In Pursuit of the Fan
Christopher Handran

The position of the fan is generally assumed to be incompatible with that of the critic. To be a fan is to love fanatically, to give in to one’s subjectivity, while critics require the objectivity that is afforded by dispassionate ‘distance’. However, Nicholas Bourriaud argues that the fan is not passive, but creative, because consuming culture means interpreting it in acts of interiorised, silent trajectories between signs. Video artist Daniel McKewen takes this thought as his starting point in examining his own consumption of (and by) popular culture.

McKewen’s love of Hollywood cinema can be seen in his video installation Ten Top Ten Office Blockbusters of All Time, in Dollars (2010–). On ten monitors, he shows the current ten top-earning films. Each is overlaid with two sets of animated numbers in juxtaposition: one tallying up the film’s box office revenue, and the other listing its cast and production details. In an attempt to position itself as a review of popular culture, politics, and current affairs, the magazine/mass-media exemplar of Hollywood imagery, codes, and conventions, but also of his dependence on cinema’s tools. For McKewen, the technology he uses in making his work is as much of a guilty pleasure as the movies and celebrity culture that provide its content. His fandom is that of the techno-fetishistic connoisseur, the ‘prosumer’. In the figure of the prosumer, the entertainment industry has created a perfect fan, invented to market home-cinema equipment, considers the objects of their desire part of their everyday lives. They form communities, online and in person, where perfectionists and演技风扇——the objects of their desire through works of homage, montage, and fan fiction. Indeed, the sense of ownership felt by fans is not unlike that of the variants expressed by Star Wars fans at the franchise’s recent incursions. Perhaps, in this way, fandom constitutes another form of critical distance, something akin to striking distance—the proximity required to land a blow.

It is from this position that McKewen addresses his viewer; not from behind the screen, but from in front of it, beside them in the front row, sharing the experience, from one fan to another.

McKewen acknowledges that, in drawing on the Hollywood dream machine, he is somehow complicit. This is not only true of the cultural and technical tricks and temptations, McKewen acknowledges that he is enthralled by it. He says: I don’t want to have that baseless desire, I don’t want to be played . . . I understand desire itself is not meant to be exposed. Re-presenting the images in this way becomes disturbing, as if something shameful and private has been revealed. Alternatively, we can detect a sublimation of his desire to emulate Tom Cruise. In The Passage of Indeterminacy in the Intensification of Being (2010–12), where McKewen’s Love of Hollywood cinema can be seen in his video installation Ten Top Ten Office Blockbusters of All Time, in Dollars (2010–). On ten monitors, he shows the current ten top-earning films. Each is overlaid with two sets of animated numbers in juxtaposition: one tallying up the film’s box office revenue, and the other listing its cast and production details. In an attempt to position itself as a review of popular culture, politics, and current affairs, the magazine/mass-media exemplar of Hollywood imagery, codes, and conventions, but also of his dependence on cinema’s tools. For McKewen, the technology he uses in making his work is as much of a guilty pleasure as the movies and celebrity culture that provide its content. His fandom is that of the techno-fetishistic connoisseur, the ‘prosumer’. In the figure of the prosumer, the entertainment industry has created a perfect fan, invented to market home-cinema equipment, considers the objects of their desire part of their everyday lives. They form communities, online and in person, where perfectionists and演技风扇——the objects of their desire through works of homage, montage, and fan fiction. Indeed, the sense of ownership felt by fans is not unlike that of the variants expressed by Star Wars fans at the franchise’s recent incursions. Perhaps, in this way, fandom constitutes another form of critical distance, something akin to striking distance—the proximity required to land a blow.

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