

## **Editor's Introduction**

Sue Turnbull

*University of Wollongong, Australia*

This issue of *Participations* will be the last to which Professor Martin Barker will contribute.

Sadly, Martin has had to step down from his editorial role as a result of ill-health. Despite this, he has as been as 'hands-on' as he could manage for this issue, formatting the articles ready for publication, a task he said he could do 'in his sleep', until he couldn't. As Joint Editor, I therefore took over the responsibility of putting this issue together and would like to thank Martin, the *Participations* Executive Board, Ernest Mathjis, Celia Lam and Renee Middlemost for their support in doing so. I'd also like to thank our theme editors, Maya Nedyalkova and Daniela Treveri Gennari for managing to meet our deadlines in such a timely way and for providing such a fascinating collection of articles and interviews in part two of their section dealing with *International Film Audiences: Industrial and Academic Perspectives*. I'd also like to thank Rhys Fowler who has been the indefatigable worker behind the scenes who has managed the upload of all the *Participations* content over the years even when he had left academia.

But most of all, I'd like to thank and acknowledge Martin who founded the journal in 2003 and who has provided the energy and the enthusiasm that have brought so many of us together in the only (we still believe) academic, peer-reviewed journal dedicated to audience and reception studies. In seeking to pay tribute to Martin's considerable contribution to the field, I'd like to quote from the editorial introduction to the first issue which is well worth re-visiting to reminds us of what that vision originally was:

We believe audience and reception studies matter and we are prepared to make a fuss about it, up to the choice of the title. We claim they matter a lot to whoever is in media studies, whoever is involved in media policy, in media economics, sociology, psychology, basically to anyone who has any interest in fields of cultural inquiry. They matter because they give room to a basic sense of wonder about the relationships between media and publics. And of course it isn't just a question of the traditional mass media. New digital interactive media. Live events, and performances. Cultural sites and institutions. From naive gaze to jaded glance, senses of wonder have been the start of most (if not all) audience and reception research. It is our aim that *Participations* can give space to academic expressions of that sense of wonder.

As Martin asserted, *Participations* was intended to be a meeting place for anyone interested in the history and the practice of audience research, he wanted the journal to be cross-disciplinary, diverse, and inclusive – and so it has become. While that first issue might only have contained three articles and two book reviews, subsequent issues such as the May issue in 2021 contained 8 articles and three sizeable theme sections as well as two book reviews. Compared with most other academic journals, *Participations* has continued to expand and grow in strength.

Over the last nineteen years, what is indeed wondrous is just how heroically Martin has maintained that sense of wonder. For those of us who have met Martin and worked with him, this will come as no surprise. Martin's enthusiasm when faced with the challenge of an audience study remains undeterred. He lives and breathes audience research and is never more excited than when he encounters a new idea or approach.

In order to recognise Martin's contribution more effectively than I am able in this brief introduction, Feona Attwood and Clarissa Smith are putting together a special issue of *Participations* (19.3) dedicated to Martin for publication later this year. As I write this, the general papers and theme section for Issue 19.2 are already in train and a new editorial board is potentially waiting in the wings, with Bridgette Wessels, Daniela Treveri Gennari and Elizabeth Evans taking on the roles of co-Editors in Chief. The future of *Participations* is looking good. In the meantime, I shall continue as Acting Editor and would like to reaffirm our commitment to ensuring that we remain the first port of call for audience research that continues to inspire a sense of wonder. Please continue to spread the word.

In this issue, as well as the theme section on Transnational Film Audiences that combines academic and industrial perspectives, we have five general papers that effectively demonstrate the breadth and reach of *Participations'* concern with audiences. From researching transnational audiences for screen content in an era characterised by access to multiple streaming platforms including Netflix and YouTube, to the value of books as souvenirs to their consumers.

First up, Catherin Bengesser, Andrea Esser and Jeanette Steemers explore the complexities of designing a methodology that will enable them to explore how British screen content is received in Europe. Drawing on a pilot study conducted in Denmark in 2020, the authors describe the five research strategies that underpinned their study with a reflection on how these might be modified for the future. Interestingly, the team also invited some of the participants to reflect on the research design and their involvement, which has produced some intriguing insights.

Next, Natalie Ann Hall provides us with a timely reflection on the role of Russia's international broadcaster RT (formerly Russia Today) and its reception in the UK. Clearly this paper was written before the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and will no doubt prompt considerable interest into RT's role in recent months given its stated goal is to 'acquaint...international audiences with a Russian viewpoint on major global events'. As Hall suggests, the network's reporting of issues, such as the annexation of Crimea, have already come under scrutiny for their pro-Russian bias and potential mistruth. However, while prior research has addressed the content circulated by RT, in keeping with *Participations*

commitment to audience and reception studies Hall is particularly interested in how this content is received by users in the UK who appeared to be attracted to the outlet because of its 'outsider' status. The insights provided are surprising and salutary.

Sharmaine Loh and Callum Gilmour are also concerned with the transnational circulation of media content, in this case how the Korean phenomenon of K-pop has been adopted by middle-aged female fans in Malaysia: a cohort who face the added challenge of negotiating their fandom within a restrictive socio-cultural terrain that does not encourage public displays of devotion and affection. As they reveal, the presence of the Korean entertainment industries in Malaysia has escalated over the past decade in parallel with a raft of other cultural practices. What is particularly interesting here is how these older women for the most part frame their relationship with their pop idols in familial terms rather than as romantic attachments. There are many other dimensions to their fan practices including their access (pre-Covid) to international travel which they can easily afford in ways that sets them apart from younger fans.

In keeping with *Participations* interest in audiences for 'live events', Emma Weitkamp, Karen Collins, Milly Farrell and Lucy Askew explore the implications of Covid-19 for theatrical performances. While the live broadcasting of theatre into cinemas would appear to have become part and parcel of theatre practice in the UK, this clearly hasn't happened in a country such as Australia. Nor has the practice of digitally streaming live performances to audiences during the pandemic which is reported here. As the authors argue, the transition to digital opened up a whole new set of possibilities for both the performers and the audience.

Finally in this section, Rachel Noorda explores how books may be received and enjoyed in ways that go beyond a reading of the text. While collecting, gifting, sharing, displaying and decorating are some of the practices with which we may already be familiar, Noorda introduces us to the practice of or purchasing books as souvenirs. Situating her research within the conceptual terrain of tourism studies, Noorda reports on a survey she conducted with 290 readers who had bought a book while travelling. Looking over my shoulder at the book case in my study, I could immediately identify at least two books that confirmed the findings presented here that usefully extend our understanding of people's relationships to the books on their shelves.