Introduction

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Fans are special. Nowadays they appear to be the holy grail of media culture, which makes it hard to believe that they were once its outcasts. In the 1980s, the common idea was that fans were mindless and mass media were maddening. Fans were characterized as extremely devoted followers that had an obsessive attachment to media stars or texts, stressing the fanatical part in the etymology of the word fan. The alleged irrationality of fandom, and incidents like the murder of John Lennon by the hand of a fan in 1980, strengthened the idea that fandom was a pathology and that popular culture was dangerous.

Henry Jenkins was one of the first scholars to counter these notions. His *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (1992) set the tone for all fan studies to come. Jenkins recalls that when *Textual Poachers* was published in 1992, it 'described a moment when fans were marginal to the operations of our culture, ridiculed in the media, shrouded with social stigma, pushed underground by legal threats, and often depicted as brainless and inarticulate' (Jenkins 2006a: 1). It was through his book and a number of other 'early' studies on fans (for example Bacon-Smith 1992, Fiske 1992 and Lewis 1992), that fans as a special audience group were noticed and valued.

Based upon mostly ethnographic fieldwork, audience resistance became a central concept that revealed a more complex relationship between fans and popular culture. These studies formed a political project: 'a statement against the double standards of cultural judgment and the bourgeois fear of popular culture; a statement in favour of fan sensibilities which gave a voice to otherwise marginalized social groups' (Sandvoss 2005: 3). Perhaps unsurprisingly, Jenkins and others self-identified as fans as well. They were thus already familiar with contemporary fan cultures, such as Trekkies and football fans, and its practices, such as fanzines and fan fiction.

From the 1990s onwards, the notion of the active audience became widely accepted within media and communication studies. The rise of this concept is partly due to contributions from fan studies, but cannot be understood outside a more general development: the rapid growth of Internet use. Fan cultures flourished in cyberspace and many fans were self-taught early adapters. The Internet allowed communities to form regardless of its members' physical location, thus allowing like-minded fans to connect. Geek culture, which borrows heavily from fan-favoured genres like science fiction and fantasy, had come to dominate the Internet. Participation and participatory culture became the buzzwords of Web 2.0, a term used to summarize the cumulative changes in the ways the Internet is developed and used. As a result, many of the negative connotations of fans were lost in favour of Web 2.0 ideologies. In these new ideologies it is argued that the Internet appeals to people's inherent desire to participate.

Henry Jenkins continued his role as trailblazer of fan studies with *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Intersect* (2006b). This book describes fan cultures at this particular

moment in time when fans were discovered and celebrated by media producers. According to Jenkins, the introduction and distribution of new technologies enabled 'consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content. Powerful institutions and practices … are being redefined by a growing recognition of what is to be gained through fostering … participatory cultures' (Jenkins 2006a: 1).

As the Internet, most noticeably through the development of mobile technologies, has become ubiquitous to the everyday life of almost everyone – from unborn babies to the homeless – it appears that in 2014, everyone is a fan. Much more so than in 2006, the average audience member is connected within networks and 'digital' is now taken for granted. Co-creation, fan funding and the rise of the prosumer have continued to blur the lines between production and consumption and the relationships between consumers and producers of cultural products are far more complex than ever before.

'Participation culture' is no longer a niche phenomenon, but has become the new normative standard. Usage of the word fan has become ubiquitous and it is now applied to a range of audience positions, from frequent watchers (due to television broadcasters' promotional strategies) to returning customers (due to Facebook terminology). Concurrently, understandings of active audiences resulting from early research on fans have spread to the mainstream. Concepts derived from fan studies, such as transmedial storytelling and co-creation, are now the standard fare of journalism and marketing textbooks alike. Fans are thus in the vanguard of media advances. It has become common sense that 'everyone is a fan of something'. Even fervent opponents of a certain genre, text or star can be defined within this paradigm as so-called 'anti-fans'.

As we show in this *Research Companion to Fan Cultures*, this exaltation of audiences and fans is problematic. If everyone is a fan, the concept has lost its meaning; blurred distinctions often conceal conceptual emptiness. If audiences are increasingly part of the production processes, should they not be paid for their labour? To what extent are the relationships between fans and producers equal? What, if any, are the new resistances? Why is it that despite the ubiquity of fandom, it is still confined to the domain of popular culture? And, although mobile media has changed our everyday lives in fundamental ways, 'the age of mobile' also shows a nostalgic longing for offline connections and bodily proximity. Audiences revalue physical spaces and consciously reflect on the constant exchange between the mediated and the sensory (Reijnders 2011). Do fans continue to be the vanguard of such developments in media?

Finally, and perhaps most pressingly in academic terms, if the paradigm of fan studies has become mainstream, is there still a need for a separate field for the study of fan cultures? How distinctive are its concepts and methodologies? These developments thus call for a critical rethinking of the function and significance of fandom, fan practices and fan studies. Table 1 summarizes, in simplified form, the developments in, and challenges for the field of fan studies.

Taking these considerations into account, we formulate three guiding questions for this *Research Companion to Fan Cultures*: (1) What is a fan?; (2) What is the current relationship between fans and producers?; (3) Where does contemporary fandom manifest itself? These three questions are addressed in the three parts of this volume. As a whole, they elucidate the key themes that are part of the fan studies vernacular. Within the chapters, a historiography of fan studies topics is presented. As the contributing authors draw from recent empirical work, the *Companion* also provides fresh insights and innovative angles to the latest developments within fan cultures. Because the volume is specifically set up as a companion for researchers, the chapters include recommendations for the further study of fan cultures. As such, the volume is of interest to both scholars that are new to the field and to those who have been studying fans for some time.

Table 1   **Advances in/of fan studies**

Theme	Fan resistance	Fan participation	Fan exaltation
Characterization	Fans are marginalized	Social media users as fans	Everyone is a fan
Relationship with producers	Audience resistance	Audience participation	Audience capitalization
Manifestations of fandom	Pre-digital platforms like fanzines	Communities in cyberspace	Beyond the virtual, reality mixed with media
Fan studies	Dawn of the field	Mainstream acceptance of main concepts	Reconsideration of boundaries between fans and audiences

Chapter Overview

Part I: Re-defining the Fan

The first part of the volume focuses on re-defining fandom. In the past, authors have provided different definitions of fans and different distinctions, typologies or taxonomies of audiences. For example, Tulloch and Jenkins (1995) distinguish between fans and followers: a fan is more involved and claims a social identity as being a fan, whereas a follower does not. Similarly, Brooker and Brooker (1996) separate fans from cult-fans, with the latter being more knowledgeable and more fan-community-oriented. Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) provide a more complex taxonomy in which they view audience involvement as a continuum ranging from consumers through fans, cultists and enthusiasts to small-scale producers. Hills (2002) rejects this taxonomy, arguing that fandom is a contested term and attempting to define it in any fixed terms is not useful. Instead, fandom should be viewed as the site 'of a cultural struggle over meaning and affect' (Hills 2002, xi).

As noted in the previous section, through the emergence of social media the very term 'fan' has indeed been subjected to inflation in a way that has not been described extensively in the literature before. The abovementioned ways to distinguish fans from other audience groups are unsatisfactory as these distinctions have become far more complex. To better understand what differentiates a fan from the average audience member, the question is raised why people become fans and *when*: in which contexts do they define themselves as fans?

The first chapter by Matt Hills studies the transformative event of 'becoming a fan'. Hills discusses how fandom can change and how individuals may move back and forth between fandoms. He addresses the use of self-narratives of individual media consumers as a research method for understanding these processes.

Kristen Bryant, Denise Bielby and C. Lee Harrington touch upon similar topics in Chapter 2. Their chapter focuses on how fans' collecting of cultural objects contributes to scholarly understanding of the culture of fan communities. Based on interviews with and participant observations of fans recruited at fan conventions, they explore changes in fandom over the life-course by focusing on adult talk about toys.

Chapter 3 by Shenja van der Graaf continues this exploration of the changing meaning of fandom during the life-course. She explores the performative orientation of fandom at the intersection of milestones, coming of age and showing age within fan exchanges in online fan communities. She draws on a single case study of the actor Keanu Reeves and uses data from a variety of online sources.

Another way of discussing what fandom means is by turning to anti-fandom. Rather than expressing an attraction, anti-fans communicate dislike and antipathy. Liz Giuffre in Chapter 4 proposes the need to investigate fans who actively display negative feelings towards particular bands or songs. Informed by analysis of popular music discourse such as lyrics and media interviews, she explores popular music fandom as a form of complex cultural engagement and argues that anti-fandom provides a necessary opposition to the more popular demonstrations of positive fandom.

In Chapter 5, Nathalie Claessens and Hilde Van den Bulck continue the exploration of anti-fans by analysing how characteristics of anti-fans relate to those of fans and non-fans. They investigate how the online communities of three celebrity websites are used to express very personal negative feelings towards celebrities and how, through this expression, these communities offer a platform to deal with social issues that are considered sensitive or taboo.

Whether the focus is on fans or anti-fans, both essentially relate to the many relationships we have with the media. In Chapter 6, the Janissary Collective provides a theoretical inquiry and argues that an understanding of fan studies and *fannish* behaviour can help shed light on our current relationship to and with media. They contend that fan studies pave the way for a nuanced understanding of media as a crucial survival mechanism in the twenty-first century.

Cornel Sandvoss and Laura Kearns in Chapter 7 explicitly address the inflation of the fan by returning to 'ordinary fandom' in the digital media age. This type of commonplace everyday life media fandom constitutes a large group of audience members that are affectively engaged with the media, but not so much focused on social connectivity with other fans. Seeking to explore the interplay between technology, changing forms of textuality and 'ordinary fandom', Sandvoss and Kearns conducted interviews with fans recruited offline and who self-identified as fans using digital media.

Part II: Fans and Producers

The second part of the *Companion* consists of chapters focusing on relationships between fans and producers. These relationships have always been problematic, but over the years producers have embraced fan production, sometimes to the extent that producers capitalize on fans' creativity. Conflicts still arise. Recently, for instance, fans of *Star Trek* clashed with producer J.J. Abrams over the 2013 feature film *Star Trek: Into Darkness*. New technologies allow for more direct engagement of fans with their objects of affection on a scale that was not possible ever before, possibly sidelining producers.

In Chapter 8, Lucy Bennett analyses Lady Gaga's tweets. Bennett argues that celebrities' widespread use of social media is reconfiguring levels of connection and depths of engagement between both celebrity and their associated fan communities. Lady Gaga skilfully uses social media to speak directly to her fans as fellow partners, which encourages powerful feelings of importance amongst her fans.

In a similar fashion, Angela Chang discusses the changing nature of the connections between artists and fans of Chinese folklore opera in Chapter 9. Based on participant observation and informal interviews, she argues that online media technologies offer new and alternative ways to disseminate fan-oriented texts, create identification within fan communities and the possibility of Internet-enabled relationships between fans and celebrities.

In Chapter 10, Francesco D'Amato examines fan funding and other types of fan participation that are made possible by online networks and new technologies. His analysis of fan funding websites shows different types of relationships that can be established between fans and artists based on these new technologies. Not only the relationships between fans

and artists or producers are changing, these new technologies also affect the type of roles that fans play.

In Chapter 11, Arturo Arriagada and Victor Cruz discuss the way digital media redefines the role of fans in the production and consumption of cultural goods. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, they argue that indie music fans through the use of technology emerge as curators of taste and as opinion leaders. As such, they are more than mere consumers of cultural goods.

Focusing on a different aspect of the fan-celebrity relationship, Mark Duffett examines the subtle differences between celebrity following and fandom in Chapter 12. In his theoretical contribution, he argues that the role of celebrity has been understudied within fan studies. According to Duffett, participatory culture research has repressed celebrity. Attention to the 'cult of personality' greatly helps integrate and extend understanding of fandom.

In the last chapter of this part, Chapter 13, Frederik Dhaenens and Sofie Van Bauwel focus on the role of fan participation and fan production. They conduct a theoretical inquiry into heteronormativity and online fan practices that tackle same-sex desires by analysing re-edited videos of gay characters in soap operas and the online fan discussions they elicit. Dhaenens and Van Bauwel argue that these fan practices may challenge heteronormativity and operate as a form of queer resistance.

Part III: Localities of Fandom

The third part of this collection deals with the manifestations of fandom: the questions of where and how fandom is being expressed. Notions of both locality and technology are the main focus of these chapters. Locality can refer to a geographical location, but also points to the distinction between the physical and the digital, the real and the mediated. Technology refers to possibilities to overcome the physical world and to enhance bodily experiences, but also provides simple tools for fans to interact with other fans and to create new localities.

In Chapter 14, Hye-Kyung Lee investigates transnational cultural fandom by turning to manga, anime and K-pop fandom beyond its producing countries. She draws upon interviews and fan forums to discuss location within the cultural globalization, global cultural industries and nation-branding projects. Through the development of technologies, cultural fandom's organization and participation have become globalized.

Gary Sinclair, in Chapter 15, discusses the conflicts that take place in the Irish online heavy metal scene. His data consist of in-depth interviews, participant observation and an analysis of online forums. Fan communities interact both online and offline. Sinclair observes how the online scene has had a less civilizing effect on the offline behaviour of fans.

Chapter 16 by Ross Hagen is also concerned with struggle. Hagen addresses the term *kvlt* in black metal discourse, a term that evokes insularity, community and hermeticism. Informed by an analysis of online forums and communities, he investigates negotiations between fundamentalist and progressive fans in the black metal scene. These negotiations expose the ways in which fans define what it means to be an authentic or true fan.

Rather than taking a snapshot of how online communities function in one point in time, in Chapter 17 Ruth Deller takes a longitudinal approach to fan communities. Deller revisits the same online fan communities she studied ten years ago. Fans of Cliff Richard and Belle & Sebastian have responded in different ways to a decade of changes in both the careers of the artists as well as the Internet and related technologies.

In Chapter 18, Kaarina Nikunen brings theorizations of space and place to the context of television fan cultures. She explores the geographies of national and transnational online fandoms in the context of the Finnish *Xena: The Warrior Princess* (XWP) fan community.

Based on multi-sited online ethnography, Nikunen shows how national identities and transnational sensibilities collide in the experience of fandom.

Nicolle Lamerichs in Chapter 19 moves away from the frequently studied digital fandoms and turns to engagement in the flourishing offline space of the fan convention. She conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Dutch anime conventions. These take place in spaces that are actualized in relation to fiction. They are affective spaces where textual affinity binds like-minded individuals.

Another take on physical locations is offered by Karin Becker, Andreas Widholm and Robert Kautsky in Chapter 20. Also using ethnography, they explore the interlocking issues of mediatization and globalization and their impact on the construction and negotiation of football fan identities. Matches between national teams are broadcast to public viewing areas: FIFA fan parks that are set up outside of football stadiums during World Cups. These fan parks are important spaces in the contemporary football fan culture for the production, performance and consumption of fan identities. The authors argue the fan park, as a mediatized space, has become a site where fan identities are constructed in new ways, facilitating a cosmopolitan understanding of football.

In the final chapter, Steve Redhead reconsiders the research tradition on football hooliganism. He archives football hooligan memoirs in order to improve our ethnographic understanding of fandom in general. Accuracy of accounts of events, however violent and unpleasant, has been important to the independent publishers of the football hooligan memoirs in stark contrast to mass media accounts. As such, Redhead thus returns to the marginalization and denigration of fans.

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