD, the bonus features range from the alternative US ending to galleries of the 19th century to a number of short behind-the-scenes documentaries. Of course, my prime interest was in those documentaries that featured Jena Malone in front of and behind the camera. Thus, I love to watch *The Bennets* and *The Politics of Dating in 18th Century England*, which include movie scenes with Jena Malone as Lydia Bennet, show her in her private clothes during the rehearsals and feature a short interview with her.

But I enjoy in particular watching the *On Set Diaries*, in which Jena Malone, Talulah Riley and the rest of the cast talk in private about their personal experiences while filming the movie and the close bonds they have developed before and behind the camera. It's heart-warming to see how they have become the "Bennet family" even off the screen, leaving me with the desire to be part of this perfect family bond. Another beauty of the documentary is that the actors and actresses are shown in private as natural, lovely people like you and me. The documentary has increased my admiration for Jena Malone even more. But more importantly, I love to watch this movie as one of my favourites!

4.2.4 Discussion

The introspective data obtained from my private holistic lived experience of consuming *Pride & Prejudice* reveals some very interesting findings for further discussion. First of all, while previous marketing studies on movie consumption (Basil 2001; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Krugman and Gopal 1991) focused primarily on the attractiveness and commercial success of individual media formats, the data clearly shows that my interest was purely in the movie *Pride & Prejudice* itself and not its respective "packaging" and that I consumed the movie in absence of any rational trade-off decisions. The acquisitions of movie-related collectibles followed similar patterns. In relation to the social consumption context, past studies have argued that blockbuster movies would owe their popular appeal to the fact that they can be watched in the company of friends or family as collective entertainment (Basil 2001), while connoisseurs would enjoy movies as an individual experience for its artistic merits (Holbrook 1999). Although I intended to use *Pride & Prejudice* as background scenery for a first date, the data clearly indicates that I rather enjoy the hedonic experience of watching the movie alone for my own pleasure (Phillips 2007). This leads to the personal consumption context, which has been an area of interest in film studies and refers to the viewer's emotional state and motives for enjoying the possible effects the movie experience may have (Mulvey 1975).

Although the heated debate about movie effects on the audience is still ongoing (Oatley 1999; Rapp and Gerrig 2006), there is agreement that movies can act as means to compensate for perceived emotional deficits (Cohen 2001). The data confirms that *Pride & Prejudice* has served for me as a means to cheer myself up when I feel lonely,

unloved and sad. However, another strong motivator for me to see the movie was also the fact that my favourite actress Jena Malone is starring in it. Thus, being the fan of an actor, actress or even director significantly enhances a consumer's viewing pleasure. Both the social and the personal consumption context hereby influence AND are influenced by the perceived atmosphere during the consumption of the movie. Because movie-fans aim to *lose themselves into the movie world* (Green et al. 2004), disruptions caused by noisy audience members or poor picture/sound quality have a serious impact on a consumer's movie enjoyment, which is evidenced by my response to the two "talkative" ladies. The data further suggests that another important factor for a consumer's movie experience is the excitement of anticipation and expectations long before actually watching the movie, which unfortunately received so far little attention in the literature. Indeed, it is such a powerful factor that the disappointment of unfulfilled expectations can have a strong negative impact on the consumer's emotional state.

However, the major finding of this study is that the emotional engagement with the characters and their stories (Green et al. 2004) seems to be the most crucial element in a consumer's movie experience. As my enjoyment of *Pride & Prejudice* derived from my ability to lose myself completely in the movie's audiovisual imagination, the introspective data provides indeed strong support for the extension of Green and Brock's (2000) transportation theory to movie narratives. According to Oatley (1999), personal engagement with literary characters and their stories can take with increasing level of transportation broadly three different forms. On the weakest level, a consumer merely sympathises with the characters (= feels *with* them) as a side-participant who *likes* them. On the next level, the consumer feels empathy for the character (= *shares* the character's emotions) because of perceived *similarities* to one's own private experiences. Finally, the consumer identifies and *merges* with the character (= *feels the character's emotions* as one's own) similar to an actor playing a role. Cohen (2001) made hereby a strong distinction between *identification* and *imitation*. While imitation means that a person extends one's self-identity by copying a character's behaviour and appearance, Cohen interpreted identification as a momentary mental role-play where the consumer (like an actor) imagines being the character in the story. Once the story ends, s/he moves on to experience the next character role. Despite viewing identification as the ultimate goal of losing oneself in a book, Oatley (1999) denied this level to the

movie experience by arguing that the person would always be aware that another actor already plays the role and hence could only sympathise with the character/actor as a side-participant (Rapp and Gerrig 2006).

Although I admit that it is difficult to *become* the movie character, my introspective data still suggests that I strongly empathised and at some occasions even identified myself with several characters. In fact, it seems not only to be possible for a consumer to identify under certain circumstances with a movie character, but I was also able to sympathise, empathise and even identify with more than one character during my *Pride & Prejudice* experience. Furthermore, while previous literature in media studies (Cohen 2001; Green and Brock 2000; Rapp and Gerrig 2006) focused mainly on consumer engagement with lead characters, the data shows that, apart from Mr Darcy, I actually empathised and even identified with several support characters (i.e. Mary, Mr Collins and Lydia). My personal engagement was further enhanced when I was able to make an intertextual connection between the experiences of the movie characters and my own private life experiences. Hirschman (2000b) hereby distinguished between three types of intertextuality. *Cross-text intertextuality* describes consumers' mental linkages across similar narratives/texts they have encountered. Apart from the obvious comparisons of this movie version with the previous BBC version and the original Jane Austen novel, I also likened the landscape pictures to those of the *Lord of the Rings* movies or use certain words from the movie in other situations. *Nostalgic intertextuality* refers to consumers' mental linkages between a narrative/text and their ideas of a nostalgic past. While it might explain the popularity of the BBC version, there isn't any evidence in my introspective data. Instead, the final important finding of this study is that out-of-text intertextuality enhanced my personal engagement with the movie and its characters.

Out-of-text intertextuality refers to consumers' mental linkages between characters/narratives in a fictional text and actual people or life events in the real world, which could not only result in empathy but also identification with the fictional character. For example, I identified myself with Mr. Darcy because we both feel insecure in *conversing easily* with people we don't know (especially females) and subsequently suffer from rejections and prejudices, while we deeply hope that the women we fancy finally see us as the persons we are. For similar reasons, I felt also partially empathetic to Mr Collins, while I experienced hate and anger towards Mr

Wickham as my perceived personification of all those men I have envied in the past for their success with women. Similarly, I saw Elisabeth as a personification of the females who rejected me in the past purely by judging my physical appearance. Interestingly, the data also provided evidence that contrary to previous scientific studies (Green and Brock 2000) not only female but also male consumers may experience empathy or even identify with characters across genders. As a result of the experienced intertextuality between Mary's *fictional* emotions of feeling lonely, ignored and rejected and my personal *real* feelings of loneliness and rejection, I could feel Mary's emotions as if they were my own ones. This may also be the reason why I felt more attracted to Mary than to the other female characters.

To conclude, movie consumption as a holistic consumption experience depends on a complex tapestry of interconnected factors through which the consumer can restore his/her emotional well-being by being momentarily immersed into an imaginative world. Of course, I don't suggest that the presented introspective data and proposed findings could be generalised. But I believe that the subjective personal introspection of my experiential consumption of *Pride & Prejudice* offers a certain degree of transferability by actively involving the reader. Each time, you as the reader thought *I know this feeling* or *I have had a similar experience*, you actively engaged in what Hirschman (2000b) called an *Out-of-Text Intertextuality*, by which you, the reader, connected my essay with your own personal life experiences, and thereby confirmed the transferability of the described phenomenon. But if it hasn't happen for you, then I hope my idiosyncratic and narcissistic paper has at least made for some fun reading.

4.3. Paper 2 – Getting Lost 'Into the Wild': Understanding Consumers' Movie Enjoyment through a Narrative Transportation Approach

As consumers enjoy watching movies for many reasons, this paper takes an existential-phenomenological perspective to discuss movie consumption as holistic private lived experiences. By using interactive introspection, the two researchers examined their own individual private consumption experiences with the recently released movie *Into the Wild* (US 2007) as a complex tapestry of interrelated factors. The introspective data indicates that a consumer's personal engagement with the movie narrative, its characters and underlying philosophy is of particular importance for one's enjoyment of the movie.

This allows for and even enhances the consumer's temporary feeling of complete immersion into the movie's imaginary world.

4.3.1 Introduction

For more than a century, consumers all over the world have enjoyed watching movies for many reasons that can range from mere short-term entertainment to the personal experience of complete immersion into the movie narrative (Green et al. 2004) and identification with its characters (Cohen 2001). Yet, a closer review of the literature on movie consumption indicates that we still lack a full understanding of how an ordinary consumer experiences the consumption of movies and what subjective contribution it makes to one's quality of life. This scant attention may have resulted from marketing's primary interest in the economic dimensions of movie consumption, where the focus is often limited to box office performances or the sales and rentals of DVDs in specified markets (De Vany and Walls 2002; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Ravid 1999). In doing so, movie consumption is usually reduced to the mere purchase of individual tangible media formats (Basil 2001; Krugman and Gopal 1991) rather than investigated as the actual consumption of movies as intangible brands in themselves (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008b). In film studies, on the other hand, researchers seek to explain the effects of movies on their audiences by means of audience-response theory (Mulvey 1975; Phillips 2007). This involves trained expert viewers discussing in theory how an imaginary, idealised viewer would respond to movie texts and the cinematic experience by assuming probable motives, expectations and prior knowledge (Hirschman 1999). However, a synthesis of ideas from psychoanalysis, linguistics, semiotics, Marxism and feminism has hereby created the image of a passive viewer, who is vulnerable to the manipulative qualities of the cinematic experience (Phillips 2007). Moreover, expert viewers have often discussed suspected audience responses as a means to advance their own political-ideological agenda (see Mulvey (1975) as an excellent example).

A very different approach was recently taken by Wohlfeil and Whelan (2008b), in which one of the authors observed introspectively his own experiential consumption of the movie *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005). While they identified a complex tapestry of interconnected factors contributing to a consumer's movie enjoyment, they found a consumer's personal engagement with the film narrative and its characters to be of particular importance and provided thereby evidence for the applicability of narrative

transportation theory (Gerrig 1993; Green and Brock 2000) to movie consumption. Though primarily applied to reading, this theory suggests that *enjoyment can benefit from the experience of being immersed in a narrative world through cognitive, emotional and imaginary involvement as well as from the consequences of that immersion*, which include emotional connections with characters and self-transformations (Green et al. 2004: 311). Transportation is hereby seen as a process by which the consumer actively seeks to be taken away from one's everyday life into different narrative worlds, where one could experience a different self and engage empathetically with media characters like real friends (Gerrig 1993). This private engagement is further enhanced through out-of-text intertextuality by which the consumer connects the movie to one's own personal life experiences (Hirschman 2000a; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008b). In a recent study, Argo et al. (2008) found that consumers' immersion into melodramatic narratives may be dependent on the level of fictionality, whereby females tend to empathise more readily with narratives that feature *factual* contents, while males prefer to lose themselves in narratives with highly *fictional* contents.

But similar to previous studies (i.e. Green and Brock 2000; Rapp and Gerrig 2006), their hypotheses were only tested within laboratory experiments, where the staged and artificial setup had little resemblance to consumers' real-life experiences. The findings also contradict Wohlfeil and Whelan's (2008b) introspective data, which provide clear evidence that the male researcher empathised and even identified strongly with the rather *factual* narrative and characters in *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005). Hence, the question remains whether there is any evidence that those findings on transportation theory would reflect consumers' real-lived movie consumption experiences. Taking an existential-phenomenological perspective (Thompson 1997; Thompson et al. 1989), this study therefore aims to provide alternative insights into consumers' holistic movie consumption experiences. As both authors happen to be of different gender, come from different cultural backgrounds and live in different countries, we will compare, examine and discuss our own individual private lived consumption experiences with the recently released movie *Into the Wild* (Dir.: Sean Penn, US 2007) and how we connected the movie to our personal life experiences by using interactive introspection (Ellis 1991; Wallendorf and Brucks 1993).

4.3.2 Methodology

In order to truly understand movie consumption as a holistic phenomenological experience from an insider perspective, the focus has to be on the consumer experience in the way it presents itself to consciousness (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Thompson et al. 1989). Subsequently, we used a research method known as subjective personal introspection (SPI), which is an *experiential, private self-reflection on joys and sorrows related to consumption and found in one's own everyday participation in the human condition* (Holbrook 1995: 201). This method has an advantage of allowing the researcher for an easy, unlimited 24-hour access to an insider's lived experiences with the investigated phenomenon without having to wrestle with ethical concerns regarding the informants' privacy (Brown 1998b; Gould 2006b). However, this also means that we now have to disappoint all those readers who were expecting to find hard, scientific data obtained through hypothetical-deductive methods. Instead, we followed for this study an approach that could be broadly described as interactive introspection and involves gaining illuminative subjective insights through comparing, contrasting and interpreting introspective essays (Ellis 1991; Patterson, Brown, Stevens and Maclaran 1998; Wallendorf and Brucks 1993).

As it happens, both authors are of different gender and live in different countries. The first author is female, in her 20s, Algerian, lives in Southern France and is for the purpose of this paper referred to as the female viewer (FV). The second author is male, in his 30s, German, lives in the South of Ireland and is now referred to as the male viewer (MV). Both researchers wrote independently from each other an extensive introspective essay on their personal experiential consumption of the movie *Into the Wild* (Dir.: Sean Penn, US 2007), which, by coincidence, they have both watched recently. Based on Jon Krakauer's bestselling book, the movie retells the true story of



Photo 3: *Into the Wild* Poster (courtesy of Paramount Vantage Inc.)

Christopher McCandless, a young college graduate who decided to abandon his worldly possessions and leave his perfectly planned out life behind in order to escape the trappings of a society he despised by experiencing natural life in all its immediacy in the Alaskan wilderness. While his journey and view on life touched a number of people along the way, his romantic idealism ultimately leads to his doom at the unforgiving hands of Mother Nature. We then exchanged the two essays and each researcher compared and analysed them for both common emic themes and individual differences (Thompson 1997). Finally, we compared our two personal interpretations of the introspective essays for similarities and/or differences and summarised them accordingly (Gould 2006b; Patterson et al. 1998).

4.3.3 Major Findings and Discussion of the Data

The thorough analysis of the introspective data obtained from our personal holistic lived experiences of consuming *Into the Wild* (US 2007) has revealed some very interesting findings. For both viewers, the essence of our private movie enjoyment was the arousal, pleasure and emotional stimulation obtained from the cinematic consumption experience (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982) rather than from maximising some ominous economic benefits (Basil 2001; Eliashberg and Shugan 1997). However, while a tapestry of interrelated factors contributed to the overall movie consumption experience, both viewers experienced the strong personal emotional engagement with the movie narrative and our subsequent ability to lose ourselves mentally *Into the Wild* (US 2007) as essential to our enjoyment of the movie. This confirmed Wohlfeil and Whelan's (2008b) earlier findings, as evidenced in the following extracts:

In terms of the lead character Chris, my relationship with him changed several times over the film. At the beginning, I disliked him because he appears to be another spoiled, rebellious and stupid rich kid that feels himself to be totally misunderstood. Then, when the family history was revealed I started to understand his motivations and even empathised with him in his search for a better, more harmonic life based on love and mutual respect. I even understood when he failed to grab his first opportunity. After all, I have failed to notice a few times as well that everything I was looking for was directly in front of my eyes and I just had to take it, but I was too scared or too stupid to see it. However, after he obviously knew that he has

found what he was looking for in the flesh right in front of his eyes and feet and still left to fulfil a naïve, romanticised fantasy, then I thought again “what an idiot!” (MV)

“Into the Wild” left me sobbing like a baby; I would go as far as to say uncontrollably – Thank God, I saw this alone and in the darkness. Regarding the character, one scene that stands out in particular is McCandless killing a moose. It both vividly illustrates an intimate aspect of living in the wild and provides an almost existential moment-to-moment take on the newly discovered aspects of the character. (FV)

The story itself is an incredibly important one. Ever had that feeling of wanting to abandon your existing life and living one step closer to nature? I can’t deny being touched by the relationships that Alexander (Emile Hirsch) makes on his travels and I was haunted by images of Alexander desperately trying to get food in the Alaskan wilds, in particular his efforts with a moose. This was storytelling so good it could bring you to tears. I was convinced as to touching the nature of Christopher/Alexander. (FV)

It was a captivating movie experience and I believe that it is one of those movies that you can watch over and over again and each time you will discover something new and different. It’s also kind of going on a journey of self-discovery yourself each time you watch the film. My relation to the characters differed. I didn’t really identify with anyone of them, but empathised strongly with the hippie couple (Catherine Keener and Brian Dierker), Ron Franz (Hal Holbrook) and even Carine – but the latter could be influenced by my admiration for Jena Malone as the actress who portrayed her. (MV)

Both viewers also experienced an equally intensive level of immersion and empathy with the factual movie narrative. Thus, the introspective data would contradict Argo et al.’s (2008) prediction that a consumer’s ability to empathise with melodramatic narratives – whether factual or fictional – would be determined by one’s gender. In fact, the data would contradict the suggestion that a consumer’s ability to immerse in and

empathise with a melodramatic movie narrative would be determined by any of the common socio-demographic variables such as age, ethnicity, nationality or cultural background. But while its intensity may appear to be similar, we discovered nonetheless some interesting differences in each viewer's account of our private lived movie consumption experiences, which influenced the nature of the personal transportation experience and, hence, warrant a closer examination. Although both viewers agreed that each of our private *Into the Wild* (US 2007) consumer experiences started with a search for relevant information across similar media (i.e. magazines, IMDb, websites, TV or YouTube) long before actually watching the movie in the cinema, the type of information we sought and our underlying motivations to do so differed significantly:

Once a couple of years, there comes a movie that is both unapologetically soulful and offers a gentle philosophical take on one of the timeless myths and human tendencies. ...The first time I heard about the film was in January 2008 in a French TV talk show. I decided to learn more about the movie by looking for information on the Internet. ... I ensured myself of the quality of the movie by gathering much information on the story, the character, the moviemaker Sean Penn, magazine criticisms; comments comparison between French and English websites. In addition, I checked for the box office of the English media on Yahoo UK. (FV)

My interest and experiential consumption of this movie actually started already as early as October 2006, when I read in an interview with Jena Malone in Mean magazine that it was just being filmed...As it so happened, in this article she talked not only about her then recent film release "The Go-Getter" and her increasing interest in expressing herself in self-produced music and short films, but also that she would soon starting to film "Into the Wild" with Sean Penn. Jena Malone then vividly recalls how she had accidentally hung up on Sean Penn when he phoned her at home near Lake Tahoe to cast her, because due to a defective connection she couldn't hear him and thought it was an obscene call. I really loved the way she told the story during the interview...In September 2007, the movie trailer of "Into the Wild" appeared on YouTube. Without hesitation I used YouTube Catcher to download the trailer. Not that the trailer was giving

much away, but it definitely stimulated an appetite for more in me....Jena Malone being in the movie was enough reason for me to must see it anyway!!! (MV)

As it turned out, the male viewer is the self-confessed fan of a movie actress and much of his interest in the movie, subsequently, stems from her involvement in the movie production. In fact, he became only aware of the movie as a result of reading an interesting interview with her. Furthermore, much of his information search was directly associated with the actress, such as catching glimpses of her in the movie trailer, downloading video clips of her interviews or photos of her at the movie premiere. The female viewer, on the other hand, had no fan-related interests and learnt only by chance about the film in a TV show. Her search for information about the movie was driven by her awakened interest in its mythological narrative (Hirschman 2000a), the true background story and the lead character's philosophical ideals, which have *touched* her emotionally. The movie, nevertheless, has also awakened in her an admiration for the leading actor Emile Hirsch – though her perception of him blurred increasingly by merging his off-screen persona with his on-screen character.

Emile Hirsch gave the best performance of his career and he literally carried the whole movie on his shoulders....I shared the same values as Emile Hirsch who goes on to display a person, who is selfless and whose goal is simply to go somewhere where he can live peacefully... Throughout, it was Emile's smiles and caring advice that seem to be constant reminders to me to have hope, to believe that there's more out there than the rat race we're so wrapped up in. (FV)

As a result of those different individual motivations for watching this movie, both viewers also differed in our personal engagement with the movie's melodramatic narrative and the characters as well as in the way we actually lost ourselves in the movie experience. As is already evident in the earlier extracts and confirming Wohlfeil and Whelan's (2008b) earlier findings, the male viewer engaged very closely and emotionally with the individual characters in the movie – a response that most previous literature only ascribed to female audiences. Oatley (1999) and Cohen (2001) argued that personal engagement with literary characters and their stories in novels can take

with increasing level of immersion broadly three different forms. On the weakest level, a consumer merely sympathises with the characters (= feels with them) as a side-participant who likes them. On the next level, the consumer feels empathy for the character (= shares the character's emotions) because of perceived similarities to one's own private experiences. Finally, the consumer identifies with the character (= feels the character's emotions as one's own) for the moment similar to an actor playing a role.

While sympathising with the parents in their desperate, but fruitless search for their son, the male viewer empathised during his movie consumption experience strongly with the hippie couple, Ron Franz and Chris's sister Carine. However, much of his empathy for her may result from his admiration for the actress Jena Malone, who portrayed her. On the other hand, though he didn't directly admit to it, there is also evidence that his ambivalent emotional engagement with the lead character Christopher McCandless is more than positive and negative empathy, but in fact a form of identification (Cohen 2001). Indeed, the use of out-of-text intertextuality (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008b), by which the male viewer connected Christopher's experiences on screen with his personal life experiences, suggests that the character's naivety, idealism, motives and even foolishness served as a mirror through which the male viewer relived his own experiences.

While Chris moves on and meets a kind couple of hippies (Catherine Keener and Brian Dierker) with their own sad background story of a lost son, we can see in flashbacks behind the façade of the McCandless family life. His father is a career-minded individual for whom his family is more or less a necessary status symbol... Chris and Carine are consistently caught up in the middle of [their parents regular] fights or even recipients to the fighting. More and more I was beginning to understand the motivation behind Chris's actions. His journey wasn't really the expressed statement of an over-ideological kid, but a desperate attempt of escaping from the white suburban middle-class society that his family represented. (MV)

And I could fully empathise with him now, as I also sought myself to escape desperately from a (lower working-class) living environment I was growing up in and deeply despised... Most of the time, I was told what I couldn't do

and any dream, creativity or ambition for experiencing and doing something different, something that matters, was cruelly slaughtered [by parents, teachers, career counsellors] right from the start... Instead, I ended up working in retailing for years. In all those years, movies provided me with the only source of escape and the only source of inspiration – like Jack London novels did for Chris McCandless. I needed to get out... (MV)

Interestingly, the female viewer did not really sympathise, empathise or even identify with any of the characters as such. In taking a macro-perspective, her transportation experiences were instead based on her personal engagement with the lead character's (and, thus, the story's) philosophical view on looking for the human condition and the meaning of life in modern Western societies rather than with his person. Thus, the female viewer seemed to empathise or even identify herself essentially with the presented ideals by connecting them through out-of-text intertextuality with her own personal ideals and philosophical views – an aspect that the literature on narrative transportation theory has overlooked so far, but would warrant further, more detailed investigation at a different occasion.

The mission of Christopher seemed to be showing that at some point a long time ago, we got so far from what it's really all supposed to be about. He lived by example in showing that the best way to try to figure out, where we went wrong, would be to go back to when man lived in the wild, surviving only on his wits and his instincts. At the end, he made the ultimate sacrifice trying to figure out the answer for us – and he did – that we are social beings, who need companionship and society to be really happy. (FV)

I think that Into the Wild is a gentle mediation on the poetry of the road and the extent to which personal philosophy is coloured by our own bruised sensibilities (some people don't feel they deserve to be loved, says McCandless to the ageing hippie at one point) and drive to be free, primarily free of emotional attachment to people. It explores the thin line between idealism and escapism, freedom from and responsibility to others, and the degree to which our tendency to sleepwalk through our choices can sneak up on the ideal of living in the wild far from the modern society. (FV)

However, despite our different motivations for watching the movie and, subsequently, the different nature of our personal transportation experiences with *Into the Wild*, for both viewers watching a film is like being in a dream where we can enjoy the peaceful moment of losing ourselves into the melodramatic narrative for awhile. Hence, both reviewers engaged in a certain routine of additional consumer behaviour to enhance their movie consumption experiences in advance. The female viewer, for example, discovered that the film was not shown in her local cinema, so that she had to carefully plan for a 1 hour train journey to the nearby city on the weekend, where the movie was actually screened. In order to make the trip worthwhile, she decided to meet up with friends and to go shopping, which she arranged around her *main event* – the cinematic movie experience.

I learnt that “Into the Wild” had only been released in Poitiers, which is an hour journey away from the town I live in. I decided to go there on the next weekend to watch the movie and to spend some time with my friends there. Before booking my train tickets, I first phoned the cinema to enquire about their time schedules for showing Into the Wild... The next weekend, I arrived on the morning to have lunch with my friends and do some shopping in the area before going to the cinema. But I did not ask them to go with me to the cinema, because I preferred to be on my own and not to share the movie experience with them for the simple reason that I didn’t want to listen to other people’s troubles, but to lose myself in the movie’s story. (FV)

The male viewer also faced the difficulty that the film wasn’t screened in a cinema nearby and had to consider a 50 minutes bus trip towards to a multiplex further away or to wait for the DVD release. Fortunately for him, the local arthouse cinema was showing *Into the Wild* (US 2007) four weeks later and he chose this option at the end. But this also turned out to be an advantage, as he prefers the more personal and *intellectual* atmosphere of arthouse cinemas in comparison to that of modern multiplexes, which he perceives to be noisy, commoditised and disrespectful to film as an art form with their *blockbuster & popcorn diet*. Interestingly, both viewers had in common that we prefer to watch movies on our own and not to share the experience with others. Though this doesn’t necessarily mean that we won’t sometimes (but not always) discuss the movie with friends afterwards (!), both of us simply feel that

watching the film together with friends would only invite the danger of continuous comments or chats about private matters that may disrupt or even prevent us from enjoying our transportation experiences. In fact, we experience all disruptive influences on our movie enjoyment, which also include late-comers, talking audience members, chatty teenagers and noisy families with kids running wild around, simply as quite annoying and frustrating.

I know only too well that many people decide to go to the cinema on a rather short notice and then often choose the respective movie on the spot – a regrettable habit that has probably emerged from the rise (and partial monopolisation) of the multiplexes and their brainless blockbuster & popcorn diet – but I'm not one of them. ... The good thing about Kino [an arthouse cinema] is that it is visited by an older and more intellectual clientele, which means that the chance of being surrounded by consistently chatting teenagers, running kids and permanently interrupting insensible families, which has become such a common and annoying feature experience with the multiplexes, is close to zero. The diet of independent movies is anyway beyond their interest and intellectual horizon. Thus, the chance to genuinely and truly lose myself in the movie was quite good.
(MV)

However, the movie consumption experience didn't stop for both viewers with watching the movie in the cinema. Instead, both of us engaged in efforts to transform our temporary, intangible movie experiences into tangible objects to prolong our enjoyment of the movie, its melodramatic narrative and its atmospheric audio-visual impression on our minds. Therefore, each of us enhanced our movie consumption experience by purchasing movie-related items and merchandising such as a CD of the soundtrack, an original cast-signed movie poster, movie stills and, maybe most important of them all, the movie itself on DVD. The overall aim of this kind of consumer behaviour enabled both viewers to experience the movie enjoyment either once again and/or to provide clues for remembering one's feelings from watching the movie for the first time.

The film went around in my head for days. I purchased on eBay this autographed movie poster, which was personally signed by the entire cast, to decorate the wall of my office directly over my desk. It still hangs there. In the meantime, I also bought on eBay the official press booklet for \$2.99. And I placed already a pre-order on Amazon.com for the region 1 double-disc DVD pack of the film, which will be released on 4th March 2008. The region 2 DVD will be released in the UK one week later and I hope it will also be available in Ireland, because I intend to buy it for my collection as well. (MV)

I was interested in the awesome movie soundtrack of “Into the Wild“ as well, which was so beautiful and so touching. Eddie Vedder of Pearl Jam was simply brilliant and deserves an Oscar for this effort. All the songs are just so powerful and bring back the deep emotion from the movie. It’s simply amazing how Eddie Vedder wrote songs that fit perfectly with Christopher McCandless’s story. However, I did not know the singer, but I knew how to deal with this problem. Indeed, I’ve gone through the same research process in relation to “Blood Diamond” in order to identify the singer’s name on the Internet. Of course, my primary interest was to check for a free video on YouTube and, then, to buy the soundtrack on CD, because it reminds me of the movie – even if it was a little bit expensive. (FV)

As can be seen from the last extract, the soundtrack of the movie served to enhance the nature of the female viewer’s experienced immersion into the movie’s melodramatic narrative based on her identification with the presented underlying philosophy on the human condition. Yet, not only had the musical soundtrack provided her with this kind of stimulation, but also the impressive and captivating cinematography of the Alaskan wilderness, which fascinated and drew her literally into the narrative. Urry (1990) proposed that, as an individual chooses to gaze upon a specific place, anticipation is sustained through a variety of distant non-tourist practices, such as films that construct and reinforce the gaze. In recent years, the *Lord of the Rings*-Trilogy and *Whale Rider* are known to have increased public awareness and demand among international tourists for travelling to New Zealand. Hence, by watching *Into the Wild* (US 2007), the female

viewer experienced in her the growing desire to visit the shown landscape of Alaska in its natural beauty and purity herself as a tourist one day soon, which also stimulated an interested search on information about Alaska.

After watching Into the Wild, my interest in visiting Alaska has intensified. I was inspired to visit some of the locales and landscapes featured in the film. I learned about Alaska through the movie and I was positively influenced by the beautiful areas in the US displayed in "Into the Wild". (FV)

4.3.4 Conclusions

The study's findings clearly prove that movie enjoyment should be understood as a private lived consumption experience that depends on a holistic tapestry of interrelated factors and, subsequently, should be studied in its entire complexity. In line with previous studies, we found that an individual's personal emotional engagement with the narrative, its characters and underlying philosophy, which allow for the temporary immersion into the movie's world, is of particular importance for one's movie enjoyment. The level and nature of a consumer's experienced immersion into the movie narrative is determined less by age or gender, but by one's very private motives and interests. The managerial implication of these findings is for film producers to stop heeding the calls of consultants (i.e. De Vany and Walls 2002; Eliashberg and Shugan 1997) for mass-produced, family-friendly, made-by-standard-formula movie packages that serve the smallest common denominator. Because consumers would like to enjoy the feeling of losing themselves in the movie consumption experience for a diversity of personal and intimate motives, the narrative has to be challenging and stimulate personal engagement from a variety of different angles. This would require each movie to be created again as a unique artistic product rather than as an interchangeable commodity. The point seems to be supported in particular by the recent global success and the growing popularity of both independent films and world cinema movies that tend to provide audiences with unique, interesting, involving, challenging and much more demanding narratives than Hollywood's current *standardised* and family-friendly blockbuster-diet. Moreover, after losing their former elitist image, arthouse cinemas and film-clubs are becoming increasingly popular alternatives in Europe to the multiplex cinema chains, which are often the vertically-integrated exhibition divisions of the major Hollywood studios (Kerrigan and Özbilgin 2002, 2004). Maybe, instead of

following the advice of accountants and consultants, the time has come for film producers to listen once again to real consumers as to how and why they enjoy watching movies in order to understand what movie consumption is really all about...

4.4 Paper 3 – 'The Book of Stars': Some Alternative Insights into Celebrity Fandom

While consumers have had a keen interest in the works and private lives of celebrities since the dawn of the Hollywood star system in the early 1920s, some consumers experience a significantly more intensive level of interest and admiration for a particular celebrity and, subsequently, become what are commonly known as *fans*. However, scant attention has been paid to how the relationship between fans and celebrities expresses itself in everyday consumer behaviour. This paper is taking an existential-phenomenological perspective to discuss fan behaviour as a holistic personal lived experience from a fan's point of view. By using subjective personal introspection, the lead author provides hereby insights into his private lived consumption experiences as the fan of the young and talented actress Jena Malone, which were obtained and recorded as contemporaneous data over a period of 15 months. In doing so, the paper demonstrates how drawing on narrative transportation theory may provide a deeper understanding on the nature of celebrity fandom. The study found that a consumer's fan experiences derive from one's personal engagement with the celebrity's artistic work and public persona, which is essentially the consumer's personal intertextual reading of what s/he perceives to be relevant and reliable media texts.

4.4.1 Introduction

Since the dawn of the Hollywood star system in the early 1920s, consumers have always had a keen interest in the works and private lives of movie stars (Dyer 1998; McDonald 2000) and other celebrities. Indeed, the public demand for celebrities is so strong these days that movie actors, directors, musicians, athletes, novelists and models have without doubt become an essential part of our everyday culture (Gabler 1998; Turner 2004). However, some consumers experience a significantly more intensive level of interest and admiration for a particular celebrity and, subsequently, become what are commonly known as *fans* (O'Guinn 1991; Thorne and Bruner 2006) or *celebrity worshippers* (McCutcheon et al. 2003). And I'm one of them! Yes, you have read correctly! Ever since I bought by chance the DVD of the movie *Saved!* (US 2004)

back in April 2005, I have been the devoted fan of the young, attractive and very talented actress Jena Malone, who features primarily in lesser known, yet much more interesting and challenging indie-movies such as *Donnie Darko* (US 2001), *The United States of Leland* (US 2003), *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005), *Four Last Songs* (UK 2007) and *Into the Wild* (US 2007). But what is it exactly that attracts an ordinary consumer like me to become and remain the devoted fan of a movie actress? What does the lived experience of being the fan of a movie actress (or any other celebrity for that matter) actually mean for the individual consumer? And how does celebrity fandom express itself in everyday consumer behaviour? Because these are very interesting questions, it is quite surprising that little research has so far sought to address them. The current study therefore aims to fill this knowledge gap by providing some insights into a consumer's holistic everyday lived fan experiences with a celebrity from an existential-phenomenological perspective (Thompson 1997). By using subjective personal introspection (Holbrook 1995), I describe and examine hereby my own private lived consumer experiences in becoming the fan of the actress Jena Malone back in 2005. In doing so, this research is not only looking for any evidence that either supports, questions or even contradicts previously held assumptions about fandom, but also draws on narrative transportation theory to explain fans' relationships with celebrities.

4.4.2 The Dangerous Lives of Fans

Despite a growing body of literature recently being dedicated to the study of fandom, a coherent understanding of what actually constitutes fandom is still missing. In fact, the interpretation of what a fan is often seems to be highly dependent on the underlying agenda of the researcher investigating the phenomenon. What is clear, though, is that both academic literature and popular media have placed fans consistently on the receiving end of ridicule, negative stereotyping and *bad press* (Jenson 1992). As desired, fans are hereby portrayed either as uneducated, mindless and tasteless numbs, who are manipulated by the dangerous and controlling popular mass culture (Fiske 1992; Gabler 1998; Sandvoss 2005), or as creative and subversive rebels against the corporate establishment, who poach and utilise commercial media texts for the creation of new textual products (Jenkins 1992; Shefrin 2004; Turner 2004). Some authors viewed fans as members of neo-religious cults, who worship celebrities like gods through shared rituals and the sacralisation of associated items within like-minded communities (Belk et al. 1989; Jindra 1994; Kozinets 1997; O'Guinn 1991). Others

described them as geeks and alienated, lonely social misfits, who experience for various reasons deficits in their social skills and networks (Horton and Wohl 1956). While often being intelligent, well-educated and highly successful at work or in school, in their private lives these consumers feel lonely, rejected and stigmatised especially by those others, who may be less intelligent and creative, but more privileged in terms of social skills, status and/or physical attractiveness (Kozinets 2001). Fandom would, therefore, provide a means of compensation and social interaction with similarly isolated individuals (Jenkins 1992). Some social psychologists, however, have in recent years set out to confirm sensationalist popular media reports by portraying fans as cognitively inflexible, dull and uncreative individuals (McCutcheon et al. 2003) or, even worse, as delusional, pathological-obsessive stalkers (McCutcheon et al. 2006). The choice is therefore all yours!

Yet, despite their different perspectives, all those studies have essentially two main things in common. Firstly, previous research studied only certain, more *extreme* subgroups of fans on special occasions such as Star Trek Conventions, football fan-clubs or fan-blogs (Jenson 1992; Kozinets 1997; Richardson 2004) while paying little attention to the ordinary everyday lived experiences of the *normal* fan. Secondly, the fandom literature focused either on the social dynamics and symbolic relationships that consumers have with other fans within their respective consumption subcultures (Jenkins 1992; Kozinets 2001) or on the mental states of celebrity worshippers (Leets et al. 1995; McCutcheon et al. 2003, 2006) instead of exploring the actual relationship between fans and their objects of admiration. Thus, drawing on narrative transportation theory (Gerrig 1993) may provide some explanations to fill the gap in the literature. Though primarily applied to reading, this theory suggests that *enjoyment can benefit from the experience of being immersed in a narrative world through cognitive, emotional and imaginary involvement as well as from the consequences of that immersion*, which include emotional connections with characters and self-transformations (Green et al. 2004: 311). Transportation is hereby seen as a process by which the consumer actively seeks to be taken away from one's everyday life into imaginary narrative worlds, where one could experience a different self and engage empathetically with media characters like real friends (Gerrig 1993). Wohlfeil and Whelan (2008b) also found that the personal engagement with the narrative and its characters is further enhanced through out-of-text intertextuality by which the consumer

connects the narrative to one's own personal life experiences. As Dyer (1998), Geraghty (2000) and Turner (2004) viewed movie stars and other celebrities essentially as living textual images or human brands (Thomson 2006), a consumer's interest and admiration for one's favourite celebrity could be interpreted as a kind of losing oneself into the factual melodramatic narrative (Argo et al. 2008) that is the celebrity's public life. In doing so, the consumer may sympathise (= feeling with), empathise (= sharing the feelings) or even identify (= feel the feelings) with the celebrity like a media character (Cohen 2001; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008b). After all, it is extremely unlikely that we would ever get to know the real, private person behind the public image in the media (Dyer 1998).

4.4.3 Into the Wild (or Methodology)

In order to gain truly some holistic insights into a consumer's personal everyday lived fan experiences with one's favourite celebrity, the consumer should be given a voice (Stern 1998) by focusing from an insider perspective on the consumer experience in the way it presents itself to consciousness (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Thompson 1997). But in taking an existential-phenomenological perspective, I also have to disappoint all those readers now, who are expecting to find some hard, scientific data obtained through hypothetical-deductive methods. Instead, I use a controversial research method known as subjective personal introspection (SPI), which is an extreme form of participant observation that *focuses on impressionistic narrative accounts of the writer's own private consumption experiences* (Holbrook 2005a: 45). The major advantage of this method is that it allows the researcher for an easy, unlimited 24-hour access to an insider's lived experiences with the researched phenomenon without having to wrestle with ethical concerns regarding the informants' privacy (Brown 1998b). Therefore, I will provide some introspective insights into my own private lived consumption experiences as a fan of the actress Jena Malone, whereby I collected three types of introspective data. My lived fan experiences in the period from April to September 2005 were collected as retrospective data in a 36,000-words essay, which was written in September 2005 to describe how I became a Jena Malone fan. My everyday lived experiences as a Jena Malone fan from 11th September 2005 to 31st December 2006 were then collected as contemporaneous data while they occurred in real time to ensure a high degree of data accuracy. Contemporaneous introspective data field the unique advantage of providing a large pool of emotional data that would be inaccessible to any

other research method that is based on retrospective recall or pure observation and, thus, inevitably lost forever (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008b). To ensure data accessibility for external review, I have recorded the data systematically, unfiltered and on the spot in a specifically assigned diary (Patterson 2005). In total, I collected more than 150,000 hand-written words as raw contemporaneous data for hermeneutical analysis. Due to the limited space, the following short essay provides a brief snapshot into a consumer's early fan experiences with a focus on some interesting insights that have emerged iteratively from the introspective data recorded in 2005. The reader may hereby be reminded that the emphasis is placed less on the recollection of factual behaviour but more on the everyday lived experiences (i.e. private feelings, thoughts, fantasies and daydreams) as THE essential elements of the fan experience. My co-author reviewed the diary separately to ensure that both the essay and its interpretations truly reflect the recorded data.

4.4.4 Confessions of a Jena Malone Fan

As I said earlier, it all started back in April 2005, when I bought by chance the indie-film *Saved!* (US 2004) in a 3-DVDs-for-€20 sale. I can't really explain why, but I simply had this sudden urge creeping up in me that I had to own this particular movie. And it has become one of my favourite movies ever since! Moreover, from the very first moment I watched it, I was absolutely blown away by Jena Malone's acting performance in portraying the lead character Mary Cummings – a good Christian girl who tries to save her boyfriend from being gay by sacrificing her virginity, but gets pregnant as result and is, subsequently, ostracised exactly by those, who preach the Christian values of love, tolerance and forgiveness. Although I have to admit that I was attracted to her beautiful eyes, her charming smile and her natural beauty, I was also totally captivated by her believable, natural acting performance and simply had at once to watch the DVD for a second time. But this time, I switched to the commentary of the leading actresses Jena Malone and Mandy Moore. While I listened to Jena Malone explaining how she developed her character and talking about the context of particular movie scenes, I became even more fascinated by her. Not only is she pretty and an extremely good actress, but she also seemed to be an exceptionally interesting, smart and surprisingly mature young woman. Surely, there is always the danger of mistaking the actress with her role – unless you have seen her in a variety of other roles. For me, a really good actress is therefore one, who makes each of her characters appear to be real

and believable and who manages through her performance that you enjoy watching even those movies that you would have never watched otherwise. Because only a few actors/actresses would meet these criteria, I wanted – no I needed – to find out more about Jena Malone as a person and actress as well as to watch other movies with her. Hence, I started to browse the Internet for any information that I could get my hands on. Except that I could hardly find any at all! While there are hundreds of sites and articles for virtually any single talented and more often untalented wannabe celebrity on Earth, disappointingly little was available on Jena Malone. Nonetheless, on IMDb I found out that Jena Malone, at the age of 20 back then, had already featured in 20 movies, 3 TV soap guest roles and one audio recording of a theatre play¹⁶. Armed with this list, I started over the next weeks to buy the DVDs of *Donnie Darko* (US 2001), *Stepmom* (US 1998), *Cheaters* (US 2000), *The Dangerous Lives of Altar Boys* (US 2001) and *Life as a House* (US 2001). As I could empathetically relate to each of her characters as if they were “real” people, each of her movies that I watched convinced me more and more of her exceptional talent as an actress and increased an inherent desire in me to acquire ALL her movies for my private collection. But that was easier said than done, when I soon discovered that most of her movies have only been released in the US as region 1 DVDs, but not as European region 2 DVDs. While in the past this would have been the end of my efforts, this time I started to look desperately for suitable alternatives until I could replace them with a more suitable DVD release. Finally, I purchased an external DVD drive, which I locked into region 1 to watch those US DVDs that I bought on Amazon or eBay. All the time, I also felt this strong desire to learn more about Jena Malone as a person. Hence, when I uncovered Rommelmann’s (2000) well-researched article on the Infotrac database, I was (and still am) absolutely fascinated by what I learned about Jena Malone’s personal background and my admiration for her increased significantly.

Jena Malone was born on 21-11-1984 at Lake Tahoe, Nevada, as the unplanned result of a one-night stand and spent most of her childhood growing up in the poverty of trailer parks. With her single-mother being a struggling actress in an amateur theatre, Jena wanted to be a performer from early on and responded as a 10-year old to the ad of an acting school. While this acting school turned out to be a fraud, she, nonetheless, caught

¹⁶ By spring 2008, Jena Malone, now aged 23, has already starred in 27 movies, 4 TV soap guest roles, 2 movie voice-overs, one audio recording of a theatre play and played in 2006 for 6 months on Broadway.

the eye of Beverly Strong, an influential agent specialised in child actors, who signed her on the spot for International Creative Management and became also her personal manager. What impressed me most was that, even as an 11-year old, Jena preferred (to her managers' frustration) to feature in those film projects that were dear to her heart rather than in commercially promising blockbusters. Thus, Jena turned down roles in *Air Force One* or *The Parent Trap* (Lindsay Lohan got the part instead) to play the lead characters in *Bastard Out of Carolina* (US 1996), *Hope* (US 1997) and *Ellen Foster* (US 1997), for which she received critical acclaim, some film awards and a Golden Globe nomination. But life in Hollywood didn't turn out to be that glamorous for Jena and her mother. Because her mother was required by law to be present on set all the time, she couldn't work herself and Jena became the sole breadwinner. It also meant that Jena received only home-school education – though concluding from her interviews, she seems to be very well read! But worst of all, her full income was taxed at 45%, although 25% of her gross salaries were deducted as fees for manager, agency, etc., and production companies were required by Coogan's law to pay 30% of child actor salaries into blocked trusts, which only become accessible at the actor's 18th birthday (Rommelmann 2000). Thus, Jena was left with barely 11% of her salaries to live on. Finally, faced with a bill of \$150,000 in back taxes and near bankruptcy, Jena filed with 14 for legal emancipation from her mother, which was granted at her 15th birthday, in order to work legally like an adult and to access her blocked trusts to pay off her debts. Since then, she is managing her own career without interference from others, which also included firing her manager and others, who had profited from her, and switching to United Talent Agency, who offered much more favourable fees and absolute creative freedom (Cohen 2002; Rommelmann 2000). Furthermore, Jena focused on portraying complex young female characters with real problems in challenging and artistically creative independent film productions (Miller 2006). She also refuses to do glamour photo shoots that would *present girls with false beauty ideals they could hardly fulfil and only make them feel inadequate* (Rems 2004) and, in contrast to other young celebrities, shunned the glamorous LA party life by moving back to Lake Tahoe, where she felt happy as a child (Calhoun 2003).

I was really impressed by her life story and how she managed to stay true to herself despite her young age and the economic as well as personal pressure she was under. I felt, somehow, inspired by her. Back in Germany, I also grew up as one of those latch-

key kids in a *disadvantaged* working-class neighbourhood. Fortunately, my parents were among the very few, who were employed and earned a regular income, which allowed us to move to a better neighbourhood when I was 12. Furthermore, because movies have always provided me with a mental means of escape, I wanted to be an actor as well and even joined the drama society in school. But due to my poor grades, my parents insisted that I had to focus only on *practically relevant* subjects and made me quit. To be fair, I wasn't probably talented enough to succeed as an actor anyway. Still, there was always something missing... Years later, the movie *Dead Poets Society* inspired me to go to university and become a lecturer instead. While reading now Jena Malone's life story, I have the deepest respect for her and how she succeeded against all the odds in doing what she wanted to do. She is not only extremely talented, but also managed to resist all the temptations of glamour, party-life and the commercial exploitation of the Hollywood machinery without losing her personal integrity. As I said, quite an astonishing achievement for a young actress! And I was absolutely fascinated by Jena Malone, because she doesn't fit the typical celebrity life-style of glamour and scandal - probably that's why the media seems to ignore her. Instead, I like her as the normal person I perceive her to be with all her positive and negative qualities. Subsequently, I also started to collect photos that Jena Malone has personally hand-signed, which have by now become my most-valued treasures, as they somehow represent her physical presence in my life.

4.4.5 Hope (or Discussion)

Although the introspective essay only covered the first months of my private Jena Malone fan experiences, I will discuss now one interesting insight that emerged iteratively from the data by drawing on narrative transportation theory (Gerrig 1993). While previous studies viewed fandom mainly as the social interaction between like-minded fans within consumption subcultures (Jenkins 1992; Kozinets 2001), the introspective data clearly shows that my personal fan experiences and any subsequent consumer behaviour focused exclusively on my emotional attachment to Jena Malone herself. In fact, during the entire 15 months of self-observation, I have never shown any intentions to share my admiration for her with others and preferred to enjoy it just by myself. Although sexual attraction surely played an initial role in my interest in Jena Malone, there is clear evidence that my continuing attachment to her derives from my personal engagement with her artistic work as an actress and her public persona (Dyer

1998; Geraghty 2000). However, as I'm unlikely to ever get to know Jena Malone in person, my impression of her personality is essentially an intertextual reading of relevant and *reliable* media texts (i.e. articles, interviews, etc.), whereby especially those aspects of her personal life-story are emphasised that resonate strongly with my private life experiences, ideals and dreams and, subsequently, strengthened my emotional attachment to her. This process of introjection and projection (Gould 1993) allows for the feeling of *knowing* the celebrity like a friend, whose career and life choices are then followed empathetically as if s/he was a media character in an ongoing melodramatic narrative (Argo et al. 2008). For example, I empathised with her in how she handled even so maturely at a young age all the problems she had to face and admired how she developed into such a smart, nice and interesting personality without ever losing her personal integrity. Yet, contradicting Dyer's (1998) thesis that fans would admire celebrities as *flawless, superior* human-beings, whose image is consistent across their on- and off-screen persona, my emotional attachment to Jena Malone actually derives from viewing her as a *normal* girl with all her strengths and weaknesses. My admiration is also based on her flexibility as an actress to portray a diversity of characters that also differ from her off-screen persona. But my feeling of empathy for Jena Malone is further enhanced by engaging in out-of-text intertextuality (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008b), whereby I linked her personal life-story with my very own private life experiences to an extent where I even partially identified with her. This becomes particularly evident when I admire her courage and determination in following her dreams, while I failed to do the same even under less severe circumstances. Though I don't pretend that this is the only possible interpretation of the data, this study has nonetheless demonstrated how drawing on narrative transportation theory may provide a deeper understanding on the nature of consumers' emotional attachment towards their favourite celebrity.

4.5 Paper 4 – There's Something about Jena Malone: New Insights into How Celebrities Appeal to Consumers

Although the public demand for celebrities has grown so strong these days that they have without any doubt become an essential part of our everyday lives and contemporary market economy, the marketing literature has paid scant attention to them beyond their mere potential as product endorsers. Therefore, this paper explores how celebrities capture our attention and appeal to us personally. In doing so, it seeks to

explain in particular how and why consumers become emotionally attached to one celebrity, but remain indifferent to many other equally talented, interesting and attractive ones. Drawing on introspective insights from the author's own personal fan relationship with the film actress Jena Malone and consumer responses from previous ethnographic studies of celebrity fans, the paper examines what the substance of a celebrity is and how it appeals to the individual consumer. The study finds that the substance of a celebrity consists of four key human brand attributes through which s/he appeals to consumers as a) the performer, b) the real person underneath the performer, c) the tangible manifestation of both through products, and c) the social link to other consumers.

4.5.1 Introduction

For more than a century, the film industry and other creative industries have continuously been some of the commercially biggest industries in the world (De Vany 2004; Finney 2010; Hennig-Thurau 2004a; Kerrigan 2010; Ravid 1999). It should therefore be hardly surprising that, by virtue of being the creative industries' most visible faces that capture our imagination, film stars and celebrities in general have managed to claim a substantial space within our contemporary popular culture for themselves as well (Gamson 2006). Indeed, since the dawn of the Hollywood star system in the 1920s, consumers have always been fascinated by the creative performances and private lives of film stars and all other celebrities (Barbas 2001; De Cordova 1991; Dyer 1998; McDonald 2000). The public demand for celebrities has grown so strong these days that film stars and starlets, directors, rock/pop stars, athletes, TV and radio DJs, models and novelists have without any doubt become an essential part of our everyday lives (Gabler 1998; Geraghty 2000; Turner 2004) and the contemporary market economy (McCracken 1989; Thomson 2006). As a result, our popular media discourse and a number of cultural critics have even suggested that we are living now in a superficial world that is increasingly obsessed with fame, glamour and celebrity – or *'fake heroes'* and *'human pseudo-events'*, as they sometimes call it (Alberoni 2006; Boorstin 2006; Giles 2006; Schickel 1985; Thorp 1939). However, while our newspapers, glossy magazines, TV and radio shows and especially the Internet are bursting with the latest news, stories and gossip about the careers, private lives and *'scandals'* of the *'rich and famous'*, our favourite celebrities also provide us with many positive and negative emotions to experience.

But why are we, as consumers, so fascinated by celebrities that we devote so much time and money, never mind true emotional feelings, on some famous people that we will most likely never meet in person and who will probably never know that we exist? What exactly is it about them that captures our attention and appeals to us personally in the first place? And more importantly, how comes that we are often fascinated by certain celebrities or become even emotionally attached to a particular one, but remain completely indifferent to many other ones, who are equally talented, interesting and/or physically attractive? These are surely some valid questions that would be of particular interest to marketing and consumer researchers. Yet, while celebrities undoubtedly play a vital commercial role within the creative industries and contemporary culture, surprisingly little marketing or consumer research has investigated how celebrities appeal as human brands to consumers. In fact, marketing scholars have traditionally found it (and often still find it) extremely difficult to view celebrities as products or brands in their own rights (Kerrigan and O'Reilly 2008) rather than merely as a means of endorsing other products (McCracken 1989; Thomson 2006). At best, they studied what role film stars may play in the commercial success of films (Albert 1998; Elberse 2007; Wallace et al. 1993; Wei 2006). Because this scant attention is quite disappointing, the present paper addresses this knowledge gap by providing some new insights into how celebrities appeal to consumers. First, I review the interdisciplinary stardom and celebrity literature by looking beyond the boundaries of marketing and consumer research. Then, I draw introspectively on my own personal fan relationship with the film actress Jena Malone to examine the substance of a human brand. In doing so, I try to identify a celebrity's human brand attributes that attract a consumer's personal attention and even encourage an emotional attachment to the celebrity.

4.5.2 The Book of Stars

Though it is pretty disappointing that the marketing literature has paid such scant attention to film stars and celebrities beyond their mere potential as product endorsers (McCracken 1989; Thomson 2006) and their role in a film's commercial success (Albert 1998; Elberse 2007), the audience appeal of film stars and celebrities has, nonetheless, caught the interest of film and media scholars. Subsequently, there are significant bodies of literature on stardom in film studies and on celebrity culture in media and cultural studies, which often tend to complement each other despite their different points of departure.

The focus of the celebrity literature has traditionally been on the *'bigger question'* of what meaning(s) fame and celebrity have in our contemporary culture. Hence, cultural critics have quarrelled for nearly a century as to whether celebrity culture would represent either a serious cultural decline or a process of social levelling (Evans and Hesmondhalgh 2005). Proponents of the traditional *celebrity-as-cultural-decline* perspective (i.e. Gabler 1998; Schickel 1985) are influenced by Munsterberg's (1916) concept of the vulnerable audience, which implies that, as passive recipients of media texts, consumers would be incapable of distinguishing fictional media images from factual reality. Cultural critics such as Adorno and Horkheimer (2006) and Thorp (1939) have then elaborated on this idea further to theorise that the purpose of the creative industries – and, by extension, celebrity culture – would be to divert people's attention away from the important things and direct them towards orchestrated, superficial pseudo-events. But Boorstin (2006) went even a step further. According to him, fame was in the past attributed as a public acknowledgement of a person's special skills and achievements and, thus, had scarcity value. Celebrity, however, would be awarded without the requirement of any talent or achievement. Instead, he argued that celebrity stands for a culture that seeks instant gratification and values surface image, narcissistic self-obsession and fame-for-its-own-sake over substance and the striving for a greater good (Boorstin 2006). Yet, his much-cited blanket view that celebrities are merely *'people who are only famous for being famous'* is quite unfair, as their respective claims to fame actually are pretty diverse. In fact, celebrities can be famous for their artistic-creative talent, their professional occupation, their personal relationships with (other) famous people (i.e. as a spouse, offspring, relative or love affair) or their notoriety for an *'outrageous'* and *'scandalous'* public lifestyle, such as an excessive social party life, having extra-marital love affairs, posing for nude photographs in the tabloids or having a home-made porn *'leaked'* onto the Internet (Turner 2004).

Proponents of the more recent *celebrity-as-social-levelling* perspective, on the other hand, have taken a more optimistic view. In their opinion, celebrity culture is the natural end-point in a long process of democratisation in capitalist consumer cultures (Evans and Hesmondhalgh 2005; Turner 2004). While Alberoni (2006) still argued that film stars and celebrities would constitute a *'powerless elite'*, who can command the attention and reverence of the media and audiences alike but have no real political

power, Marshall (1997) suggested that celebrities are visual representations of social mobility in democratic societies, where fame is rewarding one's effort in self-improvement. They, therefore, express the democratic values and personal freedom that capitalist consumer culture offers each of us through the widely available media technologies and consumer products (Evans and Hesmondhalgh 2005; Turner 2004). But even if we don't rise to fame ourselves, we are still empowered as audiences to determine through our consumption preferences which celebrities would succeed in a highly competitive market (Marshall 1997). Yet, despite their different views on the meaning of celebrity culture, both perspectives have in common that their discussion's focus is centred on the idea that celebrity reflects the human desire for being famous and recognised (Giles 2006; Turner 2004).

Due to its origins in film studies, the stardom literature has taken a very different direction and views film stars essentially as a specific type of film texts. Thus, film stars are critically examined as complex representative systems of cultural symbols that are constructed through intertextual networks of film ('*on-screen*') and other media ('*off-screen*') texts (Dyer 1998; King 1991). The aim, thereby, is "*not to reveal the true self of the star, but to analyse the explicit and implicit meanings of precisely that mediated image and to read it in the context of wider ideological and social discourses*" (Watson, 2007: 130). In his seminal book *Stars*, Dyer (1998) views film stars as systems of semiotic images that personify the consumer society's cultural ideals of success, glamour, the extraordinary and even the divine. Despite being literally embodied by real human beings through their name, physical appearance, voice and acting skills, Dyer theorised that film stars are accessible to us only through their semiotic on- and off-screen manifestations in various film and other media texts, in which they portray a firm, stable and recognisable canon of virtually identical characters (cultural archetypes) that personify particular cultural values and desires (Dyer 1998; Hollinger 2006). Moreover, drawing on selected examples from the Hollywood studio era of the 1920s to early-1950s, Dyer (1998) also argued that film stars would be admired as '*flawless, superior*' human beings, who display a consistent public image both on- and off-screen by portraying only those characters on film that would mirror their own '*true*' personality and life-style in real life (Hollinger 2006; King 1991). Though they never referred to each other, McCracken (1989) shared this view by describing celebrities as complex and individualised sets of culturally constructed meanings that they

accumulate through their fictional roles. Film stars are therefore seen as distinct and different from '*common film actors*', who merely represent the film industry's professional, but '*faceless*' labour force that would remain unnoticed by the audience (De Cordova 1991; Geraghty 2000; McDonald 2000).

In doing so, the stardom literature fails to accept that most film stars are actually experienced theatre and film actors, who just happen to have played in some commercially successful films, and that audiences may actually enjoy the acting performances of film stars rather than consuming their mere textual presence (Lovell 2003). It also ignores the fact that film stars portray their characters by following a pre-written script under a director's supervision. Furthermore, despite making an attempt to explain the cultural appeal of film stars, like the celebrity literature, the stardom literature fails to explain why we feel attracted and become emotionally attached to one particular celebrity, but remain indifferent to others.

4.5.3 Into the Wild (Methodology)

This paper actually emerged as a side-product from a much larger introspective study of a consumer's fan relationship with a film actress. Using a narrative form of subjective personal introspection (SPI), I hereby examined my own personal fan relationship with the film actress Jena Malone. SPI is an extreme form of participant observation that '*focuses on impressionistic narrative accounts of the writer's own private consumption experiences*' (Holbrook 2005a: 45). My lived fan experiences in the period from April to September 2005 were collected as retrospective data in a 36,000-words essay, which was written in September 2005 to describe how I became a Jena Malone fan. From 11th September 2005 to 31st December 2006, I collected my everyday lived fan experiences with Jena Malone as contemporaneous data while they occurred in real time to ensure a high degree of data accuracy. Contemporaneous introspective data field the unique advantage of providing a large pool of emotional data that would be inaccessible to any other research method that is based on retrospective recall or pure observation and, thus, inevitably lost forever (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008a, 2011c). To ensure data accessibility for external review, I have recorded the data systematically, unfiltered and on the spot in a specifically assigned diary (Patterson 2005). In total, I collected more than 150,000 hand-written words as raw contemporaneous data for hermeneutical analysis (Thompson 1997). However, while reviewing the transcripts, it became quickly

evident that I wasn't attracted to Jena Malone as a simple, homogeneous semiotic textual construct of cultural meaning, as the stardom literature suggests. Instead, she appealed to me quite differently as a creative actress, as her portrayed characters, as the '*real*' person underneath the actress, as the physical manifestation of both the actress and the person, and as a social link to other consumers. This suggests that the substance of a celebrity, far from being just a one-dimensional semiotic receptacle of cultural meaning, would actually be a multi-dimensional textual construct, whose different human brand attributes offer a special individual or combined appeal to each consumer; and, thus, a very personal '*hook to bite*'.

4.5.4 Four Last Songs

Both McCracken (1989) and the stardom literature that followed in Dyer's (1998) footsteps have viewed film stars and celebrities as semiotic receptacles of cultural meaning, which are the textually constructed accumulation of their on-screen film characters and off-screen media appearances. Thus, they would display a consistent public brand image both on- and off-screen by portraying only those characters on film that would mirror their own '*true*' real-life personality and life-style (Hollinger 2006; King 1991). Yet, the findings that emerged from the introspective data of my personal emotional attachment to the film actress Jena Malone clearly indicate that a celebrity is a much more complex persona that attracts our attention and interest through different attributes, which appeal to consumers individually or symbiotically in a personalised way and, subsequently, elicit various kinds of emotional responses, i.e. curiosity, interest, disgust, sexual attraction or emotional attachment. A closer reading of the consumer responses in earlier ethnographic studies of fan-clubs (i.e. Henry and Caldwell 2007; O'Guinn 1991; Stacey 1994) supports the notion generated by the introspective data that four key human brand attributes provide the main platform for consumers' attraction to a celebrity. As shown in Figure 1 (see Appendix), these human brand attributes refer to: a) the performer and one's creative performances, b) the real person underneath the performer, c) the physical manifestation of both through products, and d) the social link to other consumers.

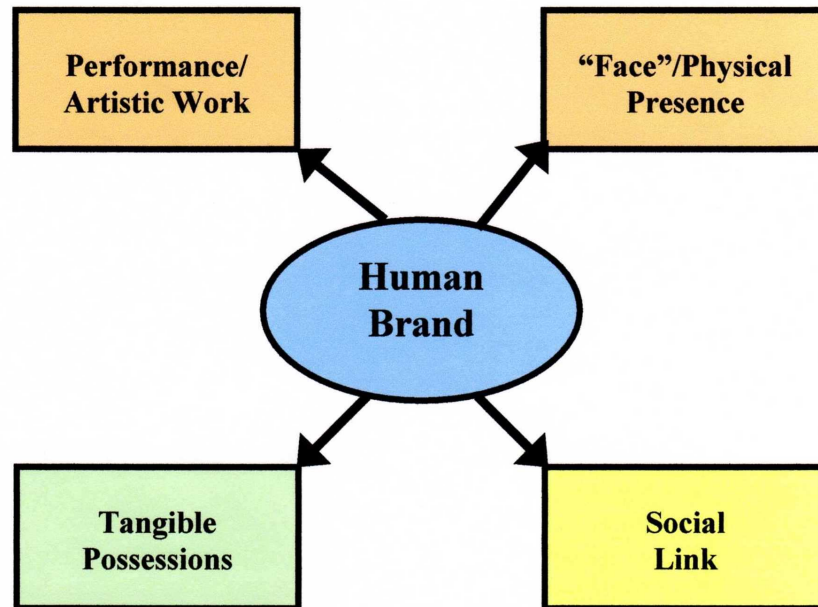


Figure 1: Human Brand Attributes Providing an Appeal to Consumers

The Celebrity as a Performer

Every celebrity, irrespective of his or her claim to fame, is first and foremost a creative performer of some sorts and, thus, appeals to consumers through the quality of one's artistic performances. For example, Jena Malone is a film actress, who primarily stars in interesting and challenging independent films and appeals to me through the quality of her acting skills in "making all of her portrayed characters appear to be believable and real". It is thereby interesting to note that I clearly differentiate between the actress Jena Malone and the various characters she portrays on screen. In fact, what particularly appeals to me about Jena Malone as performer is her flexibility to portray a diverse range of characters on screen that all vary significantly from her off-screen persona in the media. Barbas (2001) and Stacey (1994) observed similar patterns among their informants. This strongly contradicts Dyer's (1998) theory that a film star's persona is constructed out of the intertextual semiotic accumulation of film and media texts to be consistent on- and off-screen. Thus, the performer doesn't appeal so much as a semiotic receptacle of cultural meaning, but is valued as a creative artist.

The Celebrity as a Person (or "Physical Presence")

Even Dyer (1998) acknowledged that a film star is embodied by a real-living person, who gives the performer a unique face, body, voice and personality that differentiates him or her from other performers. But the physical presence also provides consumers

with clear evidence that the performer is not only a human brand, but also a real human being with a private life, personality, personal views and social relationships, who experiences joy and pain or success and failure like any other person as well. Thus, it is quite obvious that a celebrity appeals to consumers as a person as well, i.e. as a role model, as an ideal “friend”, as a potential mate or just as a figure of contempt. For instance, one particular appeal that Jena Malone is having for me all the time is that “*she presents the very type of girl I’m always falling for*”. In other words, in terms of her physical appearance, her personality, her intelligence, her artistic nature and her life-style she is the manifestation of the girl of my dreams, which clearly distinguishes her from other equally talented and attractive celebrities and sets her rather in competition with females in my everyday environment. However, as it is highly unlikely that we ever get to meet our favourite celebrities in person, we construct them instead based on our own values and inner most desires by using the celebrity’s *private persona* in the media as raw material.

The Celebrity as a Tangible Possession

The illusiveness of the celebrity for consumers is highlighted by the intangible nature of the performer, the creative performances and the private person underneath. Hence, a specific appeal of the celebrity lies in allowing consumers to take possession of the performer, the creative performances and even the celebrity’s physical presence through the acquisition of relevant tangible products. While it is obvious that I made her acting performances tangible through the purchase of her films on DVD and also collected video files of her appearances in the media or in production diaries, where she talks about her work as an actress, Jena Malone’s physical presence has manifested itself in posters and photos of her decorating both my private living-space and my office. But my most cherished treasures are Jena Malone’s original hand-signed autographs that she has in person dedicated to me personally and, thus, symbolise her physical presence in my everyday life (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2011c).

The Celebrity as a Social Link

As a celebrity is usually admired (or disliked) by more than one consumer, s/he appeals to consumers by providing them with the opportunity to share and enjoy one’s feelings for the performer and/or the person with other like-minded individuals (Turner 2004) and admire or criticise the performances together. Previous studies by Henry and

Caldwell (2007) or O'Guinn (1991), thus, looked in particular at the social interaction between members of fan-clubs in sharing their admiration for a pop singer. Some fandom scholars have even suggested that the participation in fan communities would be the primary motivation for a consumer to be a fan in the first place (Fiske 1992; Kozinets 2001). However, I have never shared nor had even the slightest intention to share my admiration for Jena Malone with other consumers beyond recommending her films to friends. In fact, despite endorsing her films (and the quality of her acting performances) to other potential viewers, I still enjoyed watching those films just by myself. The reason for these contradictory behaviour patterns can be explained by focusing on what other human brand attributes of the celebrity consumers are actually sharing or not. The celebrity attributes that consumers tend to share and enjoy with others refer to the performer (i.e. the acting skills) and, especially, the creative performances (i.e. the acting performance and even the quality of the film). However, consumers are less like to share their emotional attachment to the '*real*' person underneath the performer with others. After all, who would like to share one's flame, sweetheart or ideal mate with another person?

4.5.5 Conclusion

Despite our growing demand for celebrities, the marketing literature has paid scant attention to them beyond the mere role as product endorsers (McCracken 1989). Both the stardom and the celebrity literature have also failed to explain how a celebrity appeals to an individual consumer and why we are attracted to one celebrity, but not to another one. In this paper, I have therefore argued that a particular celebrity's attractiveness for an individual consumer would depend on how strongly each of his/her human brand attributes, either individually or symbiotically, appeals to the consumer's personal values, interests and beauty ideals as well as unfulfilled conscious and unconscious desires in particular. If the consumer experiences certain unfulfilled desires, s/he is unconsciously looking for a specific '*hook*' that promises to satisfy this specific set of desires. As each of a celebrity's unique attributes is thereby acting as such a hook, every person, who is looking for one's '*personal hook*', is in a lake full of different hooks provided by numerous celebrities bound to find the one s/he unconsciously looking for – even if it requires '*trying out*' a few others first. But once the right '*hook provider*' is found, there is no need for the consumer to look for another one. And this is usually the point where the consumer becomes a fan and experiences a

strong emotional attachment and/or sexual appeal to a very particular film star or another celebrity...

4.6 Paper 5 – ‘The Book of Stars’: Understanding a Consumer’s Fan Relationship with a Film Actress through a Narrative Transportation Approach

Although consumers have always been fascinated by the works and private lives of film stars, scant attention has been paid as to how the relationship between fans and film actors expresses itself in everyday consumer behaviour. This paper sets therefore out to explore celebrity fandom as a holistic lived experience from an individual fan’s insider point of view. Using subjective personal introspection, the lead author provides insights into his own private everyday lived fan relationship with the actress Jena Malone. The findings indicate that the fan engages with the film star’s public persona through a personal intertextual reading of ‘*reliable*’ media texts, which can even result in a feeling of ‘*knowing*’ the celebrity like a personal friend – and even ‘*love*’.

4.6.1 Introduction

Since the dawn of the Hollywood star system in the early 1920s, consumers have always been fascinated by the works and private lives of film stars and any other celebrities (Barbas 2001; Dyer 1998; McDonald 2000). Indeed, the public demand for celebrities has grown so strong these days that film actors, directors, musicians, athletes, novelists and models have without doubt become an essential part of our everyday culture (Gabler 1998; Geraghty 2000; Turner 2004) and contemporary market economy (Thomson 2006). Surely, most people tend to have merely a fleeting interest in celebrities per se and enjoy primarily the exchange of gossip with other like-minded individuals (Turner 2004). But some consumers experience a significantly more intensive level of interest and admiration for an individual celebrity and, subsequently, become what are commonly known as *fans* (Leets et al. 1995; O’Guinn 1991; Smith et al. 2007) or *celebrity worshippers* (McCutcheon et al. 2003). And, as it happens, I’m one of them. Ever since I bought by chance the DVD of the indie-film *Saved!* (US 2004) back in April 2005, I have been the devoted fan of the young, attractive and very talented actress Jena Malone, who features primarily in lesser known, yet much more interesting and challenging indie-films such as *Donnie Darko* (US 2001), *The United States of Leland* (US 2003), *Four Last Songs* (UK 2007), *Into the Wild* (US 2007), *The Ruins* (US 2008) and *The Messenger* (US 2009). But what is it exactly that attracts an

ordinary consumer like me to become and remain the devoted fan of a film actress? What does the lived experience of being the fan of a film actress (or any other celebrity for that matter) mean for the individual consumer? And how does celebrity fandom express itself in everyday consumer behaviour?

Because these are very interesting questions, it is quite surprising that little research has so far sought to address them. In order to fill this knowledge gap, the current study provides some insider insights into a consumer's holistic everyday lived fan experiences with one's admired celebrity from an existential-phenomenological perspective (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Thompson 1997). Using subjective personal introspection (Brown 1998b; Gould 2008b; Holbrook 1995), I describe and examine hereby my own private lived consumption experiences of becoming the fan of the film actress Jena Malone back in 2005. In doing so, this research is not only looking for any evidences that either support, question or even contradict previously held assumptions about fandom, but also draws on narrative transportation theory to explain a fan's experienced relationship with one's admired celebrity as an immersion into a '*melodramatic narrative*'.

4.6.2 The Dangerous Lives of Celebrity Fans

While a growing interdisciplinary body of literature has been investigating in particular sports and media fans, it still lacks a coherent understanding of what actually constitutes fandom in the first place. In fact, the interpretation of what a fan is seems often to be highly dependent on the underlying agenda of the researcher studying the phenomenon (Smith et al. 2007). What is clear, though, is that both academic literature and popular media have placed fans consistently on the receiving end of negative stereotyping, ridicule and *bad press* (Barbas 2001; Jenson 1992). As desired, fans are conceptualised either as uneducated, gullible and vulnerable '*numbs*', who are easily manipulated by the dangerous and controlling popular mass culture (Boorstin 2006; Fiske 1992; Gabler 1998; Schickel 1985), or as subversive and creative rebels against the corporate establishment, who poach and utilise commercial media texts to create new textual products (Barbas 2001; Jenkins 1992; Turner 2004). Some authors portrayed fans as members of neo-religious cults, who worship celebrities like gods through shared rituals and the sacralisation of associated items within like-minded communities (Kozinets 1997; O'Guinn 1991). Others described them as geeks and alienated, lonely social

misfits, who experience for various reasons deficits in their social skills and networks (Horton and Wohl 1956). While often being intelligent, well-educated and highly successful at work or school, these consumers feel in their private lives lonely, rejected and stigmatised especially by those others, who may be less intelligent and creative, but more privileged in terms of social skills, status and/or physical attractiveness (Kozinets 2001). Fandom would provide a means of compensation and social interaction with similarly isolated individuals. In following Munsterberg's (1916) legacy, however, some social psychologists have recently set out on a quest to confirm sensationalist stereotypes in the popular media by portraying fans as cognitively inflexible, gullible and dull individuals (McCutcheon et al. 2003) or, even worse, as delusional, pathological-obsessive stalkers (McCutcheon et al. 2006).

In light of these devastating views of fans, admitting to one's infatuation with a film actress and risking to be branded with one of the common stereotypes seems to be an unwise move. But maybe there is much more to a consumer's personal fan relationship with a celebrity than previous research have uncovered so far. Indeed, despite their different perspectives, all those studies have essentially two main things in common. Firstly, previous research studied only certain, more '*extreme*' subgroups of fans on special occasions such as Star Trek conventions, fan-club meetings or fan-blogs (Jenkins 1992; Kozinets 1997; O'Guinn 1991) while paying scant attention to the ordinary everyday lived experiences of the '*normal*' fan. Secondly, the fandom literature has focused either on the social dynamics and symbolic relationships that consumers form with other fans within their respective consumption subcultures (Kozinets 2001; Richardson 2004) or on the mental well-being of celebrity worshippers (Leets et al. 1995; McCutcheon et al. 2003, 2006) instead of exploring the nature of fans' personal relationships with their subject of admiration. Hence, a narrative transportation approach may provide some alternative explanations to fill the literature gap and to reconceptualise our understanding of fans. Narrative transportation theory (Gerrig 1993; Green and Brock 2000) was developed to understand the phenomenon of '*getting lost in a book*', where the reader is so absorbed in a story that s/he becomes temporarily unaware of one's surroundings. Gerrig (1993) described the narrative transportation experience as a psychological process, whereby a consumer ventures mentally to a narrative world by some means of transportation (i.e. the text) and by performing certain actions such as imagining the story, characters and sceneries. In

doing so, the reader travels some distance away from one's daily life, which even becomes temporarily inaccessible, and after some time returns back home again – though '*somewhat changed*' by the experience of the journey (Green et al. 2004). In allowing the consumer to immerse oneself into exciting narrative worlds, where one could experience a different self and engage with fictional characters like real friends, the narrative transportation process provides the consumer with a temporary means of escape (Batat and Wohlfeil 2009).

But how can drawing on narrative transportation theory explain a consumer's fan relationship with a film actor/actress? After all, the theory was initially aimed at understanding the mental activities of reading a book, while film actors are living people. The rationale behind the proposed approach, however, becomes clear when consulting the stardom literature. Rather than as real human beings, Dyer (1998), Geraghty (2000) or Turner (2004) viewed film stars essentially as living textual images or human brands, whose on- and off-screen persona, personal identity and reflected values are carefully designed ('*authored*'), positioned and managed in the media by talent agencies (or previously by the Hollywood studios) to suit specific market needs (Thomson 2006). Thus, the consumer's interest in the admired celebrity can be interpreted as a kind of '*losing*' oneself into the factual melodramatic narrative (Argo et al. 2008) that is the film star's public life as presented by various media texts that may include film characters, interviews, articles and gossip. In a study on film consumption, Wohlfeil and Whelan (2008b) found that the personal engagement with the melodramatic story and its characters is further enhanced through '*out-of-text intertextuality*' (Hirschman 2000b) by which the consumer connects them to one's own private life experiences. Similarly, the fan may sympathise (= feel with the film star as an observer), empathise (= share the film star's feelings due to similar personal experiences) or even identify (= feel the film star's feelings as one's own) with the admired celebrity like a media character (Cohen 2001; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008b). After all, it is extremely unlikely that we would ever get to know the real, private person behind the film star's public image in the media (Dyer 1998).

4.6.3 Into the Wild (or Methodology)

In order to gain some truly holistic insights into a consumer's personal everyday lived fan relationship with one's favourite film star, the consumer should be given a voice

(Stern 1998) by focusing from an insider perspective (Smith et al. 2007) on the consumer experience in the way it presents itself to consciousness (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Thompson 1997). Thus, I use a controversial research method known as subjective personal introspection (SPI), which was introduced to consumer research by Holbrook (1995) over 20 years ago and advanced in particular by Gould (1993) and Brown (1998b). In its purest form, SPI is an '*extreme form of participant observation that focuses on impressionistic narrative accounts of the writer's own private consumption experiences*' (Holbrook 2005a: 45), where the researcher is also the sole informant. One of the major advantages of this research method is that it allows the researcher for an unlimited 24-hour access to an insider's everyday lived experiences with the researched phenomenon without having to wrestle with ethical concerns regarding the informants' privacy (Brown 1998b). Moreover, SPI enables the researcher to explore the subjective nature of human feelings, dreams, sensations and streams of consciousness related to consumption (Gould 2008b) in the very way they are experienced by the individual, but remain inaccessible through traditional *scientific* or *qualitative* research methods. Hence, for this study, I provide some introspective insights into my own private lived consumption experiences as a devoted fan of the film actress Jena Malone after having collected three types of introspective data.

My lived fan experiences in the period from April to September 2005 were obtained as retrospective data in a 36,000-words essay, which was written in September 2005 to describe how I became a Jena Malone fan. My everyday lived experiences as a Jena Malone fan from 11th September 2005 to 31st December 2006 were then collected as contemporaneous data while they occurred in real time to ensure a high degree of '*data accuracy*' (Wallendorf and Brucks 1993). Contemporaneous introspective data field the unique advantage of providing a large pool of *emotional data* that would be inaccessible to any other research method that is based on retrospective recall or pure observation and, thus, inevitably lost forever (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008b). To ensure data accessibility for external review, I have recorded the data systematically, unfiltered and on the spot in a specifically assigned diary (Patterson 2005). In total, I obtained more than 150,000 hand-written words as raw contemporaneous data aided by 50 photographs for a thorough hermeneutic part-to-whole analysis (Thompson 1997). The entire transcript was read to gain a first sense of the overall picture. Due to early impressions, the data were broken into manageable, logically coherent chunks to be

examined individually. Emerging key themes were then put into the context of each other and the overall consumer narrative. As the recorded data represented a *'plotless'* sequence of instances, they were summarised in an extensive narrative that reflects the chronological order of events and stays true to the emotional consumption experiences and feelings. Due to the limited space, the following essay provides a brief snapshot of this consumer narrative with a focus on some interesting insights that have emerged iteratively from the introspective data recorded in 2005. The reader may be reminded that the emphasis is placed less on the recollection of factual behaviour but more on the emotional daily lived experiences (i.e. private feelings, thoughts, fantasies and daydreams) that enhanced or derived from the consumer's fan relationship.

4.6.4 Confessions of a Jena Malone Fan (An Introspective Essay)

“As I said earlier, it all started back in April 2005, when I bought by chance the indie-film *Saved!* (US 2004) in a 3-DVDs-for-€20 sale. I can't really explain why, but I simply had this sudden urge creeping up in me that I had to own this particular film. And it has become one of my favourite films ever since! Moreover, from the very first moment I watched it, I was absolutely blown away by Jena Malone's acting performance in portraying the lead character Mary Cummings – a good Christian girl who tries to save her boyfriend from being gay by sacrificing her virginity, but gets pregnant as a result and is, subsequently, ostracised exactly by those, who preach the Christian values of love, tolerance and forgiveness. Though I have to admit that I was very attracted to her beautiful eyes, her charming smile and her natural beauty, I was also totally captivated by her believable, natural acting performance and simply had to watch the DVD at once for a second time. But this time, I switched to the commentary of the leading actresses Jena Malone and Mandy Moore. While I listened to Jena Malone explaining how she developed her character within the context of particular film scenes, I became even more fascinated by her. Not only is Jena Malone an extremely good actress and very pretty, but she also seems to be an exceptionally interesting, smart and surprisingly mature young woman. Surely, there is always the danger of mistaking the actress with her character – unless you have seen her in a variety of other roles. For me, a really good actress is therefore one, who makes each of her characters appear to be believably *'real'* and who manages through her performance that you enjoy even those films that you would have never watched otherwise.

Because only a few actors/actresses would meet these criteria, I wanted – no I needed – to find out more about Jena Malone as a person and actress as well as to watch other films with her. Hence, I started to browse the Internet for any information that I could get my hands on. Only, I could hardly find any at all! While there are hundreds of sites and articles for virtually every single talented and more often untalented (wannabe) celebrity on Earth, disappointingly little was available on Jena Malone. Nonetheless, I discovered on IMDb that Jena Malone, at the age of 20 back then, had already featured in 20 films, 3 TV soap guest roles and one audio recording of a theatre play¹⁷. Armed with this list, I started over the next weeks to buy the DVDs of *Stepmom* (US 1998), *Cheaters* (US 2000), *The Dangerous Lives of Altar Boys* (US 2001), *Donnie Darko* (US 2001) and *Life as a House* (US 2001). As I could relate to each of her characters empathetically as if they were ‘real’ people, each of her films that I watched convinced me more and more of her exceptional talent as an actress and increased an inherent desire in me to acquire ALL her films for my private film collection. But that was easier said than done, when I soon discovered that most of her films have only been released in the US as Region 1 DVDs, but not as European Region 2 DVDs. While in the past this would have been the end of my efforts, this time I started to look desperately for suitable alternatives like VHS videotapes or VCDs until I could replace them with a more suitable DVD release. Finally, I purchased an external DVD drive for my laptop, which I locked then into Region 1 to watch those US DVDs that I bought on Amazon.com or eBay to satisfy my hunger for her films. All the time, however, I also felt in me this strong desire to learn more about the ‘genuine’ private person Jena Malone – something I have never really experienced in this form before. Thus, when I discovered Rommelmann’s (2000) *LA Weekly* article, I was (and still am) absolutely captivated by what I learned about Jena Malone’s personal background and my admiration for her increased significantly.

Jena Malone was born on 21-11-1984 in Sparks, Nevada, as the unplanned result of a one-night stand and spent most of her childhood growing up in the poverty of trailer parks. With her single-mother Debbie being a struggling actress in an amateur theatre, Jena wanted to be a performer from early on and responded as a 10-year old to the ad of

¹⁷ By autumn 2009, Jena Malone, now aged 25, has already featured in 31 films, 5 TV soap guest roles, 2 film voice-overs, one audio recording of a theatre play and starred in two Off-Broadway plays in 2006 and 2009.

an acting school, which turned out to be a fraud. Nonetheless, Jena caught the eyes of both Beverly Strong, who signed her on the spot to become her personal manager, and Anjelica Houston, who cast Jena for the title character in her directorial debut *Bastard Out of Carolina* (US 1996). Anjelica Houston also introduced Jena and her mother to Toni Howard, an influential agent specialised in child actors, who signed her immediately for International Creative Management. But what really impressed me most was that, even as an 11-year old, Jena preferred (to her manager's frustration) to feature primarily in those film projects that were dear to her heart rather than in commercially promising blockbusters. Thus, she turned down roles in *Air Force One* and *The Parent Trap* (Lindsay Lohan got the part instead) to play the lead characters in *Bastard Out of Carolina* (US 1996), *Hope* (US 1997) and *Ellen Foster* (US 1997), for which Jena received critical acclaim, some film awards and a Golden Globe nomination. Yet, life in Hollywood didn't turn out to be that glamorous for Jena and her mother. As Debbie was required by law to be present on set at all times, she couldn't work herself and Jena became the family's sole breadwinner. It also meant that Jena received only home-schooling – though concluding from her interviews, she seems to be very intelligent, very well read and really knowledgeable. But worst of all, after approx. 30% of her gross earnings were already deducted as fees for her manager, agency, accountant, lawyers, etc., her full income was taxed at 45%, although film production companies were required by Coogan's law to pay 30% of a child actor's salaries into blocked trusts, which only become accessible at the actor's 18th birthday (Rommelmann 2000). This meant that Jena was rarely left with more than 7% of her earnings to live on.

When finally faced with a bill of \$150,000 in back taxes and near bankruptcy, Jena filed, aged 14, for legal emancipation from her mother, which was granted at her 15th birthday, in order to work legally like an adult in the film industry and to access her blocked trusts to pay off her debts. Since then, she is managing her own career without the interference and approval from others (Calhoun 2003; Rommelmann 2000). This also included firing her manager Beverly Strong and any other stakeholders, who had profited from her in the past, as well as switching to United Talent Agency, who offered much more favourable terms and absolute creative freedom. Furthermore, Jena focused on portraying complex young female characters with real problems in challenging and artistically creative independent film productions rather than on fulfilling some ominous

stereotypes in those typical teen-comedies (Lyon 2008; Miller 2006). That's why she also refuses to do glamour photo shoots for fashion or celebrity magazines that would '*present girls with false beauty ideals they can hardly fulfil and only make them feel inadequate*' (Rems 2004). In contrast to many other young film actors, she shunned the glamorous LA party life as well by moving back to Lake Tahoe, where she felt happy as a child (Calhoun 2003; Lyon 2008). To me, this explains maybe why Jena Malone managed the transition from child actress to a serious young adult actress so effortlessly without losing her integrity, while so many other former child actors like her contemporary Lindsay Lohan struggled or even failed in their careers. I was really impressed by her life story and how she managed, despite her young age and the economic as well as personal pressure she was under, to remain true to herself. I felt, somehow, inspired by her.

Back in Germany, I grew up as one of those latch-key kids in a disadvantaged working-class neighbourhood. Fortunately, my parents were among the very few, who were steadily employed and earned a small, but regular income that enabled us to move to a slightly better neighbourhood when I was 12. Because films have always provided me with a mental escape, being an actor was a passion of mine from early on as well. I even joined the drama society in school, which was pretty much the best experience of my entire schooldays. Yet, in contrast to Jena Malone, I lacked her determination to follow my dreams. Moreover, due to my poor grades, my parents insisted that I had to focus only on relevant '*practical*' subjects and made me quit again. To be fair, I wasn't probably talented enough to succeed as an actor anyway. Still, there has always been this inner feeling of something's missing... After working a few years in sports retailing, the film *Dead Poets Society* finally inspired me to go to university and, eventually, become a lecturer instead. Since learning about Jena Malone's personal life story, I have the deepest respect for her and how she succeeded against all the odds in doing what she wanted to do. She is not only extremely talented, but also managed to resist all the temptations of glamour, party-life and the commercial exploitation of the Hollywood machinery without losing her personal integrity. As I said, quite an astonishing achievement for a young woman from a poor social background! And, by October 2005, I had become so fascinated by Jena Malone that I simply wanted to hear and read more about her in order to understand her thoughts and feelings as a private person. But because she doesn't fit or fulfil the typical celebrity life-style image of

glamour and scandal, the media (especially in Europe) seem largely to ignore her and meaningful articles are unfortunately rare.



Photo 4: My “Treasure” of hand-signed autographs addressed to me

Nevertheless, despite the scarcity of meaningful information in the media, I still managed to acquire a few cultural magazines with really interesting interviews with or articles about Jena Malone on eBay (i.e. Calhoun 2003; Lyon 2008; Miller 2006; Rems 2004) by paying often more than the actual retail price for them. But for me, they are totally worth it! And when *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005) was released in Irish cinemas, my excitement was further enhanced by the opportunity to watch Jena Malone for the first time on the big screen. At the same time, I experienced in addition to my already strong admiration for her artistic work also a growing emotional attachment to Jena as an attractive woman. In fact, I really fancy her as the normal, intelligent and interesting woman I perceive her to be with all her positive and negative qualities, and with whom I would love to meet and go out on a date. But as it is highly unlikely for that ever to happen, I began instead to look for some personalised items of Jena Malone, such as original hand-signed photos, that would give her some kind of tangible presence in my life. When Jena Malone gave her Broadway debut in *Doubt* (US 2006), I came into contact with a professional autograph trader, who offered me to get any photo image

that I would email him signed by her in person. A few days later, he asked me whether I would like it if Jena would dedicate them to me personally. Was he kidding me? If that's possible, I obviously would love that! And, indeed, he managed that Jena signed a total of 21 photos with a personal dedication to me (Photo 4), which have become my most-valued treasures ever since, because they truly symbolise her '*physical*' presence in my life. Moreover, as Jena Malone is always on my mind, so to speak, I must admit that she also occupies a certain space in my everyday life that goes beyond the mere acquisition of associated items and films. But that's a different story that would go beyond the limited scope of this paper."

4.6.5 Hope (or Discussion)

Although the introspective essay only covered the first 9 months of my personal Jena Malone fan relationship, I will now discuss one particularly interesting insight that emerged iteratively from the data by drawing on narrative transportation theory (Gerrig 1993; Green et al. 2004). While previous studies conceptualised fandom mainly as the social interaction between like-minded individuals within their respective consumption subcultures (Jenkins 1992; Kozinets 1997, 2001; Richardson 2004), the introspective data clearly show that my own personal fan experiences and any subsequent consumption practices focused exclusively on my emotional attachment to Jena Malone herself and on my admiration to her artistic work as an actress. In fact, during the entire 16 months of contemporary self-observation, I have never shown any intentions to share my intimate admiration for her with other fans either online or in person, but preferred to enjoy it just by myself instead. Obviously, the only exception would be Jena Malone herself – but that's quite a different story and unlikely ever to happen (Barbas 2001). Now, it can be argued that the main reason as to why my observed fan experiences revolved solely around the personal relationship with the film actress rather than the participation in an ominous fan community is that I would actually be '*in love with her*' – which may not be so untrue. After all, sexual attraction surely played a role in capturing my initial interest in Jena Malone and, in some way, continues doing so as part of an ongoing romantic infatuation. But how can you actually '*love*' somebody you don't know, have never even met in person and most likely never will? Drawing on narrative transportation theory would provide in particular some insights into this intimate – but in the literature largely neglected – aspect of fandom.

There is strong evidence in the presented introspective data that my continuing admiration for Jena Malone derived from my personal engagement with her artistic work as an actress as much as with her private persona. However, as I'm unlikely to ever get to know Jena Malone personally, my impression of her personality is essentially an intertextual reading of what I, as a consumer, perceive to be relevant and 'reliable' media texts such as her TV and print media interviews, her personal websites and detailed articles in better magazines (Barbas 2001; Dyer 1998; Geraghty 2000). But while Dyer's (1998) stardom theory suggested that a consumer's image of a film star would be static and externally managed by the media, the introspective data actually indicate that it is constantly evolving within the consumer's mind; similar to the images we have of those people we regularly encounter in our everyday lives. The consumer internalises the celebrity's public persona psychically within oneself, loads it with personal thoughts, feelings, fantasies and meanings and, then, projects this personal impression back onto the film actress. This would explain why my personal impression of Jena Malone's personality emphasised especially those aspects of her character and personal life-style that resonate strongly with my own private life experiences, ideals, dreams and desires and, hence, strengthen my emotional attachment to her as a 'genuine person'. This continuous process of introjection and projection (Gould 1993) allows thereby for the feeling of 'knowing' the film actress like a friend, whose career and life choices are then followed empathetically as if s/he is a media character in an ongoing melodramatic narrative (Argo et al. 2008). For instance, I empathised genuinely with Jena Malone in how she handled so maturely all the problems she had to face even at such a young age and admired how she developed into such a smart, nice and interesting personality without ever losing her personal integrity.

The current stardom literature is thereby also contradicted with regard to how consumers (and especially fans) relate to film stars. In his seminal work *Stars*, Dyer (1998) viewed film stars as systems of semiotic images that personify the society's cultural ideals of success, glamour, the extraordinary and even the divine. Thus, in drawing on selected examples from the Hollywood studio era of the 1920s to early-1950s, Dyer theorised that fans would admire film stars as 'flawless, superior' human beings, who display a consistent personal image both on- and off-screen through the portrayal of mainly those film characters that seem to mirror their own 'true' personality and life-style in real life (Barbas 2001; Geraghty 2000). My admiration for

Jena Malone, however, results from her ability and flexibility as an actress to portray a diversity of characters that often differ significantly from her off-screen persona as much as from each other. But more importantly, my emotional attachment to Jena Malone derived actually from viewing her as a *'normal'* girl with all her own personal character strengths and weaknesses rather than as a semiotic signifier of some cultural ideal. This means that I adore her primarily as an interesting, smart, natural, beautiful and talented young woman, who also has her flaws, some *'bad habits'* and makes mistakes from time to time – just like you, me and anybody else. My feelings of empathy and infatuation for Jena Malone are even further enhanced by engaging in out-of-text intertextuality (Hirschman 2000b; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008b), whereby I linked her personal life-story with my very own private life experiences to an extent where I even partially identified with her (Cohen 2001). This becomes particularly evident in my reading of Rommelmann's (2000) article, when I compare both our upbringing within disadvantaged social backgrounds and admire her courage and determination in following her dreams, while I failed to do the same even under less severe circumstances.

4.6.6 The Ruins (or Conclusion)

In heeding Smith et al.'s (2007) call, this introspective research studied celebrity fandom from an *'insider'* perspective in order to explore the nature of consumers' emotional attachment to their favourite celebrity. The main finding that emerged iteratively from the introspective data is that a consumer's fan relationship revolved primarily around one's personal engagement with the celebrity's artistic work and public persona, whereby the latter is essentially the fan's personal intertextual reading of what s/he perceives to be relevant and *'reliable'* media texts. Drawing on narrative transportation theory can hereby explain in particular how and why fans often develop and experience the feeling of *'knowing'* the celebrity personally, incl. his/her private thoughts, feelings, personality and way of life, despite having never even met the real person. This experienced *'bond of emotional closeness'* can at times be strong enough to elicit within the consumer a feeling of *'personal friendship'* or, in some way, even a feeling of *'love'* towards the admired celebrity. Moreover, it would also provide an explanation as to why fans sometimes feel enormously disappointed, when their most desired dream of actually meeting the adored celebrity in person comes true, because the celebrity turns out to be a different person in private life or just can't live up to the

(maybe unrealistic) imaginary person that they have created in their mind (Gross 2005). Of course, I don't suggest that the presented introspective data and the proposed interpretations could be generalised. Instead of imposing only my own interpretations on you as the reader, I would like to encourage you to derive your own understanding of a consumer's fan relationship with one's admired celebrity through your personal engagement with the presented consumer narrative (Gould 1993, 2008b; Holbrook 1995, 2005a) and connect it to your own private life experiences.

4.6.7 Acknowledgements

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4.7 Paper 6 – 'Saved!' by Jena Malone: An Introspective Study of a Consumer's Fan Relationship with a Film Actress

While consumers have always been fascinated by the works and private lives of celebrities, some consumers experience a significantly more intensive level of admiration for a particular celebrity and, subsequently, become what are commonly known as *fans*. However, scant attention has been paid to how the relationship between fans and celebrities expresses itself in everyday consumer behavior. Thus, in order to explore celebrity fandom as a holistic lived experience from a fan's insider perspective, the lead author uses subjective personal introspection to provide insights into his private fan relationship with the actress Jena Malone. Drawing on narrative transportation theory, the study finds that a consumer's fan experiences may derive from one's personal engagement with the celebrity's artistic work and public persona. The latter is essentially the consumer's private intertextual reading of what s/he perceives to be relevant and '*reliable*' media texts, which can result in a feeling of '*knowing*' the celebrity like a personal friend – or even of '*love*'.

4.7.1 The Dangerous Lives of Celebrity Fans

Since the dawn of the Hollywood star system in the early 1920s, consumers have always been fascinated by the works and private lives of film stars and any other

celebrities (Barbas 2001; Dyer 1998; McDonald 2000). The public demand for celebrities has even grown so strong these days that film stars, directors, rock/pop stars, athletes, novelists and models have without doubt become an essential part of our everyday culture (Gabler 1998; Geraghty 2000) and contemporary market economy (McCracken 1989; Thomson 2006). Surely, most people tend to have merely a fleeting interest in celebrities per se and enjoy primarily the exchange of gossip with other like-minded individuals (Turner 2004). But some consumers experience a significantly more intensive level of interest and admiration for a particular celebrity and, subsequently, become what are commonly known as *fans* (Leets et al. 1995; O'Guinn, 1991; Smith et al. 2007) or *celebrity worshippers* (McCutcheon, Ashe, Houran and Maltby, 2003). And as it happens, I'm one of them. Ever since I bought by chance the DVD of the indie-film *Saved!* (US 2004) back in April 2005, I have been a devoted fan of the young, attractive and talented actress Jena Malone, who features primarily in lesser known, yet much more interesting and challenging indie-films such as *Donnie Darko* (US 2001), *The United States of Leland* (US 2003), *Four Last Songs* (UK 2007), *Into the Wild* (US 2007), *The Ruins* (US 2008) or *The Messenger* (US 2009). But what is it exactly that attracts an ordinary consumer like me to become and remain a devoted fan of a film actress? What does the lived experience of being the fan of a film actress (or any other celebrity for that matter) mean for the individual consumer? And how does celebrity fandom express itself in everyday consumer behavior? Because these are some very interesting questions, it is quite surprising that little research has sought to address them so far. In fact, the growing interdisciplinary body of literature on fan studies lacks even a coherent understanding of what exactly constitutes fandom in the first place. Instead, the interpretation of what a fan is seems only too often to be extremely dependent on the underlying agenda of the respective researcher studying the phenomenon (Smith et al. 2007).

What is clear, though, is that both academic literature and popular media have placed fans consistently on the receiving end of negative stereotyping, ridicule and *bad press* (Barbas 2001; Jenson 1992). As desired, fans are conceptualized either as uneducated, gullible and vulnerable '*numbs*', who are easily manipulated by a dangerous and controlling popular mass culture (Boorstin 2006; Fiske 1992; Gabler 1998; Schickel 1985), or as subversive and creative rebels against the corporate establishment, who poach and utilize commercial media texts to create their own new textual products

(Barbas 2001; Jenkins 1992; Turner 2004). Some scholars portray fans as members of neo-religious cults, who worship celebrities like gods through shared rituals and the sacralization of associated products within like-minded communities (Jindra 1994; Kozinets 1997; O'Guinn 1991). Others describe them as geeks and alienated, lonely social misfits, who experience for various reasons deficits in their social skills and networks (Horton and Wohl 1956). While often being intelligent, well-educated and very successful at work or in school, these consumers feel lonely, stigmatized and rejected in their private lives especially by those others, who may be less intelligent and creative, but are much more privileged in terms of social skills, status and/or physical attractiveness (Cusack et al. 2003; Kozinets 2001). Thus, fandom provides them with a means of compensation and social interaction with similarly isolated individuals. In following Munsterberg's (1916) legacy, however, some social psychologists have recently set out again on a deliberate quest to confirm the century-old popular stereotype that fans are essentially cognitively inflexible, gullible, dull and uncreative individuals (McCutcheon et al. 2003) or, even worse, delusional, pathological-obsessive stalkers (McCutcheon et al. 2006). Indeed, McCutcheon et al. (2003, 2006) go even so far to suggest that *celebrity worship* would actually constitute a '*serious mental illness*', although each of their arguments is strongly contradicted by their own published statistical data.

In light of those devastating views of fans, admitting to my infatuation with a film actress and risking to be branded with one of those common stereotypes may seem to be an unwise move. But as any of these conceptualizations neither describe nor fully capture many facets of my own everyday fan consumption experiences, I can't stop wondering whether there is maybe much more to a consumer's personal fan relationship with a celebrity than previous studies have uncovered so far. This suspicion is further strengthened by the fact that previous studies have investigated fandom primarily from an outsider-looking-in perspective, whereby scholars impose their own preconceived abstract ideas onto the phenomenon (Smith et al. 2007). As a result, they have two main things in common. Firstly, previous research has studied only certain, more '*extreme*' subgroups of fans on specific occasions like Star Trek Conventions, football fan-clubs or fan-blogs (Jenkins 1992; Kozinets 1997; Richardson 2004) while paying little attention to the ordinary everyday lived experiences of the '*normal*' fan in daily life. Secondly, all those studies have focused either on the social dynamics and symbolic

relationships that consumers experience with other fans within their respective consumption subcultures (Jenkins 1992; Kozinets 2001; Richardson 2004) or on the mental well-being of *gullible, obsessive* celebrity worshippers (Leets et al. 1995; McCutcheon et al. 2003, 2006) instead of actually exploring the nature of fans' personal relationships with their objects of admiration in the first place. Hence, using a narrative transportation approach may provide some alternative explanations to address this literature gap and to reconceptualize our understanding of fans. Narrative transportation theory (Gerrig 1993; Green and Brock 2000) was developed to understand the phenomenon of '*getting lost in a book*', where a reader is so absorbed in a story that s/he becomes temporarily unaware of one's surroundings. Gerrig (1993) describes narrative transportation as a psychological process, whereby a consumer ventures mentally to a narrative world by some means of transportation (i.e. the text) and by performing certain cognitive and emotional actions such as imagining the story, characters and sceneries. In doing so, the reader travels some distance away from one's daily life, which even becomes temporarily inaccessible, and returns back home after some time again; though '*somewhat changed*' by the experience of the journey (Green et al. 2004).

In allowing the consumer to immerse oneself into exciting narrative worlds, where one could experience a different self and engage with fictional characters like real friends, the narrative transportation process provides the consumer with a temporary means of escape (Batat and Wohlfeil 2009). But in addition to our engagement with media texts, narrative transportation theory may also provide a suitable approach for explaining a consumer's fan relationship with a celebrity when linked to the stardom literature. The stardom literature (Dyer 1998; Geraghty 2000; Hollinger 2006) views film stars essentially as living textual images or human brands, whose on- and off-screen persona, personal identity and reflected values are carefully designed ('*authored*'), positioned and managed in the media by talent agencies (or previously by the Hollywood studios) to suit specific market needs (Thomson 2006). The consumer's interest in the admired celebrity can thus be interpreted as '*losing*' oneself into the factual melodramatic narrative (Argo et al. 2008) that is the film star's public life as presented by various media texts that may include film characters, interviews, articles and gossip. Hence, the fan may sympathize (= feel with the film star as an observer), empathize (= share the film star's feelings due to similar personal experiences) or even identify (= feel the film

star's feelings as one's own) with the admired celebrity like a media character (Cohen 2001; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008b). After all, it is highly unlikely that we would ever get to know the real private person behind the film star's public image in the media (Dyer 1998). Thus, in order to both understand what meaning the fan relationship with a celebrity has for the ordinary consumer and to answer the earlier questions, the present introspective study takes an existential-phenomenological perspective (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Thompson 1997) to gain some holistic insights into a consumer's everyday lived experiences with one's admired film star from a fan's insider point of view (Smith et al. 2007). Using a narrative form of subjective personal introspection (Gould 2008b; Holbrook 1995, 2005a), I first describe in a narrative essay how my own personal fan relationship with the film actress Jena Malone developed and translated into lived consumption experiences over a period of 20 months. Then, with the helping hand of my co-author, I examine the recorded introspective data hermeneutically through a narrative transportation approach and discuss the findings.

4.7.2 Into the Wild

In order to gain some truly holistic insights into a consumer's personal everyday lived fan relationship with one's favorite film star, the consumer should be given a voice by focusing from an insider perspective (Smith et al. 2007) on the consumer experience in the way it presents itself to consciousness (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Thompson 1997). In taking an existential-phenomenological perspective, I use a controversial research method known as subjective personal introspection (SPI), which Holbrook (1986, 1995) introduced to consumer research over 20 years ago and which Gould (1993), Brown (1998a, b) and Carol Rambo's (1992, 2005) impressive autoethnographic articles have advanced further. In its purest form, SPI is an "*extreme form of participant observation that focuses on impressionistic narrative accounts of the writer's own private consumption experiences with a phenomenon from the viewpoint of an informed and deeply involved insider*" (Holbrook 2005a: 45), where the researcher is also the sole informant. One of the major advantages of this research method is that it allows the researcher an unlimited 24-hour access to an insider's everyday lived experiences with the research phenomenon without having to wrestle with ethical concerns regarding the informant's privacy (Brown 1998b). Moreover, SPI enables the researcher to explore the subjective nature of human feelings, daydreams, sensations and streams of consciousness related to consumption (Gould 1993, 2008b) in the very way they are

experienced by the individual, but have remained inaccessible through traditional *scientific* or *qualitative* research methods. Hence, I provide some introspective insights into my own private lived consumption experiences as a devoted fan of the film actress Jena Malone in the form of a narrative essay that summarizes the two collected types of introspective data.

My lived fan experiences in the period from April to September 2005 were obtained as retrospective data in a 36,000-words essay, which was written in September 2005 to describe how I became a Jena Malone fan. My everyday lived experiences as a Jena Malone fan from 11th September 2005 to 31st December 2006 were then collected as contemporaneous data while they occurred in real time to ensure a high degree of '*data accuracy*' (Wallendorf and Brucks 1993). Contemporaneous introspective data field the unique advantage of providing a large pool of *emotional data* on consumption experiences that would be inaccessible to any other research method that is based on retrospective recall or pure observation and, therefore, inevitably lost forever (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008b). To ensure data accessibility for external review, I have recorded the data systematically, unfiltered and on the spot in a specifically assigned diary (Patterson 2005). In total, I obtained more than 150,000 hand-written words as raw contemporaneous data for a thorough hermeneutic part-to-whole analysis (Gadamer 2004; Thompson 1997). First, I read the entire transcript together with my co-author to gain a first sense for the overall picture. As the recorded data represented essentially a '*plotless*' sequence of individual instances collected over a certain timeframe, they were summarized in an extensive consumer narrative that reflects the chronological order of events and stays true to the emotional consumption experiences and feelings to gain a better overview. Based on the early impressions, we broke the data into manageable, logically coherent chunks to be examined individually. Emerging key themes were then put in context to each other and the overall consumer narrative to be scrutinized further in order to identify key patterns of meaning (Thompson 1997). The following essay is an extensive summary of the consumer narrative and focuses on some interesting emic themes that have emerged iteratively from the recorded data. I would like to remind the reader that the emphasis is placed less on the factual recollection of observable consumption practices, but more on how my everyday lived experiences (i.e. inner feelings, thoughts, fantasies and daydreams) derived from or translated into my fan relationship with the actress Jena Malone.

4.7.3 'Saved!' by Jena Malone

"I still remember the day in April 2005, when I saw Jena Malone for the very first time. Her lovely smile and her beautiful eyes captivated me so much that my entire body was filled with the same prickling warmth that I feel each time I fancy a particular girl/woman. But to be honest, there was something special about her entire persona that fascinated me and let her stand out from the crowd. The only problem is, unfortunately, that I've never met or seen Jena Malone in person (and most likely never will!), because she is an extremely talented young US film actress and, so far, my closest social encounter with her was watching Jena on the screen or reading articles about her in magazines. It all started when by chance I bought the indie-film *Saved!* (US 2004) in a 3-DVDs-for-€20 sale. I can't really explain why, but I simply had this sudden urge creeping up in me that I had to own this particular film. I recalled suddenly Jonathan Ross' glowing review on his BBC program, but I never watched the film before, as it was never released in a cinema near me, and I had forgotten all about it – until now. Thus, I didn't let this second chance slip away again. When I finally viewed the film on the same day, I was so intrigued by this gem that it has become one of my favorite films ever since! Moreover, from the very first moment I watched it, I was absolutely blown away by Jena Malone's acting performance in portraying the lead character Mary Cummings – a good Christian girl who tries to save her boyfriend from being gay by sacrificing her virginity, but gets pregnant as a result and is, subsequently, ostracized exactly by those hypocrites, who preach the Christian values of love, tolerance and forgiveness.

Although I have to admit that I was very much attracted to her beautiful eyes, her charming smile and her natural beauty, I was also totally captivated by her believable, natural acting performance that I simply had to watch it at once for a second time. But this time, I switched to the commentary of the leading actresses Jena Malone and Mandy Moore. While I listened to Jena Malone explaining how she developed her character and talking about the context of particular film scenes, I became even more fascinated by her. Not only is she pretty and an extremely good actress, but she also seemed to be an exceptionally interesting, smart and surprisingly mature young woman. Of course, there is always the danger of mistaking the actress with her role – unless you have seen her in a variety of other roles. Therefore, a really good actress for me is one who makes each of her characters appear to be believably 'real' and who manages

through her performance to allow you enjoy even those films that you would have never watched otherwise. Because only few actors and actresses would meet these criteria, I wanted – no I needed – to find out more about Jena Malone as a person and actress as well as to watch other films with her. The next morning, I started therefore to browse the Internet for any information about her that I could get my hands on. Only, I could hardly find any at all... Incredible! While there are hundreds of sites and articles for virtually every single talented and more often untalented (wannabe) celebrity on earth, frustratingly little was available on Jena Malone and most of it hadn't been updated for years. Nonetheless, IMDb presented me with a surprisingly long list of films in which she had featured so far. Despite being merely 20 years old at that time, Jena Malone had already 20 film roles and 3 guest roles in TV soaps to her credit, participated as a lead character in an audio recording of a theater play, voiced a character in the animation film *Howl's Moving Castle* (JPN 2004) and had two further films already in post-production¹⁸. Quite an astonishing achievement!

Yet, I was particularly surprised to learn that I had actually seen Jena before in another film, when I saw *Contact* (US 1997) in 1998, in which she played Jodie Foster's character as a child. But back then, I obviously paid little attention to a merely 12-year old girl and was also a bit annoyed by the film's underlying religious connotations – though the acting was quite good. Anyway, armed with this list I started over the next weeks to buy DVDs of *The Dangerous Lives of Altar Boys* (US 2001), *Donnie Darko* (US 2001), *Stepmom* (US 1998), *Life as a House* (US 2001) and *Cheaters* (US 2000). As I could relate empathetically to every one of her characters as if they were 'real' people, each of her films that I watched confirmed her exceptional talent as an actress and increased a strong desire in me to acquire ALL of her films for my private film collection; a feeling that I had never experienced before. In fact, I was really hungry for Jena Malone and her films and somehow in danger of starvation, if I couldn't watch them all. However, that was easier said than done, as I soon discovered that most of her films have only been released in the US as region 1 DVDs, but not as European region 2 DVDs. This means that they don't run on our DVD players without locking them into the wrong region. I felt totally heartbroken! What could I do? In the past, this would

¹⁸ By summer 2010, at the age of 25, Jena Malone has already featured in 33 films, 5 TV soap guest roles, 2 animation film voice-overs, one audio-recorded theatre-play and performed on stage in 2 Off-Broadway plays.

have been the end of my efforts. But this time I began desperately to look for suitable alternatives. As an interim solution, I managed to buy on eBay *The Ballad of Lucy Whipple* (US 2000) as a VCD and three other films on VHS until I could replace them with a more suitable DVD release. Finally, I purchased an external DVD drive, which I locked into region 1 to watch all those US DVDs that I increasingly bought on Amazon or eBay to satisfy my hunger for her films. Yet, all the time, I also felt in me this strong desire to learn more about Jena Malone as a private person; again something I have never experienced before.

Hence, when I found Rommelmann's (2000) well-researched article, I was (and still am) absolutely fascinated by what I learned about Jena's personal background and my admiration for her increased even more. Jena was born on 21-11-1984 in Sparks, Nevada, as the unplanned result of a one-night stand and spent basically most of her childhood in the poverty of trailer parks. With her single mother Debbie being a struggling actress in an amateur theater, Jena wanted to be a performer (actress, singer/songwriter, writer or dancer) from early on and responded as a 10-year old to the ad of an acting school. While this acting school turned out to be a fraud, Jena nonetheless caught the eyes of both Beverly Strong, who signed her at once to become her personal manager, and Anjelica Houston, who cast her for the title character in her directorial debut *Bastard Out of Carolina* (US 1996). Anjelica Houston also introduced Jena and her mother Debbie to Toni Howard, an influential agent who specialized in child actors and signed her on the spot for International Creative Management. Yet, what really impressed me most was that, even as an 11-year old, Jena preferred (to her manager's frustration) to feature only in those film projects that were dear to her heart rather than in commercially promising blockbusters. Thus, she turned down roles in *Air Force One* or *The Parent Trap* (Lindsay Lohan got the part instead) to portray the lead characters in *Bastard Out of Carolina* (US 1996), *Ellen Foster* (US 1997) and *Hope* (US 1997), for which Jena received critical acclaim, some film awards and even a Golden Globe nomination. Still, Jena Malone and her mother experienced life in Hollywood as anything but rosy and glamorous. As Debbie was required by law to be present on set at all times, she couldn't work herself and Jena became the sole breadwinner of the family. It also meant that Jena only received home-school education on the set; although concluding from her interviews (i.e. Cohen 2002; Miller 2006, Rems 2004) she seems to be very well read.

But worst of all, after approx. 30% of her gross salaries were already deducted as fees for her manager, agent, accountant, lawyers, etc., her full income was taxed at 45%, although production companies were required by Coogan's law to pay 30% of a child actor's salaries into blocked trusts, which only become accessible at the actor's 18th birthday (Rommelmann 2000). This meant that Jena was rarely left with more than 7% of her earnings to live on. When finally faced with a bill of \$150,000 in back taxes and near bankruptcy, Jena filed, aged 14, for legal emancipation from her mother, which was granted on her 15th birthday, in order to work legally like an adult in the film industry and to access her blocked trusts to pay off her debts. Since then, she is managing her own career without interference and approval from others (Calhoun 2003; Cohen 2002; Rommelmann 2000). This step also included firing her manager Beverly Strong and any other stakeholders, who had profited from her in the past, and switching to United Talent Agency, who offered much more favorable fees and absolute creative freedom. Furthermore, Jena focuses on portraying complex female characters with genuine problems in challenging and artistically creative independent film productions rather than fulfilling certain ominous teenage stereotypes in typical teen-comedies (Calhoun 2003; Lyon 2008; Miller 2006). That's why she also refuses to do glamour photo shoots for fashion or celebrity magazines that would "*present girls with false beauty ideals they can hardly fulfill and only make them feel inadequate*" (Rems 2004: 47). In contrast to many other young film actors, she shunned the glamorous LA party life as well by moving back to Lake Tahoe, where she felt happy as a child (Calhoun 2003; Lyon 2008). Maybe this also explains why Jena Malone managed the transition from child actress to a serious young adult actress so effortlessly without losing her personal integrity, while so many other former child actors like her contemporary Lindsay Lohan have struggled or even failed in their careers.

I was really impressed by her life story and how she managed, despite her young age and the economic and personal pressure she was under, to remain true to herself. Somehow, I felt inspired by her. Back in Germany, my childhood involved growing up as one of the latch-key kids in an '*impoverished*' working-class neighborhood. Fortunately, my parents were among the very few, who were steadily employed and earned a regular income, which allowed us to move to a somewhat better neighborhood when I was 12. Anyway, like Jena, I also made a list of what I wanted to become, which included actor, athlete, psychologist and filmmaker. Because films had always provided

me with a mental means of escape, being an actor was a passion of mine from very early on. I even joined the drama group in school, which was pretty much the best experience of my entire schooldays. Yet, in contrast to Jena, I lacked her determination to follow my dreams. Furthermore, my parents insisted, due to my poor grades, that I had to focus exclusively on ‘*practice-relevant*’ subjects and forced me to quit the drama group. To be fair, I probably wasn’t good enough to succeed as an actor anyway. But when I finally graduated from school with Fachhochschulreife, I had lost nearly all my childhood hopes and dreams and started working in sports retailing instead, living aimlessly from one day to another. Only when I watched *Dead Poets Society* years later, I felt inspired again to go to university, study marketing and become a lecturer; and I succeeded. But I still regularly have this nagging feeling inside of me that something is missing. While reading now Jena Malone’s personal life story, I felt the deepest respect for her as to how she succeeded against all the odds in doing what she wanted to do. She is not only very talented, but also managed to resist all the temptations of fame, party-life and the commercial exploitation of the Hollywood machinery without losing her personal integrity. As I said earlier, quite an astonishing achievement for a young woman from a poor social background!

By October 2005, I had become so fascinated by Jena Malone that I wanted to hear and read more about her in order to understand her thoughts and feelings as a person. But because she doesn’t fit the typical celebrity life-style, the media seem to ignore her and meaningful articles are scarce. Nevertheless, I still managed to acquire a few magazines with interesting articles on or interviews with Jena Malone (i.e. Calhoun 2003; Lyons 2008; Miller 2006; Rems 2004) by usually paying more than the actual retail price for them. But for me, it was totally worth it! At the same time, my excitement was further enhanced by the first chance to watch Jena Malone on the big screen in *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005). Moreover, I had finally acquired all her films either on DVD, VCD or VHS – except of *The Ballad of Jack & Rose* (US 2005) and *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005), which I added in January and February 2006 respectively – for my private collection. While I continued to download photo images of Jena Malone into the designated digital photo collection folder on my laptop and to look up eBay for Jena Malone-related items, my frantic hunt for her films, articles, posters, which I used to decorate my room (Photo 5 + 6), and any other memorabilia decreased suddenly and significantly from early-November 2005 to February 2006. Yet, my emotional

attachment to Jena Malone remained very strong, as my material possessions of her films and memorabilia were not the only means through which I experienced her increasing presence in my private life. In fact, Jena Malone was literally always on my mind.



Photo 5 + 6: Evidence of Jena Malone’s “physical presence” in my life

While I honestly believe that I have been quite successful in my professional career so far, especially since entering academia, my private life, unfortunately, feels more like a failure to me. Like anybody else, I suspect, I was imagining since my early teenage years what it is like to go out with a girl, to be in love with her, how it feels like to share the first kiss, the first time with each other, etc. But the years passed by and nothing really happened in this regard. While everyone else around me seemed without much effort to be falling happily in and out of love with their special ones, I suffered one rejection after another, as no girl found me attractive or interesting enough to date me. In fact, in my entire life I’ve only been in a few relationships with females, which never lasted very long and the last one ended some time ago. It hasn’t been for the lack of trying, but I believe that my social skills are somewhat ... *‘underdeveloped’*. For most of my life, I felt socially excluded at school and work, so that my circle of friends has been rather limited. A strong contributing factor is surely that I’m privately very shy, have a low self-esteem in private matters and *‘don’t converse easily’* with attractive

women I don't know. And when I finally have the courage to talk to a female whom I fancy, my pulse rises, my hands become sweaty, my nerves run amok and I mumble through my dry mouth something idiotic that is often the wrong thing at the wrong time. Previously, I compensated the feeling of loneliness with an extensive active participation in sports, but my social network there turned out to be superficial rather than true friendship. And with every year that I'm getting older, this feeling of loneliness, emotional starvation and the lack of romantic love experiences turns into frustration, helplessness and desperation. But what exactly has my private misery to do with Jena Malone? At the beginning – nothing!

Though I felt sexually attracted to her, my initial interest and admiration for Jena Malone was mainly based on her work and achievement as an actress. But the nature of my emotional attachment to her changed after suffering another major disappointment in my private life. As I hadn't been on a date for a long time, I was filled with an enjoyable and arousing feeling of excitement, anticipation, happiness and nervousness mixed together, when a nice girl finally agreed to go out with me. But I was also very insecure and scared that I would lack the social skills and experience in knowing how to behave appropriately in this kind of situation. The date didn't work out so well, as I wasn't really sure whether she was really interested in me. If she was, then I failed to interpret her signals correctly. Anyway, frustrated with having to live my lonely life as an involuntary single again, I started to seek romance and love from a very different source – Jena Malone. While this might sound quite weird, I can assure you that it is actually an innocent example of Horton and Wohl's (1956) parasocial relationship concept. It started approximately two weeks after my date when I finally watched *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005) in the cinema. That night, I was dreaming to be of Prussian decent and just moved to the English countryside of the late 18th century, where I suddenly saw this beautiful girl and knew she's the one – even though the local people seemed to shun her for unknown reasons. As it turned out, this girl was Lydia Bennet (= Jena Malone), who had returned to her family in shame after Mr. Wickham had seduced but not married her. Yet, my dream character didn't care, started to court her and finally asked for her hand in marriage. But before I could receive an answer, I was rudely awakened by the alarm clock.

Anyway, over the following nights I really enjoyed those fictive dreams about Jena Malone and me so much that I was increasingly looking forward to them. Because they filled me with inner warmth and made me feel better about myself, I was quite devastated when the dreams, without warning, stopped from one day to another. In response, I started to imagine what it would be like meeting and talking to Jena Malone in person, going out with her or even dating and kissing her – like I would do when I secretly fancy a girl but am too shy or scared of rejection to talk to her. Each time I was feeling lonely, unattractive and ignored/rejected by the females around me when I was sitting in a café, in a pub or just walking through town, I engaged in daydreams, in which I was in a ‘real’ and ‘serious’ romantic relationship with Jena Malone as my girlfriend. I imagined walking hand-in-hand with her through the park on Sunday afternoons, maybe fooling around on a park bench like young lovers do, going to the movies or theater, having a chat and a drink together in a pub or cuddling in front of the TV after a romantic dinner. In doing so, I kind of wrote in my imagination my very own fictional narrative about a romantic everyday relationship between Jena Malone and me, in which I could lose myself mentally for awhile and fulfill my emotional, romantic and, to some extent, even my sexual needs. However, the sexual fantasies I did experience on very rare occasions played only a minor, rather supplementary role in my overall romantic narrative. But as girls, especially actresses, like Jena Malone are unlikely to meet and fall in love with ordinary guys like me on the street, I imagined myself becoming an actor by chance as well. Indeed, while reading Stephen King’s *Rage*, I experienced the story as a film, in which Jena Malone and I as actors were playing each a certain character. I thereby created the illusion that we met on the set, started dating, fell in love and became a loving couple. From there on, I imagined every novel I was reading as a film production that featured Jena Malone and me.

While I could drop in and out of those imagined narratives to attend to my everyday affairs like closing a book after a few chapters, I started to look for some personalized items of Jena Malone, such as original hand-signed photos, that would in some way symbolize her physical presence in my life. But I couldn’t really find anything until Jena Malone gave her Broadway debut in the theater play *Doubt* from January to June 2006. Suddenly, a few professional autograph traders were offering original Jena Malone autographs priced from \$45 to \$85 on eBay, which she had personally signed in front of the theater as evidenced by the bonus proof photos. Back in February 2006,

there was no doubt in my mind that I needed to have as many as I could afford to buy and for the next 3 months a much more intense and targeted buying spree began. As most sellers offered basically the same photos signed by her, my purchase decisions were often influenced by those proof candid that were the most recent and natural photos of Jena Malone. Hereby, I came into contact with a professional autograph hunter, who offered me to get Jena Malone to sign personally any photo image that I would email him. A few days after emailing him my most recent and precious Jena Malone photo files, he asked whether I would like to have Jena address them to me personally. Are you kidding me? What kind of question is that? If that is possible, I obviously would love to! And he managed to have Jena Malone address 21 hand-signed photos to me in person, which have become my most valued treasures, my private crown-jewels (Photo 7). All the time, I was also tempted to fly to New York to watch her performing live on stage and maybe even meet her backstage. But fearing that I may burst my imaginary bubble, I didn't go ahead with it. As long as I had my imaginary relationship to fall back on, I could cope with loneliness and rejection in my life. But what would happen, if I lost even that one?



Photo 7: Original hand-signed photos that Jena Malone addressed to me personally

However, I soon didn't need to worry about those things, as I had an increased email exchange with a very nice, attractive and intelligent young woman, whom I met the previous year at a conference. As I really liked her from the first moment we met, I was absolutely excited when we arranged for me to visit her in August 2006. But while I was looking forward to visiting her, I suddenly stopped dreaming about having a relationship with Jena Malone; although I still enjoyed watching her films and cherishing her hand-signed photos. Yet, although the first days were perfect, my visit increasingly turned into a disaster due to many unforeseen circumstances. Maybe I was too overexcited, but I guess that my poor social skills let me down once again. As I tried desperately to make up for it at another conference in September, external interferences shattered all my hopes for reconciliation and pushed me into a disastrous emotional turmoil filled with the intense emotional pains of hopelessness, sadness, loneliness and the complete absence of any feeling that may promise some form of happiness. While I functioned quite well on the outside, internally I locked myself in. Hence, I turned to Jena Malone as the only person that promised me love, comfort and emotional warmth and allowed me to join her symbolically through her films, photos and the hand-signed photos that she had personally addressed to me. Over the next weeks, I watched in particular *Saved!* (US 2004) at least a dozen times and enjoyed looking at her photos, her beautiful eyes, her charming smile and signatures for hours. It felt like she was there with me. Somehow, her imagined love and support helped me back on track and I finally started to brighten up again. Of course, I know that I will never meet Jena Malone in person nor ever be given the opportunity of actually dating and kissing her. In fact, she most likely will never know who I am or that I even exist. Moreover, I will also never be in the position of knowing what kind of person Jena Malone in her private life really is. Nevertheless, her artistic work and her textual persona has provided me with meaning, purpose and a source of inspiration to enjoy life despite all the frustrations and disappointments I have suffered so far. Therefore, I honestly believe that Jena Malone actually *Saved!* (US 2004) me from perhaps something worse by giving me something nice and exciting to feel about.”

4.7.4. Four Last Songs

The essay offers some interesting insights into how a consumer's fan relationship with a film actress expresses itself in everyday consumer behavior and what meaning it carries for the individual that have emerged iteratively from the obtained introspective data. In

the past, academic literature has treated fandom mainly as an inherent and static personality trait based on some pre-defined '*abnormal*' characteristics and behavior patterns by which fans could be differentiated quite conveniently from '*normal*' consumers (Jenson 1992; McCutcheon et al. 2003; Munsterberg 1916). The introspective data, however, provide clear evidence that a consumer's fan relationship with an admired celebrity actually constitutes a dynamic process that is constantly evolving with permanently varying levels of significance and experienced intensity for the individual. Moreover, while previous studies have conceptualized fandom primarily as a *participatory culture*, where like-minded consumers socially interact with each other within their respective consumption subcultures (Jenkins 1992; Kozinets 1997, 2001), the introspective data clearly show that my personal fan experiences and any subsequent consumption practices focus exclusively on my emotional attachment to Jena Malone herself and my admiration for her creative work as an actress. Indeed, during the entire 16 months of my contemporaneous self-observation, I have preferred to enjoy my admiration for her just by myself and never shown the slightest intentions to share it with any other fans either online or in person. The only exception would obviously be Jena Malone herself – but that's quite a different story and unlikely ever to happen. Now, it can be argued that the main reason why my observed fan experiences revolve entirely around the personal emotional attachment to the film actress rather than the participation in some ominous fan community is that I could actually '*be in love with her*' – which may not be so untrue. After all, romantic and sexual attraction have surely played a role in capturing my initial interest in Jena Malone and, in some way, continue doing so as part of an ongoing romantic infatuation. But how can you actually '*love*' somebody you don't know, have never even met in person and most likely never will? It is in particular this intimate – but in the literature largely neglected – aspect of fandom that drawing on narrative transportation theory provides some interesting insights in.

Although the introspective consumer narrative shows that my ongoing admiration for Jena Malone derives from my personal engagement with her artistic work as a film actress as much as with her off-screen persona, it is hereby interesting to note that the findings contradict the present stardom literature already with regard to how consumers relate to film stars. In his seminal book *Stars*, Dyer (1998) views film stars as systems of semiotic images that personify the consumer society's cultural ideals of success,

glamour, the extraordinary and even the divine. Thus, in drawing on selected examples from the Hollywood studio era of the 1920s to early-1950s, Dyer theorizes that fans would admire film stars as '*flawless, superior*' human beings, who display a consistent public image both on- and off-screen by portraying only those film characters that would mirror their own '*true*' personality and life-style in real life (Hollinger 2006). This view is also shared by McCracken (1989), who describes celebrities as complex and individualized sets of culturally constructed meanings that they accumulate through their fictional roles. Yet, my admiration for the performer Jena Malone results from her ability and flexibility as an actress to portray a diversity of characters that significantly differ from her private persona as much as from each other. But even more importantly, my emotional attachment to Jena Malone derives from actually seeing her as a '*normal, ordinary*' young woman with all her personal strengths and weaknesses rather than as a semiotic signifier of some cultural ideal, which is also evidenced by my romantic and sexual attraction to her. This means that I see her primarily as an interesting, intelligent, beautiful, natural and talented young woman, who also has flaws, some '*bad habits*' and makes mistakes from time to time – just like you, me and anybody else. These feelings of empathy and infatuation are further enhanced by engaging in out-of-text intertextuality (Hirschman 2000b; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008b), whereby I link Jena Malone's personal life-story to my own life experiences to the extent that I even partially identify with her. For example, by comparing my own personal experiences of growing up in a socially disadvantaged neighborhood to hers, "*I know only too well what it means to overcome the obstacles she had to face*" and, hence, admire her courage and determination in following her dreams; especially as I failed to do the same under less severe circumstances. Thus, '*sharing*' similar life experiences helps to strengthen the emotional bond that the fan experiences in relation to the admired celebrity.

However, as I'm unlikely to ever get to know Jena Malone personally, my impression of her personality is essentially a personalized intertextual reading of those media texts that I, as a consumer, perceive to be relevant and '*reliable*', such as her TV and print media interviews, her personal websites and detailed articles in '*better*' magazines. But while Dyer (1998) argues that a consumer's image of a film star is fixed and externally managed by the media, the presented consumer narrative suggests instead that this image is actually constructed within the consumer's mind and constantly evolving;

similar to our images of the people we regularly encounter in our everyday lives. This is clearly evident in my deeply-engaged, but also quite selective reading of Rommelmann's (2000) article, when I genuinely empathized with Jena Malone in how she "*handled so maturely all the problems she had to face at such a young age*" and admired how she developed, in my opinion, into "*such a smart, nice and interesting personality without losing her personal integrity*". The consumer internalizes the celebrity's off-screen persona thereby psychically within oneself through a selective reading of media texts and loads it with one's own thoughts, feelings, fantasies, values and meanings. Then s/he projects the created personal impression back onto the celebrity, just to internalize it once again with freshly obtained imageries from the media. This finding would also explain why my reported impression of Jena Malone's personality especially emphasizes those traits of her character and life-style that resonate strongly with my own private life experiences, ideals, dreams and desires and, as a result, strengthen my emotional attachment to her as a '*genuine person*'. More importantly, this continuous process of introjection and projection (Gould 1993) allows for the feelings of actually '*knowing*' the film actress like a close friend, whose career and life choices are empathetically followed in the same way as that of a fictional media character in an ongoing melodramatic narrative.

This experienced feeling of knowing the celebrity personally, including his/her private thoughts, feelings, personality and way of life, can at times become strong enough to elicit an emotional feeling within the fan of '*personal friendship*' or even '*love*' towards the adored celebrity; a phenomenon that Horton and Wohl (1956) have termed *parasocial interaction* or *relationship*. While the literature acknowledges parasocial relationships with media figures as quite a common phenomenon, especially among adolescents (Giles and Maltby 2004) and the elderly (Chory-Assaad and Yanen 2005; Rubin et al. 1985), the term itself has become increasingly loaded with largely negative connotations in both academic and popular literature. This is not surprising, as a number of social psychologists (i.e. McCutcheon et al. 2003, 2006), in recent years, discuss parasocial relationships primarily as a mental illness that is associated with a consumer's alleged cognitive inflexibility, impressionability, gullibility and pathological-obsessive behavior. However, this narrow, but increasingly popular view is quite unfortunate, because Horton and Wohl (1956) actually suggest the opposite by clearly highlighting the beneficial and healthy cathartic effects that parasocial

relationships would provide for the lonely and socially isolated, but otherwise “*mentally normal*” people. In their opinion, “*nothing could be more reasonable or natural than that people, who are isolated and lonely, should seek sociability and love wherever they think they can find it*” by forming a compensatory emotional attachment to a particular celebrity, who is “*readily available as an object of love*” (Horton and Wohl 1956: 223). Parasocial relationships with celebrities would therefore provide lonely individuals with a cathartic experience that helps to restore their emotional well-being in times of psychological distress. Leets et al. (1995) also add that a parasocial relationship only turns into pathological and dangerous behavior on those rare occasions, when it proceeds into fanatical obsession and an absolute defiance of reality.

The introspective data seem indeed to support Horton and Wohl’s theory. One theme that is dominant throughout the entire consumer narrative is the feeling of loneliness deriving from my unfulfilled longing for a romantic, affectionate and loving relationship with a female, which has so far failed to materialize in my life. As any social relationship involves essentially two people mutually reciprocating their feelings for each other, experiencing constant rejections by females on expressed grounds of not being attractive and interesting enough for them have resulted over time in low self-esteem, shyness (“*don’t converse easily with women*”) and growing insecurity (“*don’t know how to behave appropriately or to read her signals correctly*”) when interacting with women I fancy. With little opportunity for a romantic relationship with a female available in real life, Jena Malone lends herself perfectly as a readily available object of love for me to compensate for the experienced deficits; especially as her physical appearance and public persona match very closely “*the type of girl I’m always falling for*”. My impression of her personality is thereby a projection of my own unfulfilled desires and, especially, of what a potential girlfriend for me may be like as a normal person. My relationship fantasies with her essentially reflect how I imagine an ideal romantic relationship to be like in everyday life. However, that my parasocial relationship with Jena Malone is of a cathartic nature becomes apparent by the fact that it is not constantly present, but develops and recedes as a direct psychological response to external events in my real-life relations to women. Indeed, I engage most intensively in a parasocial relationship with Jena Malone in those particular moments, when I have just suffered another serious interpersonal disappointment or have been rejected again by a female I fancy. My imagined relationship with Jena Malone provides me thereby

with a temporary means of coping with feelings of loneliness, perceived unattractiveness and the lack of romantic love that would eat me up from the inside. But every time a new possibility emerges for me to develop a real-life relationship with a female, the parasocial experience quickly recedes again.

4.7.5. Hope

In heeding Smith et al.'s (2007) call, this introspective research studied celebrity fandom from an '*insider*' perspective to explore the nature of consumers' everyday fan relationships and emotional attachment to their favorite celebrity. Obviously, I don't imply that the introspective data and the proposed interpretations can be generalized. Nor do I pretend that my presented interpretation of the complex introspective data would be the only possible one; far from it. What I do suggest, however, is that some really interesting insights into celebrity fandom emerged from this introspective study that previous studies based on traditional research methodologies have overlooked or failed to describe. The main finding that has emerged iteratively from the introspective data is that a consumer's fan experiences revolve around one's personal engagement with both the celebrity's creative work as a performer and the celebrity's off-screen persona. The latter is essentially the fan's mental construction that evolves from the personal intertextual reading of what s/he perceives to be relevant and '*reliable*' media texts and is determined by the fan's inherent desires. Hence, drawing on narrative transportation theory can explain in particular how and why fans often develop and experience the feeling of '*knowing*' the celebrity personally, including his/her private thoughts, feelings, personality and way of life, despite having actually never met the real person. This experienced '*bond of emotional closeness*' can at times be strong enough to elicit a feeling of '*personal friendship*' within the consumer or, in some way, even a feeling of '*love*' towards the admired celebrity (Barbas 2001) that can express itself in a parasocial relationship. It also provides an explanation as to why fans sometimes feel enormously disappointed, when their most desired dream of actually meeting the adored celebrity in person comes true, because the celebrity turns out to be a different person in private life or just can't live up to the (perhaps unrealistic) imaginary person that the consumer has created in one's own mind (Gross 2005).

4.7.6 Acknowledgements

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CHAPTER 5

FIVE STAR DAY

5.1 Introduction

The overall aim of my research journey – and, hence, also the aim of this thesis – is to develop a genuinely holistic understanding of what meaning the everyday lived fan relationship with one’s admired film actor or actress has for the individual consumer and how this emotional attachment manifests and expresses itself in everyday consumer behaviour from a real insider perspective. Hence, after mapping out the contemporary interdisciplinary bodies of literature on fandom (Chapter 2), film consumption and film stardom (both Chapter 3) and also showing how my own work is positioned and making a contribution within them, I have therefore presented in the previous chapter those six publications that form the core of this thesis and let them speak for themselves. With one exception, all these papers are based on the introspective consumer narrative of my own emotional attachment to the film actress Jena Malone and provide together some interesting insights into the personal and experiential nature of celebrity fandom. Each of these publications explores thereby a particular facet (or dimension) of the film star’s special appeal and very personal attraction to the individual consumer that ranges from her creative work as a performer and artist to the private person behind her public image in the media. Although I already outlined their individual contribution to the literature earlier on in this thesis, this final chapter now begins with a summary of their findings within the context of my overall research project. This is followed by a discussion of the thesis’s overall contribution to the literature on film consumption, stardom and fandom. Then, the research project’s methodological contribution, implications and limitations are addressed, before outlining my agenda for future research within this project.

5.2 Summary of the Publications’ Findings and Contributions

In this research project, I have set out to gain a genuinely holistic understanding of a consumer’s everyday lived fan relationship with one’s admired film actor or actress and how it manifests itself in consumption practices and experiences. But even though both the stardom literature within film studies and the celebrity endorsement literature within marketing view film stars as being *‘systems of semiotic images that personify the consumer society’s cultural ideas of success, glamour, the extraordinary and divine’*

(Dyer 1998; King 1991) or *'individualised sets of culturally constructed meanings that film stars accumulate through their fictional roles'* (McCracken 1989; Thomson 2006), the introspective consumer narrative of my own emotional attachment to the film actress Jena Malone (see Appendix B) presents a much more complex picture. As discussed in more detail in paper 4, a film actor or actress can appeal to the consumer as a creative performer, as the private person behind the public media image, as a social link to other consumers and his/her potential tangibility through associated products. The six papers that form the heart of this thesis and I have presented in the previous chapter, therefore, follow a logical transition from the fan's admiration for the film actress's creative work to the adoration of her private person by each exploring a particular facet (or attribute) of the film star's special appeal and very personal attraction to the individual consumer. This transition is thereby twofold. On the one hand, the publications constitute a journey that reflects a gradual transition over time from the consumer's initial interest in a film over the admiration of the film actress as a creative performer to an infatuation with the film actress as a real person. After all, any fan interest in a film actor or actress starts by actually watching him or her in a certain film or TV show that captures the heart of the consumer and moves gradually on from there. On the other hand, a kind of transition is also provided by the order of the publications in terms of covering the broad spectrum of consumer experiences that a fan relationship with a film actor or actress entails and that are in some form always present. The various facets of a film star's special appeal and personal attraction to the individual consumer are thereby addressed step-by-step.

It seems quite obvious that a consumer's personal enjoyment and admiration of the film actress' creative work as an artist and performer plays a vital role in a consumer's fan relationship with her. In fact, it's usually the enjoyment of a particular film that lays the foundation for such a relationship to develop. Hence, the first two papers look into how a consumer holistically enjoys the consumption of a film in its entirety. Paper 1 has found that it is a complex tapestry of interrelated factors that contribute together to the consumer's film enjoyment even long before and/or after actually watching the film. But in taking a narrative transportation approach, I have also found that the consumer's personal engagement with the film narrative, its characters and underlying philosophical message is of particular importance, as it not only allows for a momentary escape from reality into the fictional film world, but is even further enhanced through intertextuality, by which the consumer connects the film to one's personal life experiences. Paper 2

confirms the findings and adds that the nature and intensity of a consumer's immersion experience is exclusively determined by one's private motives, interests and inherent desires. While it is possible to compare the immersion experiences of 2-3 informants for similarities and differences, it becomes apparent that an increasing number of informants inadvertently disenfranchises the individual's film consumption experience of its very essence by reducing it to the smallest common denominator. However, both papers also provide some interesting observations with regard to a consumer's fan relationship with the film actress as a performer. My interest and desire to watch *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005) and *Into the Wild* (US 2007) was awoken by Jena Malone featuring in them; even though she is only playing a support role in both of them. But despite admiring in either case her acting performances and how she brought her characters to life, she isn't the main focus of my film consumption experience and I enjoyed the films in themselves instead. This clearly contradicts the stardom literature (see Dyer 1998; Hollinger 2006; King 1991). But then again, according to Dyer's (1998) definition, Jena Malone isn't a film star anyway. So, why am I fascinated by her and enjoy her presence in those films more than, let's say, leading lady and film star Keira Knightley? The answer is that, for me, her acting performance made her stand out by not imposing herself on the film.

Paper 3 shifts the emphasis of the fan relationship towards the film actress's off-screen persona, as she is presented in the media. Building on the stardom literature's traditional conceptualisation that views film stars in essence as specific types of film texts that are constructed through the intertextual accumulation of various film and media texts (Dyer 1998; Hollinger 2006; King 1991; Krämer 2003), I have taken a narrative transportation approach to gain some holistic insights into a consumer's everyday lived fan experiences with a film actress based on my personal interaction with Jena Malone's depiction in the available media texts. I, thereby, found that a consumer's fan experiences with a film actor or actress derive from one's personal engagement with his/her creative work and public off-screen persona. The latter is essentially the consumer's personal intertextual reading of what one perceives to be relevant and reliable media texts. Thus, instead of viewing the film actress as a '*flawless, superior*' human being, who portrays a canon of virtually identical film characters that mirror their '*true*' personality and life-style (Dyer 1998; McCracken 1989), I admire her as '*normal*' girl who is also a flexible actress. In doing so, it becomes apparent that, as a consumer, I make a clear distinction between the actress as a private person and her portrayed on-screen characters. In fact, this paper

inadvertently demonstrates how I begin to construct my own personal image of Jena Malone through a selective reading of media texts (especially Rommelmann 2000) that emphasises in particular those aspects of her that relate strongly to my own inherent values, dreams and desires. As a consequence, paper 4 deconstructs the substance of a film actor/actress as a textual image in order to look at how and why consumers become emotionally attached to a particular one, but remain indifferent to others, by identifying the individual facets or human brand attributes that offer a particular appeal to the consumer. The paper found that the actual substance of the film actor/actress consists of four key human brand attributes through which s/he appeals to the individual consumer as a) a performer and artist, b) the '*real*' person underneath the performer, c) the social link to other consumers, and d) the tangible manifestation of both the performer and the '*real*' person through products – depending on the consumer's personal interests, values and inherent desires.

The last two papers move to the part of the fan relationship with a film actor or actress, where the consumer engages with the film actress as an actual private person. Indeed, both papers found that the consumer clearly distinguishes between admiring the film actress's acting performances in the portrayal of on-screen characters and adoring the actress as an actual person. But because it is highly unlikely that a consumer ever meets his/her favourite film actor or actress personally and get to know the real person behind the image, the consumer's impression of the film star's private persona is one's own mental construction that emerges from a personal intertextual and selective reading of what the fan perceives to be relevant and '*reliable*' media texts. And in drawing on a narrative transportation approach, paper 5 shows how this image is constantly evolving within the consumer's mind through an ongoing process of introjection and projection (Gould 1993). The consumer, thereby, internalises the film actress's off-screen persona psychically within oneself, loads it with private thoughts, feelings, fantasies and meanings and, then, projects this personal impression back onto her to introject the image again. Hence, my personal impression of Jena Malone's personality emphasises especially those aspects of her character and personal life-style that resonate strongly with my own private life experiences, ideals, dreams and desires and, subsequently, strengthen my emotional attachment to her as a '*real*' person. The continuous process of introjection and projection, thereby, allows for the feeling of '*knowing*' the film actress like a friend – including her private thoughts, feelings, personality and way of life. As

this experienced *'bond of emotional closeness'* can be strong enough at times to elicit within the fan a feeling of *'personal friendship'* or even *'love'* towards the admired film actress, paper 6 developed these findings further by exploring the parasocial nature of a consumer's fan relationship with her private persona. Just like a traditional romantic or social relationship, a consumer's parasocial relationship with a film actress is a dynamic process that evolves over time in response to situational circumstances and emotional feelings. Moreover, the paper found that the parasocial relationship with the film actor or actress can actually provide lonely individuals with a cathartic experience that helps to restore their emotional well-being in times of personal psychological distress.

5.3 Overall Contribution to the Literature

The one or the other reader may still be wondering what significant contributions this *'self-indulgent'* research project (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Wallendorf and Brucks 1993) would make to the academic literature and what its managerial relevance might be. Well, Holbrook (2000: 85) has repeatedly argued that *'the fundamental difference between **marketing research** and **consumer research** is that the former **should** whereas the latter **should not** be guided by the criterion of practical relevance and usefulness to marketing managers'*¹⁹. In other words, even though this thesis and the presented findings – like any other *'piece of decent consumer research'* (Holbrook 1995) – may somehow become eventually useful to some marketers within the film industry or other creative industries such as film studios, talent agencies, publicists, the media or even celebrities themselves, I value instead the advancement of our knowledge about the true nature of consumers' personal fan relationships with their favourite film actors and actresses (or any other celebrities) in itself as the primary purpose of my research. As mentioned earlier, the aim of my research journey and, thus, this thesis is to develop a truly holistic understanding of what meaning(s) the everyday lived fan relationship with an admired film actor or actress has for the individual consumer and how this emotional attachment manifests and expresses itself in everyday consumption practices and experiences from a genuine insider perspective. Yet, due to the very special nature of the film star fandom phenomenon (or celebrity fandom in general), my research not only draws on an interdisciplinary body of literature from academic fields like consumer research, film studies, media studies, marketing, social psychology, sociology as well as

¹⁹ Emphasis highlighted through bold letters by me.

sports and leisure research, but also inadvertently adds in one way or another to the very same as well. Indeed, despite being primarily located within consumer culture theory (CCT) (Arnould and Thompson 2005) and the emerging consumer introspection theory (CIT) (Gould 2011), this thesis (and the presented papers in it) makes its overall contribution to the interdisciplinary literatures on film consumption, stardom and fandom by providing new insights into the actual substance of a film star's human brand and introducing a reconceptualisation of fans that puts the emphasis back on the special emotional bond that consumers form, foster and maintain with them.

5.3.1 Contribution to the Film Consumption Literature

It doesn't require much imagination to see that a fan's admiration for a film actress is also intrinsically and inadvertently linked to an admiration of her creative work as an artist and performer, which is in essence the enjoyment of her films. Therefore, the first contribution of this thesis is to the film consumption literature. Previous research on film consumption has focused either on a film's commercial success at the box office or on comparing the attractiveness of individual media formats (the film's '*packaging*'), while audience-response theory generally discussed film consumption as a proxy for advancing the scholar's own ideological agenda. In contrast, this research has taken an actual film viewer's and fan's perspective and looked holistically at how a film is really consumed. The first finding, thereby, is that the widely assumed rational trade-off between various film formats is virtually non-existent, as the consumer – and especially the fan – is primarily interested in the film itself and actually watches the same film a number of times across various film formats (i.e. cinema, DVD and TV), which would render the conceptual research designs and findings of several earlier, mostly experimental studies (i.e. Basil 2001; De Vany 2004; Gazley et al. 2010; Krugman and Yopal 1991; Lehmann and Weinberg 2000; Sawhney and Eliashberg 1996) quite obsolete. The second finding is that a complex tapestry of interrelated factors influence, contribute to and determine an individual consumer's film enjoyment from long before to long after actually watching the particular film in question, which previous studies have failed to address in their entirety. But the major contribution to the film consumption literature is the important role of the consumer's ability to immerse oneself mentally in the film and to engage personally with its characters, narrative and underlying message, which has in this way and complexity never been revealed before.

Finally, going back to the first sentence of this section, the involvement of the admired film actress obviously plays a major role in a fan's interest and enjoyment of the film. In fact, the admired film actress is widely accepted as generating a fan's initial awareness and interest in a film in the first place. Yet, while the role of the film star in attracting audiences for a film has already been considered by many earlier studies in marketing (Albert 1998; Elberse 2007; Eliashberg and Sawhney 1994; Ravid 1999; Wallace et al. 1993) and film studies (Dyer 1998; Hollinger 2006; King 1991; Krämer 2003), this was often done by considering merely the 2-3 leading film stars in the order of their billing on film posters and/or film credits (Kerrigan 2010; McDonald 2000, 2008). However, the consumer narrative in Appendix B clearly shows that the size of the film actress's part has actually never been an issue in generating the fan's interest in her films at all. In fact, the fan's awareness, interest and enjoyment of the two films that are specifically investigated in this thesis did indeed emerge from the film actress's involvement in them; even though she is only featuring in support roles. While her appearance and performance may have gone unnoticed with many other viewers, who have primarily been preoccupied with other facets of the film, her presence has been the key area of interest and attention for the fan. This observation stands in clear contradiction to the vast body of literature on stardom, film consumption and consumer preferences in general and, thus, opens up an interesting area for further academic research.

5.3.2 Contribution to the Stardom Literature

The thesis's second overall contribution is to the stardom literature by providing insights into the actual substance of a film star's human brand that have emerged from a narrative transportation approach (Gerrig 1993; Green et al. 2004). Until now, due to its origins within the field of film studies, the stardom literature has primarily relied on audience-response theory as a means of examining from a specific ideology-informed perspective how film audiences, at least in theory, would interpret film stars as '*homogeneous sets of film textual images*' (Ellis 1999; King 1991; Watson 2007a) and '*semiotic signifiers of generic cultural archetypes and values*' (Dyer 1998; Hollinger 2006; McCracken 1989). The film star is thereby seen as the accumulation of various film and other off-screen media texts, whereby film scholars put the emphasis clearly on the film star's on-screen persona with his or her mediated private persona serving merely as an extension. As a result, the portrayed characters on screen and the private person of the film star off-screen are seen as being virtually one-and-the-same person,

whose personal image is designed and managed to fulfil universal cultural expectations (Dyer 1998; McDonald 2000; Thomson 2006). However, the introspective data in this research clearly indicate that the consumer never mistakes the film actress for her portrayed characters and quite clearly distinguishes between them by enjoying the portrayed character as part of the overall film text and, at the same time, admiring the quality of the actress's acting skills. The research and this thesis, therefore, have introduced narrative transportation theory as an alternative analytical prism to enhance our understanding of how actual consumers personally engage with film stars or any other celebrities in real life. In fact, unlike the critical audience-response theory, a narrative transportation approach examines actual consumer narratives to gain genuine insights into how consumers actually experience film actors/actresses as self-constructed reflections of their own personal values, dreams and inherent desires. Moreover, it also provides insights into why a consumer may find a certain film star interesting, attractive and desirable and another one irrelevant and repulsive. A narrative transportation approach of fan narratives, thus, also reveals some interesting insights into the actual substance of a film star's human brand appeal.

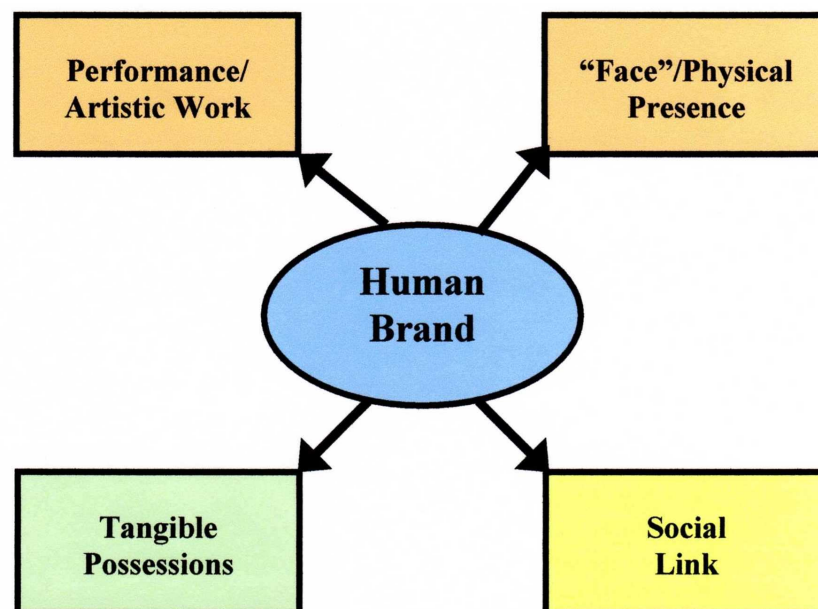


Figure 2: The Attributes of a Human Brand That Offer an Appeal to Consumers

Indeed, using a narrative transportation approach, the introspective data presented in the publications that form this thesis and in the extensive consumer narrative in Appendix B clearly indicate that a film actor or actress (or any other celebrity for that matter) is a

much more complex textual construct than the stardom literature implies. The thesis's most significant contribution to the stardom literature, therefore, is providing a deeper understanding of the actual substance of a film star and his/her human brand appeal. For various methodological and conceptual reasons, previous studies have always presented film stars and other celebrities as one-dimensional textual constructs with a universal consumer appeal that semiotically unite their recognisable canon of portrayed on-screen characters with the public media images of their private lives (Dyer 1998; Evans and Hesmondhalgh 2005; McCracken 1989; Thomson 2006). In contrast to this traditional view, this thesis suggests that film actors/actresses and any other celebrities are instead the complex, multi-dimensional textual constructs of real human beings that offer a very personal appeal to each individual consumer, which elicits various kinds of emotional responses such as curiosity, interest, disgust, sexual attraction or emotional attachment. Hence, the substance of the film actor/actress as a mediated textual construct can be broadly summarised in four key human brand attributes (Figure 2) through which s/he appeals to the individual consumer as a) the performer and artist (including creative work), b) the '*real*' private person underneath the performer that gives the artist a '*physical presence*' in real life, c) the social link to other like-minded consumers as a source of either shared admiration or shared contempt, and d) the physical products that enable the tangible manifestations of the otherwise intangible performer and private person. The consumer can thereby relate to only one individual human brand attribute or to any given symbiotic combination of these human brand attributes in order to feel at least temporarily attracted to a particular film actor or actress. The conclusion of this finding is that a consumer's emotional fan relationship is determined and expressed by the personal appeal of each of these attributes. The more of the human brand attributes appeal with growing intensity to the consumer's inherent desires, dreams and values, the stronger does s/he feel emotionally attached to the respective film actor or actress.

5.3.3 Contribution to the Fandom Literature

Apart from offering insights into the actual substance of a film star's human brand, this thesis's third and most significant overall contribution is to the interdisciplinary fandom literature by presenting a reconceptualisation of fandom that puts the emphasis back on what should normally matter the most – the special emotional bond that fans form, build and experience with the admired subject of their fandom. This reconceptualisation of fans, thereby, provides us with some interesting insights into the personal meanings that

the emotional fan relationship with one's beloved film actor or actress has for the individual consumer and how it expresses itself in everyday consumer behaviour. But in order to realise such a reconceptualisation of fandom, it requires first to have a clear and detailed overview of how fans have already been conceptualised across the literature of the different academic disciplines. Unfortunately, despite the interdisciplinary nature of the phenomenon, most of these disciplines – maybe with the exception of consumer research – seem to have shown very little interest in crossing the boundaries of their own discipline-internal literature into other fields. Therefore, earlier fandom taxonomies were restricted to the literature of a specific academic discipline and limited to either providing a historical account of discipline-specific paradigm developments (Gray et al. 2007) or ranking the different levels of fan commitment (Hunt et al. 1999). Yet, none of the previous taxonomies has looked at the different essences of how fans have been conceptualised so far. Thus, this thesis's first contribution to the fandom literature is the development of a thorough and truly interdisciplinary taxonomy of contemporary conceptualisations of fans in the literature across the various academic fields, whereby particular attention is paid to the essence of how fans are conceptualised (see Chapter 2). As none of these fandom conceptualisations pays any attention to the fans' personal relationships with their respective fandom objects, the most important contribution to the fandom literature is a reconceptualisation of fans that addresses this particular conceptual deficit in the fandom literature.

By following up and building directly on this thesis's main contribution to the stardom literature, my research suggests that the nature and intensity of a fan's emotional attachment to one's admired film actor/actress are determined by the personal relevance, appeal and meaning that each of the latter's human brand attributes, either individually or in symbiotic harmony with each other, has for the individual consumer. Although they haven't been specifically stated in the publications (and, hence, this thesis) as such, five key themes have forcefully emerged iteratively from the hermeneutic analysis and interpretation of the introspective data of my own personal fan experiences with the film actress Jena Malone. In keeping with the personal introspective nature of my research journey and the publications that form this thesis, I name the five themes in specific relation to my own fan relationship as follows:

- Admiring the Actress Jena Malone
- Adoring the Person Jena Malone

- Taking Possessions of Jena Malone
- Sharing vs. Non-Sharing Jena Malone
- Living with Jena Malone

But even though these theme names are closely tied to the consumer narrative of my own personal fan relationship with the film actress, they are equally applicable to any other consumer's personal fan relationships with one's favourite film star or celebrity simply by exchanging the names of the admired celebrities.

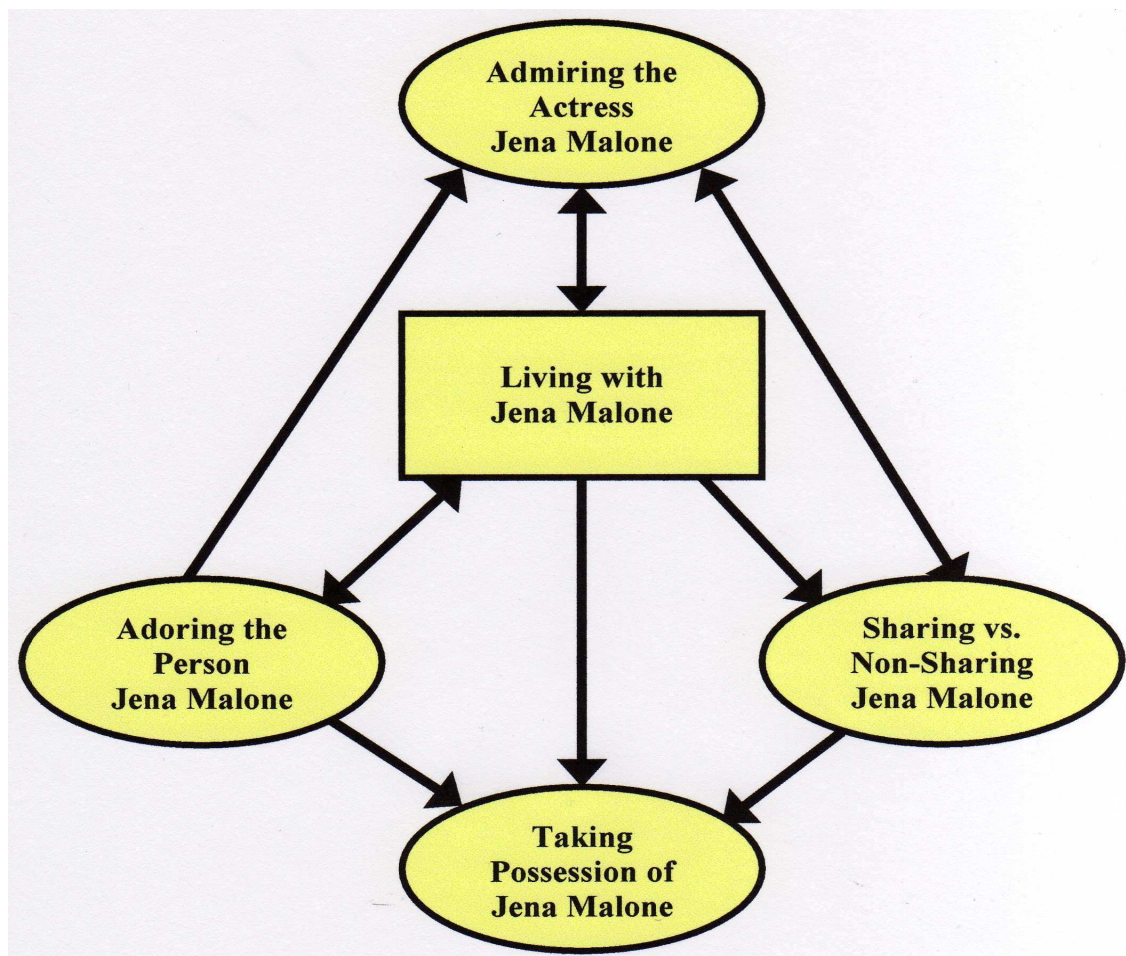


Figure 3: Model of a Consumer's Fan Relationship with a Film Actress

As can easily be seen from their names, the first four themes are closely linked to the four human brand attributes that make up the substance of a film actor or actress and provide his or her special appeal to the consumer. Hence, '*admiring the actress*' reflects the fan's interest in the film actor/actress as a creative performer, which involves his/her acting skills and performances in portraying on-screen characters as well as enjoying the films. '*Adoring the person*', on the other hand, reflects the fan's emotional attachment

to the film actor/actress as a *'real-living'* person. But as the consumer is unlikely to meet the admired film actor/actress in person, one's impression of him/her is essentially the consumer's personal and selective intertextual reading of what one perceives to be *'reliable'* media texts. *'Taking possession'*, then, refers to those fan activities, whereby the consumer seeks to establish a tangible presence of the film actor/actress as a creative performer and private person in one's personal life through the acquisition of products. And, finally, *'sharing vs non-sharing'* refers to fan's willingness to share one's fandom with other like-minded consumers, whereby the consumer usually tends to share happily one's admiration for the film star's creative performances and his/her films with others, but is unwilling to share the emotional attachment to the film actor/actress as a private person. After all, who wants to share a friend or girlfriend with others? However, an underlying key theme that most forcefully emerged iteratively from the introspective data, which is particularly evident in the last two papers and in the extended consumer narrative in Appendix B, is the issue of temporality that I have named *'living with'*. Just like any other social or romantic relationship in real life, a consumer's everyday lived fan relationship with an admired film actor/actress is a dynamic process that develops, evolves and changes constantly over time due to a constant flow of new information and personal emotional experiences and also due to the consumer's own changing desires, fantasies, values and attraction in relation to the film actors's or actress's human brand attributes. This dynamic process allows the consumer to develop a feeling of actually *'knowing'* the film actor/actress like a personal friend or even to experience feelings of *'love'*. Figure 3 provides a graphic outline of how these five key themes relate to, interact with and reinforce each other and, thereby, enable the consumer to experience a complex and strong fan relationship with the respective film actor/actress.

5.4 Contribution and Implications for Methodology

But in order to gain a truly holistic understanding of how a consumer's everyday lived fan relationship with one's admired film actress manifests itself in everyday consumer behaviour and may even lead to the formation of a parasocial relationship, it requires a research methodology that gives the individual consumer a voice (Stern 1998) and, at the same time, allows the researcher a 24-hour access to the observed phenomenon of interest. Thus, in heeding Smith et al.'s (2007) call for an emic description of fandom *'as it is experienced'* by real fans and without the researcher imposing any preconceived abstract explanations onto it, this thesis's final contribution to the literature, obviously,

derives from the controversial nature of my research journey's methodology, whereby I occupy the dual role of the researcher and the sole informant, and adds to the emerging consumer introspection theory (CIT) paradigm (Gould 2011). In other words, the papers that form this thesis have demonstrated how using subjective personal introspection (or autoethnography) is enabling the researcher to explore first-hand the subjective nature of human thoughts, feelings, daydreams, creativity, spirituality, sensations and streams of consciousness related to consumption (Gould 1993, 2008b; Holbrook 1995, 2006) in the very way they are experienced by the consumer, but have remained inaccessible through conventional *scientific* and *qualitative* research methods (Brown 1998b). In doing so, this thesis makes essentially three sub-contributions. First of all, much of the debate and controversy about the '*scientific merits*' of subjective personal introspection has revolved around the credibility and trustworthiness of the collected data (Gould 1991, 1995, 2006b; Holbrook 2005a; Shankar 2000; Wallendorf and Brucks 1993; Woodside 2004, 2006). Yet, there has virtually been no discussion to-date in relation to an appropriate and rigorous analysis of introspective data. While the presented papers have already laid the groundwork for an appropriate, rigorous data analysis strategy, this thesis proposes a detailed hermeneutic interpretation process for introspective data in Appendix A, which has been the foundation of my research project and is modelled on the traditional phenomenological approach described by Thompson (1997).

In contrast to Gould (2008a, b) or Holbrook (1995, 2005a), however, I understand SPI primarily as an insightful data collection method rather than as a complete methodology in itself – especially in absence of a coherent framework for a suitable data analysis and interpretation strategy. The second sub-contribution, therefore, is the introduction of narrative transportation theory as a hermeneutic framework for examining introspective consumer narratives like written texts. After all, if the stardom literature is viewing film stars as semiotic sets of accumulated film and media texts and phenomenologists tend to interpret an individual's everyday life-world as a text (Thompson 1998), then it is only fair to suggest that a consumer's fan relationship with film actor/actress would not only represent a kind of narrative transportation experience, but that it can also be understood as text in itself that can be examined through a narrative transportation approach. Thus, by drawing on narrative transportation theory as a framework for hermeneutic analysis, subjective personal introspection offers some genuine insights into the meaning that the emotional attachment to the admired film actor/actress and the experiential consumption

of his/her films, autographs, photos, articles and other associated products have for the fan beyond the hedonic pleasure value that can be observed during their immediate consumption. The final sub-contribution to the literature is heeding a call by Stephen Brown (1998b, 2006b, 2011) for a more inspired and '*reader-engaging*' style of writing within marketing and consumer research; one that draws on the conventions of fictional literature in order to make the reading experience more enjoyable. Hence, the thesis is not only using SPI to obtain insights into a consumer's everyday lived fan experiences with a film actor/actress, but also in order to break down the traditional divide between the researcher, the text and the reader by encouraging the reader to follow me as a '*side-participant*' on a journey of discovery into the phenomenon of celebrity fandom as well as to engage personally with the narrator's private everyday lived fan experiences with and struggle of '*being-in-the-world*' through use of biographical consumer narratives. The reader is thereby invited to develop his/her own understanding of film star fandom through a dialogue and an '*active mental immersion*' into the consumer narrative in a way that wouldn't be possible by any traditional methodological means.

5.5 Limitations of the Research

But as with any other academic research, obviously, there are also some limitations attached to this thesis as well. What these limitations are, however, also depends to some extent on the expectations, ideology and epistemological grounding of the reader. For example, a reader deeply embedded in logical empiricism may consider the thesis's reliance on a sample of one and the subsequent lack of generalisability as its biggest limitation. In fact, a major limitation in this regard would already be the fact that the classical hallmarks of good '*scientific*' research just don't apply to the epistemological, ontological and methodological stance of my research. As with any earlier studies that relied solely on researcher introspection (Gould 1995; Holbrook 1995; Shankar 2000), the same concerns raised by Wallendorf and Brucks (1993) and Woodside (2004, 2006) and discussed in Appendix A in more detail may still be relevant to this thesis and were considered in the overall research design, as explained in 1.4 as well as A.4.3 and A.4.4. First of all, the fear of distorted recall of events due to the reconstructive nature of human long-term memory has been addressed by collecting the lived fan experiences as contemporaneous data at the time they occurred (or at least as close as possible), which ensures high data accuracy due to the very limited intervening time. Data access for external review has been ensured by recording the introspective data in a specifically

assigned diary that is available on request. Finally, the contemporaneous data collection approach also ensured that the data specificity hasn't been distorted by a primary focus on more memorable events, which are often not remembered in the way they objectively happened – as is normally the case in research methods that rely on retrospective recall such as interviews, surveys and focus groups. Furthermore, the reader may be reminded that the phenomenological perspective views memories not as the recall of past events, but as an experience that takes place in the present and just happens to involve an event in the past (Husserl 1986). A conceptual misunderstanding among critics of SPI (Remu 2011; Woodside 2004) has always been the case that these critics often tend to interpret introspective accounts as a factual, objective account of the observed event or phenomenon itself. This view, however, is completely wrong, as the actual subject of introspective research is not the description of a certain event itself, but the description of how a consumer actually experiences this particular event as part of one's life-world.

Hence, the reader may be reminded that the emphasis of this research, this thesis and the publications presented in it is on the consumer's everyday lived experiences with the film actress, which include personal thoughts, feelings, fantasies and daydreams, rather than a mere recollection of factual behaviour that could have been achieved by less controversial research methods. While SPI is the best, if not only way actually to get access to the genuine world of human experiences, there are obviously some operational limitations attached to it as well that need to be mentioned. Firstly, in order to record the experienced emotional feelings, dreams and fantasies, they need to be transferred and described in linguistic terms. This, obviously, holds the general problem that, despite a shared culture and negotiated meaning of language, the same term refers to different mental imageries within individuals due to their different personal backgrounds and life experiences. The same is true for the description of physiological and psychosomatic reactions that are triggered by the respective emotional experiences. Secondly, even though the fan experiences have been recorded at the point of occurrence, due to the complexity of human experiences, it is very difficult to record all relevant experiences in their entirety – especially in times of emotional turmoil, stress and excitement. Thus, a selective perception of events, though strongly reduced by the contemporaneous data collection approach, can't be prevented completely. Also, a problem in particular at the beginning of the data collection is the issue of self-censorship. Recording one's feelings into the diary was a bit like talking to another person and, therefore, involved a period

of building trust and becoming comfortable with revealing one's explicit inner feelings and desires to the public. Another related issue is that certain experiences are recorded in the heat of the moment and, therefore, can be perceived by outsiders as offensive and immoral or even lead to libel issues. To address this issue, I recorded everything in the diary as it occurred. During the transcription of the diaries, I have made some necessary alterations (i.e. taking out names and identifying marks of affected individuals other than myself and Jena Malone or any other textual media person, changing certain words and phrases in order to avoid libel issues, etc.).

A major problem with introspective data is the issue of data credibility and confirmability. Most traditional qualitative methods, such as grounded theory and case study research, require their own hallmarks of good research, which are modelled on the positivist scientific criteria, to be met by using techniques such as the triangulation between different informants and between different researcher interpretations, member checks and external confirmations. However, it is the nature of human experiences that they are always unique to the individual and, therefore, cannot be described, measured and explained by quantitative means and methods. Any data interpretation that reduces human experiences to their smallest common denominator by focusing exclusively on the commonalities and similarities within the obtained responses, as scientific research methods and traditional qualitative methodologies like grounded theory generally do, is inadvertently disenfranchising them of their very essence. Thus, it also is impossible for anyone to observe and confirm another person's inner emotional experiences, as I explain in more detail in Appendix A. But while human experiences such as the nature of a fan's emotional attachment to his adored film actress cannot be confirmed by a third person or observer, the individual's experiences, nonetheless, can be compared with those of another person (Batat and Wohlfeil 2009; Gould 2006b). However, key is thereby NOT to focus on establishing the smallest common denominator, but actually to compare the individual consumer experiences for their similarities AND differences.

5.6 Agenda for Further Research

As Heidegger (1927) points out, the existential-phenomenological perspective holds that any interpretations that emerge through a hermeneutic analysis never represent the final and absolute findings, but only one set of possible findings (Goulding 2005). Thus, any interpretation of a phenomenon has to be understood as being merely a snapshot

that has been taken at particular moment in time from a particular perspective. But it is the nature of knowledge with regard to any given phenomenon that it constantly evolves and develops further in response to every piece of newly obtained information or in response to a re-reading of the same old material under altered personal and situational circumstances. And the same is true for this particular thesis. Each of the publications that form the core of this thesis reflects a particular stage in my research journey, and it should have become obvious to the reader how with each one of them my understanding of the phenomenon of film star fandom has evolved. As a consequence, the presented thesis is merely a snapshot of the current status of my ongoing research journey, which has potential for further research. A good starting point are the overall contributions to both the stardom and the fandom literatures with relation to the substance of a film star's human brand appeal, as discussed in Chapter 4 (paper 4) and in 5.3.2, and how it provides the consumer with the very '*hook*' that encourages one's emotional attachment to the film star. This, then, leads straight into the model of a consumer's fan relationship with a film actress that I have presented in 5.3.3 and which is a newly emerging picture that hasn't been the subject of any earlier publication so far. Because of its complexity and depth, a further thorough and detailed exploration could promise to lead to another major contribution and publication emerging from this research.

Another interesting idea is to expand the research by exploring the fan experiences of other consumers with their favourite celebrities in form of consumer narratives as well. The key should be a comparison of those fan experiences in terms of similarities AND differences through the same SPI-based narrative transportation approach that formed the basis on the research project – as already practiced and discussed in relation to film consumption in Chapter 4 (paper 2). Two interesting features in a consumer's everyday lived fan relationship with a film actor/actress that hasn't been discussed so far, as they haven't been an issue in my introspective data, may also warrant further investigation. Firstly, as separation, break-up and divorce are common features within many types of social, romantic and professional relationships, how and why do they occur and/or play out within a fan's parasocial relationship with a film star? Secondly, even though a fan's parasocial relationship is purely imaginary, what happens when the adored film actor or actress is involved in a real-life relationship with a partner (or even married)? How does such a development, if at all, affect the nature of a consumer's fan relationship? While the popular media is filled with stereotypes, empirical field data are still non-existent.

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APPENDIX A

INTO THE WILD

“Just as painters make art with colours and musicians with sounds introspectors do so too with words.” (Patterson 2009)

A.1 Introduction

The research methodology represents essentially the academic road-map for a journey of intellectual discovery into a phenomenon that calls for scholarly explanation. But in case you are wondering as to why this appendix is titled *Into the Wild*, I believe that the film by Sean Penn, in which Jena Malone also featured in a support role, provides us with an excellent analogy for the existential-phenomenological perspective that guides this research. Just like the lead character Christopher McCandless, we have to get out of our comfortable trap that is the established path of academic scholarship and leave the ‘old’ (= what is known and/or how it has become known) behind and walk with an open mind into ‘*unknown territory*’ to obtain genuine insights into the human condition (Batat and Wohlfeil 2009). And if we look hereby into our own individual subjectivity (Gould 2008a), we might even learn the one or the other thing about ourselves. Now, with regard to the present study, I have provided you in Chapters 2 and 3 with a detailed overview of what is already known in the current literature on film actors and their fans and, subsequently, made the case for re-conceptualisation of fans that puts the emphasis of research back onto fans’ personal relationships with their favourite film actors. I, thereby, proposed to draw on narrative transportation theory to examine consumers’ emotional attachments to their admired film actors as holistic lived experiences. However, in order to gain some genuinely holistic insights into a fan’s personal everyday lived experiences with the favourite film actor/actress, the consumer must be given a voice (Stern 1998) by focusing from an insider perspective (Smith et al. 2007) on the consumer experience in the very way it presents itself to consciousness (Thompson 1997). In this appendix, I outline my rationale for choosing a subjective personal introspective approach that is grounded in existential-phenomenology as well as the methodological issues that need to be addressed. And although Chris McCandless met his doom at the unforgiving hands of Mother Nature, I hope that at the end of this intellectual journey I may be spared a similar fate at the hands of academia.

A.2 The Rationale for Choosing an Introspective Research Methodology

As the main objective of any academic research is to contribute to the advancement of knowledge regarding any phenomenon that warrants investigation, the question arises immediately as to why I've chosen subjective personal introspection as my research methodology for this study rather than any other more established and less controversial ones. Firstly, research methodologies commonly described in the marketing literature on consumption experiences, including some of my own studies (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2006b, c, 2007), often failed to appreciate the overall context by studying merely individual elements in isolation. Secondly, research methodologies that have previously informed both the fandom and the stardom literature also lacked the necessary holistic stance and only tended to examine film stars and their fans individually by imposing preconceived, one-sided and often prejudiced meanings onto them from a detached outsider-looking-in position (Holbrook et al. 1989; Smith et al. 2007). Hence, I have felt the desire to move our understanding of the consumption of celebrity fandom forward by taking a holistic approach that allows for researching a fan's personal relationship with a film actor/actress from a genuine insider perspective (Smith et al. 2007) as it is experienced by the individual in everyday life. As this study emphasises both the idea that meaning is in the mind and the importance of understanding the lived experience from the consumer's subjective point of view (Gould 1993, 2008a), I believe that the best way to conduct this kind of research is a subjective personal introspection that is philosophically grounded in existential-phenomenology (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008a, b, 2011b, c). In illuminating on consumers' use of media texts to engage in imaginary relationships with human brands, this study contributes to the consumer culture theory project despite the reservations voiced by Arnould and Thompson (2005) with regard to the value of using introspection or poetry as modes of consumer representation.

Due to its underlying assumption that people construct their own subjective meanings based on a mixture of their personally lived and culturally shared experiences (Holbrook 1995), existential-phenomenological research philosophy is embedded in the perceptual approach of humanistic inquiry (Hirschman and Holbrook 1992). Humanistic inquiry appreciates consumer behaviour as a set of diverse experiences that add to the value people place on products, which help to create order and certainty in their chaotic lives (Hirschman 1986). This also includes the researcher's self-discovery as an essential part of what is being observed while gaining a better understanding of consumer behaviour's

various facets for its own sake without the specific intention to influence them or to advance the agenda of marketing practice (Holbrook 2000). As the aim of existential-phenomenology is to understand a phenomenon from the perspective of an insider, the logical consequence is to acknowledge the value of data provided by the researcher as subject for advancing academic knowledge. This is especially true when investigating a phenomenon like fandom that could only be understood genuinely through an insider's personal lived experience (Brown 1998b). But in order to examine the consumption of film actor fandom as a holistic phenomenological experience (Thompson et al. 1989), it requires a research methodology that allows for an easy, unlimited 24-hour access to an insider's ongoing lived experience with the phenomenon, while not having to wrestle with ethical concerns regarding the informant's privacy (Brown 1998b; Holbrook 1995). Thus, I provide insights into my own everyday lived consumer experiences as a devoted fan of the young, but very talented actress Jena Malone by using subjective personal introspection (SPI). In the following the sections, I will provide an overview of existential-phenomenology as the underlying ontological and epistemological research philosophy for study, SPI's (also known as autoethnography) as a relevant research methodology and, finally, the research approach applied in this study.

A.3 Existential-Phenomenology as This Study's Underlying Research Philosophy

“Our first task will be to re-discover phenomena, the layer of living experience through which other people and things are first given to us. We shall no longer hold that perception is an incipient science but conversely that classical science is a form of perception which loses sight of its origins and believes itself complete.”

(Merleau-Ponty 1962: 66)

Phenomenology is a philosophy, a research paradigm and a research methodology all at the same time, which makes it very difficult to describe and understand. Still, I'll try my best! Although the term '*phenomenology*' goes back to the 18th century (i.e. Hegel and Kant), as a philosophical method and research tradition it is strongly associated with the works of the German philosopher Edmund Husserl. As a mathematician, Husserl sought to find a philosophical foundation for the study of mathematics and logic, whereby he oriented himself on psychology as the dominant (social) science of that time (Waldenfels 1992). Influenced by the teachings of Brentano, he thereby questioned the wisdom behind the Cartesian Duality, the distinction between body and mind, and the

subsequent strong emphasis on applying the foundationalist approaches from the natural sciences to the study of social phenomena. Foundationalist thought is characterised by the '*desire to ground human knowledge on a firm and indubitable Archimedean point*' to separate truth from non-truth and scientific from non-scientific knowledge (Thompson 1990: 25) that characterise the positivist approaches Husserl referred to as '*psychologism*'. The underlying assumptions of foundationalism state that a) there is an extant reality based on fundamental natural laws that can be discovered through rigorous science, b) human behaviour is determined by external forces, and c) humans perceive the same objective entities in exactly the same way because reality is independent of human experience (Thompson 1990). You should hereby note that several qualitative methodologies such as grounded theory, case study research or structuralism are foundationalist approaches as well, as positivist criteria are used to evaluate the merits of the generated knowledge. Thus, Husserl (1985) developed phenomenology as an anti-foundationalist approach to knowledge, which is centred in the certainty of conscious thought (Hirschman and Holbrook 1992) and rejects all the foundationalist notions of absolute truth, Cartesian duality and its criteria of evaluating knowledge claims (Thompson 1990).

A.3.1 From '*Going Back to the Things Themselves*' to '*Being-There-in-the-World*'

Despite their real-existing physical presence in the external material world, Husserl (1985) argued that objects only appear to the individual human in one's conscious thought as '*intentional objects*' rather than being perceived correctly as the material objects they are. Subsequently, Husserl regarded intentional objects not as things in themselves but as '*phenomena of consciousness*', from which he followed the logic that '*all consciousness is consciousness of something*' and all thoughts are always directed at some phenomena of interest (Hirschman and Holbrook 1992; Waldenfels 1992). Thus, Husserl (1985) proposed to '*go back to the things themselves*' in order to understand the '*essences*' of particular phenomena in their ideal form and the context of their appearance. To grasp knowledge with certainty, researchers are required to bracket their preconceptions of the external world and focus only on the contents of consciousness, which is called the '*lived experience*' (Husserl 1986). Yet, Husserl's ideas moved over time from the initial *transcendental phenomenology* that sought to describe the essential structures of consciousness (Husserl 1985) to one that aimed to interpret the everyday meanings and structure of the world as '*lived*' by the individual

human – the so-called *'life-world'* – (Husserl 1986; Thompson 1998); just to return in the last years of his life back to transcendental phenomenology (Waldenfels 1992). The foundation of human understanding derives hereby from an underlying field of pre-reflected experiences such as emotional experiences, practical knowledge and an intuitive understanding of one's cultural way of life (Husserl 1986; Thompson 1998).

Because Husserl's concept of the life-world remained to be the mere description of the contents of an individual's consciousness, subsequent phenomenological scholars like Heidegger (1927, 1935), Merleau-Ponty (1962) or Gadamer (1989) developed it further by arguing that the life-world is the structure of fundamental relationships that shape an individual's everyday lived experiences and the private meanings s/he ascribes to them (Thompson 1997). While rejecting Husserl's transcendence of consciousness via the pure essences (Hirschman and Holbrook 1992) and injecting existentialist ideas instead, the proponents of existential-phenomenology argued that, as a hermeneutic construct, the life-world provides an analytical framework where holistic understandings of phenomena arise from the iterative, interpretive interaction between life-world categories and the developing understanding of consumers' life narratives (Thompson 1998; Waldenfels 1992). As an applied phenomenology that focuses holistically on consumers' everyday lived experiences relating to investigated phenomena, Heidegger (1927) borrowed from the Gestalt psychology and proposed that knowledge originated in its existential *'Gestalt (figure)'* or *'Dasein (being-there)'* and, hence, should provide insights into human life experiences as the individual's *'being-in-the-world'* (Heidegger 1935). Merleau-Ponty (1962) suggested that pre-reflected perceptual experiences serve as the foundation for conceptual knowledge claims and have to be understood as a process of *'seeing-as'* metaphors. The seeing metaphor is one of three metaphors used by Thompson et al. (1989, 1990) to explain existential-phenomenology as well. Human experiences that have traditionally been viewed as unconscious are hereby described as both reflected and unreflected and located in the present life-world only rather than as being determined by historical antecedents (Merleau-Ponty 1962).

As reflective meanings emerge from the background of unreflected experiences, their relationship to them can be understood through the figure/ground metaphor (Thompson et al. 1989). Because of being confronted at any given time with environmental and situational settings that allow for such a diversity of human experiences, individuals

focus always on certain aspects, which are perceived as standing out compared to others that remain in the background (Lai et al. 2008). In following this metaphor, three consequences warrant further consideration (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Thompson et al. 1989, 1990). First, human experiences must be conceptualised as a dynamic process, where certain aspects stand out from the ground at one point in time, but recede back into the ground at another point in time while other aspects become figural instead. Second, despite standing out from the ground at one point in time, the figure is never independent from its contextual ground. In fact, neither figure nor ground/context can exist without the other, as they constitute each other (Heidegger 1935; Merleau-Ponty 1962). Third, all human experiences, such as thoughts, feelings, dreams, fantasies, memories, perceptions and imaginations, are intentional phenomena that are directed towards some focal point (Lai et al. 2008; Thompson 1997; Thompson et al. 1989). In addition, the pattern metaphor from the Gestalt psychology, finally, holds that a pattern (i.e. behaviour) can't exist separate from its surrounding context. Hence, individuals' experiences and behaviour shouldn't be studied independent of the environmental and social contexts they live in and interact with (Heidegger 1927, 1935; Merleau-Ponty 1962). Existential-phenomenology, subsequently, seeks to describe human experiences in the very way they are 'lived' within the context they emerge from (Gadamer 1989; Ladkin 2005; Thompson 1997). This inevitably means that the world of lived experience doesn't necessarily have to be identical with the world of objective observation and description (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Thompson et al. 1989).

A.3.2 The Four Core Categories that Determine an Individual's Life-World

“The stories consumers tell about their everyday experiences create temporal trajectories in which a past event is relived in relation to present concerns and projected towards an envisioned future. The temporal ordering creates relationships between a consumer's contemporary understanding, his or her personal history, and a broader field of historically established meanings.” (Thompson 1997)

In following Merleau-Ponty (1962), Thompson (1998) identified four core categories as the life-world's existential aspects, which include perceptions of the cultural context, emotional relationships to others, the lived body and the historicised self. Firstly, based on the assumption that meanings of specific experiences always emerge within

individuals' socio-cultural lives (Ladkin 2005), the life-world analysis is primarily interested in understanding the way through which individuals make sense of their surrounding social and cultural environments (Merleau-Ponty 1962). Secondly, because personal interactions comprise not only the social fabric of everyday life, but are also crucial to an individual's sense of belonging to a social community as well, every social relationship (including parasocial ones) and interpersonal contact provides a stream of meaning (Lai et al. 2008). Furthermore, in contrast to the traditional economic-rational exchange paradigm, the life-world concept emphasises that interpersonal (as well as parasocial) relationships are emotionally charged with symbolic significance for the individual, which involve all those emotions like feelings of care, love, jealousy, anger, frustration, disappointment, happiness, sadness, etc. as essential facets of human experience and existence (Gadamer 1989; Thompson 1997, 1998; Wadenfels 1992). A strong portion of Merleau-Ponty's (1962) work was devoted to the study of the *lived body* – one's own body as the main instrument of human experience. First of all, in contrast to the Cartesian container metaphor, where the body is merely the separate container of the human mind, Merleau-Ponty (1962) views the body as the essential instrument of human experience through which one experiences the external world. Yet, the body is also an object in the world, which (like any other material object) is subject to external forces and can be experienced, controlled and monitored (Lai et al. 2008).

Furthermore, the body also plays an essential and unique role in the construction of each individual's self-identity and self-perception (Heidegger 1927; Merleau-Ponty 1962). Any voluntary or involuntary alteration to one's body (i.e. makeup, haircut, styling, decorations, injuries, mutilations, rape, etc.) has the potential to transform the way in which one relates to all other aspects of the life-world (Ladkin 2005; Lai et al. 2008). Furthermore, while our perception of our own bodies is quite personal (though often in objectified terms), we tend to view the bodies of others generally as objects in a way that rarely corresponds with our private sense of embodied subjectivity (Lai et al. 2008; Thompson 1998). The final core aspect of the life-world is the historicised self. Thompson (1998) interpreted historicity as referring to the living legacy of cultural practices, beliefs and meanings that provide the transcendent or intersubjective ground of human experience, where history becomes a meaningful event through personal and culturally-shared stories and narrations that express the cultural way of life.

“From a hermeneutic perspective, consumers appropriate this system of cultural meanings to make sense of their life-world circumstances, and these personalised stories express a dialectic between textual and life-world structures.” (Thompson 1998: 135)

The historicised self, subsequently, emphasises that an individual’s self-identity is not the collection of personal character traits, but the reflection of the person’s self in terms of his/her biography and personal history as well as socio-historical background (Lai et al. 2008; Merleau-Ponty 1962). In other words, the life and consumption stories of individuals express a personal subjective history of cultural meanings that have been experienced holistically in their own specific life-world and life-project (Ladkin 2005; Thompson 1998). To summarise, the aim of existential-phenomenology, as defined by Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Heidegger (1927), is to obtain the consumer’s everyday lived experiences through the eyes of this particular individual. Due to the natural perceptual differences between the researcher and his/her informants, however, the ultimate form of understanding human experiences within situational contexts would be achieved by the researcher taking on the dual role of researcher and informed subject, as espoused by subjective personal introspection (Gould 1991, 1995, 2006a; Holbrook 1995, 1997).

A.4 Autoethnography and Subjective Personal Introspection

More than 25 years ago, Holbrook (1986, 1987, 1995, 1997) introduced **subjective personal introspection (SPI)** to consumer research as research methodology that, as an extreme form of participant observation, focuses on *‘impressionistic narrative accounts of the writer’s own private experiences with a (sub)culture or phenomenon from the viewpoint of an informed, integrated and deeply involved member’* (Holbrook 2005a: 45). Apart from Holbrook, its use in consumer and marketing research has been advanced in particular by Gould (1991, 1993, 1995, 2006a, b, 2008b), Brown (1998a, b, 2006; Reid and Brown 1996), Patterson (2005, 2009; Patterson et al. 1998), Hackley (2006, 2007), Earl (2001) and recently even by me (Batat and Wohlfeil 2009; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2006a, 2008a, b, 2011b, c), despite facing (often premature) criticism from certain groups within both the positivist (Calder and Tybout 1987; Woodside 2004, 2006) and the interpretive research community (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Wallendorf and Brucks 1993). Nonetheless, the late-1980s also saw the emergence of **autoethnography** as a research methodology in sociology and communication research,

which has been spearheaded by Ellis and Bochner (Ellis 1991; Ellis and Bochner 1992, 1996, 2000) and their former research students such as Rambo (1992, 1996, 2005; Rambo and Ellis 1989) and Tillman-Healy (1996). Ellis and Bochner (2000: 735) described autoethnography as '*an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal with the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract and resist cultural interpretations.*' Though SPI and autoethnography emerged independently from each other in academic fields like consumer research, sociology, communication research, organisational behaviour, arts or women's studies, their striking resemblance and interchangeability in terms of aims and methods has led to their conceptual '*merger*'.

A.4.1 Historical Development of SPI/Autoethnography

Despite marking a very recent development in social sciences research, the historical origins of both autoethnography and introspection actually go back to the 1880s-1920s. As the full name *autobiographical ethnography* suggests, autoethnography emerged – rather accidentally – as a research method within the academic field of anthropology. Due to setting out to study the people's social and cultural world(s), anthropology's dominant research methodology since the late-1790s has always been ethnography (Ekström 2006). Until the end of the 19th century, ethnographic research was primarily conducted by members of the European aristocracy or gentry, who studied not only the social world(s) of '*primitive cultures*' in foreign countries, but also those of the lower classes in their own countries (Buzard 2003). As their traditional ethnographic methods, however, tended to interpret native cultures and social subcultures by the contemporary standards and values of the upper social classes in Western societies, an increasing dissatisfaction with this approach arose by the late-1880s among scholars, who felt that many (sub)cultures had actually been misrepresented or misinterpreted (Buzard 2003). Thus, a desire grew to understand social or human phenomena from a cultural insider's rather than an outsider's perspective (Holbrook 1995). The find of an 16th century diary in 1908, in which an Incan soldier named Ayala, who served in Pizaro's army after the fall of the Incan empire, exposed, by describing in detail the Incan history and everyday way of life, the Spanish invaders' misrepresentations of their culture, led to the idea of

autoethnography with the claim that '*only natives should research natives*' (Buzard 2003; Goulding 2005). Yet, due to a changing academic research environment that placed an emphasis on '*scientific objectivity*' in conducting ethnography, the autoethnographic approach was soon forgotten again – until its revival by Hoyano in 1979 and by Bochner in 1985 (Crawford 1996; Ellis and Bochner 2000).

Nearly simultaneously to autoethnography, introspection was introduced to psychology by Wilhelm Wundt in 1879. Wundt was particularly dissatisfied with the science behind clinical psychiatry, which was dependent on observation and focused exclusively on the treatment of visible symptoms (Carlson, Marting and Buskiet 2004). Introspection was used by Wundt as a means to understand the working of the human mind and, by doing so, to identify the root causes for the mental illnesses of individual patients (Malin and Birch 1998). Although Freud applied Wundt's introspection to investigate his own subconscious, it was Carl Jung, who in the early 1920s first used guided introspection in psychoanalysis to gain insights into people's conscious experiences, but also to access what he called their collective unconscious – the memories and ideas inherited from their ancestors (Carlson et al. 2004). At the same time, despite being mainly influenced by Gestalt psychology, Husserl (1985, 1986) advocated introspection as a method for his concept of transcendental phenomenology to investigate intentional experiences within the life-world (Waldenfels 1992). But from the 1920s onwards, psychology became dominated by behaviourism with its strong adherence to positivism and falsificationist scientific inquiry, which subscribed faithfully to the idea that human behaviour could be explained in simple stimulus-response models and that only valued observable phenomena as worth knowing (Thompson 1990). And because unobservable internal experiences such as thoughts, feelings and dreams were regarded as unimportant, introspection was rejected as '*unscientific*' and, subsequently, deleted from psychology textbooks (Carlson et al. 2004; Malin and Birch 1998).

In the 1970s, behaviourism was increasingly replaced by cognitive psychology and its central information processing paradigm or, through the incorporation of cognitive psychological ideas, developed at least further into neo-behaviourism (Carlson et al. 2004). However, both experimental and cognitive psychologies are still dominated by scientific methodologies. Nonetheless, with the growing interest into mental processes, introspection received a revived interest among some psychologists and psychoanalysts

(Fellows 1976; Morris 1981), which finally resulted in the (in)famous Nisbett and Wilson controversy. This controversy is of particular relevance to this research, as Nisbett and Wilson (1977) provided the primary argumentative basis for most criticism directed at SPI and autoethnography (Wallendorf and Brucks 1993; Woodside 2004). As background information, Nisbett and Wilson's career as researchers and their entire belief system was grounded in a faithful devotion to behaviourism, which held that a) humans could easily be manipulated within simple stimulus-response settings at the will of researchers, b) the human mind only responds to external stimuli but leaves humans with the illusion of independent thought, and c) humans are not conscious of their own decision-making processes (Nisbett and Wilson 1977). With the revival of introspection in psychology research and practice, Nisbett and Wilson now felt that neo-behaviourism and, subsequently, psychology as an academic discipline was under threat from the '*devilry of unscientific anarchy*'. Sounds quite familiar, doesn't it? Especially in light of the response that Gould's (1991) publication in the JCR received (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Wallendorf and Brucks 1993). Anyway, despite not being the only critics of introspection (Evans 1981), Nisbett and Wilson (1977) became (in)famous for their stated aim to discredit introspection as a valid research methodology by providing '*genuine*' scientific evidence.

While acknowledging that humans are neither mindless machines nor voiceless animals (Fellows 1976), Nisbett and Wilson's (1977) key argument, nevertheless, was that people would at any given time only be aware of a problem (stimulus) and their solution (response), but would never know or even be able to describe how exactly they actually came to find their solution to the problem. In other words, humans would be akin to calculators: You type in the problem and you get the result, but no description of the problem-solving process! As proof for their argument, Nisbett and Wilson discussed the findings of six behavioural experiments. The first problem was that they only conducted one of the experiments themselves, while they discussed the other five experiments, which were all conducted in the late 1920s/early 1930s by other unaffiliated researchers, based entirely on the findings published in journals – in other words, only secondary data taken at a very different time under different conditions. The second problem was that all six experiments could easily be identified as self-fulfilling prophecies by their very design (Howe 1991), which left the subjects essentially in a catch-22 situation. Either they provided support for a hypothesis by reporting the expected response or, by

reporting an unwanted response, they provided evidence that they didn't know what they were doing. Thirdly, as Nisbett and Wilson (1977) rejected any verbal statements from research subjects out of hand as unreliable and unscientific, any evidence contrary to their argument was automatically thrown out of court. Yet, if their argument was true, then this would mean for business studies that any study based on interviews (including questionnaires!) would be unscientific and, hence, invalid (Gould 1995).

In the meantime, several studies have contested Nisbett and Wilson's (1977) findings by scientific means. After carefully reviewing Nisbett and Wilson's interpretation of each experiment's findings, neither Howe (1991) nor White (1988) found any support for their conclusions. Instead, both found that Nisbett and Wilson's findings were driven by their ambition or agenda rather than the actual data. Furthermore, Guerin and Innes (1991) came after replicating the outlined experimental designs to a similar conclusion as both Howe (1991) and White (1988). Anyway, with the rise of humanistic inquiry (Hirschman 1986) and the growing acceptance of interpretive research approaches in the social sciences (Stern 1998), the desire to understand human, social and cultural phenomena through the eyes of involved insiders has grown again since the 1980s (Ellis 1991; Ellis and Bochner 1996, 2000). This desire is further enhanced by the limitations of traditional research methodologies with regard to a) the situational context (location, situation, timeframe), b) the type of data (retrospective vs. contemporaneous) that can be obtained, c) access to informants, d) privacy and intimacy issues as well as e) the nature of the research phenomenon (sensibility of the topics, i.e. abortion, sexual abuse or AIDS). And, finally, there is also increasingly the question as to why a researcher should sacrifice his/her expertise and vast pool of insider knowledge in relation to the investigated phenomenon on the scientific altar of objectivity that has caused for some discomfort (Brown 1998b; Gould 2006a, b, 2008a, b; Holbrook 1995, 2005a, 2006).

A.4.2 What Exactly Is Autoethnography/Subjective Personal Introspection (SPI)?

Without any doubt, there are a number of misconceptions about SPI/autoethnography in the literature, which have not only contributed to most of the criticism voiced against this methodology, but often had even their origins in the very same criticism as well (Brown 1998b; Gould 2006b; Patterson 2009). The question, therefore, arises as to what exactly is SPI/autoethnography and what is it NOT. According to Holbrook (1987, 1995, 1997), subjective personal introspection is an experiential, private self-reflection

on the joys and sorrows related to consumption and found in one's own everyday participation in the human condition. In other words, it is an extreme form of participant observation, which focuses on impressionistic narrative accounts of the writer's very own personal life experiences with the investigated phenomenon from the privileged position of the real insider as primary data (Holbrook 2005a; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008a, b; 2011b, c). Thus, unlike any other research methodology, the researcher takes on the dual role of both researcher AND informant – often, but not exclusively, in a sample of one (Ellis 1991; Gould 1995, 2006a; Rambo 2005). In doing so, s/he reduces (if not even eliminates) the '*self-imposed*' scientific distance between the researcher, the research phenomenon and the reader by actively encouraging the latter's personal engagement with the narrator's private everyday lived experiences and struggle of '*being-in-the-world*' through the use of biographical narratives (Ellis 1991; Rambo and Ellis 1989). By interpreting the micro practices and everyday lived experiences of a real-living person, the researcher not only recognises that an individual's private feelings, thoughts, self-concept and behaviour are always linked to social and cultural values and meanings through the interaction with others, but also accepts that s/he her/himself contributes and experiences everyday life as an individual as well (Ellis and Bochner 2000; Gould 2008a, b, 2011; Holbrook 1995, 1997).

Thus, it is now time to repudiate some of the misconceptions that critics (i.e. Arnould and Thompson 2005; Wallendorf and Brucks 1993; Woodside 2004) have regularly put forward against SPI/autoethnography. First of all, SPI/autoethnography is NOT a Morgan Spurlock-style self-experiment, whereby the researcher can enter and leave the investigated phenomenon at will. Indeed, s/he is already a genuine insider prior to the study and most likely will remain one after its completion (Holbrook 1995; Rambo 1996; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2011c). Thus, the researcher doesn't pretend to be someone s/he is not. Secondly, SPI/autoethnography is often dismissed as merely a narcissistic, idiosyncratic exercise that is context-bound to the individual and, thus, of little practical relevance to consumer research (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Wallendorf and Brucks 1993). What these critics, however, fail to notice is that, as a genuine member of the investigated (sub)culture, the autoethnographer is a legitimate informant with a valuable insider knowledge into the phenomenon of interest that is inaccessible to outsiders and, subsequently, better equipped to understand it than a (non-)participant observer (Gould 1991; Rambo 1992). Moreover, as Gould (2006a) so nicely pointed out, how can a

researcher claim the right to observe and interpret other people's behaviour as an expert, when s/he can't trust at the same time one's ability to interpret one's own behaviour? To my knowledge, the answer to this question is still somewhere out there... Finally, there is still the rather ridiculous, but nonetheless popular charge that SPI/autoethnography is essentially an easy research method for lazy, self-indulgent researchers (Woodside 2004, 2006). From my personal experience, it is much easier to conduct quantitative research due to the predefined manual-like procedures that you can follow (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2006c, 2007), while it is extremely difficult to expose your inner feelings, thoughts and fantasies to the public and remain honest and true to yourself in doing so (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008a, b, 2011b, c). If you don't believe me, try it for yourself by applying the introspective techniques that Gould (2006a; 2008a) has outlined...

A.4.3 Researching One's Own Experiences

The next question that arises is as to how you can research your very own personal experiences with a phenomenon of interest through subjective personal introspection/autoethnography. As already mentioned earlier, the researcher takes on the dual role of both researcher and subject. While the researcher element of the duality reflects hereby the data analysis and interpretation of the research, the subject element refers to data collection, whereby the introspective/autoethnographic researcher acts simultaneously as *insider*, *informant* and *research instrument*. In the functional capacity of a genuine insider, and hence a natural member of the investigated (sub)culture, the researcher is in the privileged position of having access to otherwise '*inaccessible*' phenomena of interest, such as daydreaming, abortion (Ellis and Bochner 1992), prostitution (Rambo 1992; Rambo and Ellis 1989), experiencing direct vs. indirect discrimination (Bristor 1992; Valtonen 2004; Williams 1992), coping with mental or physical illnesses (Jago 2002; Tillman-Healy 1996), coping with or recovering from abuse or other traumata (McMellon 2006; Olson 2004; Rambo 1996, 2005) or '*just*' the aesthetic enjoyment of arts and culture (Earl 2001; Holbrook 1986, 1987; Shankar 2000). Another advantage of being an insider is that the researcher engages naturally with the phenomenon and the cultural environment s/he is studying with little impacting on it. Moreover, s/he is able to make sense of the investigated phenomenon within its relevant context (Gould 1991; Holbrook 2005a). This stands in clear contrast to ethnography, for instance, where the researcher participates as an outsider in the investigated culture and is therefore viewed and treated by the '*natives*' as an '*intruding alien*' (Geertz 1973). As outsiders,

subsequently, ethnographers are more prone to imposing their own assumptions on the observed behaviour and phenomena rather than reflecting their true meanings for insiders (Gould 2006a, b, 2008; Patterson 2009; Smith et al. 2007).

Next, the researcher provides the study in his/her functional capacity as a participant not only with a credible expert witness to the investigated phenomenon (Tillman-Healy 1996; Rambo 2005), but is also allowed an unlimited 24-hour access to the participant's everyday lived experiences without having to wrestle with ethical concerns regarding the informant's privacy and intimacy (Brown 1998b; Ellis 1991; Rambo 1992; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2011b, c). Most other research methods used to study consumers' everyday lived experiences with a phenomenon of interest are often prone to a biased sampling of events – ironically a charge that Wallendorf and Brucks (1993) levelled at SPI – due to relying either in interviews on informants' retrospective recall of memorised events or on their temporary observations of informants within specific and narrow situational contexts (i.e. conventions, flea markets or soccer matches) – because, let's be honest, none of us likes to have someone for a few months looking permanently over our shoulders 24 hours-a-day. Yet, as a self-observing informed participant, the researcher is in the position of doing exactly that by being always concurrently present when interesting events occur and to give a privileged first-hand account of them in the way they are actually '*experienced*' (Earl 2001; Gould 1991, 1995, 2011). This leads now to the researcher's functional capacity of being his/her own research instrument. Due to one's privileged position to experience the studied phenomenon first-hand as an insider, the researcher is able to see, hear, smell, taste and feel it in its entire holistic complexity in a way that is impossible to achieve by any other research methodology (Brown 1998b; Ellis and Bochner 2000; Patterson 2009; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008b, 2011b, c).

As with any other research methodology, the subjective personal introspective research approach starts with the data collection process. The unique and advantageous feature of subjective personal introspection is hereby that you, as the researcher, are able to obtain two very different types of data. First of all, there are the retrospective data, which are data based on an individual's memories and recollections of past events. Because many (especially early) introspective studies represented only the researcher's retrospective recollection of his/her past experiences with a particular phenomenon, Wallendorf and Brucks's (1993) main argument against SPI was that it would invite the danger of

selective generalised inferences rather than accurate reports of specific instances. What they conveniently overlooked, however, is that it is exactly this type of data that is also collected through interviews, focus groups, surveys, recall tests and even ethnographic member checks (Brown 1998b). Secondly, SPI/autoethnography gives the researcher also the unique opportunity to obtain contemporaneous data, which are data recorded at the point (or at least very close to the point) of occurrence in terms of time, location and context (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008a, b, 2011b, c). In doing so, you have access to raw, unreflected emotional data, such as feelings, thoughts, daydreams or spirituality, which can be recorded in fresh detail as specific instances. But whatever the type of data you seek, Wallendorf and Brucks (1993) identified in their review of the autoethnographic literature four different possible approaches for the collection of introspective data:

- ***Researcher Introspection***

Obviously, this is the most controversial introspective data collection approach that was introduced to consumer research by Holbrook (1986, 1987, 1995, 1997, 2005a, 2006), advanced by Gould (1991, 1993, 1995, 2006a, 2008a, b, 2011) and the one primarily referred to in this thesis. The research context is hereby some aspect of the researcher's private life experiences, so that s/he acts as the expert and sole informant in a sample of one. Yet, despite having faced the strongest resistance from proponents of the '*more traditional*' research methodologies (Wallendorf and Brucks 1993; Woodside 2004, 2006), researcher introspection has inspired in the meantime a few '*scholarly eccentrics*' (Patterson 2009) to follow in their footsteps and adopt this method to gain genuine insights into the human condition. Most notably among them to be named are in particular Rambo (1996, 2005) and Brown (1998b, 2006; Reid and Brown 1996), while others also include Bristor (1992), Crawford (1996), Earl (2001), Hackley (2006, 2007), Jago (2002), Shankar (2000), Valtonen (2004) and even myself (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008b, 2011b, c). But although there have been an increasing number of peer-reviewed publications over the recent years, researcher introspection still hasn't been used in postgraduate research so far – at least not to my knowledge.

- ***Interactive Introspection***

This introspective data collection method is closely related to action research and was introduced to the social sciences by Rambo (1992; Rambo and Ellis 1989) in her sociological study of exotic and lap dancers. Similar to an AA meeting, the aim is to

understand private experiences within the larger context of shared experiences. The researcher engages hereby in an interactive dialogue with other informants, in which they share their private experiences and insider knowledge, to study the '*emergent experiences of all involved parties*' (Ellis 1991). To-date, this approach has already proved to be extremely useful in the study of drug addiction (Hirschman 1991), erotic dancing and prostitution, child abuse, abortion (Ellis and Bochner 1992), cancer survival, bulimia (Tillman-Healy 1996), consumer responses to advertising (Patterson et al. 1998) or film consumption (Batat and Wohlfeil 2009).

- ***Guided Introspection***

This introspective data collection approach is becoming increasingly popular in market research practice as an alternative to traditional in-depth interviews and focus groups, as it is relatively easy, convenient and cost-efficient to conduct. Informants, of whom the researcher(s) can be one, are hereby asked to write a detailed introspective essay on their personal lived experiences with regard to the phenomenon of interest (Brown 1998a; Maclaran and Brown 2005). It's also interesting that Wallendorf and Brucks (1993) as well as Woodside (2004, 2006) acknowledged that this data collection method would provide some potential for marketing and consumer research – probably because it also promised some benefits to their own preferred research methodologies.

- ***Syncretic Introspection***

Finally, this rather theoretical data collection approach is essentially a mixed method approach that involves a combination of the other three introspective methods, which was suggested by Wallendorf and Brucks (1993) and Campbell (1997) to introduce '*more scientific rigour*' into introspective research, but was never applied in any study.

Once the introspective data have been collected, they need to be analysed, interpreted and reported. As a relatively new methodology, however, here lies the major difficulty, because data analysis and interpretation has received little consideration in the relevant literature so far. Depending on the underlying research philosophy, data analysis approaches vary strongly between various studies. Thus, I review in A.4.4 the relevant literature from proponents and critics to suggest how academic rigour could be ensured. However, what all introspective studies share is giving absolute primacy to representing honestly consumers' voices (Stern 1998), whereby the style and form differs

significantly in terms of creativity and flexibility from traditional academic writing styles and formats. The main feature is that introspective/autoethnographic accounts are written in the first person or, as Patterson et al. (1998) called it, with the critical 'I'. This way, the writing becomes more personal in order to engage the reader with the consumer narrative and to encourage a parasocial dialogue between both parties. Furthermore, the text is written in a colloquial, non-scientific everyday language; again with the aim to invite the reader into the narrator's private life experiences. The primary mode of expression is to present the autobiographical account of your life experiences (Crawford 1996; Holbrook 1986, 1987; Jago 2002; Rambo 1996, 2005) or your conscious thoughts and feelings (Gould 1991, 1993; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2011c) in narrative stories (Ellis and Bochner 2000). However, poems (Mischenko 2005; Tillman-Healy 1996), songs, photos (Holbrook 2005a, 2006; McMellon 2006) or videos (Rabikowska 2010) have become increasingly popular alternatives or supplements to mere narrative accounts. But whatever the chosen mode of expression, the emphasis is on gaining insights into human experiences, such as feelings, thoughts, fantasies, dreams and perceptions, rather than the mere recollection of factual behaviour. After all, the overall aim is to provide the reader with an understanding of the phenomenon through sympathy, empathy or even identification with the narrator's perspective (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008a, b; 2011b, c).

A.4.4 How to Ensure Academic Rigour in the Interpretation of Introspective Data

The major debate on the use of subjective personal introspection in consumer research still revolves around the primary question as to how academic rigour can be ensured in the knowledge development process; especially when it comes to interpreting one's own autobiographical data (Patterson 2009). The biggest problem with this debate seems to be the fact that proponents and opponents have continuously argued past each other from the ivory towers of their personal research philosophies. For instance, Wallendorf and Brucks's (1993) reason for rejecting introspective research – though they referred only to Gould (1991) – was that it didn't meet their narrowly-defined evaluative criteria of good ethnography (Brown 1998b; Holbrook 1995). In a similar vein, Woodside's (2004, 2006) desire to move subjective personal introspection towards confirmatory personal introspection derived from his positivist-informed search for objective truth. As a result, the proponents of introspection have drawn on philosophy, romanticism and even on other interpretative research methodologies to justify its value for the social

sciences (Gould 2006a, 2008b, 2011; Holbrook 1995, 1997). While subjective personal introspection can be justified '*scientific*' grounds, Brown (1998b) argued that such an attempt to overcome the superior equipped opponents on their intellectual territory would be a strategic mistake. Instead, he proposed to justify introspection as an artistic research approach and, hence, to judge a study's academic rigour on the evaluative criteria of art and literary criticism. While I would basically agree with Brown, based on my review of the criticism by opponents (Wallendorf and Brucks 1993; Woodside 2004, 2006) as well as the experience of proponents of introspection (Brown 1998a, b; Ellis 1991; Gould 2006a, 2008a, b, 2011; Holbrook 1995; Patterson 2009), I suggest now an approach that I think to be useful for ensuring academic rigour in introspective research.

Generally, the data interpretation should follow similar patterns as already known from ethnography, phenomenology and literary criticism. Thus, the data must be interpreted in their holistic complexity to reflect and describe the individual's experiences and struggles of '*being-in-the-world*' exactly in the context they occur (Thompson 1990). This usually involves the application of Heidegger's (1927) hermeneutic circle in the data analysis and interpretation. Although subjective personal introspection favours and celebrates the subjectivity of perception instead of researcher objectivity (Merleau-Ponty 1962) while rejecting scientific criteria for evaluating its merits, this research methodology is not a mere narcissistic exercise without any academic rigour. In fact, like any other subjectivist or interpretivist research methodology, academic rigour in introspective research is ensured in relation to credibility, trustworthiness, comparability and transferability of the data interpretation (Hirschman and Holbrook 1992). The researcher has to ensure data credibility by recording and analysing only those data that reflect truly the introspector's actual experiences with the investigated phenomenon without making any posthumous alterations to enhance positive or reduce negative evaluations of one's experiences and behaviour (Holbrook 1995). But it must also be noted that the data reflect the individual's subjective personal experiences with the observed behaviour and events and, therefore, should not be mistaken with any factual behaviour that could be objectively or subjectively observed by others (Gould 2006a, b, 2008a, b). The key is simply that, as naively as it may sound, the researcher has to be honest with others as much as with oneself. The difficulty, hereby, is to avoid internal censorship, but at the same time also to avoid causing any harm to oneself or others,

which in essence is no different to any other qualitative or quantitative research methodology (Gould 1993; Holbrook 1995).

As with any other research methodology, honesty is also important in subjective personal introspection to ensure the trustworthiness of the research project. Previous introspective studies have regularly been confronted with the charge that there is no way for another person (i.e. reviewer or reader) to know whether the findings really emerged from the data or whether the data was consciously selected (if not even made up) to provide self-fulfilling evidence for pre-assumed theoretical concept; hence, their strong urge for confirmation through member checks (Wallendorf and Brucks 1993; Woodside 2004, 2006). But how do you really and truly know what I'm currently thinking or feeling? Indeed, the problem with the demand for external confirmatory evidence (akin to external validity) is that it is impossible for you or anybody else to confirm another person's experiences, as Holbrook (1995) has demonstrated in response to Wallendorf and Brucks (1993). Moreover, as a recent South Korean case has clearly demonstrated, even the presentation of scientific data – statistics or experimentation – can't provide you with a 100% guarantee that they haven't been made up with fraudulent intent. Thus, the issue of trustworthiness in subjective personal introspection is no different to any other research methodology. To address it, I recommend the same three methodological criteria that already apply to phenomenological analysis and interpretation: the emic approach, autonomy of the text and bracketing (Thompson et al. 1989). The autonomy of the text, which includes any data from personal narratives and field notes to photos and videos, is particularly crucial. Although the text was initially created by the researcher in one's dual role as subject, from the moment of its transcription, analysis and interpretation the researcher has to engage with the research text as an autonomous entity – as if the text would be the transcription of another person's interview. Hence, any desire to make any posthumous alterations in order to enhance positive or reduce negative evaluations of one's experiences and behaviour must be resisted.

The phenomenological process of bracketing may provide a helpful tool to allow for a rigorous examination of one's personal data. As a time gap usually exists between data collection and interpretation, bracketing would help the researcher, firstly, to block out preconceived notions of oneself and one's behaviour as well as, secondly, to gain some mental and emotional distance from the private text that s/he has generated in the

subject role, which ensures an emic and iterative approach (Gadamer 1989). In an emic approach, the interpretation of the data relies exclusively on the informants' own terms, phrases and categories (Thompson et al. 1989). In case of SPI, this means that as the researcher you describe your lived experiences in exactly the same words that you used to record them during your encounter with the phenomenon – even if different terms may sound better at a later point in time. As I said earlier, the data credibility depends on keeping, analysing and interpreting the data as they have originally been recorded. What is quite different to other interpretive research methodologies, however, is the issue of data confirmability, which is also the focal point for most criticism thrown at introspective studies (Gould 2006a, 2008b; Woodside 2004, 2006). Data confirmability reflects essentially the qualitative equivalent to the reliability construct in quantitative research, which has its origins as an evaluative criterion in the more positivist research approaches of grounded theory and case study research (Goulding 2005). Basically, it involves the confirmation of the recorded data, the interpretation and findings by a third party (Arnould 1998). Traditionally, recorded data is confirmed through member checks and/or triangulations of data obtained from different sources at different sites, while interpretations and findings are confirmed through comparative triangulation between different researchers or the review of neutral auditors (Belk et al. 1989; Goulding 2005).

The problem with confirmability as an evaluative criterion is that it has at its core the idea that any human behaviour and experience can be confirmed as factual and truthful by comparing the observations of different informants, which is of little use to SPI as it is basically impossible to confirm someone else's personal experiences (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2011c). And exactly herein lays the major flaw in Woodside's (2004) critique of Holbrook's (2005a) article²⁰. Holbrook mentioned hereby a conference presentation, in which he – triggered by a private photo collection – experienced his private memories of his grandfather, whereby he was occasionally supported or corrected by his mother's comments. Woodside, subsequently, viewed the mother's comments as an example of data confirmations in SPI by a second researcher or, at least, a neutral auditor. What Woodside (2004), however, failed to notice – and after Gould's (2006b) response later to acknowledge (2006) – is that the mother did NOT confirm Holbrook's introspective

²⁰ It seems strange that Woodside's article was published before the article by Holbrook he is referring to. But Woodside happens to be the JBR's editor and it seems that Woodside's article, for some reason, passed the review process at *P&M* much faster than Holbrook's original paper did at the *JBR*...

data, but merely compared the experience of her own private memories of her father – triggered by both the photo collection AND her son’s experienced memories – with those of Holbrook (2005a). Thus, based on her memories, Holbrook’s mother was at best able to (dis)confirm certain habits of her own father that Holbrook has described. But at no point did she or was she able to confirm Holbrook’s private experiences in remembering his grandfather (Gould 2006b). As a result, Gould (2006b) proposed comparability as a suitable evaluative criterion instead, whereby private experiences would be compared in a parasocial dialogue between the introspective narrator and one’s reader(s).

The reader’s ability to compare the introspective narrator’s personal experiences with one’s own lived experiences leads us to the final evaluative criterion of transferability. Obviously, findings generated through SPI research cannot – and are not intended to – be generalised (Ellis 1991; Holbrook 1995). Instead, the aim is to provide insights and a thorough understanding of an individual’s everyday lived experiences with a particular phenomenon, which may be experienced by others, at least to some extent, in a similar (but not identical) way (Tillman-Healy 1996; Olson 2004). For instance, while my personal fan experiences and behaviour with Jena Malone is not generalisable per se, the obtained insights are nevertheless comparable and even transferable to other celebrity fans’ own lived experiences. There are two main approaches for assessing the transferability of introspective studies. The more classical approach is a triangulation within the data, i.e. whether an interpretation that emerged within one situational context could be transferred to some extent to another situational context and thereby highlights some underlying patterns (Earl 2001; Ellis and Bochner 2000; Gould 2008a). An alternative and rather unconventional triangulation approach is aimed at encouraging the reader to engage actively into a parasocial dialogue with the introspective narrative (Rambo 1996, 2005; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008b, 2011b, c). Triangulation is thereby achieved by the reader’s *sympathy* (feeling with), *empathy* (sharing the feeling) or even *identification* (feeling as one’s own) in engaging personally with the narrator’s private experiences. Each time the reader experiences a déjà vu à la ‘*I know this feeling*’ or ‘*I have had a similar experience*’, s/he has confirmed the transferability of the research findings to one’s own personal lived experiences (Holbrook 2006; Patterson 2009).

A.5 Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The question that now arises is as to how the methodology I have discussed in theory so far has been applied in the practical context of this research. Going back to the start of this appendix and drawing on the analogy of a discovery-oriented journey, I've designed this exploratory research as the equivalent of going backpacking on uncharted paths through unknown territory with the aim to find and uncover a magical place as my sought destination (Earl 2001). The magical place is a thorough understanding of the everyday lived experiences of an ordinary consumer in admiring a film actor/actress and his/her films as a devoted fan. Of interest is hereby also the question as to how the consumer perceives the private fan experiences as making a significant contribution to his/her subjective quality of life (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2011c). In doing so, my aim is to re-conceptualise our understanding of fans and fandom away from the current dominant paradigm of participatory culture, where a consumer is only recognised as a fan when s/he participates through shared experiences within a fan community (i.e. Jenkins 1992; Kozinets 1997, 2001; Richardson and Turley 2006, 2008), towards a re-focus on the consumer's experienced (parasocial) relationship with the treasured fandom object, of which academic scholarship seems to have lost sight or has rarely paid attention to in the first place. Hence, in order to reach this magical place, I have to travel light by carrying just the necessary basic phenomenological equipment of an open mind to tell stories about the subjective personal fan experiences with a film actress I have encountered along the way and to examine their meaning for the enthusiastic, if not even fanatic (Smith et al. 2007; Thorne and Bruner 2006) experiential consumption of film actors and their films as artistic brands (Kerrigan and O'Reilly 2008).

Thus, if you have been expecting to find at this stage some hard, scientific data obtained and tested through hypothetical-deductive methods, then I just have to disappoint you. Instead, we need to take a true insider perspective (Smith et al. 2007) in order to gain some genuine insights into a consumer's private everyday lived fan experiences with a celebrity by giving the consumer a voice (Stern 1998) and focusing on the consumer experience in the way it presents itself to conscious (Thompson 1997). This journey, therefore, follows the subjective personal introspection of my own personal everyday lived experiences as a devoted fan of the young, interesting and very talented film actress Jena Malone, of my feelings and thoughts during the consumption of her films as well as the dedicated collection of Jena Malone related collectibles and memorabilia.

All those everyday lived experiences tell insightful stories about how the experiential consumption of a particular human brand and her artistic work as well as associated items is making a significant contribution to an individual's personal subjective quality of life. In reconceptualising fans from the traditional view of participatory fan culture towards the intimate relationship between fan and fandom object, it is hereby interesting to learn whether the well-publicised, often negative images of fans, which our society generally holds, have any bearing in reality or whether there is much more to a fan's emotional attachment to one's admired movie actress than current academic literature has uncovered or acknowledged from its traditional outsider-looking-in perspective so far (Henry and Caldwell 2007; Smith et al. 2007; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2011c). Apart from the minor difference of studying a broader subject and involving a much more extensive, elaborate and dense data volume, the methodological approach for this thesis is pretty identical with the one that I have already employed on a micro-scale in relation to film consumption (Batat and Wohlfeil 2009; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2006a, 2008b).

A.5.1 Data Collection of My Everyday Lived Experiences as a Jena Malone Fan

The data collection's aim is to collect my own private everyday lived experiences as a fan of the film actress Jena Malone through subjective personal introspection (Gould 1991, 1995; Holbrook 1987, 2005). The data collection process, thereby, took place and was completed prior to my review of the fandom and stardom literature to ensure that my introspective data would neither consciously nor unconsciously be influenced by my knowledge of existing conceptualisations in the literature. Thus, I collected primarily contemporaneous introspective data over a period of 16 months and supplemented them with retrospective data and photographic evidence. The rationale for this multiple data collection approach was as follows: When this research started back in September 2005, I had just become a Jena Malone fan barely four months earlier and the memory of this development was still fresh in my mind. As I found that the information on how an individual becomes a fan of a particular celebrity and experiences the progression of the fan relationship might be useful, I recalled the period from April to 10th September 2005 as retrospective data in an essay format, which was written in the second week of September 2005 and amounted to approx. 36,000 words of raw data, to describe how I became a Jena Malone fan. Although Wallendorf and Brucks (1993) pointed out that retrospective data, due to knowledge obtained in the intervening time, carry the inherent danger of being distorted by the reconstructive nature of one's long-term memory, it is

nonetheless my opinion that their benefit of providing valuable information on the situational context and process of becoming the fan of a celebrity would in this case outweigh those immediate concerns. The recollections were aided further by physical records of Jena Malone films on DVD, VCD and VHS, magazines with articles or interviews as well as any other fan-related collectibles that I have purchased in stores, on Amazon or eBay during that time.

In the following period from 11th September 2005 to 31st December 2006, I collected my personal everyday lived Jena Malone fan experiences and behaviour as raw contemporaneous data while they occurred in real time to ensure high '*data accuracy*' (Wallendorf and Brucks 1993). Contemporaneous data field the unique advantage of providing a large pool of emotional data that would be inaccessible to any other, more traditional research method, which is based on retrospective recall or pure observation, and, hence, inevitably be lost forever (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008a, b, 2011b, c). To ensure the data accessibility for an external review that Wallendorf and Brucks (1993) demanded, I have recorded the contemporaneous hand-written data systematically, unfiltered and on the spot in a specifically assigned *blue colour-coded* diary (Patterson 2005). In total, I have collected approx. 150,000 hand-written words as raw data. In order to separate experiences related to Jena Malone personally from my experiences in consuming her films in general, I have recorded my fan experiences while consuming Jena Malone's films as contemporaneous hand-written data in a separate *black-coded* diary, which amounted to approx. 35,000 words of raw data. The reader may please be reminded that the emphasis was placed less on the factual recollection of my behaviour, which could have been obtained by other '*more objective*' research methods, but much more on my everyday lived experiences such as personal feelings, thoughts, fantasies or daydreams as the essential elements of the fan experience.

For the contemporaneous data collection, I used hereby thought-watching exercises that were relatively similar to the ones recently discussed by Gould (2006a, 2008a), whereby I aimed to observe within me how my thoughts, fantasies or feelings in response to Jena Malone-related stimuli – both external (i.e. film performances, photos or articles) and internal (i.e. daydreams and imageries) – developed, progressed, receded and even resulted in different emotional responses as well as physical reactions. Nevertheless, in contrast to Gould's meta-cognitive introspection that concentrates primarily on a

consumer's intense state-of-mind itself (Patterson 2009), my own style is much closer to the narrative introspection espoused by Holbrook (1987, 1995, 2005), Rambo (1992, 1996, 2005) and many other introspective studies, where autobiographical stories and events provide us with a lens for looking into the human condition of our mundane everyday lives (Batat and Wohlfeil 2009). However, collecting contemporaneous data on the spot also meant that I recorded them in the *'heat of the moment'*. Though I left them in the original wording in the transcripts, I decided on ethical grounds to take the liberty of rephrasing them once I had to use them within the official body of text for two reasons. The first one is to avoid causing offence or long-term harm to myself and to any other involved person. And the second one is to prevent the risk of libel actions as a result being taken against WIT or myself. Finally, the contemporaneous introspective data was furthermore supplemented by a third data set consisting of 50 photographs that I took during the same period of time. These photographs are intended to contribute to further holistic insights into how the Jena Malone experience has manifested itself in my life-world over time and even physically invaded my private space over time.

A.5.2 Strategy for Interpreting My Jena Malone Fan Experiences

Due to taking an existential-phenomenological perspective (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Thompson et al. 1989), the only legitimate data sources are the described experiences and views of the participant, who just happens within the context of this study to be the researcher as a judgement sample of *'one'*, that should be taken as *'fact'* (Goulding 2005) and reflected accordingly. Hence, the data interpretation's emphasis has to be on the meaning(s) that the personal everyday lived fan experiences (i.e. thoughts, feelings, fantasies or daydreams) with the actress Jena Malone as well as the consumption of her movies and collectibles has for me as a consumer. Particular consideration is hereby given to the social and cultural, but also to the emotional contexts in which the fan experiences occur (Lai et al. 2008). In line with this philosophical perspective, I have oriented the data interpretation largely on Thompson's (1997) proposed hermeneutical-narrative model of understanding. Thompson (1998: 129) argued thereby that *'it is important to recognise that human existence has some text like qualities but is not text per se'*. This means in practical terms that the person and the person's life history are viewed and analysed as an autonomous text, whereby specific personal experiences, behaviour and life events are contextualised within the broader narrative of self-identity, which again is contextualised in the broader narrative of established cultural meanings

and belief systems (Gadamer 1989). This may sound a little bit ironic, because the stardom literature has all along treated film actors as texts and, subsequently, ‘read’ them through textual analysis. However, this irony also enables us to explore whether a (perceived) intertextuality between the consumer text and the movie actor text could explain the nature and intensity of the fan’s experienced relationship with the actor.

To interpret the data, I have used the phenomenological process of hermeneutical circles (Gadamer 1989; Heidegger 1935), which would traditionally advocate a part-to-whole analysis of each informant’s accounts through an interactive process (Goulding 2005). According to Thompson (1997), there are five key aspects of consumer stories that need to be analysed. First, individuals structure narrative contents by plotlines that present events according to a temporal movement to highlight goals, motives and envisaged outcomes. Second, consumer narratives reflect symbolic parallels between the meanings of different events. Third, they also present us with intertextual relationships, in which the meanings of different consumption stories become integrated in consumers’ narratives of personal history (Thompson et al. 1994). Fourth, consumer narratives express existential themes by which consumers negotiate their self-identity through reflections on consumption experiences, treasured possessions and life choices (Thompson et al. 1990). And fifth, consumer narratives reflect and draw from socio-cultural codes of shared meanings and conventionalised viewpoints (Thompson 1997). But because a hermeneutic analysis usually works with retrospective data that has been obtained in a number of interviews from a various suitable informants (Thompson et al. 1990), I have had to make a few adjustments to meet the unique requirements of this study. Firstly, while I’m my only sample of one informant, I have generated a large data set of more than 190,000 words rather than several small data units. Secondly, I have three different types of data, of which only the retrospective essay would reflect the plot criteria of a consumer narrative (Boje 2001). While the contemporaneous data represent the accurate chronological sequence of events, a structured plot is nonetheless absent. The data must therefore be understood as a collection of smaller interlinked narratives.

In order to get some distance between my role as researcher and my role as informant, the hermeneutic data analysis first began a year after the data collection was completed and approx. four months after the data transcription was finished. The temporal, mental and emotional distance from my transcribed lived experiences also enabled me to some

extent bracketing out any preconceptions and prejudices that I may have about myself (Husserl 1986). The first step involved a repeated full reading of the entire introspective data transcripts to gain a sense of the complete picture. Based on the first impressions, I have attempted to break the contemporaneous data set down into a number of “*more manageable*”, but logically coherent chunks. I discovered hereby that the best fitting way of achieving that was the identification of different phases through which the fan experience has moved. On the surface, all phases shared largely issues like the search for the latest information about Jena Malone, the enjoyment of her acting performances in movies, the purchase and collection of Jena Malone-related items (i.e. her films on DVD, magazine articles, posters and autographs) and her re-occurring experienced presence in my everyday life. However, their nature, direction, importance, the emphasis placed on them and, most of all, the experienced intensity seemed to differ quite significantly within the context of each of the identified phases. A part-to-whole reading supported the chosen breakdown of the data into (in themselves conclusive) temporal phases. As a further attempt to get some sense of the overall picture that the large amount of introspective data presented, which are essentially a plotless chronological sequence of individual experiences, was to summarise them into an extensive, but coherent consumer narrative (Boje 2001; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008a, b, 2011b, c) that truly reflected a) the chronological order of events as reflected by the individual fandom phases, and b) stay true to the experienced emotional feelings and perceptions by using as much original wordings, phrases and statements as possible.

The next step involved acquiring a feeling for ideas expressed within the accounts of the individual phases, so that I became able to understand them fully in their contextual complexity. This also included a textual analysis of the photographs, which have also been sorted carefully in chronological order to supplement the respective corresponding phases. In the third step, I started to ‘*extract key statements*’ (Thompson 1997) within the context of each individual identified fandom phase and the retrospective data set by identifying key sentences as well as specific phrases, terminology and even metaphors that I had used as an informant to describe a particular situation and/or fan relationship experience with a celebrity (Goulding 2005). In doing so, I have attempted to identify whether the extracted statements would indicate certain themes by grasping them within their respective situational contexts as the outcome of figure-ground relationships. For example, a regular reoccurring event was my enjoyment of Jena Malone’s films and her

acting performances, whereby the nature and expression of this enjoyment varied in dependence on what internal or external factors came to the forefront during the specific film consumption experience (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2006a, 2008b). This leads to the fourth step, in which I attempted to formulate meanings for each of the identified significant statements and their specific figure-ground relationships with the respective situational context. From there, I followed up in the next step by iteratively clustering recurrent significant statements with similar meanings into meaningful themes (Goulding 2005). Hereby, I tried to prevent, however, the emerging emic themes from being abstracted and generalised into etic constructs, which would inhibit us from understanding the essence (Gadamer 1989; Husserl 1986) of an individual's lived fan experience with one's admired actress.

At this stage of the hermeneutic analysis, it turned out that some key statements, due to their contextual figure-ground relationships, fitted well with more than one meaningful theme. This suggests that some deeper underlying intertextual linkages exist between them, which would warrant further investigation. Hence, I made the decision to split the interpretation of the emerging findings into two levels. To be on the safe side, I repeated this exercise after some time had passed in order to validate the logical coherence of the emerging themes. At the '*surface level*', I address the resulting individual themes that have emerged iteratively from the data in context with the relevant literature that each of them either supports, contradicts or even enhances. Next, I continued the hermeneutical analysis by integrating these emerging '*surface level*' themes into a coherent thick and meaningful description (Geertz 1973; Goulding 2005) of my lived Jena Malone fan relationship as a '*higher level*' theme based on identified intertextual linkages between my own life text and the Jena Malone media text (Batat and Wohlfeil 2009; Hirschman 2000b). Finally, I attempted to reduce the thick description to the essential structure that would offer an explanation for the experienced fan behaviour within the socio-cultural context of the individual's (= my) life-world, which also includes my private perceptions of the cultural settings, the lived body, the historicised self and my relationship to other people (Thompson 1998) such as family, friends and colleagues – and obviously the film actress Jena Malone in particular. The resulting '*higher level*' interpretation of the introspective data as well as the individual emerging '*surface level*' themes was reviewed again after some further time had passed for the purpose of a cross-check (Thompson et al. 1990). The reader should note, however, that any

interpretations emerging iteratively from the data through hermeneutic analysis never represent the final and absolute findings, but can only be viewed as a snapshot of the phenomenon at a particular moment in time, which evolves further with later readings and knowledge obtained after the initial study has been closed (Thompson 1990). Furthermore, any interpretation also presents only one set of possible explanations.

A.5.3 Methodological Issues to Ensure Academic Rigour

It should obviously come as no surprise that the traditional positivist criteria for judging the academic rigour of a study are hardly suitable for evaluating the quality of any introspective research (Gould 1995; Holbrook 1995, 1997). Rather than the usual foundationalist criteria for qualitative research that Glaser and Strauss devised originally as scientific justification for their grounded theory approach (Thompson 1990), both Brown (1998b) and Patterson (2009) proposed to abandon the effort for a scientific justification and apply aesthetic criteria from the arts instead. While I agree in general with both of them, this doesn't necessarily mean that some degree of academic rigour can't be applied to this study. Therefore, I outline in this section how I tried to ensure academic rigour in this study in terms of the criteria credibility, trustworthiness, comparability and transferability. First of all, in order to ensure data credibility, I have recorded the contemporaneous introspective data uncensored and unfiltered on the spot at (or close to) the moment of their actual occurrence as hand-written notes into a specifically assigned diary (Patterson 2005) to describe my lived experiences in their entire holistic complexity (Gould 2006a; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2011b, c). Because my experiences reflect my thoughts, feelings, dreams, fantasies and even my behaviour as I have perceived them at that point in time, you as reader are unfortunately required simply to trust me that these experiences have been recorded truthfully and honestly. Though this may sound not very rigorous, having to trust that the provided data has been truthfully collected is an equally common necessity in any other quantitative or qualitative research method. After all, how do we really know that some of the collected survey data hasn't been made up or some opposing data been omitted (i.e. outliers)? Or how do we know that the data in an experimental study hasn't been falsified similar to the recent case in Korea? The short answer is that there is no research, where the reader can be 100% sure that s/he has been presented with unaltered, truthful data and, thus, is just left with the option to trust the integrity and honesty of the respective researcher.

Another form of credibility that needs to be considered carefully is the one regarding the interpretation of the data. I have hereby attempted to ensure the interpretation credibility by focusing the hermeneutic analysis exclusively on the unaltered and *'truthfully'* (= from my subjective perspective as an informant) recorded retrospective and contemporaneous introspective data and the provided contemporaneous photographic evidence. This meant in practice that the transcripts of the obtained introspective data have been treated as an autonomous text in the same way as it would have been the case with interview transcripts. Hence, no posthumous additions, omission or alteration of the data to *'fit better'* with an identified theme or to make me look better as a person was allowed at any point during or after the hermeneutic analysis (Gould 1995). In fact, in staying true to the emic and iterative approach outlined earlier, any interpretations have relied solely on the very terminology, phrases, wordings and categories that I have had used at the time when I recorded the data (Thompson et al. 1990). Exceptions to the rule were only allowed in two instances that didn't impact on the data itself. First, due to ethical concerns, I have taken the liberty to rephrase some introspective data, which have been recorded in the "heat of the moment" and might provide potential for causing offence, harm or libel actions, when I used them in written documents (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008b, 2011b, c). However, you should note that the data in question were not altered in the original transcripts. Second, in order to highlight the perceived intertextual connections between Jena Malone's and my own life experiences that I have identified during the analysis of the data, I felt that it became necessary to provide the reader with some further relevant background information about myself .

During the data interpretation itself, I have tried to block out any preconceptions and prejudices that I would hold about myself through Husserl's (1985) phenomenological technique of bracketing, which involved gaining some mental and emotional distance from the transcribed lived experiences. Obviously, it is not always possible to leave all your convictions and preconceptions about yourself or a phenomenon behind. In this regard, the bracketing process was aided by the temporal distance of approx. one year between the closing of the data collection and the start of the analysis. Moreover, each identified key statement as well as the *'surface'* and *'higher level'* themes that emerged from their clustering can be traced back to the recorded data. Hence, the trustworthiness of the research findings is ensured by my ability to demonstrate that presented findings emerged as one possible and likely interpretation from the recorded introspective data.

You may, nonetheless, be reminded that the existential-phenomenological perspective holds that any interpretations that emerge through the hermeneutic approach do not represent the final and absolute, generalisable findings, but instead reflect only one set of possible findings (Goulding 2005). Indeed, Husserl (1985, 1986), Heidegger (1935) and Gadamer (1989) pointed independently from each other out that any interpretation of a phenomenon can only be understood as a snapshot, which has been taken at a certain moment in time, because it is the nature of our knowledge that is constantly evolving further with each newly obtained information or a re-reading of the same material under altered personal and situational circumstances (Thompson 1990, 1997).

Following Glaser and Strauss's lead, qualitative researchers trained in grounded theory, case study methodology or ethnography have tended to view confirmability as major evaluative criterion in judging the quality of interpretive research (Goulding 2005; Spiggle 1994; Wallendorf and Brucks 1993). It is no wonder then that critics of SPI or autoethnography have sought, if not an outright abolishment, then at least an alteration that allows for a confirmation of the observed experiences from third parties and a triangulation of data interpretations by different researchers (Woodside 2004, 2006). The only problem, however, is that it is impossible for anyone to confirm another person's experiences. While it would have been possible for another person to confirm my displayed behaviour and spoken words or that certain events have factually taken place in the way I have described them, the same person would have never been in any position to observe or know my inner thoughts, feelings or any other experiences at these moments would have been – a point that became only too evident in the Nesbitt and Wilson-controversy discussed earlier. As a consequence, Gould (2008a) proposed comparability as a suitable alternative criterion for evaluating an introspective study's quality. In difference to confirmability that requires a convergence of different views to a combined whole, comparability allows for both a convergence and a divergence of views across different people (Batat and Wohlfeil 2009; Gould 2006b). In the present study, I was able to ensure internal comparability as part of the hermeneutic analysis by comparing experiences recorded at one moment in time to experiences obtained at a different time to identify patterns and cluster them into meaningful themes. In fact, while I'm my own single informant, the contemporaneous data collection essentially meant that I was provided with samples of related lived experiences, which I could

compare in terms of their contextual similarities and differences to identify possible patterns and meaningful themes (Batat and Wohlfeil 2009).

For instance, one sample would consist of all my consumption experiences in watching Jena Malone's films, all of which I watched many times. Due to comparison I was able to identify through an analysis of their similarities and differences patterns in the film enjoyment I experienced. A little bit more complicated would be the external comparability that Gould (2006a) and Rambo (1992, 2005) have alluded to, because it involves an active involvement of the reader that I'm unable to control. Basically, as the reader, you are invited to assess the comparability of the presented interpretations by engaging yourself actively in a parasocial dialogue with my introspective narrative (or, alternatively, the introspective data transcripts). In doing so, you would compare a) the presented interpretations with your own interpretations of the introspective data, and b) the presented introspective narrative/interpretation with your own lived experiences. Especially the second part of external comparability provides hereby the grounding for transferability as the final evaluative criteria. Although my personal lived experiences as a Jena Malone fan are unique to me, their transferability to a wider context can be proven by other consumers (incl. the reader), who share or have shared similar everyday lived experiences with their own favourite celebrity under similar situational or socio-cultural contexts. Transferability is hereby achieved when the reader experiences the presented findings providing an illuminating intertextual connection to one's human condition (Holbrook 1995; Rambo 1992), which might express themselves in emotional responses such as feeling sympathy, empathy or even identification with my presented lived Jena Malone fan experiences (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2011c). Even small *déjà vu* moments like *'I know this feeling'* or *'I have had a similar experience'* would confirm the presented interpretation's transferability to your own personal lived experiences.

A.5.3 Researcher Reflexivity and Limitations of the Introspective Approach

"According to one editor, I'm having a problem with my 'voice'. She tells me it is not clear who is speaking at various points in the text I have produced. I need to clarify when the dancer is speaking and when the researcher is speaking. Here's the problem. My voice is cracking as I write this. My identity is fracturing as I spill out my guts while trying to produce in my audience an emotional knowing of my experience as a dancer/

researcher. I cannot smoothly switch hats and write, 'Here is how the dancer in me feels, and here is how the researcher feels'... My perception of my 'self' incorporates influences from these roles, but the end result is not compartmentalised around them. The self produced in this text is emergent from the interaction of those roles." (Rambo 1992: 104)

From the moment that I came across this passage in Carol Rambo's introspective study on striptease and lap-dancers, I somehow knew exactly how she felt. First of all, I have myself received only recently some similar reviewer comments in relation to two of my own manuscripts. As upsetting as such comments definitely are after you've stripped your inner emotional self bare to provide insights into the nature of human experiences, there is nonetheless some truth to them. While the separation of your researcher and informant roles (or voices) may sound quite easy on paper (at least that's what I thought when I started the research), it looks slightly different in practice though. Hereby, I don't mean the often-mentioned risk of preventing the data interpretation consciously or unconsciously from arriving at a negative account of my own person. What I really mean is representing these two roles and their voices into an academic written document as two clearly differentiated and separated entities. As Rambo (1992) already explained, although both the researcher and the informant voices always reside within me, it is only one of them that figures at any given time in the forefront, while the other lingers in the background waiting for its turn to come out. As a consequence, the invisible line as to where the involved private voice of the informant ends and where the distant analytical voice of the researcher begins may become blurred at times. Thus, editors, reviewers and critics have often questioned whether it would actually be possible for an introspective researcher to separate their analytical researcher voice systematically and completely from the informant's private voice. The direct answer to this question, I have to say, is obviously 'No'. However, is such a strict separation of the introspective researcher's two voices really what we should strive for in the first place (Holbrook 1997) or is their more to be gained from listening to what the dialogue between these two voices may actually reveal about the experienced self (Rambo 2005)?

On the one hand, the editors' and reviewers' dominant need for a clear demarcation between the subjective voice of the informant and the objective, analytical voice is quite understandable. There has always been an inherently common fear among researchers

from the traditional qualitative research methods such as grounded theory, ethnography and even phenomenology of *'going native'* (Arnould and Thompson 2005) and thereby becoming the academic equivalent to the mythological figure of Icarus. Having been emotionally overwhelmed by the pleasure of his flying experience, Icarus came too close to the sun (= truth), which melted the wax of his wings, and he fell to his death. Hence, the main fear in qualitative research is that the researcher would become too strongly involved with one's informants as well as the phenomenon and, subsequently, lose the *'necessary'* objective distance that scientific scholarship demands to ensure rigorous research is acceptable to positivist viewpoints (Spiggle 1994; Wallendorf and Brucks 1993). But with a view to the current research, can you genuinely study subjectivity and emotional experiences from an objective distance? While humanistic inquiry has in the past raised a number of valid questions in this regard (Hirschman 1986; Holbrook 1985, 1988; Holbrook et al. 1989), most published interpretive research remained primarily rooted in the traditional *outsider-looking-in* approach that advocates, despite claim to the opposite, a clear formal distinction between the researcher and the informant(s) both during the research and in the representation of their individual voices (Arnould 1998; Arnould and Thompson 2005; Goulding 2005). Ironically, the fear of *'going native'* even led on some occasions to a reverse scenario, whereby a researcher was personally and emotionally close to the research side at the begin of the study, but during the course of the project removed himself increasingly from it as a result of the research (Richardson and Turley 2008).

Inherent to the introspective research approach, on the other hand, is the researcher's desire not only to talk about human experiences in relation to a certain phenomenon, but also to provide the reader with a true understanding as to how these human experiences really feel like by making them *'available'* in an emotionally written narrative (Rambo 1992). Thus, the blurring of the demarcation line between the researcher and the informant voices is a trade-off that not only needs to be made for writing an engaging text that *'lures'* the reader into the experiential world of the phenomenon, but also captures the experiential nature of the narrator's life-world (Holbrook 1995). In terms of this study, I have attempted to write the thesis as a parasocial dialogue by which I hope to engage the reader with my lived Jena Malone fan experiences. Still, you may have also noticed by now that I switch at times away from my leading conversationalist voice towards my critical researcher voice. As a result, it may happen occasionally that my

subjective data presentation may overlap with the critical data interpretation. But rather than viewing this as a weakness of the study, I would suggest instead that these role interactions would provide you with further additional experiential insights into my '*emerging self*' produced by the text as a whole (Ellis and Bochner 2000; Rambo 1992, 2005). This makes particularly sense, as the study of my Jena Malone fan experiences could be interpreted as an expression of my fandom. Another issue that arises from here would be the question as to what extent my private fandom has changed as a result of my professional investigation into it. I have to admit that this is a particularly interesting question in light of the vast collection of contemporaneous personal thoughts, feelings or fantasies that I have compiled during the course of this research.

Indeed, it was at the beginning quite an awkward feeling to have always a diary with me and stop at every moment an experience occurred to write it down immediately. Still, looking backwards, it might be even awkward to recognise that I got somehow so used to recording my thoughts and feelings that I stopped thinking about it. Consequently, the contemporaneous data collection may have introduced an atypical self-awareness about my fan experience due to the recording. However, there is very little evidence in the data that I reflected on the fan experiences at that moment of recording or that I actively sought certain experiences to '*fulfil a prophecy*'. What I can't conclusively determine, though, is whether my Jena Malone fan experience would have developed differently, if I hadn't been studying it introspectively. Firstly, it is the first time that I experienced this kind of admiration for a movie actress or celebrity, which means that I'm not in the position to compare it with a previous fan relationship. In my opinion, this wouldn't be a reliable method anyway. Secondly, as one of the findings in this research suggests fandom is not a static character trait that can be manipulated, but a dynamic process that evolves and adapts constantly. Hence, there is no way to establish what changes the heightened self-awareness has brought about or to what extent the developing fan relationship evolved around this form of intrusion. What I definitely know, however, is that my emotional attachment to Jena Malone has continued to this very day long after the self-observation and data recording have been finished. As my current fan experiences with Jena Malone don't feel any different to me than the recorded data back then, I'm quite confident that the introspective approach, despite the heightened self-awareness, has not significantly altered the nature of my fandom.

One related issue that I've encountered during the research was the problem of self-censorship. When I started the data collection, writing my thoughts, feelings, daydreams and fantasies into the diary initially felt to me like talking to another person. In other words, it took me about three months to get gradually comfortable enough to trust the diary with my most personal and intimate thoughts, feelings, fantasies (incl. sexual ones) and the subsequent physical responses. Thus, while self-censorship initially was a problem, it was overcome by my increased routine during the course of the study. A selective perception of events, whereby certain experiences were recorded while others went by unnoticed, could have also proved to be a problem. However, I wouldn't consider it as a methodological weakness, because it only reflects the very nature of human experiences that I'm studying, whereby some experiences figure strongly in one's consciousness while others linger unnoticed in the background (Thompson et al. 1989). More of a difficulty proved to be my efforts in describing the emotional experiences I was feeling or the imageries I have had in my mind in linguistic terms. At times, I used therefore a picturesque language of describing the pictures in my head. Nevertheless, on regular occasions, I opted for adding smilies or little drawings to my recorded descriptions as supplements that would express my feelings appropriately. While all those methodological issues have to be acknowledged, they shouldn't be viewed necessarily as obstacles to chosen introspective research approach. In fact, I'm convinced that subjective personal introspection in combination with a hermeneutic analysis is valid methodology that has strong potential for providing deeper insights into a consumer's everyday experienced fan relationship with a film actress.

APPENDIX B

THE BALLAD OF JENA MALONE & ME

B.1 Introduction

Now, the time has finally come to go onto our journey into a consumer's everyday lived fan experiences with a film actress. As I have mentioned previously, the collected contemporaneous data of my lived Jena Malone fan experiences constitute in their raw form a large number of small independently experienced incidences that had been recorded in the exact temporal non-narrative order, in which they occurred. Based on Boje's (2001) proposition that people tend to make sense of their environments and lives through storytelling, one of my first steps in the hermeneutic data analysis process was to summarise both the retrospective data and, more importantly, the vast amount of contemporaneous data into a coherently written narrative to get an overview for the whole data set. My rationale behind this approach was to obtain a first feeling as to how the individual instances of emotional fan experiences and behaviour may be related to each other within a temporal narrative development frame. Due to writing this extensive essay I found it possible not only to identify first key statements and potential themes, but also to notice how a consumer's fan relationship with an actress evolves over time in a way that remains hidden to a mere retrospective perspective. Moreover, as I tried to keep the felt experiences alive by staying faithful to original expressions and wordings, I believe that the essay is also beneficial in helping you to get a better feel for the nature of my everyday fan relationship with Jena Malone and to understand the relevance and meaning of the identified themes, which I discuss in Chapter 4, within the context of the consumer narrative's bigger picture, which may be more effective and insightful than presenting them merely as fragmented vignettes. Nevertheless, while the essay provides you with an accurate account of my fan narrative, you should keep in mind that the data analyses in Chapter 4 are based on the original transcripts.

B.2 How I Got to Know Jena Malone...

I still remember the day in April 2005, when I saw Jena Malone for the very first time. Her lovely smile and her beautiful eyes simply captivated me instantly to such an extent that my entire body was filling up with the same prickling inner warmth, which I feel each time when I start fancying a particular girl/woman. But to be honest, it was not

only her natural beauty and her undeniable sexual appeal that attracted me to her, there was also something else about her entire persona that fascinated me right from the start and let her stand out from the crowd for me. Although I didn't know anything about her at that time, I have nonetheless had this strong intuition that she is a very special person and that I simply needed to learn more about her, simply to get to know her (better). The obvious next step would therefore be to gather all your courage and strengths together and try to talk to her. But that's something I've never been good at, just to start with, and many opportunities in the past have slipped out of my hands because of it. The much bigger problem, however, is that I have never actually met or seen Jena Malone in person – and most likely never will. Because she is an interesting and extremely talented young US actress, my closest social and/or personal encounter with her, so far, has been watching her acting performances on screen, downloading interviews with her from the Internet or reading her interviews as well as articles about her in magazines. Yet, while it is quite obvious that Jena Malone would probably never know that I even exist, my parasocial encounter with her has nonetheless had a profound effect and changed my life for better or worse.

As I said earlier, it all started at the end of April 2005, when I went to Dublin for a job interview at Dublin Business School (DBS) but didn't get the position. However, as usual, I used the opportunity of being in Dublin for acquiring a few new DVDs for my movie collection. Probably like most other people, I have enjoyed watching movies since my early childhood for the hedonic pleasure value that they provide. But for me, movies are much more than merely another form of entertainment. The experiential consumption of movies has always provided with an exciting way to escape the reality of my lonely, boring and routinised life by presenting me with a source of inspiration and giving me the opportunity to live out my hopes, dreams and fantasies in the realm of my imagination. As a result, I have collected movies enthusiastically since I was 10-years old; first in the old Super 8 format for a second-hand projector that I had bought cheaply from a flea-market, then a few years later on VHS and, after I purchased myself in April 2004 a laptop with a DVD-drive as a birthday present, I've nowadays switched to DVDs. In addition to my usual spots, HMV and Tower Records on or near Grafton Street, I had recently discovered Laser store, which has specialised in rare DVDs of arthouse films, cinematic classics and world cinema movies, as an ideal hunting ground near Trinity College. And it was here at Laser on that particular day, when I suddenly

found this indie-movie called *Saved!* (US 2004) on offer in a 3-DVDs-for-€20 sale. The film uses the narrative framework of a high school comedy to take an ironic look at the hypocrisy of Newborn Christians in promoting their religious dogmatism. Although I can't really explain to this very day why, but I simply had this sudden strong urge creeping up in me that I needed to buy and own this particular movie and that I couldn't leave without it.

To be honest, I didn't know at first what to expect of the movie, as so-called teen comedies are usually very dull, uninspired, cheeky-clean and far removed from any real people's lives. But I suddenly remembered Jonathan Ross's glowing review on his BBC program *Film 2004* and that I actually would have liked to watch this movie back then. However, the movie suffered a strong backlash from the wrath of the religious right in the US and the Catholic Church in Europe, who both endorsed the questionable Mel Gibson film *The Passion of the Christ* a few months earlier, for being 'unchristian' and 'subversive' and was never released in a cinema near me. Thus, I never got the chance to see it and, subsequently, forgot all about it – until now. But being offered this second chance, I was intent on not letting it slip out of my hands again and purchased it straight away with a few other films. In the very moment I arrived back home in Waterford, I set up my laptop to enjoy watching my latest acquisition and I was so intrigued by this gem that it has become one of my absolute favourite movies ever since. The movie avoided all the typical clichés that usually come with the teen-comedy genre. There are no generic goodies and villains, no ugly duckling who turns into a swan after meeting her prince, no geek who enters the realm of the illusive in-crowd just to find out the social group s/he comes from is the best of one (A very conservative, class-conscious ideology!). Instead, all characters in *Saved!* (2004) have their personal strengths and weaknesses and face the same problems (and little successes) like any other teenagers, who go through their senior high school year. Thus, it's very easy to identify with each of them rather than ridiculing Mary Cummings (Jena Malone) or Hilary Faye (Mandy Moore) before feeling sorry for the former and angry about the latter.



Photo 8: Jena Malone as Mary Cummings in Saved! (Photo courtesy of United Artists Film Inc.)

Surprisingly, the film doesn't make the expected '*cheap fun*' of the Christian faith, as many Newborn Christians in the US and other Christian organisations claimed in opposition to Saved! (US 2004), but is actually promoting the REAL Christian values of love, tolerance and forgiveness. What the movie really criticised is the dogmatism by which fundamental Christians (or members of other religions) exercise their beliefs in form of strict rules and morals and judge other people on the extent they follow those dogmatic rules without questioning. The irony is that the dogmatism in enforcing those rules and morals often contradicts the faith's actual essence that it is supposed to value and promote, while their self-righteous attempt to impose their narrow-minded beliefs on others within and outside their religious communities has contributed to the current excesses of fundamentalism in many religions. In Saved! (US 2004), this hypocrisy is discussed in a nice, thoughtful way within the context of the American Eagle Christian High School, a US high school embedded in the evangelical teachings of the Newborn Christians, without resorting to the usual stereotypes by depicting only ordinary young people (like you and me) who are caught up in everyday situations and have to deal with problems that everyone of us could have encountered in one way or another as well. But much more importantly, from the very first moment I watched the movie, I

was absolutely blown away by Jena Malone's acting performance in portraying the lead character Mary Cummings (Photos 8 and 9), who is a devoted, good Christian teenager until her boyfriend confesses that he is gay. In an honest, but ultimately fruitless effort to 'save' him from his 'gayness', Mary sacrifices her virginity and becomes pregnant as result. While starting to question her beliefs, she is also ostracised exactly by those hypocrites, who preach the Christian values of love, tolerance and forgiveness, such as her best friend Hilary and the school's headmaster Pastor Skip, who happens to be her mother's secret lover. Yet, she finds support in some friends, who may not be Christians formally but still show her what it means to be one.



Photo 9: Jena Malone and Eva Amurri in Saved! (Photo courtesy of United Artists Film Inc.)

Although I have to admit that I was really hooked by Jena Malone's beautiful eyes, her charming smile and her natural beauty, I was also totally captivated by her natural and believable acting performance that I simply had to watch the DVD at once for a second time. But this time, I switched to the commentary of the leading actresses Jena Malone and Mandy Moore instead of the normal sound. While I listened to Jena Malone explaining how she developed her character and talking about the context of particular movie shots and scenes, I became even more fascinated by her. Not only is she an extremely talented actress and very pretty, but she also seemed to be an exceptionally

smart, interesting and surprisingly mature young woman. In fact, I felt that there is something special about her, which I just couldn't put my finger on. Although there are many actresses, who are according to our culturally beauty ideals much more attractive than her, I found Jena Malone to be a gorgeous young woman (Photo 10 and 11). For me, she is a natural beauty the way she is, because she reflects the type of girl I'm always looking and longing for – a buddy and tomboy, who is sexy without massive make-up and styling, but because of her natural charm and '*physical imperfections*' (i.e. pimples (Acne) and very small breasts – though I, personally, can't find anything wrong with that); simply the girl next door, who is fun to hang out with. In short, I felt immediately attracted to her, emotionally stimulated and, I've to admit, sexually aroused by her. Jena Malone is simply the kind of girl I dream of having as a girlfriend to love, marry and '*live-happily-ever-after*' with. It was somehow like being a teenager again, who has a crush on this cute girl, but is too shy and insecure to talk to her or even to ask her out, which is the story of my life. However, though I haven't really heard of her before, Jena Malone also seemed to be a very talented young actress, because she wasn't just playing Mary but actually '*became*' her character and portrayed her as the ordinary girl next door without succumbing to extravagance or the self-indulgent over-styled self portrayal (as many other teen actresses like Hilary Duff, the Olson twins or Lindsay Lohan do).



Photo 10 + 11: Jena Malone in Private (Photos: www.jena-malone.com)

Of course, there is always the danger of mistaking the movie actress with her portrayed character – unless you have seen her in a variety of other roles. For me, a really good actress is therefore one, who makes each of her characters appear to be believable and real and who manages through her acting performance that you enjoy watching even those movies that you would have never watched otherwise. But because there are only a few movie actors and actresses around these days that would truly fulfil these criteria, I wanted – no I needed – to find out more about Jena Malone both as an actress and as a person. Moreover, I wanted to watch her acting performances in a number of other movies with her as soon as possible – even if only to see whether she was really such an exceptional young actress that I increasingly believed her to be or whether I had just fallen in love with her movie character Mary in *Saved!* (US 2004). Thus, when I arrived in WIT the next morning, I started immediately to browse the Internet for any piece of information on Jena Malone that I could get my hands on. Except that I could hardly find any at all! Incredible! While you can find hundreds of websites and articles for virtually every single talented and more often untalented (wannabe) celebrity on Earth, unfortunately, there was disappointingly little on Jena Malone available on the Internet. In fact, back in April 2005, after several hours of searching, I could only find five fan-sites, four of which hadn't been updated since 2000/1, and merely seven of the usual celebrity databases such as Yahoo! Movies, Moviefone or IMDb. Nonetheless, I found out on IMDb that Jena Malone, despite being merely 20 years old at that time, had already featured in 20 movies and in 3 TV soap guest role appearances, participated as lead character in an audio recording of a theatre play and voiced a character in the Japanese animation movie *Howl's Moving Castle* (JPN 2004)²¹. Quite an astonishing achievement for an actress of her young age; especially as two further movies *The Ballad of Jack & Rose* (US 2005) and *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005) in postproduction!!

But I was particularly surprised to learn that I had actually seen Jena Malone featuring in a movie before. Back in 1998, I watched in the FH Nordostniedersachsen's student cinema the movie *Contact* (US 1997), in which Jena played Jodie Foster's character Ellie as a child. However, I obviously paid very little attention back then to a merely 12-year old girl and I was also a bit annoyed with the movie's overall strong religious

²¹ By summer 2011, at the age of 26, Jena Malone has already featured in 35 films, 5 TV soap guest roles, 2 animation film voice-overs, one audio-recorded theatre-play and performed on stage in 2 Off-Broadway plays in spring 2006 and spring 2009 respectively – with a further films being currently in production.

connotations – though the acting standards of the entire cast were quite good. Anyway, armed with her movie list from IMDb I went the next Saturday, 30th April 2005, into Waterford's town centre with the aim to buy a few movies of her on DVD. But to my big disappointment, after 5 hours of intensive searching I still could only manage to find just three of those movies. While ignoring *Stepmom* (US 1998) for the moment, I bought the DVDs of *Donnie Darko* (US 2001) and *The Dangerous Lives of Altar Boys* (US 2001) and went home with the plan to watch them on that very evening. However, I had to postpone for a day, as RTE 2 happened to show by coincidence *Contact* (US 1997) on this very evening and I just had to watch it because of Jena Malone. Because I could empathetically relate to each of her portrayed characters as if they were real people I know, all three movies confirmed that Jena Malone is indeed an exceptionally talented young actress and got me even more interested in her and her work. As a consequence, I felt this increasing desire in me not only to watch all her movies, but actually to acquire them for my personal movie collection, which I had never experienced in this form before. I was kind of really hungry for Jena Malone and her movies! But as I could only get *Stepmom* (US 1998) in the shops, I didn't think twice to purchase first the DVDs of *Cheaters* (US 2000) and *Life as a House* (US 2001) on May 7th and 10 days later *Hitler: The Rise of Evil* (US 2003) on Amazon.de. At the same time, however, I also felt this strong need in me to learn more about Jena Malone as a private person and, hence, was absolutely delighted when I came finally across Nancy Rommelmann's (2000) article in the LA Weekly in mid-June 2005.

B.3 What I Learnt about Jena Malone's Life-Story...

Despite having never paid any real attention to any celebrity's private life before, I was in Jena Malone's case curiously drawn to know as much as possible about her personal life. And when I finally uncovered by chance Rommelmann's (2000) detailed, but also critical LA Weekly article on the InfoTrac database, I was (and still am) so astonished and fascinated by what I learnt about Jena's personal background that my admiration for her increased even more. Jena Malone was born on 21-11-1984 in Sparks, Nevada, near Lake Tahoe as the unplanned result of a one-night stand. But although she spent basically most of her childhood growing up in the poverty of trailer parks as what Americans so nicely call 'white trailer trash', she enjoyed her 'unconventional' lifestyle nonetheless. With her single-mother Debbie being a struggling actress in an amateur theatre, Jena wanted to be a performer (either as an actress, singer/songwriter, writer or

dancer) – or at least a teacher – from very early on. When Debbie moved with her daughter to Las Vegas to take a low-paid job in a call centre, Jena responded a few months later as a 10-year old to the ad of an acting school and convinced her mother to move to Hollywood to give it a try. While this acting school and talent agency, which charged hopefuls \$500 per month for its ‘services’, turned out to be a fraud and only organised a few jobs in ads and a Michael Jackson video for Jena, she still managed on the set of a USC student film to catch the eyes of Beverly Strong, who signed Jena on the spot in order to become her personal manager. Furthermore, during an audition Jena Malone also caught the eyes of Anjelica Houston, who casted her straightaway for the title character “Bone” in her controversial directorial debut *Bastard out of Carolina* (US 1996). In addition, Anjelica Houston introduced the 10-year old Jena and her mother Debbie to Toni Howard, an influential agent specialised in child actors, who signed her immediately for the leading talent agency International Creative Management.

Yet, what really impressed me most at this stage was that, even when she was just aged 11, Jena preferred, to her managers’ frustration, to feature primarily in those film projects that were dear to her heart rather than in commercially promising blockbusters. Thus, Jena turned down roles in *Air Force One* and Disney’s remake of *The Parent Trap* (the part went then to Lindsay Lohan) in order to play the lead characters in *Bastard out of Carolina* (US 1996), *Hope* (US 1997) and *Ellen Foster* (US 1997) instead, for which she received critical acclaim, some film awards and both two Independent Spirit Award and a Golden Globe nominations. Still, *Contact* (US 1997) and *Stepmom* (US 1998) are evidence that some of her film choices had potential for commercial success as well. However, life in Hollywood didn’t turn out to be that glamorous and rosy at all for Jena and her mother. First of all, in the case of child actors the law requires that a parent has to be present on set at all times, which basically meant that Debbie couldn’t get herself a job as well and Jena became the sole breadwinner of the family. But having to be on the set and being part of the film set/crew are too different things, which also meant that Debbie felt increasingly isolated and excluded from her daughter’s life. To give herself some purpose, Debbie appointed herself as the director of Jena’s company, which was set up to ‘loan out’ Jena to film productions and thereby to allay the heavy tax burden on her income. Secondly, the demanding film schedules also meant that Jena Malone received only home-school education – though concluding from her interviews (i.e. Baltin 2004; Chan 2007; Miller 2006), she seems

not only to be very intelligent, but also very well read and impressively knowledgeable about many things and areas!

But worst of all, it seemed that everyone but Jena was making a very nice living out of Jena Malone. After a total of approx. 30% of her gross salaries were already deducted by her manager, agency, accountant, lawyers, etc. as their fees, the remaining 70% of her full income was taxed at 45%, although film productions were required by Coogan's law to put 30% of a child actor's gross salaries into a blocked trust that can only be accessed at the actor's 18th birthday (Rommelmann 2000). This meant that Jena was rarely left with more than 7% of her earnings to live on. When Debbie became pregnant with Jena's stepsister Maddie, Jena Malone used the opportunity of filming *Stepmom* (US 1998) with Julia Roberts and Susan Sarandon to persuade her mother to move to New York and to attend a professional children's school. While being placed already in 9th grade, Jena was so far ahead that she got quickly bored. But due to the high living costs in New York City and the fact that the Malone's had for the first time the financial means to enjoy themselves, while Debbie also complied with her family's request for some financial support, they quickly lost track of their financial spending and started to run out of money. Jena had just turned 13 on the set, when she had to face a bill of \$150,000 in back taxes and, with hardly any money left in the bank, near bankruptcy. The financial problems also caused severe tensions for the previously harmonic relationship between mother and daughter, as Jena blamed Debbie's handling of her earnings for the situation and having to work in projects just to pay off her debts that she would have never done otherwise, but also for acting as her manager when she just wanted her to be a mother. Finally, Jena Malone, aged 14, filed in 1999 for legal emancipation from her mother in order to be able to work in the film industry like an adult as well as to access her blocked trusts to pay off her debts. In fear of being left out of her daughter's life, especially after she was expelled from the set of *The Ballad of Lucy Whipple* (US 2000) in July 1999, Debbie tried to stop the emancipation. This only intensified the tensions between them and reached finally its climax three months later.

When Jena Malone was filming *Cheaters* (US 2000) in Toronto, she invited Debbie and Maddie to visit her for the weekend. But after having somehow read Jena's private diary during the visit, Debbie became convinced that her daughter might be harming herself and called everyone in Jena's life to help her. Jena felt betrayed by her mother and

became so upset that she had to take time off from filming. And after having filed a restraining order against her mother to prevent Debbie from accessing her earnings and interfering with her professional life, Jena's legal emancipation was finally granted in November 1999 at her 15th birthday. Since then, Jena Malone has taken full control of her finances and managed her own career without any interferences and approval from others, who pursued more often than not their own interests rather than hers (Calhoun 2003; Cohen 2002; Rommelmann 2000). In practice, this meant that in a *cost-cutting exercise* she fired her manager Beverly Strong and most other stakeholders, who had in the past profited nicely from her. Next, Jena switched to United Talent Agency, who offered much more favourable fees and, more importantly, absolute creative freedom. As an actress, Jena Malone has focused in particular on portraying complex young female characters with realistic problems in creative and challenging independent film productions rather than fulfilling the usual teenage stereotypes in some typical "*Disney-like*" teen-comedies (Rotter 2003, 2004; Miller 2006; Sherwin 2004). For the same reasons, she also refuses to do glamour photo shoots for fashion or celebrity gossip magazines that would '*present girls with false beauty ideals that they could hardly fulfil and only make them feel inadequate*' (Rems 2004). Moreover, in contrast to many other young celebrities, Jena has shunned the LA party life as well by moving back to Lake Tahoe, where she felt happy as a child. This may also explain why she managed the transition from child actress to a serious young adult actress so effortlessly without losing her integrity, while so many other former child actors like her contemporaries Lindsay Lohan and the Olson twins struggled or even failed with their careers.

B.4 How My Fan Relationship with Jena Malone Developed from Here...

I was stunned and really impressed by Jena Malone's life story and how she managed to stay true to herself, her dreams and her ideals despite her young age and the financial as well as personal pressure she was under. I can't deny that, somehow, I felt inspired by her. Furthermore, while reading Jena Malone's life-story, some images of my own past suddenly went through my mind again. Back in Germany, I spent most of my childhood growing up in one of Braunschweig's most '*disadvantaged neighbourhoods*', which is the politically correct term for those ghettoised, poverty-stricken areas with extremely high unemployment rates, low social upwards-mobility, lots of crime and most people surviving mainly on welfare payments. Fortunately, both my parents were among the very few, who were in steady semi-skilled employment and provided our family of five

with a small, but comparatively decent regular income. Many years later, when I was 13 years old, it even enabled us finally to move to a better working-class neighbourhood. However, it also meant that, while my younger siblings stayed with my grandparents until they reached school age, I became one of those many ‘latch-key kids’, who spent most of the time on their own, when I started going to school and, subsequently, had already to be quite self-sufficient at the age of 7-8 onwards. Since those years, movies have always provided me with a means of temporary escape and I became fascinated by the imaginary worlds that their stories presented as much as with the art of filmmaking itself. Just like Jena Malone, I made a list of what I wanted to be when I grew up, which included professional athlete (at first soccer, later table tennis), musician, psychologist (I read Freud and Jung before I was 12 years old), teacher and, most importantly of them all, an actor, especially as I was already participating in the school’s drama society in addition to playing club soccer.

Due to my interest in movies, being an actor was a particular passion of mine from very early on – not so much in terms of being famous, as it is usually the case, but in terms of being able to engage intimately with the characters you portray. Hence, when I managed surprisingly to be among the 6 pupils of my primary school, who were accepted at a gymnasium²² that year, I joined the school’s drama society again, which was pretty much the best experience of my entire schooldays. Yet, in contrast to Jena Malone, I hadn’t had the necessary self-esteem and her determination to follow my dreams to the end. Moreover, my parents were quick to blame my participation in the drama society for my poor grades and overall school performance and forced me to quit it for good in order to focus exclusively on ‘*practically relevant*’ subjects. However, the problem was really that the gymnasium represented a world that was alien to me, to which I had difficulties to adjust and which I hated, as its day-to-day business favoured the children from privileged backgrounds and discriminated indirectly against the less well-off²³.

²² Unlike Hauptschule and Realschule, where students graduate after 9th grade or 10th grade respectively to learn a blue- or white-collar trade, the Gymnasium is the highest secondary school form, where students graduate after the 13th grade with the Abitur that enables access to university.

²³ One good example among many were the school exchanges with the US partner school, which were officially open for anybody – if you could fulfil two pre-conditions. Firstly, you had to pay DM 7,000 (~ € 3.500) for the 3-week trip, which would have been my parents combined gross income for two months and, therefore, unaffordable. Secondly, you had to be able to provide a US student on the return visit with a room on his/her own, which would be impossible to accommodate for any family living in a rented apartment. As no exceptions were granted, only children from well-off families could therefore take part in this programme of a public school.

Without having now anything left I was really interested in, I started to rebel against the system through my personal withdrawal from everything in school. Furthermore, I also felt increasingly that my confidence was undermined by others, as school and guidance counsellors, instead of encouraging me in my pursuits, usually tended to tell my parents and me primarily what careers I wouldn't be suitable or intelligent enough for. At the end, I failed my Abitur because of my English major, but still managed to graduate with a Fachhochschulreife qualification. But by the moment I left school, I had lost nearly all my hopes and childhood dreams and started to work in sports retailing instead. Though I was also involved in table tennis as a player, trainer and voluntary PR manager, I lived most of the time aimlessly from one day to another and sought regularly my mental escape in the fictional world of the movies. Finally, the movie *Dead Poets Society* inspired me many years later to go to university, study marketing and, eventually, become a lecturer instead.

To be fair, I wasn't probably talented enough to succeed as an actor anyway. Yet, all the time, there has always been this nagging feeling inside me that something is missing or that I have lost out on something special along the way. While having read now Jena Malone's personal life-story, I felt the deepest respect for her and how she was at such a young age able to succeed against all the odds in doing what she wanted to do. Indeed, Jena Malone is not only an extremely talented young woman, but she also managed to resist all the temptations of glamour, party-life and the commercial exploitation of the Hollywood machinery without (seemingly) losing her personal integrity. Apart from her undeniable talent and natural beauty, I was thus clearly impressed by the fact that Jena Malone has succeeded in following her dreams, while I have failed even under less severe circumstances. In my opinion, that's a quite rare and astonishing achievement for a young actress from a poor social background! But I was also somewhat shocked to learn how the not-so-glamorous everyday reality of working in the film industry, which ultimately resulted in the financial and legal problems at hand, had painfully damaged Jena's previously harmonic relationship with her mother. While it would be easy to put the blame for the friction on Debbie's (for mismanaging her daughter's earnings), but also Jena's (for suing and 'abandoning' her mother) feet, as a number of self-appointed "experts" have done, I was actually wondering whether I would have really done it any different if I had been in their shoes. To be honest, I'm not so sure! Furthermore, I could somehow sense in Jena's affectionate words that she still truly adores her mother.

Hence, I honestly hope that both have in the meantime been able to forgive each other and leave the pain behind. However, what was particularly surprising to me was how much I got emotionally involved in Jena Malone's life-story, as I have never shown such an interest in another person, whom I haven't even met in person, before. For some strange reason, Jena Malone must have hit a particular nerve (or even more than one)...

Anyway, due to Rommelmann's uncompromising portrayal of her as a normal teenage girl caught up in extraordinary circumstances, I have become even more fascinated by Jena Malone and simply wanted to see, hear, read and learn more about her as a private person, so that I could gain a more intimate understanding of her personal thoughts, feelings and dreams. Somehow, I didn't view Jena Malone as just another attractive female celebrity at all, but instead as a normal, intelligent and interesting young woman with her own positive and negative qualities like any other young woman that I could have seen on the street, pub or at work. And as with any other real-living young woman that has caught my eye in the past, I felt the desire to find out what kind of person she really is. Particularly appealing was hereby that she neither fits and fulfils nor ever actually tried to fulfil the typical celebrity life-style image of glamour, luxury, parties and public scandals that the popular media are excessively bombarding us with. Yet, this could also be the reason why the media seem to ignore her and meaningful articles and interviews are so scarce. But personal information about Jena Malone wasn't the only thing that was difficult to obtain. Because I could relate empathetically to each of her portrayed characters as if they were real people, I felt this strong desire in me to watch and acquire Jena Malone's entire work as a movie actress. Still, despite having so many movies to her credit, none of them were available on Amazon.co.uk or in the shops – except of those few I had already purchased by now. And while Amazon.com offered many of her movies on DVD, they were unfortunately only in Region 1 (US/Canada) and not in Region 2 (Europe), which meant that they don't run on our DVD players without locking them permanently in the wrong region code. What could I do? I felt absolutely heartbroken, as you can imagine! Thus, I needed to find a solution – fast!

A particularly good example of how I relate emotionally to her movies and engage with her characters is the movie *Cheaters* (US 2000), which I finally managed to watch for the first time in mid-June 2005 in an effort to relieve the stress experienced in the final days leading up to the submission of my MBS thesis for examination. The movie itself

retells the true story of the cheating scandal in the 1995 Illinois Academic Decathlon for High Schools, whereby the underdogs from Steinmetz High School had surprisingly outperformed the favourites from record winning Whitney Young High School, after they had by chance come a few days earlier into possession of a copy of the competition test. In doing so, the movie uses the story for confronting the much-taught moral ideal of '*Cheating is wrong!*' in a clever and engaging way with the social reality in our modern societies, where '*winning is everything*', on multiple levels that go beyond the initial school competition setting. Steinmetz is a typical poorly-funded public school in a disadvantaged neighbourhood, where the students are branded from day one as no-hopers with little chance of a better future and the disillusioned teachers have resigned themselves to cater only for the most necessary basics. Having experienced something similar, I can really empathise with Jena Malone's character Jolie, who is an intelligent girl that is hungry for knowledge, but also struggles desperately to fulfil her academic potential in an endless uphill battle – just because she comes from a '*wrong*' social background. Whitney Young, on the other hand, is an excellently resourced fee-paying school in a well-off area that, nevertheless, still receives public funding from the state school board, whose members are mostly Whitney Young graduates. The Decathlon committee's office is even located in Whitney Young, where the tests are stored prior to the competition as well – a fact that has never been questioned. It's not surprising then that, rather than officially contesting the results, Whitney Young's team coach, as a sore loser, simply asks a friend in the state school board to investigate the Steinmetz answer sheets thoroughly and to compare them with their past performances.

The problem is that an official complaint would have only resulted in a recount of the present answer sheets, while a comparison with past performances is inadmissible by the competition rules. Nonetheless, the state school board is not only quick to follow up on the request by bending, if not even violating the rules, but also implies straightaway that the obvious increase in performance is due to foul play – though they never had any evidence that irregularities have actually occurred – by demanding that Steinmetz retake the test and, thus, indirectly confirm the suspicion. Because Steinmetz refuses, the state school board strips them publicly of their title for cheating and, fearing a public outcry, now seeks to justify their decision by getting a confession by any means possible, which include deliberately violating the students' constitutional rights (i.e. interrogating them continuously for hours while denying legal or parental representation) and threatening

them with serious social and spiritual consequences. In other words, Steinmetz is in fact cheated upon on a much larger scale by the state school board and Whitney Young, as favouritism, unequal treatment and deliberate bending of rules to the advantage of a certain party are only other forms of cheating. The irony is that the Steinmetz students didn't actually cheat after all during the competition. The hardcopy of the test has just given them more confidence in their own abilities, so that they even won those elements of the competition that weren't covered by the test. Overall, the movie essentially criticises the hypocrisy in Western societies of paying lip-service to the moral value of '*cheating is wrong*', while they are in reality based on cheating and only too often reward cheaters with success. The first point is highlighted in the final scene, where the president of the Illinois School Board, who proudly proclaimed that the lesson for students to be learnt from the scandal is that '*cheating is wrong*', was convicted 6 months later for major tax evasion! Moreover, due to their involvement in the cheating scandal, Jolie and her team members were given scholarships and, thus, managed the previously impossible by being able to study at an Ivy League university.

It is without saying that I could immediately relate empathetically to the film narrative, its message as well as Jena Malone's character Jolie and her Steinmetz team members. But like reading Jena Malone's personal life-story in Rommelmann's article, the movie also triggered a number of long-forgotten memories from my own schooldays and life experiences, where I encountered or was subjected to various forms of '*institutionalised cheating*' within the German school system and society (which obviously applies in similar ways to Ireland or any other Western society) that would quite easily provide further support for the movie's message. On the one hand, a combined feeling of anger, frustration, helplessness and vulnerability was squeezing my internal organs within me in response to the perceived, but also experienced injustice and inequality (see above). On the other hand, however, there was also simultaneously a sense of pride of what I have achieved so far against or better despite all these odds – something that comes across in Jolie's closing voice-over at the end of the film as well. Although none of her other movies triggered such strongly experienced intertextual linkages between their stories and my personal life experiences so far, I engaged and connected emotionally with each of them – and in particular with Jena Malone's characters. Subsequently, I felt really hungry for watching Jena Malone in more of her movies and even somehow in danger of starvation if I couldn't get them! In the meantime, I searched the Internet for

any little scabble about Jena that I could find and finally created myself a Jena Malone Info document on my laptop, in which I copied and pasted all the articles and information much as possible into a chronological order. I've never shown this kind of devotion for any celebrity at all before, but Jena Malone just seems to be worth it. Then, my sister suggested during a phone call that I might look up eBay and give it try.

Apart from Amazon, Aer Lingus and eBooker, I've so far remained highly sceptical to purchasing items over the Internet and never considered eBay at all. But still, if it meant that I had an alternative option to acquire her movies, I could at least have a look at what's on offer, couldn't I?! After typing in "Jena Malone" into the search field, I found 386 items listed worldwide and, though the majority of listed items were the 'usual' movies, I registered at the end of June 2005 to use the chance for bidding on the VCD of *The Ballad of Lucy Whipple* (US 2000), a Dutch DVD of *Confessions of an American Girl* (US 2002) and the rare "Emmy Consideration" VHS tape of *Hope* (US 1997), which I all won a few days later. While I still couldn't get most of her films as Region 2 DVDs, my recent purchases encouraged me nevertheless to acquire her movies on VHS (my TV/VCR-Kombi turned out to be able to play both PAL and NTSC video tapes) or on VCD until I could replace them with a suitable DVD. Thus, in order to satisfy my hunger for Jena Malone and her movies, I bought over the next months a Hong Kong VCD of *The Book of Stars* (US 1999) and US VHS tapes of *Bastard out of Carolina* (US 1996), *Ellen Foster* (US 1997), *The Badge* (US 2002), *Corn* (US 2002) and *The United States of Leland* (US 2003) as interim solutions. While I was clearly shocked by her debut *Bastard out of Carolina* (US 1996), in which Jena Malone already proved her acting talent in playing quite realistically the victim of physical and sexual child abuse, and impressed by her portrayal of the lead character in *Ellen Foster* (US 1997), it was *Confessions of an American Girl* (US 2002), which Jena Malone had also co-produced, that captured my imagination. It seemed to me that the movie narrative had a particular private relevance to Jena, as her character Rena seems to personify her fear as to how desperate her trailer park life would have become, if she hadn't succeeded as an actress. Though it is nothing special, curiously I actually like it this movie, because somehow it just feels truly honest. However, several other movies remained still available only as Region 1 DVDs and I needed another solution to the problem as fast as possible.

Nevertheless, I managed to find and purchase a number of magazines with Jena Malone articles or interviews on eBay over the next months that weren't available here. All of them had unfortunately in common that I paid more than the usual retail price for them. Still, for me, it was worth it! However, while some of them, unfortunately, turned out to be short and meaningless, others (i.e. Filter 2002, Interview 2002, Index 2003, Dazed & Confused 2003, Nylon 2004, Bust 2004, I-D 2004 or Venice 2004) were simply really brilliant and exciting – especially in terms of the picture of Jena Malone as a private person that emerged from them directly or between the lines. She comes clearly across as an extremely lovable, funny, natural and intelligent young woman, who is also surprisingly mature and independent for her age. But unfortunately, from the articles I also learned that Jena Malone smokes. To be honest, she mentioned something like it in the commentary on the *Saved!* (US 2004) DVD, but I simply chose not to hear it. I know that you may be wondering now why I make such a fuss about the fact that Jena smokes. The thing is that usually – actually ALWAYS so far – I was turned off by girls and women who smoke, because in my view it's simply not sexy and men, who have the fetish of finding smoking women erotic and sexually stimulating, should get their brainless heads checked. Normally, I would have lost interest in the past as soon as I saw a girl smoking. However, in case of Jena Malone, I simply choose to ignore the fact. Thus, Jena is the first girl/woman I still find highly attractive and romantically drawn to – or even sexually attracted to – despite her smoking habit. That's absolutely new and worth mentioning!!! Anyway, in the meantime, the cinema release of *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005) was scheduled for 16th September 2005. My excitement to watch Jena Malone finally on the big screen, therefore, grew strongly throughout July and August and I was looking forward to the movie in anticipation...

B.5 How *Pride & Prejudice* Strengthened My Fan Relationship with Jena Malone

I must admit that I would probably not have cared about *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005) at all, if Jena Malone had not played the role of Lydia Bennet in the film. In fact, I was never even tempted back then to read Jane Austen's famous novel. One reason was that, a long time ago, I had the misfortune of watching the highly praised and critically acclaimed BBC TV version with Colin Firth. While many people (certain film critics among them) still view it as the '*ultimate screen version of Jane Austen's beloved novel*' and as the '*benchmark for all screen versions yet to come*', my opinion was slightly different. To be honest, I think it is rubbish! Like most British period dramas (in

particular those made for TV by the BBC), I found this movie to be a completely clichéd glorification of a nostalgic past that for sure has never existed in this form – except maybe in the imagination of a desperately bored housewife. But, who knows, that might be the reason why so many female viewers saw in Colin Firth the ultimate personification of ‘their’ Mr. Darcy? The acting standard was on par with that of *Coronation Street* (a popular, but mediocre British TV soap opera), while the characters were so one-dimensional that the only thing missing was a sign on the shoulders stating their name and dominant personality trait – just in case the viewer hasn’t noticed. Personally, I couldn’t care less about any of the portrayed characters. On Sunday, July 31st, I saw that the Sunday Times featured an article about the forthcoming *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005) movie in its *Culture*-supplement (see Photos 12 + 13). In the hope of also finding something written about Jena Malone I bought the Sunday Times for the first time ever. But to my big disappointment, there wasn’t one single word about Jena – just about leading actress Keira Knightley and director Joe Wright!



Photo 12: Articles from the Sunday Times *Culture*-Magazines, 31st July (above) and 11th September (below) 2005



Photo 13: *Pride & Prejudice* memorabilia from my collection (incl. DVD, *Culture*-Magazine (31-07-2005), CD-Rom Press Kit, Autograph)

The article itself, though, was actually very well and interestingly written by Joanna Briscoe (2005). First of all, the author shared my opinion of the BBC TV version and ensured me that I'm no longer the only one with a strong inherent dislike for it. But more importantly, she compared the new film version to the literary original by placing Jane Austen's novel in the context of her time and, thus, argued that all previous small and big screen versions have set the novel in the wrong period for mainly stylistic and glamorous reasons (One that is more in line with a romanticised nostalgic past rather than with the lived reality of Jane Austen's time!) and, subsequently, altered inevitably the understanding of the narrative as well as its societal background. In contrast, Briscoe (2005) regarded the upcoming film as much more realistic than any of its predecessors, because it '*bypasses all the previous traditional Regency-lite conventions of a painterly tableau of empire-line dresses, sotto voce ballroom squeals and high-ceilinged elegance*' of the annoying BBC version. In fact, director Joe Wright located the new movie in the Georgian time of 1797, when Jane Austen actually wrote the initial draft of the book, rather than in 1813, when the book was published, and recreated the rural life of the gentry accordingly. More impressively, in order to ensure realism, Joe Wright even prohibited the actresses from wearing any make-up that wasn't available in the 1790s. Surely, this decision must have pissed off MaxFactor and their associated Hollywood make-up artists, who are well-known for their stylistic involvement in all glamorous, pseudo-historic Hollywood blockbusters. But, personally, I had no doubt in my mind that the actresses would look more beautiful in their natural appearance than any of the MaxFactor-styled glamour girls from the ads! All in all, the article captured my interest for the movie. In fact, an internal excitement and expectation was mounting up.

As a form of release, I went the next day to the local bookstore and bought a newly released copy of Jane Austen's novel, which already featured '*by coincidence*' the forthcoming movie's poster artwork on the cover. As I read the book over the coming weeks, the story and its many characters grabbed me more and more. However, you must note that my personal reading of the novel differed increasingly from the stiff and over-indulged interpretation of the dreadful BBC TV version I saw before. I couldn't wait any longer for the movie's release and started to count down the days to September 16th. In early September, something else happened in my personal life. After several months of struggling, I finally had the courage to ask a certain girl out for a date. Due to

a string of bad experiences in the past, I'm very shy and have a low self-esteem when it comes to making the first step and '*conversing easily with women*' I'm attracted to. Thus, this was a very big step for me – especially as I haven't been on a date for 5 years. But because she was already leaving on 20th September for an exchange year in Germany, I planned to make the date as romantic and memorable as possible. And what could be more romantic than sitting next to each other in a dark cinema and watching a romantic movie like *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005), whose story has been loved by women for centuries? While I was looking forward in excitement to our date the following Saturday, TV ads were announcing the movie's Irish and UK wide release for the coming Friday. On Sunday, September 11th, I bought the Sunday Times a second time, because the *Culture*-magazine featured this time a detailed article about Jena Malone (see Photo 12). As it is the first *real* article about Jena written in an Irish/UK publication I'm aware of, I was totally delighted! On Wednesday, I enthusiastically watched the news in order to see glimpses from the Dublin premiere of *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005). Jena Malone even appeared for 30 seconds on a short TV3 news report! Overall, the critics for the movie were surprisingly good. Not that I care much about them, but it's reassuring...

But then followed a major disappointment! The Irish-wide release of *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005) was for some mysterious reasons restricted to Dublin, Cork and Limerick only. After all the promotional build up, my personal expectations and my excitement, this no-show was very frustrating! With the initial plan for my first date in shatters, we both went on to see *Cinderella Man* instead. But while Renee Zellweger was annoying as usual, the movie overall wasn't really worth remembering either. Also, no romantic feelings sprang over that would have encouraged me to hold my date in my arm or to dry a tear. I was so frustrated that I spent half the movie wondering whether there is too much salt in the popcorn or too less popcorn in the salt. After some careful deliberations I came to the conclusion that the latter must have obviously been the case. And although the date was very nice after years of loneliness, unfortunately, it didn't work out the way I was hoping for either. As I now returned again to my usual, unexciting daily life as an unwilling, lonely single, I was hoping that *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005) would be released the next week in my town as well. After all, it was just topping the box office. And indeed, the movie was finally released in all other areas in Ireland with only one exception – Waterford. As I tried phoning the cinema to enquire their plans for showing

Pride & Prejudice (UK 2005), I was only connected to a tape that gave the current programme I already knew and allowed for automated bookings, but not for human enquiries. The website provided exactly the same information. Customer service, where are you?! Therefore, I tried to enquire directly at the cinema and experienced real-life relationship marketing in practice.

Instead of being treated as a valued customer, I was just rudely repudiated by a bored, disinterested employee behind safety glass, who told me that *'they don't know because all decisions are made by the Dublin headquarters'* and that *'there is no way of finding out'*. In fact, he claimed that they don't even have a contact number to call their headquarters! Confronted with this response, I felt so angry and helpless that I couldn't concentrate on anything for the rest of the day! Obviously, I was already extremely disappointed that I couldn't watch the movie, but this openly expressed disregard for their customers frustrated me even more. But when one week later *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005) was finally released in Waterford as well, an exciting kind of happiness mixed with anticipation or even joy to finally see Jena on the big screen went through my entire body and filled it with a kind of warmth. I needed to see the movie and couldn't wait any longer. Thus, I packed up all my things and went off to the cinema. It was worth the wait, as *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005) is simply a magnificent movie that you can watch over and over again. And for the record this film is by far superior to all its predecessors and in particular to the dull but popular BBC TV version. The movie never gets boring and is just a joy to watch – beautiful landscape pictures a la *Lord of the Rings* combined with nice camera frames that outline the England of the 1790s. All actors did a great job in making every single character appear to be real and believable. Deep in my heart I can feel the way they feel and know why they do what they do. It doesn't even matter whether you sympathise with them or dislike them. In fact, *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005) as a story plays with judgment errors made by first impressions (the novel's original title). At the end, there aren't any good or bad guys – only humans.

The only exception is Mr. Wickham, who represents the typical handsome, smooth talking guy girls are always falling for. Men like him know how to be centre of attention and how to attract women. But behind their pretty masks and smooth words, those *'mercenaries'* (Ironically, Wickham is a lieutenant with a travelling regiment) are often shallow, arrogant and selfish cowards, who don't care for anyone else but themselves.

Yet, while decent, honest men (like me) can easily look through their fog of deception, women still always seem to fall for them and simply turn a blind eye to the falseness in their cheap words. Obviously, I'm a bit jealous of their permanent, undeserved success with the ladies. Every time, when a girl that I fancy ignores me and instead falls for the false charm of another Wickham, I have this painful feeling of powerlessness and heartache simultaneously running through my entire body. But it just hurts even more, when the same girls, once '*their Wickham*' leaves them in misery, are then quick to blame ALL men instead of their own self-imposed ignorance in falling for them rather than for an unpopular geek. I have witnessed it at least a hundred times so far and I'm still counting. Poor Lydia will soon learn the hard way that she hasn't found her happiness! Maybe this is also why I sympathised with rather than laughed at Mr. Collins? Because Tom Hollander did an excellent job in portraying Mr. Collins in exactly the way I have imagined him while reading the novel, seeing him on screen helped me feel much better about myself. I know that I'm not very handsome and women usually don't notice me, but I'm pretty sure that I can never be THAT dull and boring for anyone – hopefully! I got quite a confidence boost just by realising that! Nevertheless, I also felt empathy for him, as I have experienced many times myself how it feels like to find yourself being ignored or even laughed at by the very females you fancy – just because you are unable to make interesting conversation.

But I empathised even more with Mr. Darcy, the central male character, because like me his is uncomfortable in interacting with people he doesn't know – and especially with women. Similar to my own personal experiences, his introverted behaviour and insecurity is (mis)interpreted by the ladies (and other people) as arrogance, pride and incivility, which leads to their prejudices and dislike of him. In his excellent portrayal, Matthew Macfadyen lets his Mr. Darcy look dislikeable in an involuntary and passive fashion, whose real character must be discovered by the audience in the same way as Elisabeth does by looking behind the prejudices that resulted from first impressions. In doing so, his interpretation differed significantly from Colin Firth's rather theatrical performance in the BBC TV version. I could especially identify myself with Darcy's internal struggle in trying to talk to Elisabeth and to show his affections to her, which always results in forced mimics and in saying the wrong words at the wrong time. Of course, this only supports or even feeds her initial prejudices against him. This happens to me all the time and only reinforces my personal insecurities. Thus, I share Mr.

Darcy's loneliness, his inner struggle and disappointments, but also his hopes and dreams to be seen as the person he really is – at least by the woman he loves. In difference to me, however, Mr. Darcy has two major advantages that, at least, attract some level of female interest: He is rich and handsome, while I'm unfortunately neither! But otherwise the internal similarities in character are striking. I just hope that at one point in time I will finally be rewarded like he was at the end.

But as a male consumer, I'm obviously much more interested in the female characters and the actresses who personify them. The main female characters are Elisabeth (Keira Knightley) and Jane Bennet (Rosamund Pike). Jane is the good-hearted oldest daughter who always sees the best in people and is said to be the most attractive girl in the country. Although she surely is beautiful, she isn't really my type. Due to her free spirit and wit, Elisabeth would be more interesting to me. Keira Knightley delivers probably her best performance to-date in bringing this character to life. I was particularly stunned by how closely Elisabeth resembles many women I have met so far in the way she responded to the different types of men represented by Mr. Darcy, Mr. Collins and Mr. Wickham. She responded to each of them with a prejudice that was based on her first impression of their physical and social appearances rather than their actual personalities. I find it quite ironic that women, in my personal experience, always criticise men for judging them mainly on their physical beauty (Which is true!), while they do exactly the same thing (Which is only fair!). Yet, they still always claim to look only for the *inner values* in men. But Elisabeth tries at least to change her prior judgements. As a Jena Malone fan, I obviously paid particular attention to her character of Lydia Bennett, the youngest daughter. Although I must admit that I'm biased, Jena did an outstanding job in portraying Lydia as a rather wild, over-romantic 15-year old girl with an obsession for fashion, dancing and officers – in short as the typical spoiled teenager of today and back then. Lydia is young, naïve and just romantically '*in love with love*' itself rather than any particular man, which ultimately leads her into serious trouble, when Wickham seduces her to eloping and having underage sex outside marriage. Though Wickham is forced to marry her, she is too naïve to see that he only wanted to exploit her youthful beauty and innocence for little more than an one-night stand. I feel really sorry for Lydia when she finds out that Wickham never cared for her. He will treat her badly and soon betray her with other women.



Photo 14: Jena Malone as Lydia Bennet in *Pride & Prejudice* (Photo courtesy of Working Title and Focus Features)

Nevertheless, Jena Malone looks incredibly beautiful and sexy in her Georgian-style dresses (see Photo 14). She is a real natural beauty to fall in love with and doesn't need any MaxFactor styling. But then again, I'm biased! However, the female character I most emphasised with is Mary Bennet (Talulah Riley), as she is very shy, introvert and lonely – just like me. She is also said to be only ordinary looking and less beautiful than Jane and Elisabeth. Yet, I find her to be much more attractive than her sisters. In order to find her place, Mary consistently tries to be the perfect daughter to her parents by wanting to fulfil all the cultural expectations that society has held for women in that era. But no matter how hard she tries, all her efforts go unnoticed by her parents, sisters, relatives and men alike. Apart from books, Mary seeks her happiness in playing the pianoforte and singing. While in one particular scene the whole Bennet family is gathered for breakfast at the table, Mary takes hers at the pianoforte. Subsequently, she is very enthusiastic about grasping her chance to shine by singing and playing at Mr. Bingley's ball. Unfortunately, while she is a relatively good player on the pianoforte, Mary's voice can't hold a note and her performance ends in a total disaster. Everybody's laughing at her until her father finally stops her. I could really feel how hurt and heartbroken she is. So much that I would have liked to comfort her! But instead

I've to sit lonely in the cinema and watch her left on her own crying and feeling sadly alone again. On the next day, it got even worse for Mary, because she was probably the only person in the family, who would have settled for marrying Mr. Collins. As Jane was 'unavailable' and Elisabeth rejected him, Mary was sure that, as the third daughter, it would now be her turn. Although anything wasn't said either in the movie or in the novel, I could read it in her face (excellent acting by Talulah Riley!). Instead, Mr. Collins ignores her by marrying Elisabeth's friend Charlotte Lucas. Mary is in my opinion a nice, but misunderstood and ignored person, who doesn't deserve to suffer the emotional hardships forced upon her.

All in all, watching *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005) was a really great experience, which exceeded my expectations by miles and was surely worth the wait and excitement. The only bad thing was that I had to change my perfect seat in the cinema because two middle-aged ladies couldn't keep their mouths shut for just one single minute and stop commenting on every single scene. Why is it each time I go to the cinema that at least one ignorant person somehow is determined to ruin my film experience? Nevertheless, I simply knew that I would watch the movie soon again, which was already the case during the following week. As I'm an involuntary single for years and don't have any hope of being in a loving relationship in the nearer future, I felt very lonely, sad and depressed and, subsequently, was simply unable to concentrate on my work. Thus, I left my desk early and drifted towards the cinema. After briefly screening the programme, my choice fell on *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005) once again, because I simply knew that it would be good for rescuing my emotional well-being. This time, fortunately, there wasn't anybody around trying to spoil it for me, which was really great! Although my impressions from the first viewing a few days ago were all confirmed, this time I paid even more attention to Jena Malone, who is so sweet, sexy and really owns the screen with her charm, even when she is only in the background of the frame. She simply is Lydia, but also continues to add her own style in portraying this silly girl. Despite her young age, she has already shown that she is an excellent actress with a great future. It just required her smile, her eyes and her presence to raise my spirits and to make me feel warm and happy. The movie itself also made me feel much better about myself and relaxed again. I think I was even smiling for the first time that day! But my experiential consumption of the movie didn't stop with the two visits to the cinema. Indeed, over the next months, I started to acquire a number of collectibles on eBay (see Photo 15) in an

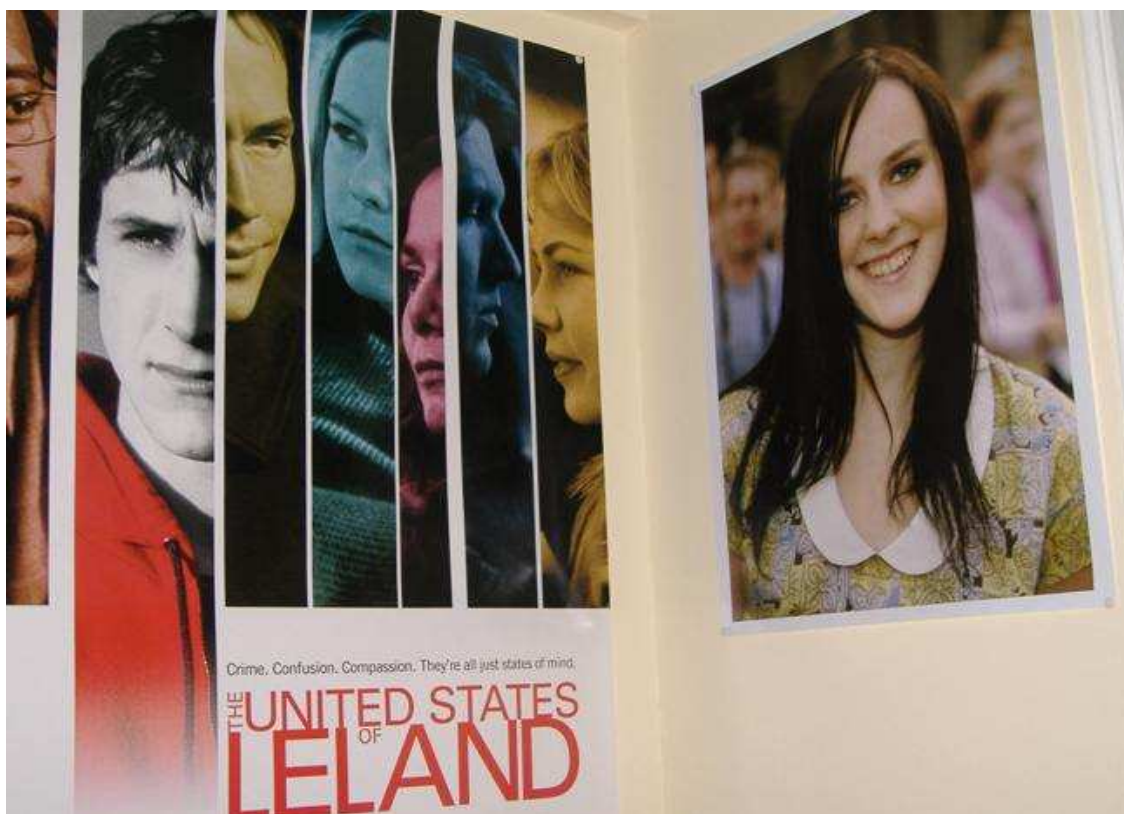
effort to transfer my intangible movie experience into tangible objects. Obviously, I focused hereby in particular on those items that involved Jena Malone.



Photo 15: Items of my *Pride & Prejudice* Collection (incl. DVD, Book, CD-Rom Press Kit, Mini-Poster, Signed Autographs, *Culture* Magazine, Oscar Promo Booklet) on 10th March 2006.

In addition to Jane Austen's novel and the articles in *Culture*-magazine, I had already obtained two mini-posters of the movie in early September, but were now adding during October two promotional US lobby cards, the original CD-Rom press kit, a film cell plaque to decorate my desk in WIT with and a photo poster of Jena Malone at the film's London premiere. However, these acquisitions merely represented an extension of my growing effort to possess any Jena Malone-related collectibles I could get my hands on; the more personal the better. In fact, ever since discovering the new and up-to-date fansite *Jena Malone Fan* (no longer functional) in mid-August, I've been continuously downloading digital photos of Jena Malone and saved them into the designated photo collection folder on my laptop. At the same time, the walls in my room, which in my perception were previously too white, cold and impersonal, were increasingly decorated with the original movie posters of *Saved!* (US 2004), *Life as a House* (US 2001) and

The United States of Leland (US 2003), which I obtained via eBay over the summer, as well as with Jena Malone's photo poster from the *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005) London premiere (see Photo 16). While the posters surely gave the room a sense of warmth, colour and maybe even homeliness, they also symbolised somehow Jena Malone's growing virtual presence in my private life – especially as looking at them and the collected digital photos filled me often with a kind of inner warmth and calmness. In the process, I also managed to acquire two movie posters of *Life as a House* (US 2001) and *Donnie Darko* (US 2001), which had both been hand-signed by the respective casts (incl. Jena Malone!) and, thus, were obviously much too valuable to risk damage by 'just pinning them on the wall'. However, although the material possession of Jena Malone's movies and collectibles has become quite important to me, they were no longer the only means through which I experienced my growing emotional attachment to her. Indeed, the night after I watched *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005) in the cinema for the first time, something else happened that changed the nature of Jena Malone's presence in my life.



Poster 16: Jena Malone-Related Posters Decorating the Walls of My Room on 23rd October 2005

B.6 How a Dream Sparked My Romantic Emotional Attachment to Jena Malone...

While I honestly believe that I have managed against the odds to be quite successful in my professional career, especially since entering academia, my private life, nonetheless, feels more like a total failure to me. Since my early teenage years, I was imagining (like anybody else, I suspect) what it is like to go out with a girl, to be in love with your girlfriend, what it feels like to share the first kiss and the first time with each other. But the years passed by and nothing even remotely happened in this regard. While everyone else around me seemed to be happily falling in and out of love with their special ones, I suffered one rejection after another, as no female found me attractive and interesting enough to go even on a date with me. In fact, in my entire life I have barely been in five relationships, none of which lasted longer than five months and the last one ended over 13 years ago. It wasn't really for the lack of trying, but I believe that my social skills are somewhat... *underdeveloped*. At school and later work, I felt usually excluded for most of the time, so that my social network has been rather limited. A strong contributing factor is surely that I'm privately very shy, have low self-esteem in private matters and, like Mr. Darcy, *don't converse easily* with attractive women I don't know. And when I finally have the courage to talk to a woman/girl that I fancy, then my pulse rises, my hands become sweaty, my nerves run amok and I mumble something idiotic through my dry mouth, which is often the wrong thing at the wrong time. Previously, I compensated the feeling of loneliness with an extensive active participation in sports, whereby I even took up voluntarily managerial positions at regional association levels, just to find out that my social networks there turned out to be rather superficial than true friendship. But with every year that I'm getting older, this feeling of loneliness, emotional starvation and the lack of romantic love experiences turns increasingly into frustration, desperation and helplessness. Due to this growing cluster of unfulfilled emotional and social needs, I've inevitably started to question seriously my purpose and value in life. So, what has my personal emotional misery to do with Jena Malone? At the beginning – nothing!

Though I surely felt attracted to her, my initial interest and admiration for Jena Malone was still based mainly on her work and achievements as an actress. But the nature of my emotional attachment to her changed in October 2005 after suffering another major disappointment. As mentioned in the previous section, when a nice girl to my surprise finally agreed in September to go out with me, I was filled with a quite enjoyable and arousing feeling of excitement, anticipation, happiness and nervousness mixed together.

But as I haven't been on date for such a long time, I was also very insecure and scared that I would lack the necessary social skills and experience in knowing how to behave appropriately in this kind of situation. As I said earlier, the date didn't work out so well. The girl in question was really nice and I enjoyed being with her, but at the same time I wasn't really sure whether she was really interested in me. If she was, then I failed to interpret her signals correctly. Anyway, frustrated with having to live my lonely life as an involuntary single again, I started to seek romance and love from a very different source – Jena Malone. While this must surely sound quite weird, I can assure you that it is actually an innocent reflection of the parasocial relationship concept. Horton and Wohl (1956: 223) hereby argued that '*nothing could be more reasonable or natural than that people, who are isolated and lonely, should seek sociability and love wherever they can find it*' by forming a compensatory emotional attachment to a particular celebrity, who is '*readily available as an object of love*'. Parasocial relationships with celebrities would therefore provide lonely individuals with a cathartic experience that helps to restore their emotional well-being. Only when the parasocial relationship proceeds into fanatical obsession and an absolute defiance of reality, then would such a behaviour become pathological and dangerous (Horton and Wohl 1956). In my case, it started approx. two weeks after my last date had ended in failure, when I finally managed to watch *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005) in the cinema on September 30th.

That very night I was dreaming that I was of Prussian decent but had just moved to the English countryside of the late-18th century. Strangely, I was inspired by the ideals of the Romantic Movement and run away from a family committed to the Prussian values of authority, diligence, loyalty and militarism. Anyway, I went to a ball of the local gentry and witnessed the doomed singing performance of a pretty girl, who turned out to be Mary Bennet (Talulah Riley). As she ran out crying, I followed her down a narrow stairway to the garden, where I set myself beside her, gave her a tissue to dry her tears and started to comfort her and we talked for a bit longer. The next day, I paid a visit to the Bennets to start courting Mary according to the local customs at that time. Most of her sisters were present (except Lydia unfortunately), as were Mr. Collins, Charlotte and another guy, who came across as a hybrid between Mr. Collins and Mr. Wickham in his attitude and behaviour. Initially, Mrs. Bennet was a bit suspicious regarding my income, but for some strange reason it turned that I was a successful publisher of books in the early industrial era and had earned £7,000 the previous year. However, before I was

able to marry her, I was rudely awakened by alarm clock. Typical! I have to admit that this was a very strange dream. However, while I would normally forget most of my dreams in the very moment I wake up, this dream kept spinning through my head the whole day. Moreover, the dream came back the following night – albeit with some slight, but quite important changes. Again, due to my fortune obtained through my publishing business, I've just moved from London to the English country-side of the late-18th century. Now, I was sitting in a kind of living or drawing room at a boring card game with the Bennet family I was paying my obligatory visit as a new neighbour; especially after a gorgeous girl caught my eye while I was inspecting my new estate. But this time, the girl I was courting looked like Jena Malone, while another man, who looked like a reverend or public servant, was present to ask for Mary's hand.

When he was finally reading those dreadful sermons about women's appropriate behaviour in society, I just couldn't help myself but countering his moral views with citations from Rousseau's *Emile*. Hereby, I kept the whole time a secret look/eye on the Jena Malone-like person, who turned out to be Lydia Bennet. I noticed that she was always seated in the background corner of the room and soon learnt that she was *ruined* by Mr. Wickham in a short sexual escapade. But she brought even bigger shame on the family, because Wickham, instead of marrying her, ran off to seduce another, much richer teenage girl before finally deserting to another country. However, I didn't seem to care and viewed her, though foolish, as a lovely person. When the reading of the sermons became too nerve-wrecking and the guy, obviously a hardcore reverend, aimed many of them directly at Lydia, I asked her whether she would like to accompany me for a walk – and she did just to get out of there. We talked a lot while drifting through a park or forest. Finally, she asked me why I'm interested in her, as she is of poor virtue and reputation in society after having lost her honour and causing her father to lose much of his fortune. My reply was that I simply don't care about what people think and that I believe that she is good person, which would be the only thing that counts. Furthermore, everyone could make mistakes and if I had to criticise somebody's virtue and honour, then I needed to be impeccable myself, which I wasn't. Then, I pulled a small knife out of my pocket and scribbled something that looked like a heart into a nearby tree before asking her to marry me. With her charming smile, she said yes under the condition that her parents agree. Immediately after our return, I asked her father for her hand. But before he could say anything, the alarm clock rudely intervened... again!

Though I was already awake, I could still feel how uncomfortable those 18th century pants were and that they scratched on my skin. Anyway, these strange dreams kept my mind occupied for the next days and I was genuinely wondering what they could mean.

Anyway, the dream repeated itself over the coming nights – each time with some slight alterations. Probably, the most important continuous development across all those dreams was that the relationship between Jena Malone and me took increasingly centre stage, while the initial *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005) related elements and scenery receded more and more into the background. Furthermore, I have to admit that over the following nights I really enjoyed those fictional dreams about Jena Malone and me so much that I was increasingly looking every evening forward to them. They filled me with calming inner warmth and happiness, but, most importantly, they made me feel better about myself. In fact, the moments, in which I experienced not only loneliness but also a negative self-image or even a growing unhappiness with my persona²⁴, virtually vanished during that time. I was therefore quite devastated when a week later, without warning, the dreams suddenly stopped from one day to another. In response, I looked for a suitable compensation and started to imagine what it would be like meeting Jena Malone in person, talking to her, going out with her and even dating and kissing her – pretty much like I've done in the past and still do when I (often secretly) fancy a girl or woman, but am actually just too shy and too scared of rejection even to talk to her. In fact, each time I was feeling lonely, unattractive, ignored and even rejected by the females around me, when I was sitting in a café, in a pub or just walking through the town, which unfortunately happened only too often, I engaged in 'home-made' or 'self-written' fantasies and daydreams, in which I was in a *real* and *serious* romantic relationship with Jena Malone as my girlfriend. Therefore, you could genuinely say that Jena Malone was literally '*always on my mind*', so to speak.

But as girls, and especially actresses, like Jena Malone are unlikely to meet ordinary guys like me on the street and fall in love with them, I imagined myself becoming a movie actor by chance or better by fortunate accident as well. While reading Stephen King's psychological thriller *Rage*, I experienced the story as a movie production directed by Wolfgang Petersen, in which Jena Malone and I were playing each as actors

²⁴ The fact that I suffer from dysthymia (= chronic depression) since birth – though I was only diagnosed with the illness when I was 25 – has contributed over years significantly to the negative self-experience.

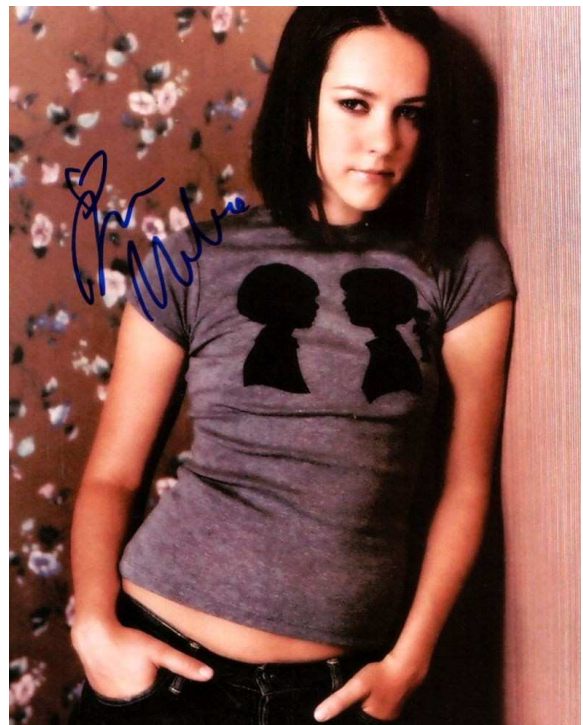
a certain character; together with Macaulay Culkin and a few others actors playing further ones. Hereby, I created myself the illusion that we met at the set, got along fine, started dating, fell in love and eventually became a loving couple. From then on, I imagined every novel I was reading as a movie production that featured Jena Malone and me working together on-screen as actors by each portraying one of the characters, while also being together in a committed romantic off-screen relationship. This escapist behaviour strengthened even further after attending the postgraduate business ball on October 22nd turned into another total disappointment for me, if not to say an emotional disaster. Initially, I thought it was a good idea to go, because I just had officially received my MBS at the graduation ceremony the day before and it would be a good to see some '*friends*' (probably one of the most misused English words) again. However, everywhere I looked I could only see couples, while the single girls couldn't care less about me and sought without any exception the quickest way out each time I tried talking to them. Hence, the more the evening progressed the more I felt absolutely lonely and uncomfortable – like being the seventh wheel of car. If the ticket wouldn't have cost me €45, I would have gone home much earlier! At the end, it was a waste of time! And when I got home, I was too upset to fall asleep and felt like crying. In search of comfort, I browsed through Jena Malone's photo collection, watched *Saved!* (US 2004) on my laptop and finally went in the early morning hours for a longer walk - just to get out and away. Anywhere...!

Even two days later, I still felt frustrated and depressed from my personal experience at the ball. Actually, I really felt like crying, but a serious consequence of suffering from dysthymia (= chronic depression) since early childhood is that you hide all your emotional feelings deep within you up to the point where it eats you up from the inside. Having suffered another massive rejection by a number of females, who couldn't even be bothered to talk to me, as a new addition to my very long list of disappointments, failures and bad experiences, is it any wonder that my self-esteem is virtually non-existent and scrapes 100 miles beneath the ground?! From that very moment on, each time when I was sitting alone in a café, had one or two pints in my local pub at the weekend, went to the cinema and theatre or just took a walk in the park on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon and felt particularly isolated, lonely, unattractive and, subsequently, ignored by all the females around me, I just began to fantasise about being right at the moment together with Jena Malone. Therefore, I imagined walking hand-in-hand with

her through the park, maybe fooling around on a park bench like young lovers do, having a cappuccino and a lovely chat in a café together, enjoying our company in the pub, cuddling together on the couch in front of the TV, having a romantic dinner in a restaurant, going to the movies or the theatre, etc. I know that this must probably sound very weird to many readers – or, worse, fulfil the stereotypical, pathological description of fans in the media. Yet, in practice, it was quite similar to reading a book or watching a movie, where you also enjoy the holistic experience of losing yourself in the narrative. The only difference was that I was mentally writing the imaginary scrip for my very own fictional narrative about a romantic everyday relationship between Jena Malone and me – a kind of an ongoing romance novel or soap opera, so to speak.



**Photo 17: Evidence of Jena Malone
Entering my Private Space
(November 2005)**



**Photo 18: Original Jena Malone
Autograph**

In other words, whenever I felt the need due to experienced deficits in terms of romance and love, I could mentally lose myself for awhile in my fictional narrative and fulfil my emotional, romantic and, to some extent, even my sexual needs. However, while I experienced on some occasions some sexual fantasies or daydreams in relation to Jena Malone, it should be noted that these sexual fantasies only played a very minor, rather supplementary role in the overall romantic narrative of the fictional relationship that I

was creating in my mind. And like closing a book after a few chapters, I could drop out of my mental role-play at any time and go back to the daily business of my everyday life. Over the coming weeks and months, I even printed out a few photo images of Jena Malone and displayed them thoroughly framed in my room (see Photo 17) to enhance the overall experience of my imagined relationship. Of course, should anyone enter my room while visiting me, I could still mask it as strongly, maybe even '*obsessively*' expressed fandom and nobody would ask any questions... However, I didn't really need to worry, as nobody dropped by anyway. In the meantime, I noticed that I hadn't bought any movie since summer that didn't feature Jena Malone. Moreover, my trips to the cinema changed substantially, as I no longer bothered going to the multiplex and became much more interested in arthouse, indie- and world cinema movies like the ones Jena Malone was featuring in. I also continued to think about different ways to obtain and watch those movies that weren't available on the European market. As recommended by a friend, my first attempt involved downloading DVD Ghost, a software that is supposed to trick the hardware into believing that the DVD is region free, and DVD Shrink, a software with which you can make a Region 0 copy of any DVD. To test my theory I purchased the Region 1 DVDs of *Hidden in America* (US 1996), *The Book of Stars* (US 1999), *Ellen Foster* (US 1997) and *Corn* (US 2002) on eBay. But when the latter two arrived first, it turned out that DVD Ghost didn't work with the DVD drive on my laptop. Fortunately, though labelled as Region 1 DVDs, the first two turned actually out to be Region 0 DVDs and were running without problem.

Then, I had another idea and finally bought in November 2005 an external DVD drive, which I locked in Region 1 to watch all those US DVDs of Jena Malone movies that I needed to buy to satisfy my increasing hunger for her but were unavailable in Europe. With the software DVD Shrink I was then also able to make a backup copy of the movies in Region 0, so that I could watch them everywhere I need to travel to. When the BBC was showing *Donnie Darko* (US 2001), I was absolutely delighted and set myself up for the home cinema experience. Unfortunately, my flatmate came home early and was determined to spoil the experience by being constantly talking and singing to himself until I finally gave up frustrated and moved to my room to watch the film on DVD. It was not the first and, of course, not the last time. Fortunately, by the end of November 2005, I had finally managed to acquire all of her movies on DVD for my collection – with the exception of *The Ballad of Lucy Whipple* (US 2000), which

was only available on VCD, and *The Ballad of Jack & Rose* (US 2005), which I was working on obtaining as a US DVD. November 2005 was also a memorable experience on a different note. Until now, nobody seems to have heard of Jena Malone before and most of her movies were never screened in the cinema – except of *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005) – or on TV. And then, suddenly, following *Donnie Darko* (US 2001), they were showing *Stepmom* (US 1998), *The Ballad of Lucy Whipple* (US 2000), *For Love of the Game* (US 1999) and *Bastard out of Carolina* (US 1996) all in the space of two weeks. Of course, I didn't miss any one of them. I just had to watch them! At the same time, I also learnt by browsing IMDb and the *Jena Malone Fan* Fan-site that Jena Malone was just involved in the production of three more movies *Lying* (US 2006), *Four Last Songs* (UK 2007) and *The Go-Getter* (US 2007). To be honest, I couldn't wait for their release. Unfortunately, it took more than two years before I got the chance in the case of two of them, while *Lying* (US 2006) has still not been released yet despite its premiere at Cannes in 2006 and a few further screenings at various film festivals.

B.7 How I Strengthened My Romantic Emotional Attachment to Jena Malone...

But with Christmas approaching, I increasingly felt absolutely lonely again, because I simply knew that I would, as the only one in my family who is a single, be the fifth wheel again. Hence, my imagined relationship with Jena Malone intensified in my head as a form of emotional comfort to myself. The way I sustained it varied in many ways. The most obvious form was daydreaming or fantasising about Jena Malone and me being lovers, which was supported by engaging regularly with her photos and movies in my collection. Moreover, I programmed my screensaver with her photos and, of course, used her photos as background images. However, while I continued to download photo images of Jena Malone into the designated Jena Malone photo collection on my laptop and to look up eBay for interesting Jena Malone-related items, my frantic hunt for her movies, articles, posters, which I used to decorate my room with, and other memorabilia that determined the previous months decreased suddenly and significantly from mid-November 2005 onwards. One reason might have been that I had already obtained all of Jena Malone's available movies – except of *The Ballad of Jack & Rose* (US 2005) and *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005) – for my private movie collection as well as any relevant article that was written about her and I knew about, so that nothing was left to obtain anyway. Thus, the focus shifted towards looking for new information and developments in her career and for some new photos or articles of her. However, those continued to

remain rather scarce. Yet, I was very proud when I managed at least to gain possession of four original autographed Jena Malone photos during that time – though they were already a few years old (approx. from 1999 to 2001). Nevertheless, as my material possession of Jena Malone was by far not the only means through which I experienced her increasing presence in my private life, my emotional attachment to Jena Malone remained very strong, because she was literally always on my mind, so to speak.

The Christmas breaks in Germany were basically as I expected them to be. Apart from seeing my one-year old nephew, I felt most of the time isolated among all the couples around me. This was made even worse by being constantly reminded of this fact by “well-meaning” relatives, who had nothing better to do then asking: “When are you (thinking about) bringing a nice girl home?”, “At your age, shouldn’t you be married already?” or “Why haven’t you got yourself a nice woman and got married by now?” You can’t imagine how painful that is and how you feel even more like a failure than you already do by yourself! Equally bad are the typical well-meaning comments like “Every pot has its lid!” or “There’s someone for everyone, you just have to go out find her!” Yeah, right! Thus, each time I went to the city centre shopping or browsing across the Christmas market, I imagined doing that with Jena Malone by showing her around my hometown. When I finally arrived back in Waterford in early-January 2006, I comforted myself with a self-gift. Indeed, I’ve finally managed to obtain the DVD of *The Ballad of Jack & Rose* (US 2005) for my private collection. Moreover, while browsing the Internet for new Jena Malone-related information, I learnt that she will be performing as Sister James in the Off-Broadway play *Doubt* (US 2006). I would have loved to see her live on stage – if only I had the money to afford such a trip. But my PhD scholarship didn’t allow me for such expenditure - unfortunately! Instead, I was increasingly looking forward to the forthcoming DVD release of *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005) that was scheduled for February 6th, 2006. To be honest, I was offered a pirated DVD of the movie on eBay back in December and briefly felt quite tempted. But very often those pirate DVDs are of such poor quality that it simply wasn’t worth the effort! Instead, I waited patiently and nervously for the official DVD release.

Actually, TESCO sold the DVD already on Sunday and I was one of the first who bought it! The advantage of DVDs is not only the great picture and sound quality, but in particular all those bonus features on the disc. And in addition to the obligatory subtitles

and director Joe Wright's audio commentary, there are a number of exciting bonus features on the *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005) DVD. They range from an alternative US ending (Why do Americans need a different ending?) to galleries of the 19th century to a number of short behind-the-scenes documentaries. Of course, my primary interest was dedicated to those documentaries that featured Jena Malone in front of and behind the camera. Thus, I loved to watch especially the bonus features *The Politics of Dating in 18th Century England* and *The Bennets*, which include movie scenes with Jena Malone as Lydia Bennet that show her in her private clothes during the rehearsals and feature a very short interview with her. However, I enjoy in particular watching the *On Set Diaries*, where Jena Malone, Talulah Riley, Keira Knightley, Carey Mulligan, Rosamund Pike, Brenda Blethyn, Donald Sutherland, Tom Hollander and Matthew Macfadyen talk in private about their personal experiences while filming the movie and the close 'family' bonds they have developed before and behind the camera. It's heart-warming to see how they have become the 'Bennet family' even off the screen, leaving me with the desire to be part of this perfect family bond. Another beauty of the documentary is that the actors and actresses are shown in private, when they are not playing their characters, as natural, lovely people like you and me. In fact, the documentary has increased my admiration for Jena Malone even more, like the *Making of Ellen Foster* (US 1997), the video interview at the Dennis Miller Show from June 2004 or the commentary of *Saved!* (US 2004) have already done before. Anyway, I loved to watch this movie as one of my favourites!

But as a devoted Jena Malone fan and also in order to feed the illusion of my imagined relationship with Jena Malone, I started to look increasingly for some personalised items that would in some way also symbolise her physical presence in my life. Hence, I concentrated my limited financial resources on acquiring in particular original hand-signed photos of her. The more up-to-date both the photo and signature were the better! Unfortunately, apart from the two autographed agency photos from 1999 and 2001 respectively as well as the three movie stills of *Cheaters* (US 2000), which were also signed around 2000/1, I couldn't really find anything. However, this changed drastically when Jena Malone finally gave her Off-Broadway debut in *Doubt* (US 2006) from late-January to late-June 2006. By mid-/late-February 2006, a number of (semi-)professional autograph hunters and traders were offering autographed photos of Jena Malone on eBay with prices ranging between \$45 and \$85. All of these traders claimed that they

had obtained Jena’s autographs personally in front of the theatre. But while it became quickly apparent that several of the autographs were fakes, a few genuine autograph traders were differentiating themselves by accompanying their autographed photos often with proof candids that showed Jena Malone signing the respective photos in front of the theatre. There was no doubt in my mind that I needed to have as many of them in my possession as I could afford to obtain – or, alternatively, at least one! Still, \$65 is a lot of money when you are living on a scholarship. My pulse started to rise, my hands became sweaty and my mouth turned dry for desire to have them in my possession. Not knowing what I should do, I was therefore fighting with myself for the next two weeks until I finally gave in and bought the first one from a seller nicknamed Aplusgraphs. As it turned out, this was just the start for a second, but much more intense and targeted buying frenzy that just kicked in.



**Photo 19: Original Hand-Signed Photo
of Jena Malone**



**Photo 20: Jena Malone Signing Photos
After Performing in Doubt
(Photo by Anthony Ribisi)**

From March to June 2006, I was acquiring approx. 40 original hand-signed photos of Jena Malone (see Photos 18 + 19) from four trustworthy autograph traders in New York. And as many sellers often got the same photos – usually movie stills from Contact (US 1997), Ellen Foster (US 1997), Donnie Darko (US 2001), Life as a House

(US 2001), *Saved!* (US 2004) and, by April 2006, *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005) – signed by her, I increasingly focused in particular on the accompanying proof candids that came as a free bonus with the autographed photos as my selection criteria. For once, it was the only way to obtain photos of her after the two most recent and only up-to-date fan-sites (*Jena Malone Fan* and *Jena Malone Online*) had just been closed down again. But my main rationale behind this unorthodox approach was essentially that a) these photos happened to be the most recent photos taken of Jena Malone that I could get my hands on, b) they were taken privately and, thus, would be unique possessions, and c) they provide a true authentic reflection of Jena Malone by showing how she is in private (see Photo 20). In doing so, these private and natural candids of Jena Malone served as another legitimate means through which I could manifest and experience the illusion of her ‘*personal presence*’ in my private everyday life. Anyway, during those weeks I developed a closer contact to a professional autograph trader named Anthony Ribisi (aka Aplusgraphs). Finally, he offered me in April 2006 that I should just email him any particular photo of Jena Malone that I would like to get personally signed by her and he would get the job done – for a fee obviously. Tempted by this offer, I emailed him four of my most precious Jena Malone photo images the very next day. Only a few days after emailing him these very special Jena Malone photo files, he asked me whether I would like to have Jena dedicating them to me personally. Was he kidding me? What kind of a question was that?! If that was really possible, I would obviously love to!!! Anyway, spurred on by this exciting experience, I emailed five more photo images of Jena Malone and a few more after that and a few more after that.

At the end, I had emailed him 25 photo images in total. Most of them were taken within the previous two years at the premieres of *The United States of Leland* (US 2003), *Saved* (US 2004) and *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005), but some were also private photos that were shot for some magazine articles in Nylon and Venice. With the last batch on May 30th 2006, I emailed him the most recent pictures of Jena Malone that were taken just three days earlier at the Cannes Film Festival while attending the premiere of *Babel* and promoting her own new movie *Lying* (US 2006). I had only obtained them from WireImage.com the previous day. Anyway, at the end, Anthony had actually managed that Jena Malone did indeed dedicate 21 of the 25 photos to me personally with her hand-written signature. The last 10 of them, which I finally received in mid-June 2006 after days of nervous waiting, are shown in Photo 21. As you can surely imagine, these

photos that Jena Malone had personally hand-signed and addressed to me constitute my most precious and valuable possessions, my absolute treasures, my crown jewels ever since! I don't really care what other people might think about them, because for me they are absolutely invaluable! For these three months from March to May 2006, buying autographs became unfortunately a kind of addiction as well, whereby my expenditures exceeded my monthly income not only for the first time in my entire life, but also for two consecutive months and just barely equalled it for the third month. I've to admit that this was a shocking experience, which also manifested itself in some stress-related symptoms such headache and stomachache for two weeks in mid-June 2006. It took awhile to come consciously to terms with the experience and to get the expenditures back under control by late-July 2006.



Photo 21: Original hand-signed photos, which Jena Malone has dedicated to me personally (15-06-2006).

B.8 How My Emotional Relationship with Jena Malone Actually 'Saved!' Me...

Despite being short of money due to both living on a scholarship and the excessive acquisition of Jena Malone's original hand-signed photos during those months, I was nevertheless tempted to fly to New York, so that I could watch Jena Malone performing live on stage directly in front of my eyes and maybe even meet her backstage or in front

of the theatre with all the other autograph hunters. Indeed, as I only knew her from films, photos and video-clips, I was wondering all the time what she would look like and turn out to be as a real-living person. Going to New York and watching her performance on stage might therefore have been a good chance to find out. Naturally, I was also imagining what it would be like to meet her finally in private, to talk to her and to get to know her in real life. At the same time, however, I'm only too aware that I'm just not the kind of guy for whom a *Notting Hill* scenario or narrative (= Bookstore-owner Hugh Grant bumps accidentally in Julia Roberts' Hollywood movie star and both fall happily in love with each other...) would ever come true. These things only happen to other men, but never to me. After all, as I couldn't even attract the interest of a nice girl in my daily environment, why should then someone like Jena Malone notice – never mind be interested in – me at a brief chance encounter?! Thus, at the end, I was simply too afraid of bursting my imaginary romantic Jena Malone bubble with just another real-life interpersonal disappointment that I, subsequently, used a number of excuses like the lack of time and money (the latter wasn't so unjustified) for convincing me successfully not to go ahead with it. A decision that – looking back to it – I was regretting ever since! Subsequently, I started to think about writing her a letter instead, in which I could also tell her about my research as an 'ice-breaker' – which might also be a good means to stand out from other fans and, maybe, get me noticed in her eyes.

Although a number of friends and colleagues encouraged me especially between April and July 2006 to do exactly that, I was again much too afraid of any consequences that a personal response – or even more likely a non-response – from her would potentially have for my emotional well-being. As long as I had this imaginary relationship to fall back on in those times when I experience a severe loneliness and feel unattractive due to another (perceived) rejection by the females around me, everything was fine. But what would happen, if even my imaginary relationship with Jena Malone would turn out to be another major disappointment? No, it would be much better to keep this relationship with her save in my mind and to hold on to it for as long as it would last! Still, there was also the small chance that I might actually get a nice personal response from her, which would just be too good to miss out on. During the months from May to early-July 2006, I often consoled myself by browsing regularly through my collected treasures – Jena Malone's autographs with a strong preference for those most recent ones that she had dedicated to me – or her photos that I had sorted into a specific photo album, whereby I

loved in particular those private candid photos that came as bonus with the autographs. I even framed some of them to decorate my room with them (See Photo 22). As the spring and summer months were also extremely sunny and warm ones – especially for Irish weather, I used the opportunity to wear all the T-Shirts with Jena Malone imprints that I had bought back in autumn 2005 (see Photo 23) in public and express my fandom to her openly. Somehow, I also enjoyed answering the many questions I was asked as to whom she is and the films she was in. Yet, I also noticed that I hadn't really watched any of her movies for months by now. Though there was a strong desire, I just never really got to it. In fact, since October 2005 I planned on several occasions to have a Jena Malone film festival at the weekend just for myself. But it never actually happened, as I just couldn't decide on the films that I wanted to watch. Somehow, I just didn't want to offend any one of them by favouring another... – though I definitely had my favourites!



Photo 22: Framed Jena Malone Photo
(19-07-2006)



Photo 23: Jena Malone T-Shirts
(09-10-2006)

Anyway, I soon didn't need to worry about the potential consequences that arise from my imaginary relationship with Jena Malone being dashed by a disappointing response from her. In fact, some of my extraordinary expenditures in May 2006 originated not in my excessive acquisition of Jena Malone's autographs, but in a certain development within my private life that occurred parallel to the former and should have a major

impact on how my fan experiences with Jena Malone progressed further from July to November 2006. It started actually back in June 2005, when I met at a conference a very nice, intelligent and beautiful young woman from a French university. Since that time, we have kept a regular contact to each other via emails. While our email exchange at first constituted merely a professional network between two PhD students in consumer research, over time we got to know each other more personally and had finally become by spring 2006 close friends. Actually, I really liked this girl right from the very first moment we met and, secretly, I was hoping that I might have finally got lucky after all that misery to have found in her the one I have always been looking for. Hence, I was absolutely delighted, when she finally invited me in late-April 2006 to visit her over the summer for a week. It felt like I'd just been given the delayed birthday present that I was wishing for all my life. During the following weeks, we arranged my visit for mid-August 2006 and I booked the flight in May despite my hugely overstretched budget. In fact, I was so excited and enthusiastic that from June onwards I just couldn't stop imagining how this visit, which also happened to be technically my first real holidays for two years, and especially my time with this girl would be like. However, while I was looking forward in growing anticipation and inner excitement to visiting her, something unexpected happened at the same time. For some strange reason, I suddenly stopped in late-June 2006 dreaming about having a relationship with Jena Malone. I still enjoyed watching her movies and cherishing her hand-signed photos, like I said, but the fantasies of an imaginary relationship between us were completely wiped off my mind.

When the highly anticipated visit to my friend in France was finally dawning in August, I became also increasingly nervous and afraid that I would scare her away, because I simply wouldn't know how to communicate my feelings properly to her. After all, I hadn't really had any experiences in this department to draw from. Fortunately, my worries evaporated quickly after she picked me up at the airport. I felt really happy, as everything was nearly perfect during the first days and we had a lot of fun together. But due to unforeseen circumstances that strongly interfered in the second half of the week with our plans, my visit turned increasingly into a major disaster. Maybe I was too overenthusiastic or just misread the signals again, but I guess that my poor, untrained social skills let me down once again and contributed strongly to another interpersonal disappointment without me even noticing it. Subsequently, we separated on such bad terms that it ate me up from the inside. Thus, as soon as I returned home sad, frustrated

and totally heartbroken, I turned to the only person that promised me comfort, love and warmth: Jena Malone. For the following days, I watched her movies nearly endlessly – some of them like *Cheaters* (US 2000), *Life as a House* (US 2001), *Saved!* (US 2004) or *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005) even more than once – before I was ready to face the cruel world again. I also spent hours watching Jena Malone’s interviews in videos that I had downloaded from the Internet, reading the collected magazine articles about her and browsing through her photos and autographed photos, which were conveniently stored on my desk (see Photo 24). In doing so, I also sought to gather some internal strength in the desperate hope of being given the opportunity to make up with this young woman at another forthcoming Irish conference in early-September 2006. Indeed, while we were arranging back in May my trip to France, we also planned to use this conference in Ireland for her to visit me as well.



Photo 24: Albums with Jena Malone Photos and Autographs, Magazines and Other Collectibles (09-10-2006)

Although I hadn’t heard anything from her again since we had a nasty argument with each other due to my underdeveloped social skills, I was looking forward to seeing her again and apologise for my stupidity in the hope to restore our friendship – and maybe

even more. Yet, once again, external circumstances interfered when the owner of our pre-booked B&B, after having confirmed twice as many bookings as he had rooms, told my friend on arrival – without my knowledge – that I had cancelled her booking. Obviously, that was a lie! Why should I want to cancel the booking of someone I genuinely care about?! Unfortunately, she believed his lies and, as you can imagine, was so extremely upset that she didn't want to talk with me at all. Although this time it definitely wasn't my fault at all, these external circumstances made my effort for reconciliation and the renewal of our friendship virtually impossible. Instead, the events pushed me into an extremely disastrous psychological turmoil filled with inner darkness and the intense emotional pains of desperation, hopelessness, sadness, isolation, loneliness and the experienced complete absence of any feeling that might have promised some form of personal happiness. While on the outside I seemed to function quite well in going about my daily business during the following two months, internally I was locking myself in and shutting everything out. Hence, I turned to Jena Malone again as the only person that – at least in some imaginary form – promised me the love, comfort and emotional warmth by letting her join me through her movies, photos and in particular through the original hand-signed photos that she had personally dedicated to me, which more than ever symbolised her '*physical*' presence in my life. During all these week until the end of November 2006, I must have watched in particular *Saved!* (US 2004) at least a dozen times, but Jena Malone also visited me many times on my laptop screen through her acting performances in *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005), *The United States of Leland* (US 2003), *Life as a House* (US 2001), *Cheaters* (US 2000) and *The Book of Stars* (US 1999).

Moreover, I spent many hours flipping through her photos and hand-signed autographs to enjoy myself in internalising her natural beauty, looking into her pretty eyes and embracing her lovely smile. Somehow, it felt like she was there with me, took me in her tender arms and comforted me through her personal presence in my private space. As weird as it may sound, but her imagined love and support actually helped to put me back on track and I finally started in late-November 2006 to brighten up again. In November 2006, I also discovered that she has just put some home-made art and music video-clips on YouTube, which strengthened the feeling of personal presence as well. Of course, I always knew exactly that I would never ever be in the position to meet Jena Malone in person, never mind been given the chance of actually kissing and dating her.

In fact, I was quite aware of the fact that she would most likely never know who I am or that I even exist. Furthermore, I would also never be in the actual position of genuinely knowing what kind of person Jena Malone really is in her private life. Everything I know about Jena Malone is in fact my personal image of her, which I have derived from a variety of media texts such as her interviews in video-clips and magazines, her DVD commentaries, her self-produced video-clips on YouTube and detailed articles about her in better magazines. Nevertheless, her textual persona and artistic work has provided and continues to provide me with meaning, purpose and a source of inspiration for enjoying life despite all the frustrating interpersonal disappointments I have suffered so far. Not only had I watched the movie *Saved!* (US 2004) countless times during those weeks, but I honestly believe that, in some way, Jena Malone actually '*Saved!*' me from my emotional darkness by giving me – at least within the context of my imagination – the love and romantic relationship with a girlfriend that I have been longing for all the years but was denied in real life so far. Thus, I finally wrote to her in December 2006 the personal letter I had already planned half a year earlier and posted it before Christmas. If she does respond to my letter, that would be so cool! But if not, then that's okay too. After all, in my imagination she could still be there for me, when I need her... again.

APPENDIX C

JENA MALONE'S CREATIVE WORK

C1. Music Projects/Albums

2006:	<i>A-Newt: Emotional Nutrition</i>	Jena Malone & her Bloodstains
2007:	<i>Bloodstains for Sailors</i>	Jena Malone & her Bloodstains
2008:	<i>At Lem Jay's Garage</i>	The Shoe

C.2 Appearances in Music Videos

2010:	<i>Berkeley Girl</i>	Harper Simon
2011:	<i>Electric Love</i>	Dirty Vegas
	<i>Changes</i>	Dirty Vegas
	<i>I Think Bad Thoughts</i>	Danko Jones
	<i>Raccoon</i>	The Shoe

C.3 Theatre Appearances (Broadway/ Off-Broadway)

2000:	<i>The Member of the Wedding</i> (Audio-Reading)
19 th January – 2 nd July 2006:	<i>Doubt</i>
27 th January – 1st March 2009:	<i>Mourning Becomes Electra</i>

C.4 Films and Guest Appearances in TV Soaps

1995:	<i>The Sunday Child</i>	(Dir: Martin Hayes; USC Film)
1996:	<i>Chicago Hope - #2.19: Sweet Surrender</i> (Stacey Morrissey)	
	<i>Bastard out of Carolina</i> (Ruth Anne 'Bone')	(Dir: Anjelica Houston)
	<i>Hidden in America</i> (Willa)	(Dir: Martin Bell)
1997:	<i>Contact</i> (Young Ellie)	(Dir: Robert Zemeckis)
	<i>Hope</i> (Lilly Kate Burns)	(Dir: Goldie Hawn)
	<i>Ellen Foster</i> (Ellen Foster)	(Dir: John Erman)
1998:	<i>Stepmom</i> (Anna Harrison)	(Dir: Chris Columbus)
	<i>Touched by an Angel - #5.25 Hearts</i> (Casey)	
	<i>Homicide: Life on the Street - #7.8-9 P.I. Kellerman</i> (Debbie Straub)	
1999:	<i>For Love of the Game</i> (Heather Aubrey)	(Dir: Sam Raimi)
	<i>The Book of Stars</i> (Mary McGuire)	(Dir: Michael Miner)

- 2000: *The Ballad of Lucy Whipple* (*Lucy Whipple*) (Dir: Jeremy Kagan)
Cheaters (*Jolie Fitch*) (Dir: John Stockwell)
- 2001: *The Dangerous Lives of Altar Boys* (*Margie Flynn*) (Dir: Peter Care)
Donnie Darko (*Gretchen Ross*) (Dir: Richard Kelly)
Life as a House (*Alyssa Beck*) (Dir: Irwin Winkler)
- 2002: *The Badge* (*Ashley Hardwick*) (Dir: Robby Henson)
Confessions of an American Girl (*Rena Grubb*) (Dir: Jordan Brady)
Corn (*Emily Rasmussen*) (Dir: Dave Silver)
- 2003: *Cold Mountain* (*Ferry Girl*) (Dir: Anthony Minghella)
The United States of Leland (*Becky Pollard*) (Dir: Matthew Ryan Hoge)
Hitler: The Rise of Evil (*Geli Raubal*) (Dir: Christian Dugay)
- 2004: *Howl's Moving Castle* (*Lettie-Voice*) (Dir: Hayao Miyazaki)
Saved! (*Mary Cummings*) (Dir: Brian Dannelly)
- 2005: *The Ballad of Jack & Rose* (*Red Berry*) (Dir: Rebecca Miller)
Pride & Prejudice (*Lydia Bennet*) (Dir: Joe Wright)
- 2006: *Big Love - #1.2 Viagra Blue* ()
Container (*The Woman-Voice*) (Dir: Lukas Moodysson)
Lying (*Grace*) (Dir: M. Blash)
- 2007: *Four Last Songs* (*Frankie*) (Dir: Francesca Joseph)
The Go-Getter (*Joely*) (Dir: Martin Hayes)
Into the Wild (*Carine McCandless*) (Dir: Sean Penn)
- 2008: *The Ruins* (*Amy*) (Dir: Carter Smith)
Law & Order - #19.4 Lost Boys (*Michelle Landon*)
- 2009: *The Soloist* (*Lab Technician*) (Dir: Joe Wright)
The Messenger (*Kelly*) (Dir: Oren Moverman)
- 2010: *Rachel* (*Rachel*) (Short Film) (Dir: Leonardo Guerra Seragnoli)
Five Star Day (*Sarah Reynolds*) (Dir: Danny Buday)
- 2011: *David Goldberg* (*Vida*) (Short Film) (Dir: Ione Skye)
Sucker Punch! (*Rocket*) (Dir: Zack Snyder)
The Wait (*Angela*) (Dir: M. Blash)
- 2012: *For Ellen* (*Susan*) (Dir: So Yong Kim)
Jack and Diane (*Susan*) (Dir: Bradley Rust Gray)
Family Tree () (Dir: Brian Savelson)
- 2013: *Fallen* (*Arianne Alter*) (Dir: Saul Cajacuri)