

Editorial Introduction

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This editorial introduction comes from the midst of COVID-19, aka the corona-virus, a global pandemic that is affecting the health of people across the world and impacting heavily on academic work. We hope our readers are safe and healthy.

All of the content in this issue of *Participations* predates the COVID-19 outbreak, and it needs to be read in that context. That said, when preparing this introduction more than a few elements of this issue seem to invite reading against the background of the ‘new normal’ that is emerging around us.

Katty Alhayek examines a particularly vulnerable and fluid form of television viewing by focusing on Syrian refugees as a cohort of audiences whose existence (and labeling) as ‘displaced’ forces and/or allows them a type of participation into the reception of television texts that stands apart from what is the norm. Ella Lillqvist investigates an activist fan community that identifies as (or is identified as) part of the Nerdfighter ‘phenomenon’: a crossover between online fandom, collaborative charity and awareness raising for charity events. It is difficult not to see parallels between COVID-19 actions of support for frontline workers, past examinations of activist-related fan groupings such as the Harry Potter Alliance (documented by Seth Soulstein and Henry Jenkins), and Lillqvist’s exploration of Nerdfighteria. Also focusing on forms of fandom, Laura Antola explores transnational adaptations of Marvel comics, in particular the discourse around translations in the letter pages of Finnish comic books. Neelam Sharma analyzes fiction ‘narrative building’ by studying readership and audiences in India. Using the stimulus text ‘Suhaginey’ (*Married women*), this article offers an innovation to reader-response theories through a mental models-approach to reading. Erin Sullivan’s article on audience experiences of streamed theatre presents insights into how live broadcasts (of the London Globe’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, in this case) offer opportunities and challenges to conceptualizations of liveness, as it weaves together the terms of ‘aesthetics’ and ‘attention’. The terms ‘displaced’, ‘imagined’, ‘streamed’ and ‘modeling’ ring loudly given today’s context. They will no doubt only become more important as time passes, and as new theoretical constellations of audiences become visible.

This issue's Themed Section, edited by Judith E. Rosenbaum and Gwen Bouvier, is devoted to 'Twitter, Social Movements and the Logic of Connective Action: Activism in the 21st Century'. This section is particularly concerned with the study of both activism and citizen engagement (and their entanglement) on the world's dominant 'discussion' platform, Twitter. Bouvier and Rosenbaum concentrate on the concept of the logic of connective action (borrowed from Bennett & Segerberg), to put forward insights into how individual users, and small and not-so-small groupings of users, of Twitter coalesce around collaborations and alliances that strive to engender change, with a specific interest for how individual stories are melded (or not) into larger narratives. At the same time, they point out how current forms of Twitter activism can be problematic as well. The issues covered range considerably, from Alexandra Reynolds' research into the use of Twitter in museum activism, via Lorenza Parisi, Francesca Comunello, and Andrea Amico's examination of the nature of digital volunteering during the 2013 Sardinian floods, to Diana Zulli's criticism of uses of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter and the challenges and opportunities it presents to theories of media uses, audiences and receptions. Heather Walker's essay on "#CripTheVote and its use by activists during the 2016 presidential election", stresses the issue of engagement.

The very term 'engagement', and its peculiar theoretical (perhaps pre-theoretical) presences in the study of audiences and receptions, will form the focus of a special section of *Participations* in the near future. As Martin Barker and Sue Turnbull's Call for Proposals on the topic in this issue outlines, the employment of the term 'engagement' has become a source of debate, and its frequently unproblematic adoption in a variety of types of studies, from advertising research to online activism to cult viewing experiences, requires scrutiny. Engagement, as the CFP for a Themed Section of *Participations* in May 2021 (with spillovers in subsequent issues, if and as necessary), points out, may well be one of the defining words of the field this journal seeks to, well, engage with.

Engagement is also a term along an axis of types of (or lacks of) control, by audiences, or over audiences, and as such it relates to the policing of audiences. This brings us to censorship. *Participations* is happy to help announce and give visibility to the *Screening Censorship Conference*, planned for October 2020 in Ghent, Belgium. Its Call for Papers is circulating on most email lists and briefings, and particulars, including its line-up of guest speakers including Linda Williams, Richard Maltby, Manuel Mozos and Rachel Talalay, can be checked here: <http://censorship-symposium.org> Organized in collaboration with the International Film Fest Ghent (one of Variety's Top-50 must-attend festivals), it will feature panels on the relationship between censorship and film audiences, and will screen collections of 'cuts' from various countries, as well as an original cut of beleaguered cult classic *Tank Girl*. Hard, strict institutional censorship often came alongside implied or 'suggested' forms of soft censorship, including, importantly, the self-censorship or audiences disciplined into particular viewership positions. Today, soft and hard censorship co-exist in even more fluid forms. The acts of banning, regulating, trimming, and tailoring films for 'harmless' consumption, by bureaucracies, pressure groups and activists, are

frequently embedded within wider debates about media use. Studying disciplined audiences, self-disciplined, by corporate stipulation, or by rule of by-law, then, is important.

In conclusion, if now more than before is a time to read, in isolation or across media and technologies, let me speak for myself, and highlight three items: Richard Sennett's sociological study *Together* (and its now eerie section on making 'sociable masks') seems worth a new look, given its focus on cooperation in a world made up of self-interests; and the attention to activities (or non-activities, but even then still pretty active non-activities) of waiting, routine-action, and daydreaming that Billy Ehn and Orvar Löfgren present in *The Secret World of Doing Nothing* has acquired a heightened... where-was-I, -oh-yes... relevance. The last item, of course, is issue 17.1 of *Participations*. Enjoy and Engage.