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The Ashgate Research Companion to Fan Cultures

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The Ashgate Research Companion to Fan Cultures is aimed at researchers of fan cultures, both new and seasoned, and seeks to highlight areas for further study. It aspires to examine redefinitions of 'fan', to ask questions of the relationships between fans and producers, to query why fandom is still the preserve of popular culture and to continue to consider the role of digital and mobile media. It critically rethinks the need for fan studies through a series of chapters about anti-fans, ageing, collecting, celebrity, digital connectivity and affect. It is divided into three parts: re-defining the fan; fans and producers; localities of fandom. It fulfils these goals, although the chapters vary in the success with which they do this. Here I critically evaluate significant chapters in each part.

Part 1, re-defining the fan, reassesses the position of the fan in fan studies, focussing on stories of the birth of fandom, fans' self-definitions and changes to fandom over the life course. This starts with Hills, who writes that studies of fandom have concentrated closely on communities of fans of single objects to the neglect of examining how individuals become fans of multiple objects. He argues that analysing the initial experiences of encountering and being transformed by the object can be illuminating. Hills's redefinition of fandom and fans' relationships with the fan-object is a valuable addition to fan studies as it moves on from the focus on the sociality of fandom to consider previously excluded individual fans. In a more empirically grounded chapter, Claessens and Van den Bulck create a typology of anti-fandom in order to bridge the gap between fan studies and parasocial relationship theory in psychology. The anti-fan (of which there are three types: anti-fan pur sang; fan anti-fan; and former fan) is characterised by familiarity with the fan object, strong negative emotions towards the object and a tendency to casting moral judgements and taking the high ground over the celebrity.. The authors argue that where fans make communities that can be found and analysed, anti-fans do not, although they can be traced online. This raises a question that the authors don't address of whether one-off online comments can constitute anti-fandom. Shouldn't anti-fandom be more than that? Nevertheless the clear definition of the typology is a useful starting point for further work on anti-fandom.

The Janissary Collective (a group of students and staff from Indiana University and University of Amsterdam) are not so successful in redefining fans or fandom. They argue that media usage is so immersive that it has become invisible and we use media without realising it. Indeed it has become a vital survival mechanism for the 21st century. Fandom, they claim, requires certain competencies (technical skills and 'conceptual' competencies - interpersonal and literary) in order to survive in specialised fan communities. It is not clear how these two arguments are linked. The chapter would have benefitted from more precise terminology in what is meant by media use because there is a slip between

discussing fans of television (i.e. cultural texts in the form of particular programmes), reddit (a media form for viewing a range of cultural texts) and smart phones (a technological device). With such imprecision about what counts as 'media' it is difficult to understand exactly what and who is being theorised about. Fans themselves seem to slip out of the chapter so that their primary argument about fandom as providing the necessary skills to survive in a mediatised world is lost. This is a shame as the concept of media as a survival mechanism could have made an interesting contribution to fan studies, but it just misses the mark. In distinction to this underdeveloped chapter is the standout chapter by Sandvoss and Kearns. The authors aim to shine a light on ordinary fans who are neither consider themselves part of a community nor are very productive in a textual or enunciative way (but they may be in a semiotic way), arguing that too much emphasis has been placed on the collective. 'Ordinary' fans use digital media in a highly individualised manner as an 'interpretive fair' to seek out paratexts to construct their own ideas about the fan object. The chapter is beautifully written and includes plenty of good evidence. Highlighting the need to consider fans who neither engage with other fans nor produce texts about the fan object is a valuable contribution to fan studies since, as the authors note, ordinary fans are the silent majority of fans, but our current definition is based on the collective minority. The idea of the interpretive fair is very striking (I got particularly excited about this element) and brings a new theoretical lens through which to consider different types of fandom and digital media use. This brilliant chapter therefore proves a very valuable addition to knowledge and moves fan studies forward in useful ways, opening up new areas for research.

Part 2 considers the sometimes fraught relationships between fans and producers, with reference to the ways in which social media has changed these relationships. Bennett argues that social media is a two-way street with advantages for both the celebrity and the fans: it provides fans with intimacy and connectedness to the celebrity; it provides the celebrity with a way to communicate with her fans. The chapter is based on a transnational study of Lady Gaga fans and it includes some interesting quotes from fans and Lady Gaga. But the chapter omits to discuss important contextual issues, like how

Lady Gaga's twitter feed is a representation of Lady Gaga and the monetary market in which she is working. Lady Gaga is treated as honestly engaging with fans, although Bennett does describe it as 'performed intimacy' (113). Similarly the consistent description of Lady Gaga as a celebrity is deeply problematic (not to say infuriating for me as I study sexism and music). Lady Gaga is a musician and Bennett includes quotes in which her music is referred to by fans and by the artist. This important element, however, is not considered. Lacking this contextual detail, the result is that the chapter is somewhat superficial and doesn't get to grips with what is at stake in musicians' social media use to promote a relationship with their fans. More useful is Duffett's chapter in which he argues that Durkheim's concept of effervescence and religious totems can be secularised to make sense of the relationship between celebrity and fandom, which has previously been mis- and under theorised. In particular he contends that it can help to make sense of the emotional/affective part of fandom. This theoretical chapter includes a great review of literature on fandom - it covers a lot of ground - and, through its consideration of music fandom *per se*, it moves on understandings of fan-producer relationships to take into account the social side of fandom as well as the personal. But what about the fans who relish the obscurity of their star? And those who hate it when they get too popular or sell out? This theory doesn't consider those fans and so reveals an area where more work needs to be done.

Part 3 explores how fandom is manifested in specific localities, both geographical and technological. Here, then, is a turn to the collective in fandom and the section examines relationships between fans. Sinclair argues that online and offline spaces have civilising etiquettes, but they are not quite the same - online spaces see a greater degree and virulence of violent, angry and masculinity-reinforcing language. The chapter draws on a study of online and offline fans in the Irish metal scene (subgenre unspecified) in order to assess how the same fans interact with one another in both spaces - a valuable project. Sinclair uses Elias's notion of the civilising process in order to assess how people interact. Yet this was not entirely successful due to Sinclair's ambiguity about whether etiquette does exist - had he introduced this idea earlier and explored it more fully, especially with

relation to the differences in the two groups, then that would have made for more nuanced chapter. Hagen's is an exploratory chapter that examines how 'kvl't' works within black metal forums, particularly with reference to subcultural capital, nostalgia and the commercial workings of the genre. He utilises Kahn-Harris's notions of mundane and transgressive subcultural capital, and the real contribution of the chapter is to show how these can play out in unexpected and contradictory ways (for instance in the sub-subgenre of blackgaze). Although Hagen examined black metal forums, much of the argumentation comes from his own experiences as a black metal fan and musician. Whilst this in itself is interesting and makes a worthwhile contribution to understandings of the ambiguities of black metal, the chapter doesn't go beyond exploring the manifestations of kvl't and its contested place in black metal. Pulling out from the subgenre to explore what this means for fan participation and different groups of fans (other than those who are dismissive of new fans) would have enabled better understanding about the varieties of fandom even within the same musical genre in the face of monolithic studies.

The strength of the collection is that it includes work from a range of disciplines, bringing together media studies perspectives (like Bennett's on celebrity) and sociological perspectives (like Sinclair and Hagen's use of subcultural theory). There is also a good mix of sites of fandom (e.g. music, sport, television) and global and digital locales, as well as mixture of theoretical and empirically based chapters, only some of which I've considered here. By far for me, the first part on thinking through definitions of fandom was most beneficial. The main weakness of the book is the variation in quality so that brilliant, groundbreaking chapters like Sandvoss and Kearns' sit alongside underdeveloped chapters like that by the Janissary Collective. Nevertheless this is a good overview of current research in fandom and those new to the field will find evidence of its health. There is a sense of the field's history, its crucial questions, its range of disciplinary perspectives and sites of fandom: it makes a useful addition to fan studies.