



MARK DUFFETT

UNDERSTANDING FANDOM

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF
MEDIA FAN CULTURE

B L O O M S B U R Y

Understanding Fandom

An introduction to the study of media fan culture

By
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Foreword

What if? – reimagining fandom

Professor Matt Hills

Understanding Fandom sets out the key debates that have helped to shape fan studies. But it does more than that. Mark Duffett draws on his own prior research to illuminate discussions, and integrates work on media fandom – that is, fans of movie franchises and TV shows – with work on popular music fandom. Surprisingly, these areas have rarely been combined. Unusually, then, in the chapters that follow you will find Daniel Cavicchi’s brilliant work on Bruce Springsteen fans (1998) quoted just as often as Henry Jenkins’s seminal work from *Textual Poachers* (1992).

More than that, Duffett suggests new directions and intriguing critiques. Understanding fandom means recapping influential analyses and approaches, sure, but understanding cultural phenomena and their academic study can also mean identifying paths not taken, and returning to marginalized ideas or aspects of fandom. At its best and most worthwhile, understanding is not a passive repetition of received wisdom: it is also a *reimagining of the object of study*, a series of (realist) what-ifs. What if established theoretical frameworks have missed elements of fandom? What if fandom can be analysed in new ways? What-ifs enable us to perceive aspects of our cultural reality which common sense, or dominant systems of meaning and value, tend to set aside.

And to this extent, fandom and academia are curiously alike: both centrally involve processes of re-imagination. Academics strive to see things and theories anew, while fans often work on re-imagining their beloved objects, whether through fan fiction, commentary or projecting future versions of media texts and responding to imagined developments (*Star Wars* fans are currently busy pondering what a Disney-owned version of the franchise will look like, for instance). Both media scholarship and fandom – although, of course, these are not two hermetically sealed entities – work on re-thinking and challenging the popular culture that surrounds us.

How does *Understanding Fandom* start to reimagine fandom and fan studies? Well, it does the following: considers whether ‘anti-fandom’ (Gray 2003) can be invited under certain circumstances ([Chapter 2](#)); asks why work on celebrity has been

separated from work on ‘textual poaching’ in Henry Jenkins’s *oeuvre* (Chapter 3); argues that psychoanalytic theories may never be able to offer a wholly meaningful grasp on fandom (Chapter 4); devotes more attention to becoming-a-fan stories than is usually the case (Chapter 5); focuses on pleasures of connection as well as those of appropriation and performance (Chapter 6); considers fandom as a ‘queering’ of gender identities and performances alongside the reinforcing of gender norms (Chapter 7); sets out a novel theory of ‘imagined memories’ to think about multi-generational fandom (Chapter 8); suggests that fans’ communal concerns may simply be ‘tangential’ to those of media producers, rather than in conflict or complicity with them (Chapter 9); and argues that there is ‘now a crucial role for researchers who do not proclaim their own fandom’ (Chapter 10).

These multiple, creative re-imaginings of fandom – and fan studies – carry many implications. Anti-fandom has become a burgeoning area of study: anti-fans are ‘distant’ readers who form an image of a text or genre without actually paying close attention to it, and who then viscerally define their identity against the disliked object. Anti-fandom can also shade into fandom, however, when fans rail against parts of their fan object, and profess to hate a new storyline, character or album. By suggesting that anti-fandom can be invited in certain circumstances, for example, by Bob Dylan’s use of the electric guitar, or punk’s DIY ethos, Duffett considers how significant changes can form part of a fan object’s unfolding history, and how specific fan objects can carry codes of broadly ‘anti-fan’ rebelliousness. The fact that both Duffett’s examples are from popular music fandom does seem to imply that ‘invited anti-fandom’ is linked to discourses of artistic risk-taking and revolt which may tend to be less present – or at least, less dominant – around some types of pop music as well as popular film and TV. For instance, does *Doctor Who* invite anti-fandom as it shifts from one production team to another? Arguably, quite the reverse: the 2010 move from Russell T. Davies’s stewardship to Steven Moffat taking charge was marked by a strong sense of continuity and brand identity (showing all 11 Doctors in *The Eleventh Hour*), as if designed to reassure audiences that the show had not radically changed. Perhaps the possibility of ‘invited anti-fandom’ is feared rather than embraced in many media industry changes, where the threat of losing or alienating established fans becomes of paramount concern. If so, ‘invited anti-fandom’ may make more sense where art discourses are more strongly in place than the branding logics that are becoming typical of popular media.

Furthermore, do boybands invite anti-fandom if they attempt to re-orient their sound and target a new demographic and new audience? Take That seem to have made the leap from boyband to near-supergroup, but in this case they achieved such a transformation by disbanding and reforming, with the intervening period (of ‘post-object’ status: see Williams 2011) partly licensing their shift in cultural status, as well as marking a recognition that their original fan base had aged alongside them. Here, again, ‘invited anti-fandom’ is displaced by a sense of enduring fandom aligned with culturally appropriate discourses of age – upon reforming, Take That were no longer a ‘boyband’, and thus their own visible and culturally-meaningful ageing made sense of their altered industrial position. Invited anti-fandom may therefore hinge on sudden, unexpected and radical changes in the fan object – something which industrial processes of continuity (and franchising/branding) will frequently tend to oppose or

smooth out. The concept cautions us to think carefully about the meanings that circulate around different fan objects, as well as how they are industrially positioned.

I will not defend psychoanalytic theories of fandom here; my own prior work offers a good enough sense of my likely position in the debate (Hills 2002). But having said that, Duffett's argument that fandom is always partly private and partly social – partly felt and partly performed – captures its hybridity extremely well. By refusing to view or define fandom as one thing, Duffett productively develops how we might best understand it. Readers looking for a handy, straightforward definition will be disappointed, of course, but those looking for a sense of fandom's different lives, and practices, and moments, will find much to savour.

Another of Mark Duffett's intriguing interventions arrives via the concept of 'imagined memories'. These are memories of key events in the fan object's history – the Beatles' early performances, or the campaign to bring back *Star Trek* after its initial TV run – that very few fans will possess themselves, but which nevertheless tend to circulate as lore within the given fan culture. As such, fans engage with reiterated, mediated narratives of production or performance which despite the fact that they may not have personally experienced these things, become so closely entwined with their sense of self (or are so greatly desired as experiences) that they become 'prosthetic' memories. Like invited anti-fandom, this concept appears more closely rooted in popular music fandom, although examples can no doubt be found for fans of long-running film and TV series. Despite Duffett pointing out that no memories are 'real' (they are all cultural and psychological productions based on cognitive processes and interpretations), there does remain a danger here: one of implying that something aberrant or psychologically distinctive happens to fans but not non-fans. If fandom is marked by 'imagined memories' but non-fandom lacks this dimension, then it may be hard to avoid a taint of psychological deviance or exceptionalism. Can fandom not be theorized in ways that articulate it with a wider range of enthusiasms and passions, rather than being locked into a notion of memory that seemingly does not cross its (sub)cultural boundaries? However, what imagined memory does usefully stress is, once again, the positive importance of imagination to fandom, with fans imagining what it might have been like to see Elvis perform live, or to watch the first ever episode of *Doctor Who* on its initial 1963 broadcast. As a concept, imagined memory will certainly provoke further work on fandom and the life course, as well as fandom and memory in general. Indeed, these areas are starting to come to the fore in fan studies (Harrington & Bielby 2010; Garde-Hansen 2011). *Understanding Fandom* thus very much forms an active part of, and crystallizes out, an emerging set of scholarly concerns.

I think the same is true of Duffett's argument that academics might no longer need to focus on their own personal fan engagements (see also Phillips 2010). This, too, helpfully captures a moment in current fan studies. I think Duffett is quite right: by forestalling discussion of personal fandoms, scholars may be better able to engage with a range of fan objects as equally deserving of theorization, something this book demonstrates very well. On the other hand, if the auto-ethnographic study of personal fandom remains absent while scholars continue to focus on 'their' personal, favoured fan cultures – rather than adopting more synthesizing and inclusive stances – then our accounts of fandom will remain highly partial, skewed towards cultural artefacts with

certain values or appeals, and skewed away from investigating the fandoms surrounding ‘regressive’ texts, or texts at odds with academic politics, cultural identities and investments. To that degree, I think remaining reflexive about what we study, and why, and what goes missing along the way – potentially ending up outside the implicit ‘canon’ of much-studied fandoms – remains absolutely crucial. At the same time, academia’s relationship to fandom may be structural as well as personal, as Deb Verhoeven points out in her (2009) analysis of film director Jane Campion’s academic-fan following. Considering ‘the preferences of academics as media consumers, in particular as a . . . market segment’ (Verhoeven 2009, 155) could mean scholars tackling their fandoms not merely via auto-ethnographic ‘confession,’ but also via analysis of how scholarship itself is increasingly integrated into media paratexts, commodities and systems of value. If digital fandom can wittingly and unwittingly add value to media brands (De Kosnick 2013), then scholar-fandom might also find itself enmeshed in these media industry processes.

In his Conclusion, Duffett argues that fanaticism and fandom have typically been kept apart, conceptually, in contemporary culture. A common-sense cultural ideology thus depoliticizes fandom, condemning it to the realm of the ‘trivial,’ or treating it as mere personal taste. One can be ‘fanatically’ devoted to right-wing or left-wing belief systems – even to ‘extreme’ ideologies – but the language or discourse of fandom is not typically used in relation to public debates surrounding political systems and beliefs. In Duffett’s terms: ‘a person can be a fan of transgressive or taboo entertainment, say, the film *Cannibal Holocaust* . . . but they could only be “fanatical” about Adolf Hitler.’ In fact, some writers have pushed at this common sense view of fandom, arguing that one can at least be a ‘fan’ of the news (Gray 2007b), or that political affiliations can be modelled using fan studies (Van Zoonen 2005; Sandvoss 2012), or indeed that fandom can be articulated with political activism (Jenkins & Shresthova 2012), even if being a ‘Hitler fan’ probably sounds very strange to our ears.

The conceptual distinction between fanaticism and fandom has also been played with in recent popular culture. *Osama: A Novel*, by science fiction fan and writer Lavie Tidhar, imagines an alternative world – unlike our own in a set of ways – where Osama Bin Laden is not a real person, but is instead the hero of a series of pulp action-adventure novels called the *Vigilante* books. In this Philip K. Dickian alternate universe, Osama fans gather together at OsamaCon, a convention celebrating the character, and Bin Laden’s activities (identifiable as versions of our own news stories and our own recent history) are recounted as thrilling fiction. In one sense, *Osama* respects the cultural boundaries and ideologies which separate fandom from fanaticism. After all, it takes a re-imagined, counterfactual universe to reverse their polarity. But at the same time, Tidhar’s novel subverts rigid categories of pop-cultural fandom versus political fanaticism, destabilizing them as imaginatively permeable. ‘Osama fans’: it is an audacious conceit, one which pushes readers to consider, and diegetically cross, the line between fandom and politics. *Osama* is a part detective novel, part counterfactual science fiction, demonstrating how our culture discursively polices the fandom/politics boundary, insistently compelling us to separate out ‘serious’ (or dangerous) belief systems from the allegedly banal frivolities of fandom and its meanings. Perhaps, whispers *Osama*’s reimagined universe, fandom is a serious

belief system which (re)makes cultural worlds:

There were other people in the hotel dining room and most of them also had Osama bin Laden paperbacks next to them, and many of them seemed to know each other and were talking, like friends who haven't seen each other in a while and were busy resuming an interrupted conversation . . .

'What's this *Osama Gazette*?'

The men exchanged glances. Clearly, their looks said, this was a stranger in their midst. 'It's a *fanzine* . . . a small publication dedicated to the scholarly *discourse* of the Osamaverse . . . You can find copies in the dealers' room'. (Tidhar 2012, 240, 242)

What *Osama* highlights is, again, the importance of *reimagining fandom*, and at the same time, the significance of practices of reimagining *within* fandom. Rather than creating 'AU' (alternate universe) fan fiction which casts familiar characters into a transformed narrative universe, or reworking an SF TV series to re-genrify or sexualize it, Tidhar's distinctive 'textual poaching' daringly appropriates news of terrorism as if it were the adventures of pulp fiction.

And Tidhar is not alone in his fantastical re-thinkings of fandom; Brandon Cronenberg's (2012) horror movie *Antiviral* also satirically trades on fandom, positing an imagined, alternative world where fans are so keen to feel connected to celebrities that they want to contract the same viruses as them. Here, the 'pathological tradition' interrogated by Mark Duffett and others, is re-imagined directly in relation to medical pathologies. In Cronenberg's fantasy world, fan-celebrity identification has tipped over into associations with, and experiences of, illness. Where Tidhar challenges readers to re-conceptualize 'the public sphere' and 'private' media consumption, Cronenberg seemingly reinforces negative images of fandom – albeit a particular type of fandom. This is not a fantasy-horror film mocking horror fans, but instead one seemingly looking down on fans of celebrity culture. Both Tidhar's and Cronenberg's counterfactual worlds depend, I would say, precisely on the ordinariness of contemporary fandom: an everyday lived experience can be transformed into a central premise of these SF/horror stories exactly because readers and viewers are counted on to recognize what it means to be a fan. But the cultural politics of these fannish what-ifs indicate that pop culture does not always just embrace media fandom; certain fandoms may look down on others, with *Antiviral* arguably reflecting this dynamic by assuming that horror fans will readily engage with satirical pathologizations of celebrity fandom. Perhaps we do not just need to challenge the lines between 'serious' politics and 'non-serious' fandom, but also the divisions and assumed cultural hierarchies between different types of (celebrity/cult media) fandom. Indeed, this takes us back to Duffett's observation that Henry Jenkins has had little to say about celebrity fandoms, focusing instead on the text-oriented fandoms engaging with fictional worlds. The separation would seem to residually reflect a strand of cultural common sense asserting that these are very different modes of being a fan. The fact/fiction binary perhaps structures differences in scholarship, whereby how one thinks about celebrity fans must be kept distinct from how one analyses media fans (and the

controversies in fandom itself over real person fiction, especially real person slash, perhaps reflect these anxieties over blurring fact and fiction, given that these are immensely powerful cultural categories).

Whether or not a general theory of fandom remains possible, the fact that fans mock one another ('I'm not that crazy sort of fan stalker'), and mock other(ed) fandoms – for example, cult horror fandom symbolically attacking *Twilight* fandom – suggests that *scholarship still needs to reimagine fandom as a greater cultural collective*, where one's own fandoms are not celebrated while others' tastes are denigrated. Taking fandom seriously should mean *taking all fandoms seriously* rather than belittling soap fans while applauding *The Sopranos* fans, say, or belittling boyband fans while applauding Bowie fans. If *Osama's* representations of fandom destabilize and transgress cultural categories, *Antiviral* perhaps problematically plays into subcultural categories of 'good' (body horror) and 'bad' (celeb glamour) fan objects.

The imagining of real world *what-ifs* has been key to fan studies' attempts to revalue fandom: Jenkins's *Textual Poachers* asked the question 'what if fandom was not negatively stereotyped and assumed to be trivial?' And what-ifs continue to be important to academic work introducing yet challenging prior theories and approaches, such as *Understanding Fandom*. What if the 'slippery slope' idea is wholly wrong, and fandom cannot be thought of as a potential gateway to pathological obsession, despite recurrent 'expert' narratives implying this within our culture? What if fandom cannot always be understood in relation to media producers and industries, but needs to be analysed at least in part on its own terms? What if fans possess 'imagined memories'? Vital universes of thought are generated by academia, fandom and sometimes popular culture itself, acting upon the world in new ways. This is an ongoing process of analysis and illumination that *Understanding Fandom* makes a thoughtful, valuable and, above all, *imaginative* contribution to.

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1

Introduction

The first performer on stage was Sting. He walked out on stage with a group of black backing singers, who began to sing one of his hits, beginning as an acapella chorus of voices . . . By the end of the first line, the 70,000 or more voices present were all singing as one, sending a message to millions watching the television signals that were being broadcast around the world by satellite. My body reacted instinctively, and I can still remember the moment vividly. My body was filled with excitement, the hairs on my arms stood up, and the ones on the back of my neck prickled. I was washed with a wave of euphoria, my whole body tingled, filled with energy, with excitement, with the moment of Kairos, of time that stood still, that had quantity rather than pace. I experienced joy, elation, exhilaration, as well as passion, political motivation and conviction.

RUPERT TILL 2010, X

It seems as good a place as any to begin a book on media fandom with music researcher Rupert Till's account of the 1988 *Free Nelson Mandela* concert in London. Till's report seems to capture something about an overwhelming sense of emotional conviction that accompanies fandom. His identification with the music is unexpected, bodily and heartfelt and seemingly lacking input from his own conscious will. It is not approached in a calculating way or as an achievement. Closer inspection reveals greater complexity. Rupert Till's pleasure seems to spring unbidden from his experience of a live performance and yet it likely represents the culmination of an extended engagement with Sting's recorded and broadcast music. Till is in a leisure environment surrounded by a vast group of like-minded people, at an event that could well have resonated with his value system. It is unclear whether his connection is just about the music, what it said in the context of Mandela's incarceration or with Sting himself for making a statement. Moreover Till's recollection comes from an event that has, over two decades, become important as part of a generational memory. He can now speak about his experience using words like 'kairos' which act as reminders that he has, in the meantime, acquired the knowledge and vocabulary of an experienced academic.¹ These things are worth mentioning, not because Till's entry into fandom

sounds in any way suspicious, but rather to highlight that fandom itself is a more complicated phenomenon than we might think.

Most of us can identify with Till's experience in some way. It supplies an example of the surprisingly commonplace moment where, as individuals, we discover something significant about our passion and identity. Many people attend concerts, collect recordings, enjoy the cinema and watch television. Almost everyone loves a particular star or TV show. Whether the fascination is with Sting or *Spiderman*, Marilyn or *Twilight*, almost everyone self-identifies as a fan in some sense. An estimated 90 per cent of American males have repeatedly played video games (Jenkins 2006, 201). CBS polls consistently find that over 40 per cent of all Americans consider themselves to be Elvis fans (Victor 2008, 152). One study of young adults found that over 75 per cent of the sample professed a strong attraction to a celebrity at some point in their lives, and over half claimed that a famous person had influenced their personal attitudes or beliefs (see Boon & Lomore 2001).

Media fandom is the recognition of a positive, personal, relatively deep, emotional connection with a mediated element of popular culture. I began researching the topic for a PhD in 1995 and still remain interested by the questions that it can raise. Fandom has intrigued a generation of scholars who are interested in the expression of social and personal identity in the context of media culture. One useful distinction to make here is between wider research fields and fan studies. **Fandom research** is a very broad, long-standing, multi-disciplinary body of scholarship that takes fandom as its primary focus. Interested scholars are either interdisciplinary in orientation or have come from academic traditions such as sociology, anthropology and psychology. **Fan studies** is a much narrower area which has emerged from cultural studies in the last two decades. Its practitioners aim to represent fandom in a positive light and tend to study fan communities and practices. A wide range of fan research still takes place, although fan studies currently attracts the most attention. Fandom remains a complex and challenging area of analysis worth studying for many reasons. As Western society shifts further into a digital, tertiary, service economy, its analysis can help to explain why individuals are increasingly constructing their personal identities around the media products that they enjoy. Given the continual mystery and ubiquity of the phenomenon, studying it can help us improve individual self-awareness. A focus on fandom uncovers social attitudes to class, gender and other shared dimensions of identity. In business, the analysis of fandom enables product development. Crucially, its study can expose the operation of *power* in the cultural field.

Understanding Fandom is based on the debated premise that its subject matter has enough coherence to warrant detailed analysis. Sports fandom remains the most accepted model for fandom in our society. Although a minority of researchers have studied both topics, in many ways sports fandom and media fandom are very different objects of study.² Sports fandom is ultimately tribal and based on a controlled, competitive mentality. It raises passionate instincts that are significantly different in both meaning and intensity to those associated with enjoying television, music or cinema. One example should suffice: in May 2008 when public video screen coverage of the UEFA cup final malfunctioned in Manchester's Piccadilly Square, a riot took place that involved 1,500 police officers trying to contain thousands of disappointed Glasgow Rangers fans. Some of the officers wore emergency riot gear as they were

expecting trouble. Fifteen police officers were injured and 42 fans arrested. In contrast, although concerts, conventions, raves, festivals, film premiers and celebrity book signings can attract large numbers of people, they are not generally associated with the atmosphere of drunken bravado and mass violence that can spoil sporting fixtures. Media fandom is socially enacted through different sets of gender relationships, different styles of behaviour and types of feeling. Because sport has gradually been extended as mass spectacle and its elite players have increasingly taken up the associated trappings of stardom, the difference between sports fandom and media fandom has perhaps diminished. David Beckham, for example, arguably has fans who are media fans rather than sports enthusiasts (see Cashmore 2004) and of course many people follow both pursuits at once. That does not mean there is no difference between them. Discussion in the present volume will not address sports fandom.

Perhaps a more pressing question is whether media fandom is itself a coherent object. Concluding an important book-length study of television fandom, Henry Jenkins wondered:

I am not sure that the types of fans I have discussed here, fans of a particular configuration of popular narratives, are necessarily identical with other varieties of fans, fans of specific media personalities, rock performers, sports teams or soap operas. These groups will have some common experiences as well as display differences that arise from their specific placement within the cultural hierarchy and their interests in different forms of entertainment. (1992, 286)

Jenkins is right: different fandoms involve a range of experiences and occupy different places in the public imagination. **Telefantasy** is a broad genre of television programming that includes sci-fi and fantasy narratives. Jenkins' book was based on research with fans of several different telefantasy series. Two points are interesting here. He identified what we might loosely call 'celebrity followers' as unserved by his analysis. As a strain of media fandom, popular music is perhaps the most representative of this contingent. Studying the difference between different media, P. David Marshall (1997) argued that film, television and popular music performers are differently exposed in their respective mass media. Marshall suggested that the aura of film stars emerges from the *distanced* nature of their screen image; we, as an audience, only witness a tiny fraction of their actual personalities on-screen. Television constructs media celebrity in quite the opposite way: by an intimate, immediate overabundance of imagery that habituates viewers on a daily basis to their familiar presence. Meanwhile, for Marshall, popular music performers are particularly associated with the image of the *live crowd*, the energetic group of admirers who have assembled in one place to see them. **Synergy** is the cross promotion of commercial products to different outlets. Marshall's differentiation argument may be breaking down in an era of multimedia synergy where film stars work on television and in theatre, and tweet messages directly to their fans online. Nevertheless, it remains useful for addressing Jenkins' concerns. The process of following mass mediated celebrities, which, taking Marshall's lead we might recognize as symbolized by pop fandom, is not so very different in kind from other types of media fandom. Instead it represents one pole in a process that can also include reading narratives (whether

biographic or fictional) and creating new reference points such as fan fiction. Jenkins (1992) looks at fans who made music ('filk songs'), but rarely does he – for both political and intellectual reasons – directly address the 'cult of personality' that undergirds some prominent types of media fandom. If fan studies has mostly been a repository for writing about telefantasy fandom for rather too long, it has much to learn from an interchange with the much smaller body of research about the popular music audience. Media fandom *holds together* narrative and personality, criticism and emotion. Its different forms – represented at their *extremes*, perhaps, by sci-fi and popular music fandom – are associated with different theoretical perspectives, yet they are *not completely distinct*. Rather than claiming to be a comprehensive survey of fandom research, this book has a more modest aim of introducing some of the key writers from the field and drawing together commonalities between fandoms for a range of media.

A brief history of fandom

Fandom is a sociocultural phenomenon largely associated with modern capitalist societies, electronic media, mass culture and public performance. In most research there is a tendency to talk about the phenomenon as if it has always existed, fully formed, in society. Some scholars have called for more research that historicizes fandom. As that issue is increasingly being addressed, writers have begun to unearth a complex history which demonstrates Henry Jenkins' claim that 'Nobody functions entirely within fan culture, nor does fan culture maintain any claims to self-sufficiency. There is nothing timeless and unchanging about this culture; fandom originates as a response to specific historical conditions' (1992, 3). Those conditions stem from shifts in the media and their tendency to reconfigure everyday experience.

The term 'fan' first appeared in late seventeenth-century England, where it was a common abbreviation for 'fanatic' (a religious zealot). It became significant in the United States a century later, where it was used by journalists to describe the passion of baseball spectators (Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998, 122). This later usage was adopted to describe dedicated audiences for film and recorded music. It is easy to make swift generalizations and say that prototypical forms of fandom therefore never existed in earlier times. That would, however, mistake the invention of the label for the beginning of the phenomenon. As Leo Braudy (1987) has shown, fame is an ancient mechanism, a point that seems obvious when one thinks about institutions like royal, religious or political office and the circulation of human faces on coinage. Portrait painting was a longstanding way to keep a record of personal likeness. Shakespeare, who was a highly successful playwright in his own lifetime (1564–1616), became the centre of one of the most enduring cultural phenomena after his death. His birthplace in Stratford upon Avon – which still attracts around 400,000 visitors per year – has been open to the public since the mid-eighteenth century. By the Victorian era it had become fashionable for visitors – some of whom, such as Charles Dickens, were famous in their own right – to scratch their names on the window panes or scrawl them on the inner walls of the cottage. The Victorian visitors' engravings are not so different

to the graffiti that is currently written by fans on the stone wall outside Graceland.³

In the early part of the nineteenth century romantic poets like Lord Byron established a new benchmark in literary popularity. Written reports and newspapers helped to spread the reputations of well known people. By this time there were multiple genres of stage performance. Long before the advent of cinema or recorded sound, performers like the singer Jenny Lind (1820–87) and actress Sarah Bernhardt (1844–1923) made international tours, complete with merchandise, on the basis of their reputations (see Waksman 2011 and Cavicchi 2011, 14–18). Newspaper reviews prepared prospective audiences for their arrival. In effect, some kind of publicity had always allowed performers' reputations to precede them. It now seems strange that audiences who had never actually seen or heard a star could be sent into paroxysms of glee primed only by press reports. Nevertheless, celebrity was mediated by such means.

A significant shift happened in the middle of the nineteenth century. The term 'celebrity', which had previously referred to the general *condition* of being famous, extended its meaning to encompass famous individuals. The development of photography catalysed and consolidated this meaning. Portrait photographers like Napoleon Sarony, who ran a studio in New York from 1867, took pictures of singers and actors. Publicity shots formed the basis of a merchandising industry of photos, cards and postcards that circulated the carefully-posed visual image of theatre performers in an era where followers could easily acquire visual referents. When the American showman Buffalo Bill (William Cody) came to London to display his travelling show in 1887, his apartment was, according to a local journalist, 'embarrassed by an overwhelming mass of flowers which come hourly from hosts of female admirers' (see Warren 2002). In the later part of the nineteenth century, audience appreciation was conferred not only on writers, heroes, singing stars, raconteurs and theatre actors. It extended to other public figures, including a coterie of dandies who combined an aristocratic sense of privilege with dapper styles of dress and a carefree approach to their personal finances.

Later in the nineteenth century, the invention of sound recording (Edison's phonograph in 1878), cinema (perforated celluloid in 1889) and airwave broadcasting (perhaps as early as 1906) laid the foundations for electronic media industries that would support the vast audiences and fan phenomena that dominated much of the twentieth century. As sociologists Ferris and Harris (2011, 13) explain, 'there would be no fame if there were no fans, and there would be no fans if there were no media, whether print or electronic'. By 1904 the Italian tenor Enrico Caruso had acquired contracts with the New York Metropolitan Opera and the Victor Talking Machine Company that consolidated his immensely popular career, though he died in 1921, four years before electrical recording enabled high-fidelity sound. Meanwhile, once film fans started writing to Hollywood, the studios began to use stars as in-house vehicles for audience engagement. Movie studios were deluged from 1908 onwards with letters for early film performers such as Florence Lawrence.⁴ When Carl Laemmle Snr, the head of Independent Moving Picture Company, publicized the names of his actors due to public demand in 1910, the star system was born. *Motion Picture Story Magazine*, the first national film fan magazine in America, began that same year. Within five

years it was joined by *Photoplay*, *Motion Picture* and *Shadowland*. Mainstream publications like the *New York Times* also began covering Hollywood stories. Some of the first fan clubs emerged around this time. By 1912, all the major film companies except for DW Griffith's Biograph revealed the names of leading studio actors.

Between the 1920s and 1950s, fan demands helped to shape Hollywood to some extent. The dominant studios initially aimed to reach a female audience and to provide young working women with figures of identification. Features such as George Melford's *The Sheik* and Rex Ingram's *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (both 1921) established Rudolph Valentino an early Hollywood heartthrob. When Valentino died of a perforated ulcer in 1926, a crowd of around 75,000 onlookers marched on his funeral home, creating a crush that shattered the glass windows and required a police charge. Reports of the event scandalized Hollywood and led to perceptions of film fandom as a form of dangerous, collective hysteria. Historian Samantha Barbas (2001, 172) suggests, however:

Although many of the men and women in the crowd were true Valentino fans, many, perhaps even the majority, were not. Most of the rioters probably had never belonged to Valentino's fan clubs. Many never followed his career, and some may never have seen his films. In many ways, the Valentino riot was less a product of movie fan culture than of American celebrity culture. Fascinated and titillated by the possibility of seeing a famous figure in person, aggressive curiosity seekers descended on the Valentino funeral with remarkable ferocity.

At the end of the 1920s the Hollywood studios collectively received over 32 million fan letters per year for both male and female stars. By this point they had departments to monitor and respond to fan mail and were collectively spending over \$2 million a year on photographs, postage and salary for fan mail department workers. The most loved stars, such as Clara Bow and Mary Pickford, received over 1,000 items of fan mail a day. The Great Depression brought even more audiences flocking to see *distraction movies*, including musicals, crime films and monster features. Universal began a particularly successful run of supernatural horror films with *Dracula* (Browning 1931) and *Frankenstein* (Whale 1931), films which made iconic figures of Bela Lugosi and Boris Karloff respectively. Lugosi's nefarious count was so successful with fans that he inspired various lines of merchandise and remained unrivalled until the Hammer studio recreated the story with Christopher Lee in 1958. *King Kong* (1933) was another early blockbuster feature that set new standards in cinematic fantasy and raised the profile of its heroine Fay Wray.⁵ Actress Jeanette MacDonald had one of the strongest fan clubs of the era, founded in 1937. When one of her fans lost the use of his legs, club members rallied to start a therapy fund for him. They also circulated a quarterly journal called *The Golden Comet*. Other film fans began to lobby David Selznick to cast Clark Gable as Rhett Butler in *Gone with the Wind* (Fleming 1939). In the mid-1940s Guy Madison's fans also lobbied to get him meatier roles. Right from the start, then, ordinary devotees were a prominent voice in the industry.

Other media had prominent fan followings too. The adoption of radio in the 1920s led to programming that soon sparked loyal followings. The male announcers who led

the dance marathons of the depression era had scores of female admirers. For a decade from the mid-1930s the sounds of the swing era prompted crowds of young people to dance to numbers performed by artists like Benny Goodman. Popular singers such as Bing Crosby quickly emerged to attract their own followings. The comic book genre, meanwhile – which had began as a supplement to newspapers and communal sales brochures for artists – exploded from around 150 titles in 1937 to nearly 700 in 1940. *Superman* comics were selling one and a quarter million copies a month that year (Hajdu 2008, 31), but within a decade the superhero boom had all but disappeared. With publications like *Tales from the Crypt*, EC Comics subsequently used controversial and macabre content to come up through the field.

As young people began to be a recognized population segment, fandom gradually became more identified as youth phenomenon. There were previous mass audience fads – like the jitterbug, popularized by Cab Calloway in 1935 – but it was Frank Sinatra's performance at New York's Paramount theatre in December 1942 that made female fans part of the spectacle in a way that set the template for Elvis, the Beatles and legions of other musicians who followed:

The solo singer stole the show and was retained for eight weeks, breaking the attendance record set by Rudy Vallée in 1924. 'Swoonatra'-ism began. Soon there were 'Sinatraddicts', adolescent bobby-soxers who wrote to him in lipstick: 'I love you so bad it hurts. Do you think I should see a doctor?' Fan fever: a bishop knocked down in a teen charge towards the singer; the singer almost strangled by two girls who pulled at opposite ends of his bow-tie. Fan fever for a popular singer, not a film star. Novel. His cigarette butts, his un-eaten cornflakes became highly prized items. So did locks of his hair, often plucked from his head. The hysteria was compared to the Children's Crusade of the Middle Ages. (Whitcomb 1972, 202)

In 1946 a group of 750 movie fans in San Francisco calling themselves 'The Senior League' started to denounce the bobbysoxers and rescue film fandom as a respectable pursuit. They were fighting against the tide. By the mid-1950s, rock'n'roll was taking over the music charts backed by a young audience who listened to the new wave of personality DJs like Alan Freed and Bill Randle.⁶ According to Daniel Cavicchi, 'Fandom has always been part of rock'n'roll's myth, appeal, and strength' (1998, 3). Meanwhile, after television spread as a domestic medium (see Spigel 2001), Hollywood began to lose sections of the family audience. Teens and young adults then became a significant section of the film audience. As both a recording artist and movie star, Elvis Presley fostered a global fan following. Over three decades after his death, he still boasts one of the largest music fan clubs in the world, which is based in the United Kingdom and has had up to 20,000 members.⁷ In the later decades of the twentieth century, young people were courted as a prominent demographic who were often the most visible section of the media audience (see Doherty 2002).

The products that inspire any genre can be distributed across a range of different media. Science fiction had grown as a literary and film genre by the 1930s. In 1939 the World Science Fiction Society created an ambitious global fan convention called 'Worldcon' that has survived to date. In the interwar years and beyond, the genre was publically championed by 'superfan' Forrest J. Ackerman, who is often credited with

coining the term ‘sci-fi’.⁸ It bloomed through the 1950s and 1960s by playing on public interest in the Cold War and space race. The era led to a spate of monster, mad scientist and alien creature films that acquired dedicated followings and have become significant objects of nostalgia.

In the 1960s cultural entrepreneurs further penetrated the young end of the marketplace. Staple film and TV genres like the Western were repackaged for the matinee audience. Meanwhile, the most prominent strands of youth culture moved away from juvenile rebellion and integrated more with hedonism and leisure: teen angels, gentle folk, surf sounds and beach party movies entertained younger listeners. The film director Alfred Hitchcock adopted a celebrity persona to present his own television series and act as a one-man celebrity brand to market his acclaimed thrillers. On American regional TV networks, meanwhile, horror hosts – like Ghoulardi (Ernie Anderson) on WJW-TV in Cleveland – emerged to present reruns of old monster movies.

The 1960s were characterized by a continuation of the Cold War stalemate and the culmination of the space race. Popular culture became interested in the possibilities and problems of scientific technology and alien life forms. Beginning with *Dr No* (Young 1962), Eon Productions’ James Bond films series (1962–) imagined a glamorous world of international espionage that has captured fans from each succeeding generation of viewers. Two new television series crystallized the concerns of the era and have since become landmarks for both sci-fi fan culture and academic writing on fandom. In England, *Doctor Who* (1963–89, then 2005–) portrayed a brilliant, foppish and eccentric time traveller who struggled against various monsters and ordeals. Three years later, *Star Trek* ran its first series (1966–9) on NBC in America. The show was originally conceived by its writer-producer Gene Roddenberry as a kind of Western set in space that would explore humanist themes of community, conflict and co-operation.⁹ Both series became long-running franchises; *Star Trek* was remade in 2009 as a feature film by director Jeffrey Abrams. Maintaining its reputation for complex and exciting texts, the *Star Trek* franchise has continued to inspire prominent fan communities.

In the middle of the 1960s the astounding popularity of the Beatles sparked a new wave of debate that tended to characterize their phenomenon as fan hysteria. Two other intriguing episodes in the history of Beatles fandom happened in the summer of 1966 – when Americans learned that John Lennon had compared his group’s popularity to that of Jesus – and October 1969 – when a false rumour took root that claimed Paul McCartney was dead.¹⁰ Towards the end of the 1960s – partly in the wake of the band’s influence – many young people ‘dropped out’ of society to form the counter-culture: a movement that mixed chemically-induced intoxication and enthusiasm for progressive rock with a commitment to civil rights and anti-war protest.¹¹ The 500,000 young music enthusiasts who attended the Woodstock festival in 1969 shared a generational love of rock songs and alternative social values. Within a few short years, however, arena rock bands were using spectacles of mass fandom to serve their own interests (see Waksman 2007).

In the 1970s, the rerunning of films on television sparked new fan interest in the highlights of past culture. At this point America was gripped by a nostalgia boom for

the 1950s referenced in shows such as *Happy Days* (1974–84) and the film *American Graffiti* (Lucas 1973). In 1970 a cognoscenti of sci-fi fans in San Diego began a long-running annual fan convention which has survived to date as the San Diego Comic-Con International (see Jenkins 2012). In popular music, folk-inspired singer songwriters and serious rock performers separated from glam rock and prototypical boybands like the Monkees and the Osmonds who catered to younger fan bases.¹² In the years that then followed the Watergate scandal and end of the Vietnam war, popular culture was imbued with a more nihilistic strain of social criticism. The decadence of disco sounds and blandness of blockbuster movies like *Jaws* (Spielberg 1975) both, in effect, marked a high point of modernist society and exposed a feeling of futility that stemmed from placing faith in an imperfect sociopolitical system. With its tagline ‘A different set of jaws’, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Sharman 1975) caricatured alternative sexualities in the same year as Spielberg’s ecological monster movie.¹³ It gradually became a cult product when audiences at midnight screenings in New York’s Waverley Theatre feigned interaction with the characters on-screen (see Rosenbaum 1980). As the decade progressed, Robert Stigwood’s blockbuster musicals, *Saturday Night Fever* (Badham 1977) and *Grease* (Kleiser 1978), heralded popular phenomena with some longevity. Meanwhile, the punk explosion extended an ethic of ‘do it yourself’ which led to a wide range of bands and fanzines in the wake of the Sex Pistols’ December 1976 *Today* show interview. Another blockbuster, George Lucas’ 1977 space fable *Star Wars* entered the mainstream as a family science fiction hit and gradually became celebrated as a cult product. By this point, fan fiction writing had grown beyond sci-fi to include cop shows like *Starsky and Hutch* (1975–9) (Pugh 2005, 91). In 1978 the term ‘graphic novel’ was used to help extend the market for a comic book called *A Contract with God* (see Fingerroth 2008). This influential move helped give rise to a new depth of audience engagement in the comic genre.

The 1980s began in a tragic way when John Lennon was shot by Mark Chapman, a mentally ill security guard from Honolulu who posed as a fan to get near his target. Lennon’s followers held memorial rallies in Central Park to remember their hero (Elliot 1998 and 1999). By this time another generation of pop fans was reading music magazines like *Smash Hits* (1978–2006) and listening to the gender-bending styles of the New Romantics, a movement that reinvented the posturing of the 1970s glam rock phenomenon (see Vermorel 1985 for a classic pop fan mail compilation). Their older siblings listened to more credible rock, metal, post-punk and later rave outfits.

The mass adoption of the video cassette recorder (VCR) and its placement in so many living rooms meant that viewers could choose from an archive of previous film and television products in an emerging culture of video shops. VCRs allowed film and TV fans to conveniently see what they wanted in a domestic context (Jenkins 1992, 71). In the United Kingdom this prompted concerns over ‘video nasties’: horror films accused of corrupting audiences with images of graphic violence. Video recording also allowed a different kind of fan engagement as shows were ‘time shifted’ and watched at their viewer’s leisure (see Cubbitt 1991). Fans immediately began doing things with video. Since the 1970s they had created their own ‘mash up’ videos in a practice known as **vidding** and screened them at conventions.¹⁴ After MTV started in the summer of 1981, fans were more widely inspired to create their own music videos.