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Editorial Introduction

The publication of this issue is important to the editors of *Participations* for more than its specific contents. The main part of the issue comprises a special issue of work deriving from the 2007 Conference associated with the Birmingham, UK, 'Beyond The Book' project. Up until now, with a few valuable exceptions, the work which this Journal has been able to publish has come overwhelmingly from those fields of cultural practice in which cultural studies-influenced audience research has particularly taken root. Centred around what can be broadly called 'mass/popular media', and heavily interested in how the media are integrated into the everyday lives of its audiences, consumers, or users, this turn to audience research has been much brokered by the distinctive phases of cultural studies' history: the revived interest in 'ideology', and in the close examination of cultural forms and practices embodying it (thence, 'power' as a key concept); the revaluations of the 'popular', and the debates about resistance, cultural formations and communities, and identities (with theorisations of the 'everyday' at their heart). Complicated by special areas of interest and method, such as the rise of fan studies, and the growth of reception studies, this tradition has always known that a lot of its concerns, and indeed its audiences, struggle for respectability.

Reader-research is different. While particular studies (and of course most famously Janice Radway's *Reading The Romance*) have faced up to the challenge of the dismissed 'popular/formulaic', by and large, books come with a cachet. This is one of the reasons why close attention to practices of reading has been quite slow to develop – although, in another direction, histories of reading are quite substantially developed. When the study of reading did grow, its roots and routes were decidedly different. Strongly influenced by hermeneutic traditions, and by the American uptake (via Stanley Fish) of European reception theory, what reader research has *struggled against* is simply very different. In recent years, the growth of a very particular tradition of studying reading groups is perhaps the equivalent for reader research of fan studies for audience research.

Yet as a Journal our sense is that the two traditions really need to talk more with each other. A sharing of questions, theories, concepts and methods is what we are looking for. In opening the pages of *Participations* to the organisers and participants in *Beyond The Book*, we are hoping to stimulate just such dialogue. The potentials for overlap, apart from anything else, are immense. Imagine future research projects using the methods and insights of reading group research to look at cinephile organisations – or amateur theatre groups. Imagine, conversely, the study of reading practices conceived within theorisations of everyday life. Then, imagine the potential of projects exploring back and

forth between books, television and films for the ways in which different versions of pervasive cultural forms carry, for different audiences, the 'charge' of the status of these different media, and the different practices of attention, participation and evaluation associated with each. Of such stuff are dreams and applications made!

We are therefore very pleased to be publishing these six essays, both their individual value, and for the chance to explore the ways in which they are both like and unlike most work we have so far published. My personal thanks both to the organisers of *Beyond The Book* for agreeing to work with us on this, and in particular to Dru Pagliasotti for taking on, and discharging brilliantly, the role of Guest Editor for this [Special Issue](#).

Also in this issue we publish three essays which are outside the Special Issue. This does not diminish them at all. One of the great virtues we have seen for publishing online is the flexibility we attain to devote as much space as we can, to whatever has completed our editorial processes. And in this case it is in our view a positive advantage to have work from such different background domains published together. Ideally, it will support and encourage eclecticism and experimentation among our readers. So, alongside the six essays which Dru outlines in her Introduction, we also carry three other essays. [Barbara Klinger](#) explores the ways in which audiences adopt quotes, lines and sayings by use of which they are able to perform (in particular masculine) public identities. [Yiu Fai Chow](#) and [Jeroen de Kloet](#) compare the reception of two local pop stars, Hong Kong's Leon Lai and the Dutch Marco Borsato, comparing the grounds and implications of their stardom. And [Joost de Bruin](#) explores young audiences' engagement with the contemporary Dutch television soap opera *Good Times Bad Times*, looking at the ways in which ethnicity, religion, gender, and age interweave to shape three distinctive 'performative styles' in responses to lesbian storylines with the series, so that a response to the programme becomes a means of demonstrating wider attitudes and orientations to the world.

The range of kinds of work thus carried in this issue really does exemplify the richness of the audience and reception, and now reader fields, that we hope to continue to support and promulgate through this Journal.

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