

Introduction: Fan and fan studies in transcultural context

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In the year since the second Fan Studies Network Conference in September 2014, from which the essays in this special section of *Participations* have been curated, scholarly attention to transcultural fandoms and fan studies has proliferated in the pages of dedicated fan studies journal issues (Kustriz, 2014; Anderson and Shim, 2015), anthologies (Kuwahara, 2014; Lee, 2014; Marinescu 2014), individual books (Annett, 2014; Brienza, 2015), and essays (Amaral, Souza and Monteiro, 2015; Chambers, 2015; Jin and Yoon, 2014; Kienzl, 2014; Otmazgin and Lyan, 2014; Noppe, 2014; Schules, 2014; Siuda, 2014; Wei, 2014; Zhang and Zhang, 2015). This work, spanning Western and Eastern Europe, East Asia, and South America, as well as a wide range of fan practices and objects, joins a somewhat less cohesive, but nonetheless substantial, body of research into transcultural fandoms whose conception we might locate in Len Ang's (1985) *Watching Dallas*. From her groundbreaking study of Dutch fans and other viewers of the American serialised television drama *Dallas* to the present day, research of transcultural fandoms collectively demonstrates the rich diversity of 'fandom' as a global practice, constituting a potent corrective to the broad tendency within English language fan studies scholarship of approaching 'fans' and 'fandom' from a somewhat normalised Anglo-American perspective. There is little agreement on what precisely constitutes 'transcultural' fandom; as Sandra Annett observes, 'transculturalism... is the cultural dimension of transnationalism... there is often slippage between 'nation' and 'culture'' (2011: 9). We see this as the key strength of the term, enabling its use as a heuristic through which to explore a range of cross-border fan practices ranging from the communal to the global.

Indeed, a substantial amount of research within transcultural fan studies is located at the intersections of national cultures and practices. Particularly given that such scholarship reflects and builds on Ang's early agenda of interrogating alternative reception

contexts of Anglo-American media, this is critical work with the potential to complicate, challenge, and contribute nuance to our understanding of ostensibly familiar media texts and their fandoms. In this special section of *Participations*, this transnational perspective is represented through work by **Simone Driessen**, writing on the Dutch fandom – past and present – of American boy band The Backstreet Boys, and **Eoin Devereaux** and **Melissa Higaldo**, exploring Morrissey fandom within the Latina/o and Chicano/a communities of Los Angeles. Together, these essays expand our understanding of the processes of becoming a fan and sustaining that fandom within the sometimes neglected ‘bonus markets’ of media distribution and marketing. They offer thought-provoking counterpoints to normalised interpretations of familiar popular cultural phenomena and their fans, foregrounding the cultural contexts through which these performers align with fans’ own, more localised popular cultural repertoires in points of affective affinity that exceed producers’ distribution and marketing strategies (Hills, 2002; Chin and Morimoto, 2013).

At the same time, a specifically ‘transnational’ orientation offers us the potential to explore the contours and consequences of overtly nation-centred, geopolitical border-crossing fandoms. In her discussion of what she terms ‘transnational cultural fandom’, Hye-Kyung Lee demonstrates that there are certain avenues of inquiry which benefit from a specific understanding of fandoms in transnational context. As she notes, one strength of the term ‘transnational’ is that it ‘signif[ies] the complexity of cultural globalisation, where culture and media are trafficked in plural directions by multiple agencies’ (2014: 195) including – critically – both culture industries and national governments. Particularly given the rise of effective, if uneven and always changing, (popular) culture-centred soft power initiatives in such countries as South Korea, Japan, and the United Kingdom, this transnational focus aligns with concerns in other areas of fan studies research about the ways fandoms are mobilised to specific corporate and government ends. At the same time, a transnational perspective equally informs our understanding of the specific fan practices produced by the industrial and even legal contexts within which fandoms arise. This is addressed in the third essay of this section through **Nele Noppe**’s comparison of the legal, business, and ethical logics that inform divergent fanwork monetisation practices in the United States and Japan. In her essay, Noppe challenges oft-accepted frameworks of fan/corporate oppositionality, arguing that fan-culturally acceptable fanwork monetisation systems in Japan offer an alternative perspective that highlights the difficulty of generalising Anglo-American fan studies paradigms of fanwork commercialisation.

Given the strong transnational bent of the abovementioned work, what is it that motivates our continuing interest in bringing such research under the broad umbrella of transcultural fan studies? As we have written elsewhere, “while national and transnational historical and socio-political contexts may inform fannish pursuits, this is neither necessarily the case nor the only possible mode of transcultural fan engagement” (Chin and Morimoto, 2013: 93). A strict focus on the trans/national aspects of even geopolitical border-crossing fandoms runs the risk of overshadowing other contexts – popular cultural, racial, sexual,

gender, class, and so on – that inform both a diversity of fan practices globally, as well as diversity within fandoms themselves.

Essays in this section by **Ciarán Ryan** and **Wikanda Promkhuntong** explore the re-imagination of familiar fan practices in less familiar, non-Anglo-American contexts. In so doing, they demonstrate the usefulness of thinking beyond the scope of national borders and belonging to other, more salient, cultural contexts as a means of contributing nuance to more normative ways of thinking about familiar fan practices such as the collection of music fanzines and production of video mash-ups. In his essay on practices of music fanzine collecting in Ireland, Ryan broadens our understanding of the meanings attributed to, and significance of fanzine circulation and curation through discussion of the ways these practices both mirror and deviate from more familiar forms of collecting. Promkhuntong's work on fan-made videos centring on the films of Wong Kar-wai, on the other hand, suggests that the content and comments of the mash-ups are shaped by the discourses of different audience groups and their specific taste cultures. Promkhuntong thus argues that Wong's global reach and popularity among audiences outside of his native Hong Kong belies assumptions of singular transnational or transcultural fandom.

Equally, emphasis on the transcultural enables us to look inward at those fan communities that constitute the bulk of English language fan studies research with an eye to inter-community and inter-fandom¹ (Hills, 2012: 121) diversity as well as disjunctures, and it is here that we locate the most potent strength of a transcultural perspective. Although not typically conceptualised under the aegis of transcultural fan studies, work that asks fan studies researchers to explore non-normative cultural practices, expectations, and experiences within ostensibly familiar fan communities effectively contributes to a project of recognising fans and fandoms as always already transcultural and, as such, generalised at the risk of canonizing certain facets of fandom to the exclusion of others.² In the final essay of this section, **Sophie van de Goor** contributes to this on-going conversation through her work on practices of policing and enforcing a normative 'good' fan within fan communities, challenging fan studies scholars to explore the ways in which 'community' can be a double-edged sword – a site of mutual interest and even support, but equally an oppressive space for those who do not conform to often arbitrary community standards.

While van de Goor's essay does not explicitly deal with the transnational in fandoms, her call for the acknowledgement of cultural diversity within fandoms and her problematisation of notions of 'community' in fan studies research offers us one way to understand transcultural fandom outside of a strictly non-Western context, all-too-easily dismissed and ignored as culturally irrelevant and where language often is a barrier to further exploration. At the same time, recent research into fan practices in the East Asian context, even if they problematically identify fan identities and practices as "deviant" (Williams and Ho, 2015), demonstrate a need to move away from blanket generalisations of what fandom is or isn't, drawing attention to the ways that terms such as 'global fandom' or 'global phenomenon of fandom' in fact carry their own specific social, cultural, and (trans)national complexities.

Such complexities, we hope, are brought forth and discussed in the essays included in this special section, with the intention of extending scholarly discussions of fans and fandoms beyond rigid notions of 'fandom' as homogenous, Anglo-American phenomena. In this way, we hope to further spur and contribute to conversation that seeks to explore how fan studies research might diversify and incorporate other fannish frameworks, even if they involve venturing into unfamiliar research territory.

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Notes:

¹ Hills defines inter-fandom as the 'relationships between different media fandoms, whereby one fan culture defines itself against and negatively stereotypes another' (2012: 121).

² See, for example, Gray, 2003; Sandvoss, 2005; Stanfill, 2011; Jenkins, 2014; Wanzo, 2015.