

Implosion

Implosion #34 is the local monthly fanzine of Arnie Katz (330 S. Decatur, Suite 152, Las Vegas, NV 89107). It is produced for the 32nd Distribution of Apa V, the Las Vegas apa, which has as this month's theme "I Had This Friend... which I have blithely ignored. Today is August 3 1996.

Implosion: The Fanzine that proves anyone can publish a fanzine.
Member, fwa.

Numbered Fandoms Revisited

The discussion of focal point fanzines failed to settle the issue. Maybe it'll continue for a few more rounds if the trio carries through with **Bogart**, **Ken**, **Tom** and **Ben** may want to study a little Numbered Fandoms theory as an aid to further discussion.

I'm less interested in finding out if **Folly** was the focal point than in testing the oft-written assertion that there can be no focal point because fandom is so fractionalized.

That's a fan commonplace today, but is it true? All Known Fandom is far too balkanized to pledge allegiance to a single fanzine. Heck, a giant slice of AKF doesn't read or care about any fanzine, let alone dote on a specific one.

Might a fanzine be the focal point of fanzine fandom? Some will mention fractionalization again, but I wonder if fanzine fandom is any more clique-ridden than it ever was. Yet if fanzine fandom is no less or more fractionalized today, was it ever really possible to designate a single fanzine as the focal point of fandom?

History is a pattern we impose on reality to make it more comprehensible. The Middle Ages didn't start or end on specific days, and you can find elements of Modern Life in the Victorian Age and vice versa.

Yet historians keep proposing theories and writing books. They strive to make a pattern that fits the facts as closely as possible and organizes those facts in a way that aids our understand of them. History is a system of simplifications.

A lot of fans expect fanhistory to be more rigorous and universal than that. Maybe we expect too much. Historical interpretation in the Mundane world is no more than a system of generalizations and approximations. A good theory is one which describes reality with reasonable

accuracy.

The Numbered Fandoms Theory makes exactly such a set of generalizations. **The Fancient** is a contemporary of **Quandry**, and **Guip** came out about the same time as **Psychotic/Science Fiction Review**. Most fan historians acclaim **Quandry** and **Psychotic/SFR** as the focal points of their eras, yet many other fans found **Fanscient** and **Guip** enthralling. The Numbered Fandoms Theory calls **Quandry** and **Psy/SFR** focal points, because they sum up the predominant aesthetic among active fanzine fans *at that time*.

So bearing in mind that analysis is just a set of generalizations, let's re-examine the Theory of Numbered Fandoms. The first thing is to establish the frame of reference. When **Speer** coined -- and **Silverberg** and **White** refined -- the concept, fandom was a single sub-culture. Fans pursued activities in varying proportions, depending on their preferences; but all shared a core of fan experience. Some might not be red hot fanzine fans, but just about all active fans dabbled in fan publishing, if only as subscribers or occasional letterhacks.

It must have seemed reasonable to see fanhistory as the rise and fall of focal point fanzines. When a fanzine got popular enough, just about everyone got it.

Times change. Today's fandom is a cluster of inter-penetrated, yet separate, subcultures. From here in Fanzine Fandom, I see a line of history that stretches back from 1996 to those eager science fiction readers whose desire to correspond could not be satisfied by prozine letter columns.

I propose to leave the history of All Known Fandom for another day and concentrate on the history of fanzine fandom. The trail of such a history begins in 1930 with **The Comet**, edited by Ray Palmer, and continues to the last zine you received.

Next comes a redefinition of key terms. Only by circumscribing its scope can the Theory of Numbered Fandoms be rehabilitated into a valid analytical tool. Let's try these:

A Fandom is a period in the history of fanzine fandom during which the most active fanzine fans reach a fan philosophical consensus.

A Focal Point Fanzine is a series, group or individual fan publication which embodies that philosophical consensus and attracts significant fanac from the most important proponents of that consensus.

A Transition is a period in the history of fanzine fandom during which no majority of active fanzine fans subscribes to a stable consensus. Usually, it is a era during which the consensus is in a state of flux. When it re-stabilizes to the satisfaction of a majority of the most active fanzine fans, a new fanzine Fandom comes into being.

With these definitions in mind, let's revisit the Numbered Fandoms Theory. This brief -- mercy! -- rundown has some adjustments from previous ones, and the 1975-1990 period probably needs re-writing.

First Fandom commences with the publication of **The Comet** and continues to 1936. The philosophies of Scientism, Sercon, Professionalism and Commercialism were the most popular among fans. **Fantasy Magazine**, its focal point, reflected this with its pseudo-pro appearance, reliance on subscribers, and an editorial policy oriented toward the prozines and pro authors.

First Transition began with the failure of **Fantasy Magazine**, and other similar publications, to find the self-perpetuating niche that would have satisfied the First Fandom aesthetic. Simply put, **Fantasy Magazine** could not acquire and maintain sufficient circulation to justify either its prestigious printed format or the participation of front-pro authors on a regular basis. A downturn in the professional field lessened the effect of Sercon, just as the end of the large-circulation printed fanzine dealt commercialism a serious blow,

Second Fandom ran a short (October 1937-October 1938), but uproarious course. Communicationism flowered as fans began to discuss matters outside science fiction and fantasy. The bold expression of strongly held beliefs and opinions led to savage political debates and incessant fan feuds.

Bob Tucker popularized Fannishness (both Trufannishness and Insurgentism) as fandom drifted away from the Mother Lode.

FAPA was a pivotal and integral part of fanzine fandom at that time, and its elections often provided an excuse for confrontation. In fact, Speer marks the end of this era at the point at which the Wolheim faction resigned all FAPA offices.

Second Transition, from October 1938 to the Chicon in 1940, is characterized by a steadily rising tide of fan opinion against fan feuding. The Barbarian Invasion, brought on by renewed newsstand success for sf prozines, enlarged the fan population and swung the focus back toward science fiction.

Third Fandom (fall 1940 to the end of 1943) represents a return of Sercon, but with room for the Communicationists. They made FAPA a surprisingly intellectual forum of ideas. **Harry Warner's Spaceways**, Third Fandom's focal point fanzine, embodies both the resurgent interest in science fiction as a topic and a strong determination to avoid feuds and controversial material.

Third Transition, starting in late 1943, reflected the turbulence of wartime society. The Draft, ration and sudden scarcity of free time for home front workers combined to reduce the number of fanzines. Fandom tried to stay in contact through difficult times.

The post-war resumption of full-time fanac, signaled by the Pacificon in Los Angeles in fall 1946, ended the indecisive, low-energy period.

Fourth Fandom reinforced the cleavage between enthusiastic readers of science fiction and science fiction fans. This era (Fall 1946 to mid-1947) included an expansion of prozine letterhacking while fanzines concentrated on the doings and personalities of fans themselves.

A Los Angeles cabal, led by Burbee, Laney, **Rotsler** and Perdue, shaped Insurgentism into a militant philosophy. Though few fans espoused Insurgentism in its undiluted form, its cynical outlook, upholding of standards and commitment to candid reportage are evident in many active fanzine fans to some degree.

Vampire, from **Joe Kennedy**, is the focal point of the small but active fanzine fandom of the mid-1940s. **Vampire's** style was relaxed and humorous, yet erudite. Science fiction was

present, but it was only one element in the editorial mix.

Fourth Transition (mid-1947 to Spring 1948) begins fanzine fandom's post-war expansion. A flood of new fans submerged the sophisticated ambiance of Fourth Fandom. The fans and fanzines that constituted the core of Fourth Fandom could no longer capture the attention of the majority of active fans, whose tastes were formed by *Startling Stories* and *Planet*.

Fifth Fandom (Spring 1948-1950) clustered around **Art Rapp's Spacewarp**. This monthly restored fanzine interest in the prozines, but leavened the editorial mix with personality columns by Rick Sneary and others and slightly slapstick humor.

Sixth Fandom filled the gap left in the fanzine field by the sudden demise of **Spacewarp** as a focal point. When the army shipped **Rapp** to Korea, the **Spacewarp** coterie found no way to continue as a cohesive, unifying force. Instead, a generation of incredibly talents neofans established a new consensus practically overnight.

Sixth Fandom embodied the ideals of Trufannishness. The spirit of cooperation, tolerance of others' opinions and good-humored fun of this fanhistorical period are unmatched. The pages of *Quandry*, by Lee Hoffman, burst with articles, columns and faan fiction by the world's best fanzine writers. When *Quandry* faltered, Joel Nydahl picked up the thread with **Vega** for another year.

Sixth Transition stretched from the end of **Vega** in 1953 to the start of **Fanac** in 1957. The boom in digest science fiction magazines in the early 1950s swung the pendulum back toward Sercon, with concomitant increase in the desire to become a pro author, editor or artist or carve out a living in the science fiction world.

Seventh Fandom is marked by a rebirth of fan consciousness. Sercon interest remained, but most fanzine fans subordinated it to fandom-based material. The Southgate in Fifty-Eight campaign may have inspired the birth of this consensus, just as the 1962 Willis Fund represented its climactic achievement.

Ron Ellik and Terry Carr edited the widely proclaimed "indispensable" newszine **Fanac**. Its lively, personalized and timely reports of fannish doings united the core of active fanzine fandom as nothing else had.

Seventh Transition ended fanzines' dominance of All Known Fandom. The Burroughs, Tolkein and *Star Trek* fans swelled fandom's population, but thinned the fannishness. Few of these newcomers had interests beyond the sercon material that brought them to fandom in the first place.

Virtually all leading Seventh Fandom fanzines folded or drastically reduced frequency between Fall 1962 and the Discon in fall 1963. And just when a consensus might have re-emerged, possibly around **Lighthouse** or **Shangri-L'Affaires**, the Breen Boondoggle staggered fanzine fandom.

The relatively controlled environment of apas took precedence over genzines. Boondoggle survivors retreated into the apas to avoid unpleasant contact with survivors from the other side, and to duck echoes of the controversy itself.

Eighth Fandom, from 1967 to mid-1969, coalesced around the degafiated Dick Geis. He poured tremendous energy into **Psychotic**, which he soon changed to **Science Fiction Review**. He pulled in the less experienced, mostly Sercon fans, with lots of pro contributors -- and kept them with hammer-and-tongs debates.

Although **Lighthouse**, **Quip** and **Warhoon** kept fannishness alive, Eighth Fandom's consensus raised professional authors to the pinnacle of prestige. The ferment in the SF field, caused primarily by the New Wave, consumed much higher percentage of fanzine pages than at any time in the previous decade.

Eighth Transition was a reaction against the over-commercialism and pro-centered fandom that built up around **SFR**. Discussionzines expanded their horizons to non-SF topics and fannishness re-asserted its historic claims on actifans.

The Eighth Transition developed when **SFR** began losing the support of active fanzine fans (while it kept the interest of fringe fanzine fans and those primarily interested in contact with pros)

Ninth Fandom (mid-1969-fall 1971), with

Focal Point at its core, saw Trufannishness and Insurgentism step back into the limelight. The Bob Shaw Fund gave active fandom a shared projects -- and a pretext for a series of special fanzines that revived the spirit of Sixth and Seventh Fandoms.

Ninth Transition still had its fannish element, but the demise of **Focal Point** as a biweekly newszine (it continued as a fannish monthly) left it without a focal point fanzine.

Improved methods of fanzine production, including electronic stenciling and the extensive use of cheap offset, nurtured Commercialism. It made the jump from fanzine to prozine seem much easier. Non-fan, underground publications gave many the hope that they could grow a fanzine into a profitable newsstand publication.

The Ninth Transition lasted until the late 1970s.

Tenth Fandom covered the early 1980s, Once fanzine fandom adjusted to its reduced circumstances within All Known Fandom, unabashedly fannish fanzines like **Pong** (Ted White and Dan Steffan) and **Izzard** (Patrick and Teresa Nielsen-Hayden) became the leading titles.

Tenth Transition was the battleground for the interlocking series of feuds known as Topic A/TAFF Wars/Bergeron Wars. The feuding within fanzine fandom became so brutal that it crowded out just about everything else from 1983 to 1989.

Eleventh Fandom showed fandom rousing itself from Tenth Transition lethargy. Willis and Harris made visits to the US, Andy Hooper started the well-conceived **Spent Brass** and then I returned to activity with **Folly**.

Eleventh Fandom which ran to the end of 1992, was a conscious effort to reinvigorate fanzine fandom with the ideals and attitudes of Sixth, and to a lesser extent, Seventh Fandoms. Insurgentism had boiled over dangerously in the 1980s, yet Eleventh Fandomites had no desire to return to the safe waters of science fiction discussion.

Eleventh Transition (Fall 1993-Spring 1994) showed fanzine fandom catching its breath. The frequency of **Spent Brass** dropped and **Folly** ceased publication after its 18th issue. Without a rallying point, fandom drifted amid growing discontent with the

"nicey--nice" atmosphere that held sway in **Folly**.

Twelfth Fandom, Spring 1994-spring 1996, rekindled interest in the Insurgent philosophy while also fostering Communicationism. Assured of continuation (at least for the foreseeable future) fans felt freer to talk about standards of quality and ethics, even at the expense of harmony.

Apparatchik took the central position in fanzine fandom during Twelfth Fandom. It became the one "must have" zine, and opinions expressed in its pages became grist for discussions in other zines, on line and at fanzine fan clubs.

After a hiatus of some years, new fanzine fans made themselves known during Twelfth Fandom. The concern with personal experience and experiences that originated outside the boundary of fandom made it possible for neophytes to forge a connection with fanzine fandom even while they studied its more esoteric ways.

To go further would be to leave the province of history for current events. I'm sure there are flaws in the details, but it seems to me that the Theory of Number Fandoms *does* aptly describe the ebb and flow of fanzine fanac over the last 66 years.

Let's kick it around.