

# **Shire Politics: Local Factors in the International Prefiguration of Peter Jackson's 'The Hobbit'**

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Please note that the definitive article on the pre-figuration stage of The Hobbit Q-Method study was given in a paper presented at IAMCR by Professor Charles Davis. A revised version of that presentation – C.H. Davis, C. Michelle, A. Hardy, and C. Hight, "The Roles of Fandom, Politics and Idealised Intertexts in Framing Audience Prefigurations of The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey" – is under review for publication in *Participations* an online audience research journal.

## Introduction

The craft and business of film-making have long provided opportunities for actors, directors, crew personnel and producers from Australasia who wished to move out of their peripheral national film industries and into the gravitational centre of movie-making known as 'Hollywood', which, during the twentieth century, was more or less located on the West Coast of the United States. However, changes in economic ideologies and resulting financial flows since the 1980s as well as developments in the robustness and utility of digital technologies for filming and data transmission have eroded the relevance of such metaphors as 'centre' and 'periphery' and have made journeying for work in the movies a multi-directional activity.

During the first decade of the twenty-first century the filming locations and post-production centres of Australasia became destinations in their own right as American-based media conglomerates took advantage of skilled and flexible workforces, favourable exchange rates and, perhaps most importantly, government subsidies for incoming international productions. In this new game of creative industries global 'tag' New Zealand was seen to be heading the leaderboard from 1999 to 2004 when director Peter Jackson secured not only the production and post-production of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, but also the world premiere in Wellington for *The Return of the King*, the last of the three films.

Six years later the same Wellington streets hosted a protest march of some 1500 film technicians coming to Jackson's rescue, demonstrating against what they perceived to be the undue influence of the Australian Actors' Union MEEA and its New Zealand subsidiary, claiming that the union's boycott of another Jackson-led production, *The Hobbit*, would result in the project having to quit the country (Cardy and Johnston, 2010). This complex of events is related to the 'Hobbit crisis' labour issue, in which, initially, a local actors' union sought a production-specific minimum standards agreement with *The Hobbit* and threatened a boycott in the absence of an agreement. The union backed down at the counter-threat by Warner Bros to relocate production of *The Hobbit* to another country. However, the conglomerate, the New Zealand government and Jackson continued to express fear of a work stoppage, causing widespread apprehension in the country. The affair ended when Warner Bros, in return for assurances that the production would remain in New Zealand, received an additional \$34 million in subsidies and a policy accommodation: the New Zealand government passed legislation defining local screen workers as contract workers rather than employees, thereby immunising 'the industry against both union-negotiated and legislated protections for workers, both for the Hobbit production and for the future' (McAndrew and Risak, 2012: 71). The compromise of New Zealand sovereignty which this rushed legislation entailed reflected badly on both the government and Peter Jackson and has had several resurgences of public interest as more facts about behind-the-scenes deals have been revealed (c.f. Scherer, 2010; Chapman, 2012; Edwards, 2012; Wall, 2012). One of these resurgences of interest coincided with the premiere of *The Hobbit: an Unexpected Journey* in Wellington in November 2012, the time period during which we undertook the research described here.

### *Changing Status, Changing Perceptions*

Analysis of media coverage from the earlier *Lord of the Rings* era (Thornley, 2006) shows that Jackson was widely hailed as a cultural and economic hero on various counts: for staying New Zealand-based when he could have moved to America; for profiling a particular down-to-earth variety of Kiwi creativity; for supporting or even 'rescuing' the productive base of the New Zealand film industry; and for bringing New Zealand to the attention of the rest of the world. Thornley proposes that the Jackson of the early 2000s can be "seen as embodying Wellington's (but also New Zealand's) struggle to carve out a discursive space for itself within the move towards increasing corporatisation, urbanisation *and* globalisation" (Thornley, 2006: 106, original emphasis).

In this struggle for significance within a changing world order, however, Jackson, in his scruffy, bare-footed commitment to New Zealand, symbolised an idealised antipodean ability to challenge, resist and, even as one commentator joked, to attempt to 'conquer Hollywood' (Thornley, 2006: 110), rather than to be incorporated or corrupted by the forces of globalisation. A decade later, however, Peter Jackson has become 'Sir Peter', and is in the process of completing a second Middle Earth trilogy based on another of Tolkien's novels: *The Hobbit*, the first instalment of which, *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* has, at the time of writing, passed the U.S. \$1billion mark in international ticket sales. The production entity associated with Jackson is now no longer a feisty little contender from the periphery, it has become, according to Haworth (2011: 106), "[a]n archetypal example of a global, networked operation 'accidentally' in New Zealand, but equally capable of being located elsewhere, and regularly undertaking commissions on a global scale." Consequently, the authorial figure of 'Peter Jackson', the creative figurehead for that 'global, networked operation', has become, as our research will show, an entity of international interest, attracting a set of complex evaluations from those considering paying to attend screenings of his new production.

### *Pursuing Global Audiences*

In order to pursue lucrative global audiences the makers of the *Lord of the Rings* and *Hobbit* trilogies have incorporated filming and digital postproduction techniques that load manifestations of the spectacular and fantastical onto narratives that follow a universally relevant 'quest' and conflict pattern. With the addition of marketing campaigns which can cost as much as 35-50% of the production budget they have thus solidified the genre of the global 'blockbuster', 'high concept' or 'event' film which *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy itself initially helped to create (see Mathijs, 2006a, 2006b; Margolis et al., 2008).

Just as these projects transcend the boundaries of nation in terms of their resourcing, crewing, aesthetics and distribution it might be expected that responses to the film event, including prefigurative evaluations, would also exhibit supra-national characteristics. Our approach, a large online Q-method study into prefigurative audience responses to *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*, enables us to test that assumption. While our findings show there are indeed dominant clusters of response that exhibit significant similarities despite differing national identifications, our analysis also suggests that nationality, gender, age and existing

fandoms are significantly correlated with certain prefigurative dispositions. In particular, for this paper, we note two minor but significant clusters of response influenced in part by local knowledge of controversies around the production context of *The Hobbit*, especially the controversy around the aforementioned labour dispute.

#### *Audiences and their knowledges: Prefiguration*

Audiences encounter films in prior possession of a diverse set of discursive resources, often developing expectations, knowledges and opinions well in advance of viewing. Especially in the case of heavily promoted products such as 'blockbuster' event films, these expectations and understandings may be framed by official marketing efforts seeking to stimulate demand among a wide viewing audience pre-release, and to encourage a positive or 'preferred' reception of it. But they also may reflect the influence of broader discussion occurring within mainstream news or specialised entertainment news media, via social media, and among friends, family, fans, and colleagues, most of which falls outside the control of film producers and publicists. Here, enthusiastic anticipation as well as apprehension, ambivalence, and outright opposition are often freely expressed. While this implies that audiencing often begins well before a film's release in the form of 'pre-viewer' engagements with a 'pre-text' (Chin and Gray, 2001), there exists relatively little empirical research on the prefigurative expectations, hopes, fears, and social characteristics of pre-release film audiences.

We seek to contribute to the scholarly literature on media audiences with this paper. First, we build on that scarce scholarly research on audiences' 'prefigurative projections' by identifying key distinctions among anticipatory audiences, and considering the extent to which pre-release discussion and promotion of an event film might influence subsequent responses to it. What we seek to add to the current small body of scholarship is empirical evidence charting the *Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* 'pre-text', including existing fans of the novel and earlier film trilogy, and members of the general non-fan audience, who have been frequently overlooked in existing studies (although see Burke, 2012). A second proposed contribution is to identify connections between these varieties of prefigurative audience engagement and certain dimensions of social location, uncovering some of the extratextual factors that may shape prefigurative dispositions among audience groups towards this much-anticipated film.

#### *Building Cinematic Anticipation: The Role of Marketing, Promotion, and Social Media in the Creation of a Film's Public Presence*

Conventional blockbuster marketing strategy is "based on the theory that motion picture audiences choose movies according to how heavily they are advertised, what stars are in them, and their revenues at the box-office tournament" (De Vany, 2004: 122). Blockbuster franchises need to develop a formidable "public presence" (Mathijs, 2006a), relying on a permanent advertising and marketing campaign to support a "sustained event" (Grainge, 2008; Jöckel and Döbler, 2006) by stimulating and leveraging flows of information. There is an important distinction within these flows between "paid" and "owned" media, which the marketing teams control, and "earned" media visibility in the form of buzz, chatter, and expressions of

favourable opinion provided by external information providers.<sup>1</sup> Pre-release marketing and promotion campaigns for feature films typically include trailers, previews, posters, print advertisements, advertisements on national television, billboards, come into the 'paid' and 'owned' categories which, in the case of *The Hobbit*, is thought to have cost \$81.5 million on top of a U.S. \$270 million production budget – 23% (Rosz, 2012).

If this paid campaign is successful it will attract more 'earned' media coverage as discussion of the forthcoming film becomes part of popular cultural awareness, a state that can also be stimulated by the deliberate creation and circulation of rumours, gossip, leaks, as well as factual news items via the entertainment press (Epstein, 2005; Grainge, 2008; Kerrigan, 2010; Marich, 2009). The creation of a massive public presence of attention-grabbing materials supporting an 'avalanche' of brand awareness was clearly evident with the first *Lord of the Rings* film trilogy, as Biltereyst, Mathijs, and Meers' (2008) study of pre-release extratextual and paratextual ancillary marketing materials reveals. They identified more than 2,500 prefigurative press and publicity materials in the U.K. alone, including marketing materials, merchandise, coverage in the press, magazines, radio and television, and official and unofficial websites.

A second, overlapping but potentially conflicting, development relates to the emergence of highly active fan audiences who use social media to communicate with each other and with players associated with the film franchise, and who also participate in the creation of an event film's public presence through the generation of 'earned' publicity. Increasingly, the Web has become the premier site in which this earned fan publicity appears. When *The Lord of the Rings* film trilogy was released, the social media phenomena exemplified by Facebook were yet to develop. The growing significance of fan sites was nevertheless demonstrated by Biltereyst et al. (2008) in their online survey of *LoTR* audiences, where the internet was listed among the three most important sources of information by 11,617 of the nearly 25,000 respondents. Since then the internet and social media have further transformed the ways that pre-release audiences are elicited and engaged, and by whom, rendering the virtual realm a significant site of prefigurative engagement, discussion and debate of *The Hobbit* in the build-up to its international release.

### *The Hobbit's Public Presence and Imagined Audiences*

In the case of *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*, intense publicity and media coverage commenced well before production of the film began (Fiorelli, 2013), with the pre-release *Hobbit* audience base receiving a steady stream of titbits in the form of news and gossip, production video blogs fronted by Jackson, posters, trailers, special previews at fan conferences, and interviews. From mid 2011, eighteen months before its release, an official Facebook page for the movie was created and an official blog revamped: the film also had a YouTube channel, a Twitter profile, and an official website. *The Hobbit* production diaries and vlogs maintained fan interest until the release of the first trailer at the end of 2011. The marketing campaign accelerated in the summer of 2012 with a preview of the film at ComicCon,

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<sup>1</sup> The terms 'owned', 'paid', and 'earned' media are used by interactive marketers to refer to messages that are communicated via proprietary media, purchased media, and word-of-mouth, respectively.

release of the second trailer, creation of a Twitter profile, merchandising of the Lego *LoTR* and *Hobbit* sets, launch of the *Hobbit* video game, fan events, a viral Air New Zealand safety video featuring actors in Middle Earth garb, apps, wallpapers and posters. As immediately recognisable icons, Hobbits, Gandalf, and especially Gollum featured heavily in posters, trailers and merchandise, and were even used to decorate aeroplanes, airports, and other public spaces in New Zealand.

Simultaneously, a flurry of attention on social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook contributed to the wealth of material in which previewers could immerse themselves. By the time of its premiere in December 2012 1,310 other websites were hyperlinked to the official *Hobbit* website (Fiorelli, 2013). This prefigurative marketing and promotion process created such a state of suspense that, by December 2012, a multitude of individuals were frequenting various online fan sites and discussion groups, most notably TheOneRing.net, and many could no longer contain their excitement.

Nevertheless, that excitement was not always positive in tone. The heavy use of advanced cinema technologies (CGI, 48 fps and 3D) in *The Hobbit* was a source of controversy online well before the film was released, and became something of a polarising element among pre-audiences, many of whom expressed concern about the film's aesthetic and its rendering of digitally created sequences. Moreover, in certain respects the *LoTR* films and *The Hobbit* do not conform to prevailing stereotypes about blockbuster films. While clearly intended, designed, and financed as profit-making cultural commodities with high-concept, blockbuster attributes, these films' fidelity to the rich Tolkien canon gives them access to an audience that is larger, more loyal, and more knowledgeable about the extratextual storyworld than are audiences for comparable products such as the *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *Spiderman* and *Superman* franchises for instance. A superficial, erroneous, or off-key film rendering of a Tolkien text could therefore have enormous negative consequences. Moreover, while the auteur film is usually considered to be the opposite of the blockbuster film, for many pre-release *Hobbit* viewers Peter Jackson's authorial direction either provided a halo-inducing confidence in the quality of the forthcoming film or, for those disappointed in films that Jackson had helmed in the intervening years, a concern that his stamp on the material would obliterate what they had loved about the book.

Accompanying those eagerly anticipating the film's resounding success were others who were apprehensive, skeptical, and in some cases deeply unhappy about certain aspects of *The Hobbit* in advance of its premiere. Thus, our research illustrates that prefigurative discussion and debate can at times undermine marketing and promotional efforts to determine the generic frameworks through which an event film such as *The Hobbit* will be perceived, at times purportedly provoking decisions *not* to see the film. Discussion threads which especially catalysed negative responses related to issues such as the critical reaction to the film's use of 48fps at CinemaCon, the controversial decisions by the New Zealand Government to subsidise the film's production and amend local labour laws to appease Warner Bros (Wall, 2012) and, in the immediate lead up to the film's release, allegations of animal abuse (Leask, 2012), were just a few of the issues that informed the film's public presence.

## Methodology

Our study of the pre-release *Hobbit* audience combined Q methodology<sup>2</sup> and Q factor analysis with an extended online survey seeking information about respondents' familiarity with intertextual sources, specific prefigurative activities, and socio-demographic characteristics. It generated data reflecting the perspectives of a diverse group of 1,000 individuals located in 59 different countries.

While Q methodology is now frequently utilised in social science research, it is only occasionally applied in studies of media audiences (see Davis and Michelle, 2011; Michelle, Davis and Vladica, 2012). Q is a rigorous qualitative-quantitative research methodology that utilises factor analysis to discern people's shared subjective viewpoints and understandings around a particular object of interest. These viewpoints are developed in response to the assessments of others, and draw from the existing discourse or *concourse* that circulates around a given text. By asking participants to preferentially rank-order a set of statements chosen to represent the universe of possible responses, Q allows each individual to 'model' his or her subjective viewpoint, expressing where it 'fits' in relation to others viewing the same text. Sorts are then factor analysed by person, a procedure that locates sets of like-minded respondents, making it possible to systematically identify and compare the variety of viewpoints shared by individuals within a wider public and their unique components (for further details see Watts and Stenner, 2005).

For *The Hobbit* prefiguration survey, a structured Q sample of 38 statements was devised drawing on a cultural trawl of dominant and marginal themes, opinions, and concerns articulated in the public commentary of fans of *The Lord of the Rings* films and Tolkien followers, media commentators, and news items relating to the production. Our cultural trawl incorporated Twitter and Facebook comments, blogs, print and online news items, media commentary, fan forum and general film discussion board comments and comments on the production videos and *Hobbit* trailers, written in English, German and Spanish.

To gain access to the range of viewpoints on *The Hobbit*, we adopted a broad recruitment strategy which included invitations containing the survey weblink in a range of relevant Facebook groups, LOTR pages, Tolkien pages, film societies in a range of countries, political parties in New Zealand, followers of other fantasy series such as *Game of Thrones*, and pages devoted to various stars of the film. We also targeted fan forums, especially TheOneRing.net. Once information about the research was posted on their main page, responses almost doubled overnight. From there, it spread further as fans reposted the invitation on other sites. Press releases generated further coverage in two of New Zealand's major daily papers. Finally, each author circulated information about the research through her or his professional, institutional and personal networks.

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<sup>2</sup> Q methodology is a mixed qualitative-quantitative methodology which excels at uncovering similarities and differences in people's subjective viewpoints, attitudes, beliefs, and experiences.

## Varieties of Prefigurative Audience Engagement

The use of this method responds to calls for research that supports reliable generalisation about audiences through accurate identification of *typologies* of audience members (Barker, Mathis and Trobias, 2008: 222). In contrast to much audience scholarship that has yielded qualitative insights with limited generalisation, our qualitative-quantitative research approach allowed us to identify and describe eight specific forms of engagement among pre-release *Hobbit* audiences globally. These included: 'Lord of the Rings film fans' eagerly anticipating another instalment from a celebrated director; 'Tolkien aficionados' with significant concerns about the fidelity of the novel's film adaptation; 'Jackson critics' expressing opposition to aspects of the film's direction and conditions of production in New Zealand; 'anxious investors' hoping for localised economic spillovers from a successful film; a 'celebrity followers' group attracted to the film by specific cast members; and three fuzzier crossover or 'in-between' groups with strong affinities to the LOTR film franchise. These eight groups account for 91.7% of all survey respondents. Amongst other topics, the results provide an indication of the strength of intention to see the film, which, while high overall, is by no means universal. The rest of this paper briefly describes five discrete perspectives.

### Enthusiastic and Eager LoTR fans: F1+

Respondents expressing viewpoint F1+, 348 of them, are highly supportive of Peter Jackson as the leader of *The Hobbit* project. These respondents (distributed around the world) strongly agreed with Statement 10, 'Peter Jackson is a genius and I have complete faith that he knows what he is doing' (10, +4) and with Statement 27, 'No one but Peter Jackson could tell this story and do it justice' (27, +4). Viewpoint F1+ also strongly agrees with statements claiming that Peter Jackson is doing the best he can to bring a complex storyworld to life (33, +3), and strongly disagrees with statements that diminish Jackson's skills as a director (26, -4); ascribe commercial greed to the decision to make *The Hobbit* into a trilogy (24, -4); express scepticism that the film's application of advanced technologies will produce satisfactory effects (8, -3); or claim that Jackson has taken too many liberties with Tolkien's work (21, -3).

F1+ members are *LoTR* film fans who are deeply familiar with the earlier trilogy, having seen these films on average 19 times and having read *The Hobbit* on average eight times. They are confident that the production of *The Hobbit* is in the hands of a gifted filmmaker who is also a sympathetic Tolkien reader. For instance, one respondent commented:

After seeing the [LoTR] trilogy and poring over the extended edition DVD extras, I have an understanding of why things were done as they were. I trust Peter and his team love and respect the material they are using for these films and want to bring it to life in the best possible way. I think the [LoTR film] trilogy speaks for itself as a reference of what we can expect (Finnish woman, age 41).

While not disputing the commercial intent of the *Hobbit* film undertaking, adherents of F1+ believe that Peter Jackson's fundamental motivation is creative, not pecuniary. F1+ also



strongly agrees with two statements that express a high level of anticipation to see the film: 'This film can't get here soon enough. I've been waiting for this my whole life, and I can't wait to see this adventure up on the big screen' (35, +3), and 'I am really looking forward to returning to the wonderful world of Middle Earth' (38, +3). A total of 92.5% of F1+ audience members declared it 'extremely important' or 'very important' to see *The Hobbit*.

### **Tolkien aficionados: F2**

Most of the 139 respondents affiliated with Group F2 define themselves as Tolkien fans and their interest in the film version of *The Hobbit* is primarily motivated by their affection for and knowledge of Tolkien's work. They have read *The Hobbit* on average 12 times, and have seen the LoTR films on average 11 times. Their anticipation and prefigurative expectations of the film are thus coloured and framed by their sense of connection with the novel, which they hope the film will successfully embody. They also harbour nostalgic memories of reading *The Hobbit* at a younger age, so their view of 'the spirit of the book' is caught up with their memories of childhood (1, +4). They are willing to accept some compromises in the book-to-film adaptation as long as the spirit of the book is not altered. As Burke (2012) notes, concerns with fidelity are a prominent feature of fan critiques of film adaptations more generally, and were especially evident among Tolkien aficionados:

Jackson has a tendency to run away with himself and enlarge on what he sees as the 'big spectacle' moments. For instance, I have concerns that the Battle of Five Armies, which in the book is quite small (with 500 dwarves and 1000 elves etc.) and takes place over one chapter will on film have a 'cast' of tens of thousands and take half of a film to show. ... He has to be true to either the book or his films, and I suspect the films will win (New Zealand male living in Australia, age 37).

The F2 audience is knowledgeable, attentive, and eagerly hopeful. It expresses general approval for Jackson's version of the *Lord of the Rings* (26, -3), while not self-identifying as LoTR film fans, and is very eager to return to Middle Earth (38, +3). 85% of this audience consider it to be 'extremely important' or 'very important' to see *The Hobbit*.

### **Celebrity followers: F3**

A small group of 15 individuals constitutes group F3, associated with a larger group of 56 respondents who load significantly on both F3 and F1. Notably, all of F3 are female and 93% of F1 are female. The average age in each group is 41. Both groups appear to express a gendered variety of prefigurative audience engagement based on celebrity fandom.

F3 individuals do not particularly care about Tolkien's novel *The Hobbit*; rather, their main motivation to see *The Hobbit* is that they are fans of one of the stars in the film. F3 most strongly agrees with the statements 'I'm very happy that one of my favourite characters will appear in *The Hobbit*' (23, +4) and 'What a great cast! Perfect choices in most cases' (17, +3). The most frequently mentioned casting attraction is Richard Armitage as the sexy dwarf, Thorin.

This illustrates that pre-viewers can ‘arrive’ at a text through preferences and affinities that are unrelated to the ‘main text’ – in this case, a pre-existing celebrity fandom (see also Chin and Gray, 2001). We turn now to the two significant groups amongst our respondents who expressed particularly anxious or negative prefigurations of the forthcoming film event.

#### **Anxious investors: F4**

A group of 34 respondents loaded on Factor 4, and 16 respondents crossloaded on F1 and F4. Notably, 82% of F4 (and 73% of F1:F4) members are New Zealanders. F4 audience members are especially concerned about the evolving reputation of the film on its success and the possible effects on anticipated economic spillovers in New Zealand. They agree strongly with statement 37, ‘This film will really help to spur tourism in New Zealand, which is great for the economy. I understand why the government would provide some public support’ (37, +4). They also express strong concern about the effects of the Hobbit labour issue (11, +3) and fully agree that the conversion of *The Hobbit* into a trilogy is designed ‘to make more money at the box office. They’re milking it for all it’s worth’ (24, +3). A 22 year-old New Zealand man commented:

The law changes and mud-slinging at the union that tried to protect our workers is a great travesty and I personally don’t know if it was worth it. .... It is very sad that John Key and Jackson bent over for Warner Bros. This has added to my distaste for the studio system and I wish the government would give equal support to true New Zealand cinema. ... We make Peter Jackson out as a saint yet he really did the dirty on Helen Kelly by demonising her and the unions.

A 42 year-old New Zealand man also commented:

Disgusted by Peter Jackson’s shabby treatment of his employees while he continues to rake in the cash, and even more disgusted at our nasty government for selling our employment law to a private American film studio, when we are already providing a significant financial investment – paid for courtesy of the generous tax payers! – yet don’t even receive any royalties in return for selling our souls. Terrible decision.

F4 members are sceptical about hype and speculation, and “have heard negative comments about *The Hobbit* but prefer to reserve judgment until personally viewing the film” (25, +4). Only 12% believe it is ‘extremely important’ or ‘very important’ to see the film. They disagree with statements expressing high anticipation to see the film (6, -3; 35, -4).

At the same time F4 recognises the potential economic and reputational spillovers from *The Hobbit* and appreciates the support provided by the government (37, +4):

I’m not a huge LoTR or *The Hobbit* fan but I like what the series [both] have done for my country’s reputation and our tourism/industry, etc. (New Zealand woman, age 41).

Only 12% of F4 members believe it is ‘extremely important’ or ‘very important’ to see *The Hobbit* film. Crossloaded group F1:F4, with 16 members, differs from F4 primarily in its great eagerness to see the film. These are mainly LoTR film fans with a sense of film nationalism who

are certain of the spillover benefits from *The Hobbit* (37, +4) and who 'feel excited and proud when I think about my country's contribution to this major international film production' (36, +3).

### **Angry and disappointed Jackson critics: F1-**

Twenty-four respondents expressed viewpoint F1-, the opposite of F1+. These respondents are on average 46 years old compared to the 34 years of the F1+ group), and one-half are New Zealanders. In contrast to earlier and very favourable perceptions of the film's New Zealand production (Pullen, 2006) and of Jackson as a homegrown hero and eccentric genius (Thornley, 2006), the New Zealanders among this group expressed bitter disappointment.

The unhappiness of the F1- group is related to the destructive aesthetic and political roles that Peter Jackson is believed to have played in bringing *LoTR* and *The Hobbit* to the screen. The F1- group most strongly agrees with statements to the effect that the film is overhyped (7, +3), that it is technology-driven at the expense of filmic quality (8, +3), that its design is determined by commercial ambitions (24, +4), and that Peter Jackson is over-rated as a director (26, +4). They therefore disagree strongly with the statement that one can have 'complete faith' in Peter Jackson's efforts (10, -4) or that no other director could do justice to *The Hobbit* (27, -4).

He's not a genius – The LOTR films and *King Kong* were all way too long and self-indulgent displays of unnecessary CGI. Making *The Hobbit* into three films shows he doesn't know what he's doing (New Zealand female, age 43).

I'm not that nationalistically parochial to think that P.J. is irreplaceable. He's an international director who happens to be from New Zealand, rather than a New Zealand director representing us on the world stage (New Zealand female, age 26).

As these comments suggest, some among this group express a sense of ownership over Tolkien's original works, or at least a sense of authoritative expertise that allows them to determine what constitutes a violation of their textual integrity by a director they regard as unsuited to such an important task (see also Barker and Brooks, 1998).

Over 60% of all survey respondents across all territories were aware of the Hobbit industrial dispute, and 77% of F1- respondents. While some stated that knowledge of the affair had lessened their esteem for *The Hobbit* production and for Peter Jackson, the majority of international respondents who commented on the issue were pragmatic about it, stating that they were aware of similar practices and that this 'seemed to be the way the world worked'. In the New Zealand context, where the issue had been extensively covered in newspapers and television news, its salience was much stronger.

Opinions were nevertheless diverse: some people who crosslisted in the 'anxious investor' category were so concerned that New Zealand should benefit economically from the production that they were supportive of the attempts made to shut down worker and union dissent and in fact blamed the unions for putting obstacles in the way of the production.

The government did the right thing stepping in and saving the films here; even if it cost them a bit of money, it will be well worth it later on. The unions were at fault for that one (New Zealand male, age 62).

For others, by contrast, the incident and coverage reflected more directly on the processes of multinational capitalism. For several F1- respondents the issue had left a bitter taste:

It annoys me that multimillion dollar companies exploit us and reap the rewards for doing so (New Zealand woman, age 46).

Warner Bros. has bought New Zealand's labour laws; it is not a New Zealand movie (New Zealand man, age 32).

As a result of their antipathy towards the production and, more especially, its director, only 4% of members of the F1- group consider it to be 'extremely important' or 'very important' to see the film, and 40% were not planning to see the film at all.

### *Conclusion*

The cross-referencing of factor clusters with nationality showed us that several of the clusters were indeed supra-national in their occurrence, in that, for instance, comments on the positive capacities of Peter Jackson as a director, on loyalty for Tolkien's work and the hope that the adaptation of his *Hobbit* novel would be sensitively treated, on the appeal of certain actors as attractants for female potential audience members and so on, were evenly distributed across territories.

For most of these people, the prefiguration activities they engaged in around the first instalment of *The Hobbit* were part of the pleasure of an anticipated cinematic event. They might have concerns about the finished product and the effect of changes to its scope or the frame rate at which it would be screened, but these concerns would not deter them from going to see the film. In this regard, the most reliable pre-release audience (in terms of traction and likely earned media exposure) is F1, LoTR fans. They are already acquired. The factor cluster F2 wants to be enthusiastic but needs to see the product; they are more apprehensive about the issues described above and could be considered as a possible 'swing' audience. The factor cluster F3 is a possible new audience segment attracted by casting decisions.

As well as these supra-national responses, we did however find two clusters of responses which showed a particularly high concentration of New Zealanders. In the *Anxious Investor* category concerned about the returns and benefits that the country and its economy would or would not receive from the production, two-thirds of those who gave a high positive or negative ranking to statements on those issues were New Zealanders. Many of the voluntary qualitative comments, a few of which we have included here, were also from New Zealanders. Respondents from other countries also commented on these statements but typically in a cooler, less passionate fashion and sometimes expressing bemusement or querying the relevance of the statements.

The anti-fan attitude to Peter Jackson as a director was more widespread since it sometimes rested on participants' prior identification with Tolkien's novels or the LOTR trilogy and did not rely on local knowledge. Knowledge of the labour dispute that had put the pre-production of *The Hobbit* on hold for several weeks was also widespread. When prompted by a statement in our data corpus 60% of our respondents worldwide had heard about it. However, it was largely New Zealand readers who cared enough about the issue to rank it at either the positive or negative extreme and to make additional comments about it, thus constituting a distinctive cluster of local responses to the prefigurative environment. The existence of this cluster is evidence of local readings that demonstrate both the shaping power and the limits of the influence that 'paid' and 'earned' media emanating from the producers of a film can have over public discussion around a forthcoming release.

We have sketched out a narrative of changes in Peter Jackson's standing in this article but a longer paper would contextualise these in relation to political, economic and technological changes in New Zealand over the same time, suggesting that factors at the local level are still important and influential on some locations of response, even in the context of globalised cinema production. We have since undertaken a second phase of the research, taken after audiences had had a chance to see the film, and have 2000 English-language responses to that phase. Earlier indications are that the level of response to that phase of research by New Zealanders is much lower. One of the questions we will be enquiring into is whether the negative prefigurative engagement of some New Zealanders with the film event, as outlined in this paper, did indeed result in a decision not to go and see the film at all.

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