

Active Audiences, Fans, and Participatory Culture

Reciprocal Communication and Creativity

Dr. Maria Fleischhack (Halle), Jonathan A. Rose (Passau)

Notions of collective creatorship were superseded only from the 18th century onward by the idea of single authorship, which then became the dominant discourse, especially in terms of copyright and ownership of a text.¹ Today, the line between author and audience is blurred by the fact that active consumers have become producers in their own right: their consumption is followed by the production of, for example, commentary, fiction or art, making them ‘prosumers’.² The opportunities of the Internet and social media allow creators and consumers to share a closer, more immediate and more visible relationship than ever before, in which reciprocity constitutes an important element as both the basis for social interaction and in terms of (perceived) moral obligations.³

Textual boundaries have thus become fluid and the concept of ownership extended. For example, after female protesters used the handmaiden’s uniforms as shown on the TV adaptation of Margaret Atwood’s novel *The Handmaid’s Tale* at women’s marches and frequently referred to the show on placards criticising patriarchal structures, Atwood was in turn inspired to write a sequel to the literary source text. As she herself states, such movements between different creative processes are “an example of a work escaping from its name – its box – and coming alive through the imaginations of its readers” to “[take on] a life of its own that is not under the control of its first creator [...] and its other creators (the makers of the show)”.⁴ Creator-consumer relationships are complex and prone to misunderstandings and transgressions, not least of all because of differing understanding of the reciprocity involved. The recently aired final season of fan favourite *Game of Thrones*, for example, resulted in the creation of an online petition to “[r]emake Game of Thrones season 8 with competent writers”⁵, which has gathered more than 1.5 million signatures within a month.

At the same time, more and more producers come to their creation as fans of prior texts, which they then adapt, e.g. Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat as self-declared *Sherlock Holmes* and *Doctor Who* fans or J.J. Abrams as a *Star Trek* fan. Looking at fan-creator relationships, fan reactions on social media and fan productions, such as fan fiction or fan art, the affective quality of this type of creativity and communication becomes apparent. Furthermore, fans have

¹ Bohnenkamp, Anne. “Autorschaft und Textgenese.” Heinrich Detering (ed.). *Autorschaft: Positionen Und Revisionen*. Metzler, 2002. pp. 62-79.

² Toffler, Alvin. *The Third Wave*. William Morrow, 1980. See e.g. p. 27 where ‘prosumer’ economics are introduced as “heal[ing] the historic breach between producer and consumer”.

³ See e.g. Becker, Lawrence C. *Reciprocity*. UCP, 1986; Scott, Suzanne. “Repackaging Fan Culture: The Regifting Economy of Ancillary Content Models.” *Transformative Works and Cultures*, vol. 3, 2009, <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2009.0150>; Turk, Tisha. “Fan Work: Labor, Worth, and Participation in Fandom’s Gift Economy.” *Transformative Works and Cultures*, vol. 15, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2014.0518>; and Veale, Kylie. “Internet gift economies: Voluntary payment schemes as tangible reciprocity.” *First Monday*, 2003, <https://journals.uic.edu/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/1101/1021>.

⁴ Salvi, Pooja. “Margaret Atwood says ‘The Handmaid’s Tale’ is no longer her own, has taken a ‘life of its own,’” MEA WorldWide. May 29, 2019.

<https://meaww.com/the-handmaids-tale-author-margaret-atwood-dystopia-american-reality-womanhood-life-own>

⁵ See <https://www.change.org/p/hbo-remake-game-of-thrones-season-8-with-competent-writers>.

become an integral part of marketing media as their creative practices provide free exposure and they are often loyal customers of any and all content connected to their interest.

This panel seeks to explore the many ways in which participatory culture and reciprocity influence cultural production and consumption. Creator-consumer relationships can be examined in a variety of media and throughout history – audience participation in early modern theatrical spectacle or Conan Doyle’s flippant comment regarding William Gillette’s enquiry about writing a play on Holmes: “You may marry him, murder him, or do anything you like to him”⁶ can be added to the above-mentioned, more recent examples.

Approaching texts with a focus on the creator-consumer relationship allows for interdisciplinary enquiries drawing on research from literary and media studies as well as affect studies, critical race theory, gender studies, digital humanities and others. This section therefore also aims to bring together research from a broad range of fields as well as open up media, audience and fan studies research and debates to other areas such as postcolonial studies or corpus linguistics.

Potential topics to be addressed in this panel include but are not limited to:

- authorship in the 21st century
- collective authorship/creatorship
- the active reader/reader-response theory
- historical perspectives on participatory cultures and memory culture
- participatory cultures and their intersections with e.g. gender, race, economy
- participation and affect studies
- prosumer culture
- gift economy and viral marketing
- celebrity culture and power relations
- participatory culture, fan communication and social media (Twitter etc.)
- transformative fan practices
- digital literacy and digital humanities
- literature and new media
- participation in English language teaching
- fandom, political participation and protest
- book clubs, reading groups and fan conventions

Please send your proposals of 300 words and a short biographical note to Maria Fleischhack (maria.fleischhack@anglistik.uni-halle.de) and Jonathan Rose (jonathan.rose@uni-passau.de).

Please include “Proposal: Active Audiences, Fans, and Participatory Culture__your name” in the subject line.

The deadline for submission is 15 January 2020.

⁶ Conan Doyle, Arthur. *Memories and Adventures*. Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 97.