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From deviation to mainstream – evolution of fan studies

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fan, fans, fandom, fan studies, cultural studies, fan studies evolution

ABSTRACT

Views on fans are changing rapidly. Not only is it hard to define a fan and pinpoint her characteristics but also different researchers have their own ideas about her. Ideas which very often differ considerably. There exists a multitude of ways to describe a fan, to decide whether her activities are communal, and if they are – what is the strength of this communal engagement and what makes fans create communities. Despite the chaos regarding ways of defining fans, one can distinguish certain description similarities. Officially, there are no schools, therefore, the article does not wish to characterize them. The goal of the author is rather to put fan studies in order, to pinpoint certain trends and changes. The author calls them waves of research. Waves which have been coming one after another since the beginning of fan studies. The article indicates chronological periods of waves, their main assumptions, points at main researchers representing every single one.

To be a fan¹ is a phrase which is a common colloquialism. One can be an admirer of a football team, good cuisine, a politician or particular mountain or seaside landscapes. In other words, we use the term to mean a variety of things or phenomena. This is not right, however, since fans are specific recipients of popular culture, a unique audience for various media texts. Fans are greatly engaged in reception. They have “in depth knowledge of the product they are fascinated by as a result of its numerous consumption. Aficionado is someone who, for example, reads a favourite text not once, twice or three times but several dozen times or more, obtaining pleasure from something that does not seem extraordinary to others (i.e. there are fans of some details or of particular characters in a story). A fan strives to intensify her pleasure by amateur production; she is often not only a consumer but also an author of texts

¹ The term fan will be used interchangeably with the term admirer and aficionado.

based on the original”². Admirers are socially minded people, they often create and join fan communities with those with the same interests in a particular media product³.

It is probably most popular or even avant-garde to be a fan of a TV series. Certain synergy of texts is present in pop culture, hence, it is likely that aficionados of a particular TV show will also take to other products based on it such as films, books, comic books, mugs, t-shirts, etc. TV shows have most fans in a sense that the series is an original product that attracts fans based on which later on produced are other texts. Also, admirers of books or films may, in turn, become fans of TV series when such a show is made based on an original film or a bestseller. This is a common phenomenon.

The article will discuss how academic views on fans have changed over the years, how they evolved. It is very difficult to precisely define the term. The characteristic provided above is only a general one. Different researchers have their own fan definitions, focusing on her various aspects. Despite the chaos regarding ways of defining aficionados, we can distinguish certain description similarities. The paper will attempt to put fan studies in order and pin point certain trends and changes. The trends have been classified into different waves, coming one after another, from early fan research to modern day. The article will discuss the waves in chronological order, their general assumptions as well as main researchers representing them. Waves, just like water waves, being influenced by various factors and conditions, are longer or shorter, slower or faster. They can overlap each other or not. The same is true for waves of fan studies – they are quite diverse. Let us examine them in more detail.

Deviation wave

This is the first of the waves, in existence since the beginning of academic research on fans. In order to classify it, we would have to choose a symbolic date. It would probably correspond with the start of first fan communities (fandom) rather than with a specific publication on the study. The first sci-fi fandom functioned in the US in the first half of the 20th century, in the 1930s. One of the movement pioneers was Hugo Gernsback, a writer and initiator of the first sci-fi magazine, *Amazing Stories* (1926). He encouraged his readers to send in letters commenting on the magazine’s content. As a result, fans not only sent

² P. Siuda, *Polski antyfan. Patrząc na fanizm, nie zapomnijmy o antyfanizmie*, “Kultura Popularna” 2008, No. 3, p. 33.

³ Cf. P. Siuda, *Fani jako specyficzna subkultura konsumpcji. Pomiędzy fanatyczną konsumpcją a oporem przeciwko konsumeryzmowi*, [in:] „Czas ukoi nas?”. *Jakość życia i czas wolny we współczesnym społeczeństwie*, ed. W. Muszyński, Toruń 2008, p. 60–71.

comments but started to exchange their addresses which Gernsback published. Soon, they began writing letters to each other or, if they lived close enough, to visit each other⁴. The year 1939 can be considered the starting date for the fantasy movement (also for the start of the deviation wave). This is also when the first International Science Fiction Convention took place⁵.

During the deviation wave, admirers were infamous, they were viewed through stereotypes with a focus on their pathological reception tendencies, in need of psychiatric help. During this wave, fans were considered to be immature, senile or simply unfit for life. They were viewed as deviants, antisocial people having difficulties in interacting with others, unable to find work or generally to have a normal life. In other words, there were really negative opinions and press about fans.

For instance, Stephen Hinerman in an article on Elvis Presley aficionados shows several examples of radical behaviour⁶. Among them, he notes tendencies to collect the oddest things related to the King of Rock. His fans buy hundreds of gadgets and memorabilia. Aside from what is officially on the market such as t-shirts, photos, mugs, etc., there is also an underground market (not supported by Graceland Enterprises, the official mementoes distributor) with much more intimate memorabilia such as Elvis' sweat or his nails⁷. Collecting of the above is not, however, the most radical form of Presley maniac fanaticism. According to Hinerman, even more interesting are fantasies which admirers come up with, such as Elvis as their sexual partner, as a premonition, as an adviser who supports them or chooses someone to be a contact person – all of the above are common cases, often described in literature. In analysis of reasons for such behaviour, he refers to Freudian psychoanalysis which considers fantasies an escape from an oppressing superego, or the omni-oppressing culture. Human, not being able to fulfil her desires and to curb her daily fears, turns to the world of fantasy. The creations of her imagination enable her to maintain a coherent personality and prevent her from lowering her self-esteem, especially in traumatic situations. Very common are fantasies in which the King is present in people's difficult life situations. Hinerman gives the example of a woman who imagined that Elvis was helping her give birth. At the time of delivery she was in dire straits; she already had two children, her partner left

⁴ Cf. J.M. Verba, *Boldly Writing. A Trekker Fan and Zine History, 1967–1987*, Minnetoka 2003.

⁵ Cf. P. Siuda, *Fanfiction – przejaw medialnych fandomów*, [in:] *Człowiek a media. Obserwacje – wizje – obawy*, ed. W. Gruszczyński, A. Hebda, Warszawa 2007, p. 143–157.

⁶ S. Hinerman, "I'll Be Here With You": *Fans, Fantasy and the Figure of Elvis*, [in:] *Adoring Audience. Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. by L.A. Lewis, London–New York 1992, p. 128.

⁷ J. Windsor, *Identity Parades*, [in:] *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. by J. Elsner, R. Cardinal, London 1994, p. 58.

her during pregnancy and her own parents, being against another baby, also turned away from her. It is apparent that she was traumatized and we can imagine that at all costs she wished to justify the birth of another child. What she did was escape into the world of fantasy and imagined that Elvis himself blessed the child⁸. Obviously, the same is true for fans of other media phenomena. Quite common are cases of *Star Trek* aficionados imagining having sex with their favourite characters. Generally, Hinerman does not paint a pretty picture. According to him, a fan is someone who needs to compensate for her life traumas, someone who needs help or is mentally ill. She must be if when not able to deal with difficult life situations, she escapes into the world of fantasy.

John Tulloch and Henry Jenkins wrote at length about how fans were viewed in academic circles during the first wave. In the work, *Science Fiction Audiences*, they consider science fiction admirers as the avant-garde of all fandom. They emphasize that since their beginnings in the 1960s fans have been viewed as deviants. For example, *Star Trek* admirers were named Trekkies which was a derogatory term depicting all that is evil in mass culture, including blind consumerism, obsessive interest in trivial matters, lack of will to develop intellectually and escaping reality in favour of fantasy. The fans themselves were against this stereotypical portrayal and the term Trekkie so they came up with the name Trekker. While the first term embodied stereotypes associated with aficionados, the second was to be more positive, even though it was created by the fans themselves. Meanwhile, academic studies on *Star Trek* fans were far from positive. Academics such as Robert Jewett, John S. Lawrence and Harvey Greenberg used their scientific status to strengthen the pathological image of these sci-fi admirers. They were portrayed as madcaps only interested in banal content⁹.

Joli Jenson, in the article *Fandom as Pathology*, states that fans were traditionally treated two ways – they were either ridiculed or considered pathological people with signs of uncontrolled behaviour, close to madness. The author shows that this view was prevalent then in academic (and media) circles, as a result of the omnipresent criticism of modernity. Aficionados, therefore, embodied everything that should be feared. Hence, they were considered dangerous “others” of modern reality. “We” are serious, while “they” are fanatical and hysterical. “We”, professors, students and well read people are healthy, while “they”, the fans, are people who are socially dysfunctional. “We”, representatives of the upper class, are interested in high culture and things worth being interested in. “We” are rational and sensible,

⁸ S. Hinerman, “*I’ll Be Here With You*”..., p. 107–134.

⁹ J. Tulloch, H. Jenkins, *Science Fiction Audiences. Watching Doctor Who and Star Trek*, London–New York 1995, p. 14–15.

while “they” are interested in pop culture and are overly emotional in expressing feelings. Jenson shows admirers were treated like pathological recipients in an attempt to maintain a division between classes. “We”, representatives of the upper class, in contrast to “them”, representatives of a lower class, are more resistant to threats connected with modernity¹⁰. John Storey, summarizing Jenson’s paper, focuses on the main points. According to academics, “the fan movement is a clear (pathological) sign of cultural, moral and social impotence which is a result of the transformation of peasant and rural societies into industrial and urban ones”¹¹. They feared modernity, claiming that it will lead to alienation, atomization and dispersion of social ties, and the forming of a fragmentary, incomplete human self. Jenson shows that this way of thinking influenced what was written about aficionados. It regards the various criticisms of modern society, emphasizing that being a fan of something is a hopeless attempt to compensate what modern life lacks¹².

The deviation wave was very negative. Bernard Scharatt, writing about extensive fan knowledge of his favourite texts¹³ calls it pseudo knowledge, something in place of understanding of social and economic structures which generally manipulate and exploit people. For admirers, pop culture texts are a remedy, something calming, which allows them to understand the forces controlling the world, meanwhile they are far from that, blurring this view even more¹⁴. Jay Goulding is even more critical. In his work, *Empire, Aliens and Conquest*, on science fiction fans he directly refers to Theodore Adorno’s theory; what he sees in sci-fi series is pseudo-individualisation based on standardization with only one goal in mind – to support pop culture industry. These shows are part of an even bigger scam system, with the goal to rationalize the inequalities and contradictions of modern societies and to maintain the status quo of the ruling elites. The texts promote sexism, capitalism, individualism and consumerism. In this sense, they enslave the viewers, preventing them from rebelling. For instance, for Goulding *Star Trek* is a text rationalizing American imperialism¹⁵.

How did it happen that fans were written about in such a negative light? Probably, because it was easy to write this way, to share beliefs about pop culture popular at the time. Many were inspired by the Frankfurt School, represented by Theodore Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse, who viewed audiences as victims manipulated by the

¹⁰ J. Jenson, *Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization*, [in:] *Adoring Audience...*, p. 10–16.

¹¹ J. Storey, *Studia kulturowe i badania kultury popularnej*, Kraków 2003, p. 117.

¹² J. Jenson, *Fandom as Pathology...*, p. 16–18.

¹³ The term text is understood to mean all types of pop culture productions such as films, TV series, books, etc.

¹⁴ J. Tulloch, H. Jenkins, *Science Fiction...*, p. 16–17.

¹⁵ J. Goulding, *Empire, Aliens and Conquest*, Toronto 1985.

industry, with the goal to reinforce existing social inequalities and convincing people to meet false needs – those of consumerism¹⁶. The Frankfurt academics were of the opinion that culture promotes consumerism to the absurd. Adorno wrote about popular music, presenting it as entertainment for the immature and infantile, the so called regressive recipients. According to him, this type of music is based on simple and repetitive patterns and only seeming individualization (the same that Goulding saw in sci-fi series). All the songs appear to be different but in reality they are all alike. He contrasted pop music with classical which was original, unpredictable and truly artistic, fit for the elites. From the Frankfurt School, it was Herbert Marcuse who elaborated on the concept of false needs¹⁷. According to him, people have a need to be creative, independent and to autonomously control their lives. However, this need cannot be realized because of the existence of false needs – those created by pop culture industry, those which can be met via endless purchasing and exchanging of goods, based on market fetishism. For example, the need of freedom is a real need but in modern, capitalist society it is replaced by a fake one – the need of free choice between a variety of consumer goods. This is obvious brainwashing for the purposes of the industry. It is impossible to overcome the false need dictate since manipulated individuals cannot see the advantages of freeing themselves from the system.

Dwight MacDonald represented similar views, he focused on lack of free will and atomization of mass audiences. Richard Hoggart, a British researcher in his famous work, *Aspects of Working Class Life*, published in 1957, wrote about the influence of American pop culture on the British working class¹⁸. He called it barbarism, being the root of all evil. Once again, pop culture audiences were portrayed as manipulated and indoctrinated populace.

Another reason why fans had such ill fame was because of their low visibility. It means that there were not many media phenomena which attracted aficionados. And, what is more, during the first wave fans were not viewed as members of communities but rather individually. Showing them as pathological individuals was easier because initially fandom was not organized as well as later on. In the 1960s and 1970s, there were a lot less texts which had their fandom than during the following wave. There were less conventions arranged and less fan fiction.

¹⁶ Cf. D. Strinati, *Wprowadzenie do kultury popularnej*, Poznań 1995, p. 15–49.

¹⁷ Cf. H. Marcuse, *Człowiek jednowymiarowy*, Warszawa 1991, p. 13–27.

¹⁸ R. Hoggart, *Spojrzenie na kulturę robotniczą w Anglii*, Warszawa 1976.

Resistance wave

Representatives of the resistance wave did not consider fans to be manipulated and pathological individuals but saw them as active and creative people, not subjected to producers' ideas but members of communities which created their own culture. The year 1992 is believed to be the beginning of this wave since it was then when its key works were created.

It should be noted that representatives of this wave would probably have little to say if the admirers themselves did not change and become more visible. In the 1980s, it became clear that more and more media products attracted their own fans. What is more, literary works created by aficionados became more complex; they were now often tied to more than one text. Fans started creating the so-called crossovers, that is stories mixing two or more films or series. Since early 1990s, admirers became influenced by the Internet. They could now interact through it, instead of solely being limited to communication via fanzines (fan papers). Fans began colonizing cyberspace, creating new places for the development of their interests. They used the Internet to discuss their favourite texts and to exchange their work¹⁹. Since there were more and more aficionados of various media products, they could make use of the most up to date technology and organize themselves better. Since they began writing and producing more and more amateur work, academic researchers decided that their behavior could not be so eccentric and deviant and that perhaps they were not such manipulated recipients of pop culture as earlier thought.

Representatives of the resistance wave used entirely different sources for their work than their predecessors. There is, for instance, research by Dick Hebdige which states that these audiences are not passive and thoughtless but active. For example, American labourers use pop culture to contrast themselves from the culture of the middle and upper classes, treating it as defense against their own subordination²⁰. Hebdige's opinions definitely differed from those who considered pop culture to be stupefying and its audiences – manipulated marionettes. With the development of theoretical reflection on pop culture and its recipients, there were more proponents of it. Barker's approach placed viewers somewhere in the middle, people somewhat influenced by pop culture industry but also those who influence the industry themselves²¹. Generally, over the last three decades, there has been an increasing amount of literature focusing on audience resistance to media and media products. Ien Ang in her

¹⁹ Cf. F. Coppa, *A Brief History of Media Fandom*, [in:] *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet. New Essays*, ed. by K. Hellekson, K. Busse, Jefferson, N.C. 2006, p. 41–59.

²⁰ Cf. D. Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light. On Images and Things*, London–New York 1988, p. 75.

²¹ Cf. D. Strinati, *Wprowadzenie do kultury popularnej*, Poznań 1995, p. 200–202.

renowned work showed how American soap operas such as *Dallas* are open to multiple audience interpretations²².

Representatives of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at University of Birmingham also disagreed with the view of passive consumers of mass culture. Early works by the CCCS on subculture groups focused on their abilities to object to and to question dominant ideologies. This approach was definitely contrary to earlier models criticizing pop culture²³. There was Stuart Hall with his model of counter decoding and David Morley who in his works such as *The Nationwide Audience* and *Family TV: Cultural Powers and Domestic Leisure* did not agree with the idea of passive recipients²⁴. Audiences are conscious and they use media for their own purposes. They resist them and re-interpret the content broadcasted by industry producers.

Among second wave researchers, Michael de Certeau is particularly influential. He distinguished two powerful forces; on the one hand – pop culture media producers and, on the other – resistant consumers with their own creativity and amateur production. The Frenchman stated that consumers are always in opposition to producers and this creates a battlefield. On it, juxtaposed are producer dictates on what and how should be interpreted with consumer aims re-interpreting texts her own way. Hence, resulting is a variety of unauthorized versions, not made by original creators, critics, academics, etc. According to Certeau, recipients are like “poachers” who travel wherever they wish and take whatever they want for their purposes. Recipients adapt texts to themselves, are active and create their own culture from elements chosen and re-processed from official media broadcasts²⁵.

Resistance wave academics largely based on the above theories. They saw fans not only as individuals but as part of communities. Researchers focused on activities which showed that aficionados were no longer considered docile dogs on the producers’ leash. They emphasized that fans organize conventions, write fan fiction, publish zines and organize protest actions – all as part of social and critical production of content different from what producers wish to impose on them. For representatives of this wave, admirers embody partisan style “guerillas” questioning the producers’ offer. Doing research on fans was now seen as being supportive of the “better” side of the conflict; those who oppose the regime

²² I. Ang, *Watching Dallas. Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*, London 1989.

²³ Ch. Harris, *A Sociology of Television Fandom*, [in:] *Theorizing Fandom. Fans, Subculture and Identity*, ed. by Ch. Harris, A. Alexander, Cresshill, N.J. 1998, p. 42–43.

²⁴ Cf. A. Szkudlarek, *Cultural Studies – brytyjska teoria krytyczna*, [in:] *Nauka o komunikowaniu. Podstawowe orientacje teoretyczne*, ed. B. Dobek-Ostrowska, Wrocław 2001, p. 182–191.

²⁵ A. Ćwikiel, *Między narracją a serializacją: fenomen Star Trek*, [in:] *Między powtórzeniem a innowacją. Seryjność w kulturze*, ed. A. Kisielewska, Kraków 2004, p. 266–268.

which wants to dominate and manipulate thoughtless and affirmative audiences consenting to all that is offered to them.

Representatives of the second wave showed that aficionados are not like that. For example, there was John Fiske and his article *The Cultural Economy of Fandom*, part of *Adoring Audience* published in 1992. This was an imperative publication fresh with new ideas. Fiske is influential and distinguished as a cultural studies researcher; his works are a chief link between earlier Birmingham research on TV audiences and subcultures and fan studies. In books published prior to 1992, Fiske repeatedly wrote about the resistance of pop culture consumers. In *The Cultural Economy of Fandom*, he does not focus on resistance to producer pressure as he did in his earlier works but there is still attention devoted to the division between those “up high” and those “down low”, and the constant struggle between them²⁶. The article’s influence is undeniable since Fiske “presented a wide range of tools which can be used to go beyond pathological models of fandom and the movement toward a more affirmative approach to fan cultures and their practices”²⁷.

In the same positive tradition, there was Henry Jenkins’ work, *Textual Poachers*, published in 1992²⁸. This author is considered to be a guru, the most influential researcher of fan culture. He also plays a part in the third wave but at this time it can be said that he was resistance wave’s key representative. Jenkins had somewhat different views than Fiske who was of the opinion that fan activity illustrates, in a sense, the way we all consume media content. Undoubtedly, admirers are much more resistant than average recipients but the tendencies taking place in fandom reflect general ones. What Jenkins saw in fans is avant-garde engaged in innovative ways of reception, a group of people different from the general public and characterized by extensive resistance radicalism. Aficionados in their reception are a lot more social, critical and productive. Camille Bacon-Smith, another second wave researcher, author of *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth*²⁹, wrote a report based on ethnographic research assessing the social character of fan activity. Other representatives include Roberta Pearson, editor of *Cult Television*³⁰, Constance Penley with *NASA/TREK: Popular Science and Sex in America*³¹, and John Tulloch.

It should be noted, though, that the onset of the second wave was partly a result of the fact that many researchers representing it were also active fans and members of various

²⁶ J. Fiske, *The Cultural Economy of Fandom*, [in:] *Adoring Audience...*, p. 34.

²⁷ H. Jenkins, *Kulturowa ekonomia fandomu szesnaście lat później*, “Kultura Popularna” 2008, No. 3, p. 31.

²⁸ H. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers. Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, New York–London 1992.

²⁹ C. Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Woman: television fandom and the creation of popular myth*, Philadelphia 1992.

³⁰ *Cult Television*, ed. S. Gwenllian-Jones, R.E. Pearson, Minneapolis–London 2004.

³¹ C. Penley, *NASA/TREK. Popular Science and Sex in America*, London–New York 1997.

communities. Jenkins was a fan of *Star Trek*, Tulloch – of *Doctor Who* and Penley loved all kinds of sci-fi productions. Being engaged in academic activity just as much as they were in their fandom, they were researchers who were of the opinion that admirers should be allowed to speak for themselves. It could be called an internal approach, listening and paying attention to what fans have to say about themselves and their interests³². Jenkins coined the term aca-fan, a short form meaning academic-fan. An aca-fan is someone who writes both as an academic and as an aficionado. As a scientist, she has access to various academic theories on pop culture, literature on the subject and academic workshops which allow her to research fandom in depth. As an admirer, she also has access to fan communities, their traditions and knowledge which also facilitate research. Jenkins is aware of the downsides of being both in one, that is of the danger of excessive identification with those researched. He is of the opinion, however, that anybody doing any kind of research can be influenced by it.

Generally speaking, during the resistance wave aficionados began to be seen as something more than just excessive consumers and fanatics. Being a fan gained positive meaning, it meant being part of a group with a goal, part of a community which interprets media content differently than the producers would wish them to do so. Research on admirers, then, became more ideological. They were now seen as audiences resisting dominant ideologies. Being tired of first wave researcher views and opinions, representatives of the second wave decided to oppose the old views. Oftentimes, being fans themselves they wished to defend their interests and environment, finding inspiration in theories contrary to those from the first wave, opposing media moguls and supporting growing fan visibility. They represented the radical approach, contrary to earlier existing views which considered fans to be “different”, manipulated and infantile individuals. For representatives of the second wave, radicalism seemed to be the best method to contradict and fight common, so far, views. Instead of radical manipulation – radical resistance. Instead of a polarized division into oppressors (producers) and the oppressed (fans), the victims were now viewed as successful fighters with the system. It can be said that in this wave views on fans changed fundamentally.

Mainstream wave

The third wave, the mainstream one, was definitely not as radical as the previous. It came after the second wave, although it is difficult to precisely state when it began. It can be

³² Cf. P. Green, C. Jenkins, H. Jenkins, *Normal Female Interest in Men Bonking: Selection from The Terra Nostra Underground and Strange Bedfellows*, [in:] *Theorizing Fandom...*, p. 9–38.

said that these two waves overlap somewhat as they use similar sources and are represented by some of the same researchers. The year 2006 can be considered the start of the third wave. It was when Jenkins' work, *Convergence Culture*³³, was published.

As mentioned above, the mainstream wave was less radical than the other two. During this wave, researchers attempted to do away with the oversimplified division into "evil" producers and "good" fans. They no longer saw admirers as freedom fighters or rebels opposing media moguls. There is no need to be at war with producers since they have learned from their mistakes and decided to change. They do not want to make fans do anything or exert any pressure on them to accept all that is offered. Today, producers have learned to listen to audiences. They consider aficionados mainstream and their priority audience. PR specialists consider fans to be prosumers who, thanks to their activity, can support a media product in a way that no advertisement ever can. Today admirers, loyal and faithful consumers, have become valuable, they are considered to be ones for whose attention and favour producers should strive. Fandom is now praised and almost put on a pedestal. Jenkins described the above well in his *Convergence Culture*. It can be said that this researcher has grown much softer since the second wave and has smoothly moved along into the third wave.

This wave came about as a result of evolution of opinions regarding pop culture recipients. They continue to be viewed as active rather than passive or manipulated audiences. Thanks to the Internet, fans have become even more visible and more active. With the onset of the World Wide Web, they have gained a tool greatly simplifying their lives³⁴; before in order to become a member of a community one had to go to a convention or be introduced by a member. Now, all one has to do is find what she is looking for on the Internet, join a group or a bulletin board or start reading the available fan fiction.

What we are dealing with today is the fan intermingling which also makes her more visible. Today, she can be a fan of multiple phenomena at the same time. What is more, this can also be included on one's creativity or attitude. This mixing is largely a result of the onset of the Web where it is easier to find fandom similar to our interests and to become a member of new communities. The Web is very conducive for joining multiple groups and intensifying one's activity. Fans are more productive these days than they have ever been. The Web is full of all kinds of stories and e-zines. There is also a multitude of productions like films, video clips and music which are strictly tied to the development of modern digital technologies. By

³³ H. Jenkins, *Kultura konwergencji*, Warszawa 2007.

³⁴ Cf. P. Siuda, *Wpływ Internetu na rozwój fandomów, czyli o tym, jak elektroniczna sieć rozwija i popularyzuje społeczności fanów*, [in:] *Media i społeczeństwo. Nowe strategie komunikacyjne*, ed. M. Sokołowski, Toruń 2008, p. 239–256.

using special programs, admirers can manipulate photographs and graphics, creating sophisticated visual art compositions. Moreover, the Web allows fans unheard of before freedom connected with the choice of object of fascination, their involvement and participation. All in all, aficionados have become a key part of the productive Internet community and, this way, mainstream recipients of pop culture. It can be said that Fiske was right, disagreeing with Jenkins, stating that in reality we are all fans representing common strategies of dealing with pop culture content.

Second wave researchers focused on fan as part of communities and her resistance. Conventions, collective protest actions and fan fiction were researched. Among admirers, it is rare that they are only fascinated by certain content, discuss it with others and do not engage in any other activity. However, third wave academics state that this kind of activity is also an imperative element of being a fan, that not everyone has to take part in conventions or be an amateur creator. Research carried out up to this point focused only on very narrow groups of aficionados, ignoring those who were less involved. In the mainstream wave, the research field was expanded, more complex and, thus, with broader horizons³⁵.

The third wave (similarly to the first) focuses on fans as individuals and divagates on their motivations and psychology. More on this can be found in Matt Hills' work, *Fan Cultures*³⁶. Cornel Sandvoss, on the other hand, in his work, *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption*³⁷, discusses the issue of fan's specific emotional involvement with the object of her attention and ponders its influence on the construction of her identity. Sandvoss narrowly defined a fan, considered her to be someone who is engaged in emotional consumerism which becomes the basis of her relationship with particular media content. The individual approach to fans is, once again, connected to the Internet. Via the Web, one can be an admirer on an individual basis, it is enough just to consider oneself a fan of something. You do not have to take part actively but can only be a lurker (someone who only watches, not disclosing her presence). Moreover, one does not even have to be aware that on the Internet there are also fans like us, one can but does not have to be a member of any community. In other words, there is a limitless number of options. The era of Web individualism has been reflected in fan research.

In conclusion, third wave achievements regard mainly an in-depth analysis of fan as an individual and the influence on her personality based on her attachment to her object of

³⁵ J. Gray, C. Sandvoss, C.L. Harrington, *Why Study Fans?*, [w:] *Fandom. Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, ed. by J. Gray, C. Sandvoss, C.L. Harrington, New York–London 2007, p. 7–10.

³⁶ M. Hills, *Fan Cultures*, New York 2002.

³⁷ C. Sandvoss, *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption*, Malden, MA 2005.

interest. On the macro level, latest research does not focus on issues of class hegemony, manipulation and stupefying defenseless mass audiences. Today, acknowledged is the imperative role which aficionados play in social, cultural and economic transformation of our times. The aim of the research is completely different – fans are not its sole subject anymore since a large number of viewers consider themselves addicts of something. In many ways, admirers represent all consumers. Through scientific discovery of fans, we can learn about laws governing modern pop culture and people's everyday lives. For these reasons, aficionados have never before been such attractive objects of analysis.

Conclusion

The first, deviation wave was the longest running, from the beginning of scientific reflection on fans until early 1990s. This phase was relatively calm; in comparison to later on, there was little interest in admirers and there were few publications on the issue, also due to low fan visibility. Most importantly, though, aficionados were written about in a negative way. Inspired by the Frankfurt School, first wave researchers presented fans as unfit for life weirdoes, alienated eccentrics manipulated by the omnipresent mass culture industry which, wanting to make ideal consumers out of them, interested them in trivial, banal content.

The second, resistance wave described admirers in a completely different manner. Its representatives were inspired by different literature than their predecessors. They emphasized individual and group possibility to resist, fight or to negotiate the pop culture. These researchers stated that replacing content offered by the industry with own interpretations can result in growing strength and be a remedy against oppression and the hegemony of dominant ideologies. This shift had a great influence on fan studies. Fans were no longer viewed as weirdoes or eccentrics with problems. They were now acknowledged and appreciated as recipients who oppose producers in their own ways by, for example, creating their own meanings and even culture. Growing fan visibility played a part in the onset of the second wave.

Somewhere in the middle, in between the first and second, is the third, mainstream wave. It emphasizes great diversification and development of fandom. It places aficionados in the mainstream of popular culture and focuses on their importance as a barometer indicating general viewer attitudes and their immense importance to industry producers, mainly from the marketing point of view. Fans have become acknowledged as a key type of audience. What is more, third wave researchers indicate that in the future their importance will further increase

and it will be more difficult to tell them apart from average recipients; in a sense, we will all become admirers.

The mainstream wave, although the newest, is considered to be superior to those previous. It is also most difficult to characterize and assess it. The first and second wave existed long enough ago that it was much easier to analyse their assumptions, indicate their representatives and chronological frames. It will take some time before we can gain perspective for the third wave in order to describe it properly. We can probably safely predict that it will not last indefinitely. As can be seen based on the article, there have been dynamically changing and quite contrasting attitudes and approaches to research on fans. If there was to be a new wave (not for some time though since the third wave is relatively new), it would most likely be as a result of unheard of yet transformations. It would be then easier to gain perspective for the mainstream wave and thus assess it accordingly.

The described above fan history is strictly connected to her increasing visibility, mainly as a result of technological development – that is of the Internet. It should be mentioned that this history has been discussed predominantly from the American and British perspective. The described above processes and changes taking place reflect what is and has been happening in other countries. Particularly, modern history, that connected with the onset of the Internet, reflects well the nature of changes which aficionados all over the world have been going through. In Poland, there have been fans since communist times but they have become more visible since the transformation into the digital era. Just like their Western counterparts, they have become active predominantly via the Web. As far as academic research, it is scarce and mainly related to the second wave. It can be said that during communist times inexistent was practically any kind of academic reflection on the subject. Still today, there is only a handful of researchers of fan studies.

Around the world there are various popular notions about admirers. Often they are imprecise, vague or indistinct. Academic research on fans is also bogged down since it offers various interpretations and ways of looking at this specific audience group. It does not make any easier since some waves are currently more popular, while others are considered passé. It can be said that on some level all these waves somehow coexist, interpenetrate each other or overlap. The third wave is presently the most dominant but it does not mean that there are no old influences. It should be noted that researchers ought to avoid falling into the trap of single-mindedness and base solely on one wave. We need to be aware of the fact that fans can be analysed from various, multiple perspectives, of all the three waves.