Conomastics: The Naming of Science Fiction Conventions

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Conomastics: onomastics of cons
Conomastics: onomastics of cons

Say what?
Conventions of fans of sf & related interests
Cons

Conventions of fans of sf & related interests

- in the sense of
  “more-or-less organized gatherings”
- not
  “literary tropes” or “accepted norms”
- periodic, irregular, or one-off
- stationary or travelling
Cons

(This “recycled-paper” background marks slides that I decided to skip during the presentation, generally because they contain more detail than would fit well in the flow and the time.)

Periodicity

- Typically annual; some are more frequent, some irregular, and some are one-shots
- Some one-shots develop into ongoing cons

Organization and goals

- Typically non-profit, run by groups of fans with some continuity for the purpose of sharing and encouraging their shared interest
- Some cons are for-profit, very commercial
- This study concentrates on the first kind
Conventions of fans of sf & related interests

including

- “hard” science fiction
- fantasy
- alternate history
- and many other subgenres that are more useful to marketers than to fans
- sf: “speculative fiction”
Cons

Conventions of fans of sf & related interests

- media: movies & TV, including non-sf
- animation
- music
- gaming
- graphic fiction
- horror
- furry
- ...

Mark A. Mandel, *Conomastics*. American Name Society, Baltimore, Jan. 7-9, 2010
Focus of con

- General sf
- Media
- Anime/manga
- Gaming
- Filk
- Costuming
- Fanzines
- Art
- Fantasy

- Horror
- Furry
- Symposia
- Con-running
- Relaxacon
- Medieval/Renaissance
- ...
Cons

Conventions of fans of sf & related interests

- readers
- moviegoers
- TV viewers
- gamers (live action role playing [LARP], video, board, cards...)
- con organizers
- academics
- ...

Mark A. Mandel, *Conomastics*. American Name Society, Baltimore, Jan. 7-9, 2010
Basic names: theme and variations
Typical toponymic

Toponym + “convention” or synonym

◆ Chicon (Chicago)
◆ Nolacon (New Orleans, LA)
◆ NorWesCon (Portland, Oregon)
◆ Sydcon (Sydney, Australia)
◆ Finncon (Helsinki, Finland)
◆ Denvention (Denver) (convention)
◆ Rusfurence (Russia) (conference, furry)
◆ Disclave (Washington, D.C.) (conclave)
Variant toponymic

Toponym → nickname or allusion to city or state

- **Magicon** (Orlando, Fla.: Disney Magic Kingdom)
- **MileHiCon** (Denver, the Mile High City)
- **LoneStarCon** (Texas, the Lone Star State)
- **SwanCon** (Perth, Western Australia: black swan)
- **SpoCon** (Spokane, Wash.)
Variant toponymic

Toponym → nickname or allusion to institution or other characteristic

- **Aggiecon** (Texas A&M, home of the Aggies)
- **Bubonicon** (Albuquerque: bubonic plague)
- **Iguanacon** (Phoenix, Ariz.)
- **Conestoga** (Tulsa, Oklahoma: settlers’ wagons) *(portmanteau)*
- **Vericon** (Harvard Univ.: motto “Veritas”)*
Puns with “con”

... and nothing else in particular

- Con*Cept
- ConClave
- ConDOR
- CONdui
- Conucopia
- CONvergence
- Conspiracy
Puns with “con” and...

...PLACE

- SpoCon (Spokane, Wash.)
- ConJosé (San José, Calif.)
Puns with “con” and...

...TIME

- **Hal-Con** (Saitama-shi, Saitama-ken, Japan)
  - “Hal” → *haru* = はる ‘springtime’ (+ こん *kon*)
  - HAL-9000 from “2001: A Space Odyssey”

- **LepreCon** (St. Patrick’s Day)

- **Millennium Philcon**
  - Philadelphia, 2001 WorldCon
  - *Millennium Falcon*, Han Solo’s ship in Star Wars
Names referring to the con’s theme
Themes

Filk music:
the folk music of sf fandom
Theme: Filk

USA

- **Consonance** (Milpitas, Calif.)
- **Conchord** (Woodland Hills, Calif.)
- **GAFilk** (Georgia, *this weekend!* 😒)
- **Conflikt** (Seattle) (anagram of “filk”)
- **The Floating Northeast Filk Convention** (NEFilk: “any filk”):
  - **ConCerto** New Jersey suburbs of Philadelphia
  - **ConCertino** Massachusetts
  - **Contata** New York City area
  - **Conterpoint** Baltimore / D.C. area
- **FilkCamp** (Muncie, Ind.)
- **Ohio Valley Filk Fest** (Columbus, OH)
  (Names in red are musical terms or variations on them.)
  *(Data from Interfilk and NEFilk)*
Theme: Filk

Outside US

- British Filk Con (traveling)
- FilKONtario (Mississauga, Ont., Canada) (KON)
- Das Frühlingsfest der Filksmusik (Bad Salzdetfurth, Germany) (German folk music gathering, Das Frühlingsfest der Volksmusik)
- HarmUni (Cambridge, England) (harmony, university)
- Filk Continental (Kirchen-Freusberg, Germany)

(Data from Interfilk)
Theme: Filk

The UK annual filk conventions

Contabile  
cantabile
Con2bile  
Contabile 2
treble clef
Treble  
e.g., treble clef
FourPlay  
play
Pentatonic
V1braphone  
VI
Transept  
sept
Obliter-8  
8; filk song
  “Falling Down on Milton Keynes” [location]
HarmonIX  
IX, harmonics
Decadence  
dec-, cadence
XIlophone  
XI, xylophone

Digeri-Douze  
didgeridoo, douze
cantabile
Conthirteena  
concertina, thirteen
Contabile Fortean  
Contabile 14
Quinze Filk Festival  
Cannes
  Film, quinze
16 Tones  
“Sixteen Tons”
Dixseption  
dix-sept
1812Tone  
18, 12-tone
D'Zenove Convention  
Geneva
  Conv., dezenove (Braz.Port.)
2t0nic  
20, tonic,
  Teutonic (w.r.t. a German guest)
aXXIdental  
XXI, # and ♭
Van der Filk  
vingt-deux,
  Vander Valk
Themes

Anime:
Japanese animation
(fandom overlaps heavily with...)

Manga:
Japanese comics
Theme: Anime

"Anime" + location

- Anime Los Angeles
- Anime Weekend Atlanta
- Anime St. Louis (now Kawa Kon)
- Anime Boston
- Anime Festival Wichita
- Anime Detroit
- AnimeIowa [sic]

(Data and analysis from Petréa Mitchell)
Theme: Anime

Japanese word, often relating to anime

- **Otakuthon** (otaku [as Eng. loan] = obsessive anime/manga fan + marathon)
- **Kumoricon** (cloudy), Portland, OR
- **Naka-Kon** (middle/heart), Kansas City, KS
- **Tekkoshocon** (steel industry), Pittsburgh
- **Tora-Con** (tiger), RIT (mascot: tiger)
- **Sakura-Con** (cherry blossom) (springtime)

*(Most data and analysis from Petréa Mitchell)*
Theme: Anime

Japanese-English pun

- **Ohayocon** (good morning), Columbus, Ohio
- **Nan Desu Kan** (nan desu ka=‘what is it?’), Denver
- **Daikon** (radish; big con) Japanese national con, held in Osaka 大阪, whose first character 大, meaning ‘big’, can also be pronounced *dai*, as in 大根 *daikon*, which refers to a popular type of Japanese radish but can also be understood as ‘big con’ or ‘Osaka-con’
Theme: specific focus

- Readercon (printed text sf)
- MaulCon (gaming; held at a mall)
- Browncoat Ball (Firefly TV series)
- Festival of Fantastic Films
- Darkover (Marian Zimmer Bradley’s Darkover novels)
- FurcoNZ (furry con in New Zealand)
- Necronomicon (roleplaying, originally focusing on horror and psychological darkness)
Cons focusing on subpopulations of the sf community
Subpopulation cons

◆ Gaylaxicon: *(gay, galaxy)*
  “gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, transgendered people and their friends”

◆ Sirens: *(Greek mythology)*
  “Inspired by the daring adventures of women characters and compelled by the brilliant works of women authors, Sirens is a conference dedicated to women in fantasy literature.”

◆ Smofcon: *(acronym “smof”)*
  “Secret Masters Of Fandom Convention. We are the people behind the scenes at your local Science Fiction conventions. ... It is where we gather to exchange our insights into what has happened during the previous year, at both the local level and at the most recently held meeting of the World Science Fiction Society (also known as Worldcon).”
Language in conomastics
No “cons” in French!

- Ad Astra  Toronto, ON
- Anticipation  Montreal, QC
- CanGames  Ottawa, ON
- Canvention  various
- ConAdian  Winnipeg, MB
- Con-Version Calgary, AB
- Draconis  Montreal, QC
- FanExpo Canada
- Gatecon  Vancouver, BC
- Hal-Con  Halifax, NS
- Otakuthon  Montreal, QC
- Polaris  Toronto, ON
- SFContario  Toronto, ON
- Torcon  Toronto, ON
- VCON  Surrey, BC

That’s what the Anticipation folks told me. Then I found
- Con*Cept  Montreal, ON *

Who knew? [see Notes]
The 2009 WorldCon, held in Montreal, was called “Anticipation”, which in English and French means looking forward to the future, but in French also refers to literature looking forward to the future:

*un roman d’anticipation = a science fiction novel*
Those UK filkers again

The UK filk cons portmanteau numbers into their names, often reaching to other languages:

- **Transept**  *French*
- **Decadence**  *Greek, Latin*
- **Digeri-Douze**  *French*
- **Quinze Filk Festival**  *French*
- **Dixseption**  *French*
- **D'Zenove Convention**  *Braz. Portuguese*
- **Van der Filk** (vingt-deux)  *French*
The Klingon Language Institute has its yearly *qep’a’* (‘big meeting’) and also helps members arrange local *qepHom* (‘little meeting(s)’).
Seriation: distinguishing this year’s con from last year’s
Seriation

◆ 1, 2, 3, ... or I, II, III...
  ● Not necessarily in sequential years, esp. with traveling cons:
    □ Loncon I (1957 Worldcon)
    □ Loncon II (1965 Worldcon)
  ● Not always consistent:
    □ Aussiecon One, Two, Three, 4

◆ Year number
  ● Nippon2007
  ● Millennium Philcon (held in 2001)
Seriation

Silicon and its successors

Society for Interactive Literature (SIL; now called LARPA):

- Silicon I, II, 2.5, III, 3.5, IV, V, VI.

Continued as

- Intercon VII, 7.5, VIII, IX, 9.5, IX, 10.5, ...
- XV, 15.5, A, B, C, ... J (in 2010)
Seriation

Sequential themes

Con*Stellation (aka Con†Stellation) uses Roman numerals, mostly: I, II, II.V, III... Each con is subtitled with the name of a constellation:

- 2009: Con*Stellation XXVIII: Vulpecula
- 2008: Con*Stellation XXVII: Cassiopeia
- 2007: Con*Stellation XXVI: Ophiuchus

For the second Con*Stellation, Gemini (astronomical symbol: ♊) was the obvious choice.

(Not to be confused with the 1983 Worldcon, also known as ConStellation, held in Baltimore.) ...which brings us to...
Polysemy

Unrelated cons with the same or similar names

*include*...

- iICON İstanbul
  - possibly for the dotted capital “İ” of İstanbul
- Icon Coralville, Iowa
- I-CON Stony Brook, Long Island, NY
- ICON festival Tel Aviv, Israel

- Sydcon Sydney, Australia
- Sydcon Malmö, in the south (syd) of Sweden
◆ When Boskone (itself a pun on *Boscon), left Boston for a few years, the gap was filled by Arisia.

◆ The Washington, DC area con Disclave (for District of Columbia and possibly also for Dante’s City of Dis) spawned a couple of relaxacons called Datclave.
Miscellany

A few bits too good to leave out

◆ The Second Occasional LoneStarCon Science Fiction Convention & Chili Cook-off
◆ The Wrath of Con (Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan)
Sources

◆ **Specific sources not listed here:**
  - The home pages of many, many cons.
  - Personal communications with numerous individuals.

◆ North American Science Fiction Association (NESFA).

◆ **Picofarad** ("The zine of little capacity").
  - Sf-oriented fanzine by Petréa Mitchell. Print and online (http://www.bidalaka.com/picofarad/index.html)

◆ Wikipedia includes a number of lists of cons, with links, including:
  - List_of_anime_conventions
  - List_of_multigenre_conventions
  - List_of_science_fiction_conventions

and many more, to be listed in the paper