



## FAN ENGAGEMENT, IDENTITIES, AND REPRESENTATION IN POP CULTURE

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### INTRODUCTION:

Popular culture has always been a challenging topic in academia. Ever since the 1950s, we have turned to look at popular texts (Williams, 2018). Whether those texts are films, songs, or even games, they fulfil a specific function for us - the audiences who consume them. Williams (2018) argues that the notion of popular culture finds its roots in something in which people are involved as a distinct entity, mainly to take distance from what we would call high culture - the niche taste(s) like opera or classical music. Yet, Williams (2018) is critical of that perspective, too: popular culture is something that is produced, and it comes with a sense of novelty.

Building on these characteristics of popular culture, Williams (2018: 907) argues we should not consider it a residual category "for things which have not made the grade as serious culture". This Special Issue, exploring the intersections of pop(ular) culture, Fan Studies and the Creative Industries, shows how we have grown in and when studying popular culture. Not only has it become a serious topic of study, but it is also a topic examined across the globe and in different layers. The contributions in this Special Issue (and the next) attest to this.

This Special Issue explores the vibrant landscape of the Creative Industries, mainly how fans - the most invested consumers and audiences of popular culture - play a role in it. Since Henry Jenkins' (1992) seminal work on fandom, considering them as textual poachers who can derive pleasure from popular texts or reappropriate them to fit their identity, studying fandom helps understand questions and challenges related to audience engagement, representation, or cultural identity.

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Fans are a thriving force in the Creative Industries. Most interesting is not just their avid consumption of cultural products but also their production of them. Fiske (1992) coined fandom as a shadow cultural economy: a community with exchanges, productions, and gifts. An aspect we still see today is Taylor Swift's friendship bracelets - not meant to be sold but created, shared and exchanged by fans amongst themselves. Such activities help us understand what fandom is, how engagement within fandom works, how this might impact identities, and what this also might mean for representation. Appropriation of some aspects of one's objects of fandom might also lead to new creations or discussions. Consider how one can write LGBTQ characters into fan fiction if these narratives are absent in a film, series or game. Or how fandom might help make sense of certain milestones, one passes in life, like using a song to find comfort after the death of a parent or to celebrate life.

Taking the lens of fandom and popular culture also allows for (further) examining the dilution of entertainment, leisure (pleasure even), and the Creative Industries (see Rodríguez-Ferrándiz, 2011) - and discussing if these concepts are still easy to define without letting them interact. And, perhaps most importantly, the focus on pop culture, fandom, and the Creative Industries allows us to discuss the everyday: everyday life and what occupies us in it, what we consider important, or using pop culture at the very least as a toolbox to make sense of the everyday. Think of what kind of discussions Greta Gerwig's *Barbie* (2023) raised, what the impact of K-pop bands like BTS or BLACKPINK might mean to the global music industry, or how we, through BookTok have all been at least become a little curious about the works of Sarah J. Maas or have turned to reading Emily Henry or Colleen Hoover.

This Special Issue also highlights how popular culture, fandom and the creative industries offer a site for studying cultural products from across the world: from a shared passion for Beyonce or BoysLove, to sports fandom or the cancellation of an object-of-fandom. Fandom, in particular, has in addition to that, grown into not only an important aspect of the Creative Industries but also a global phenomenon. While we may argue it has its roots concerning the American Creative Industries, Europe followed soon after with studying fandom: Matt Hills (2002) "Fan Cultures" is an emblematic example of how quickly Fan Studies found ground outside of the USA. This was quickly followed by work from Cornel Sandvoss (2005), who introduced a political and consumer angle to discussing fandom and called fandom a mirror of consumption. Building up on this, Mark Duffett's (2013) *Understanding Fandom* then offered a seminal work on understanding why studying fandom is of relevance in academia.

Much of the work in Europe focused (and focuses) on interpreting and examining cultural products from the US. This ranges from Rebecca Williams' (2011) study of *The West Wing*, to Anne Kustritz (2015) work on transnationalism, localization and translation in fandoms in Europe, or Simone Driessen's (2015) study on American boy band Backstreet Boys in the lives of Dutch fans, to Line Nybro Petersen's (2018)



work on Gilmore Girls, to Bethan Jones (2018) discussing Ghostbusters and Gamergate. Yet, most of these works hold a local twist: they pay attention to features uniquely bound to Europe, like translation or were conducted in the cultural context of a local industry or country.

Interestingly is also how several monographs in local languages appeared over time, for example by Melanie Bourdaa (2022, published in French) and Nicolle Lamerichs (2024, published in Dutch). Europe's influence is also visible beyond Europe: with Carniel's (2019) work on the Eurovision Song Contest's fandom in Australia. By no means is this very brief sketch exhaustive, but it is meant to offer a snapshot of Europe's roots in Fan Studies.

To further offer proof of fandoms as a global phenomenon, we can see how fandom is featured in the creative industries of China, Japan, and South Korea. Wang (2022) writes about K-pop, fandom and nationalism, while Zhang and Negus (2020) publish on East Asian Pop Music Idol production: topics like nationalism, K-pop, and fandom concerning the East Asian Creative Industries are representative for that region of the world. Moreover, in Zhang's (2024) work, we learn about the thirty year history of China's online fandom: another attest to the global scope of our Special Issue's themes. Remarkably, K-pop as a global industry is also studied in relation to countries like Argentina, Chile, Peru, and Brazil (see a.o. Cicchelli et al., 2020 and Yoon and Labarta Garcia, 2024).

Fan Studies, Popular Cultures and Creative Industries research is growing in quantity and quality of publications and diversity of themes. We've received 45 papers from different countries and in three languages: Portuguese, Spanish and English. From these 45 papers, 23 were selected by the reviewers. 12 papers are published on this Special Issue, and 11 will be published on Part 2.

## **1. Production, consumption, and circulation of pop culture in today's Creative Industries**

In this first issue, we've divided the papers into three main aspects: Circulation, The role of fans and Identities and Representation. The first section discusses pop culture's production, consumption, and circulation in today's Creative Industries and features three papers. In the opening section, we presented the Brazilian Portuguese translation of "*Rumo a uma Teoria do Fandom Transcultural*" (Towards a theory of transcultural fandom), a classic paper by Bertha Chin and Lori Morimoto published in 2013.

The impact of this paper has been huge in Fan Studies outside the Anglophone scholarship since it emphasizes "a broad(er) model of transcultural fandom studies that, in shifting focus to the affective affinities that spark fan interest in transcultural fan objects, is intended as a corrective to nation-centred analyses of border-crossing fandoms" (Chin & Morimoto, 2024). For studying fans in the Global South, such as Latin America (Amaral et al., 2024), this paper was an important concept that helped us shift our research to focus on national aspects and behaviours of our fandoms and specific objects.



The next paper in this chapter is "Barbiecore: Um estudo do apelo nostálgico pós Covid-19 e o poder do fã como influenciador da cultura pop internacional" (*Barbiecore: A Study of Post-COVID-19 Nostalgic Appeal and the Power of Fans as Influencers of International Pop Culture*) by Maria Rosa e Josenilde Souza (2024) is a qualitative study where the trend "Barbiecore" is discussed on its impacts on audiences and marketing.

Fan practices around cosplaying (Nunes, 2015; Lamerichs, 2018), costuming fandom (Godwin, 2024), or even dressing with T-shirts of their pop culture objects of affection (Becko & Amaral, 2019) have been appearing in publications such as journals or books. This paper, a new entry on this subject, connects media studies and fan cultures to influencers and fashion studies in the creative economy context.

This section's third and last paper explores the notions of science communication through literary fiction, focusing on the Japanese manga format. "Cultura Pop e Ciência. O potencial do mangá Demonslayer para a divulgação científica" (*Pop Culture and Science. The Potential of Demonslayer manga for scientific dissemination*) written by Leonardo José Costa and Regiane Regina Ribeiro (2024).

This paper points out the narrative potential of the Demon Slayer series as an instrument of science communication. Ever since the Covid-19 pandemic, the connections between pop culture and popularization of science have been a hot subject in media and communication studies, at least in the Brazilian context - Marx et al. (2023) discuss the uses and impact of memes and popular culture references in the dissemination of vaccination campaigns by public health institutions in the country - and have been studied by Oliveira et al (2017), Cardoso & Merli (2022) and Amaral et al. (2023) among others.

## 2. The role of fans in shaping and transforming pop culture

The second section of the Special Issue is about the role of fans in shaping and transforming pop culture (e.g. toxic fandom) in the Creative Industries. It features five papers. The first one, "Fãs de Séries Canceladas: evento fandomico e rompimento do pacto ficcional" (*Fans of Canceled Series: Fandom Events and the Breaking of the Fictional Pact*) is about fans of cancelled TV shows. Authors Clarice Greco and Fabio Levi Quintino dive into TV Studies and Fan Cultures to identify the impact of the cancellation of the series *Anne with an E*, discontinued in 2019, among the fans of an X community (Former X).

The next paper in this section is "Acúmulo de capitais como distinção dentro dos fandoms organizados. Uma busca pela retomada dos conceitos de Bourdieu e Fiske" (*Accumulation of Capitals as Distinction within Organized Fandoms: A Reinterpretation of Bourdieu and Fiske's Concepts*). In this theoretical essay, Enoe Lopes Pontes (2024) explores key questions about fans of fictional media, seeking to understand what makes these individuals central figures within their communities and discussing positions of power inside fan culture. Fannish capital and power are among the debates that the author explores.



The fannish power also features the encounter on pop culture politics (Sá Martino, Marques, 2022) and civic participation. Urbano et al (2021) have discussed the political relations of BTS Army and Trump during his campaign in 2020 as a decolonial approach. Sacoman (2022) has done extensive work on BTS Army and K-Pop Fans and their activism related to *Black Lives Matter* movement in Brazil.

In the paper “#Armyhelpthepantanal e o ativismo do fandom Army no Brasil” (*#Armyhelpthepantanal and The Activism of the Army Fandom in Brazil*), Lais Limonta Gonçalves and Denise Figueiredo Barros do Prado (2024) analyse the behaviour of the ARMY fandom during the ARMY Help The Pantanal fundraiser held in 2020 focusing on environmental activist instead of race issues. Fan activism by BTS Fandom in Brazil was studied on X to trace how the different strategies implemented influence the progress and results of the campaign.

From fan activism, our session goes to toxic fandom practices. Caroline Govari, Eloy Vieira and Rafaela Tabasnik (2024) articulate Fan Studies and the Culture of Cancellation based on a specific case study. The article “Fã ou Hater? Uma aproximação entre os estudos de fãs e a cultura do cancelamento” (*Fan or Hater? An Approach to Fan Studies and Cancel Culture*) proposes a systematic reflection on the Culture of Cancellation itself in the contemporary media landscape. The authors created a timeline to analyse an episode of cancellation carried out by the Brazilian pop-rock singer Pitty, on the social networking site X (formerly Twitter) in December 2023 after internet users interpreted her post as a criticism directed at the singer Beyoncé. They rethink and advance the discussions on the category of anti-fan by Gray (2003) and haters by Monteiro (2013), Gray (2019) and Click (2019).

The last paper of this section, brings us into the world of sports fandom, activism and marketing. Studies on sports fandom are becoming popular in Brazil and Argentina, especially about football, the sport that is more discussed in the media. Works of Vimiero et al. (2023) have analysed different scholarship on sports and gender in Brazil, Sá Martino (2023) studies the connection of the F1 driver Lewis Hamilton and Brazilian national pride and identity, and Ibarrola (2023) discusses how an imagined sport, *Quidditch* inspired from the world of Harry Potter has been practised by fans in Argentina.

Through a qualitative content analysis of tweets, “Do outro lado da rede: As práticas dos voleifãs na rede social X em busca de um patrocinador para o Barueri Volleyball Club” (*On The Other Side Of The Net: The Practices Of Volleyfans On Social Network X In Search Of A Sponsor For Barueri Volleyball Club*) is about a case in sports fandom which had a volleyball team perform activism to keep themselves afloat. Cecília Almeida Rodrigues Lima and Ana Maria Barreto de Azevedo França (2024) presents the main practices of these fans in carrying out the #PatrocineOBarueriVolei campaign. The role of media convergence in the participation of these fans and the possibilities of sports marketing.



### 3. Pop culture, fandom, and questions or challenges of representation, identity, and social change

The third section of our Special Issue is on Pop culture, fandom, and questions or challenges of representation, identity, and social change (e.g., race, gender, sexuality, class, disability) in the Creative Industries. Four different papers bring different topics and identities into the spotlight of academic research.

In "A Ballroom em Beyoncé e Beyoncé na Ballroom: Renaissance e a reflexividade entre cultura pop e Ballroom" (*Ballroom in Beyoncé and Beyoncé in the Ballroom: Renaissance and the Reflexivity between Pop Culture and Ballroom*), Samuel Rubens and Pablo Moreno Fernandes (2024) make a theoretical and empirical reflection about the movement between the Ballroom and pop culture discussing the connections between Beyoncé's album Renaissance and the LGBTQIAPN+ in an event hosted at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, located in the southeast of Brazil.

Another important aspect is discussed in the paper "De un fandom que no amaba a sus mujeres: expresiones de violencia de género al interior de la cultura Friki en Guadalajara, México" (*From a Fandom That Didn't Love Its Women: Expressions of Gender Violence within Friki Culture in Guadalajara, Mexico*). The author Nadiezhda Palestina Camacho Quiroz brings us an ethnographic study on gender violence practices on Friki fan culture in Mexico showing how otakus, cosplayers and gamers develop their social relations and interactions in terms of gender.

Another ethnographic research - among BL series fans on Twitter and Telegram - and discussions about politics and media, pink money and pinkwashing, and homonationalism is done by Igor Leonardo de Santana Torres (2024). In the article "*Queer opportunism: State, media, and LGBT+ rights in the context of Thai boys love (BL) series industry*". The centre of this study is the discussion on the notion of "Queer opportunism", a contradictory relationship between state institutions or any others and the LGBT+ agenda based on fan discourses and the Thai state's stance on the BL industry.

The last paper of this Special issue brings a different point of view on pop culture, discussing the failure on music industry. "Poderia o Flop indicar opressão? Notas sobre fracasso, ódio, gênero e raça no contexto digital da música pop" (*Could flop indicates oppression? Notes on failure, hate, gender and race on the digital context of pop music*) by Eduardo Rodrigues (2024) is focused on the failure of pop artists (labelled flop in the language of digital culture) and showing the uses of social networking sites as environments to amplify the media performances of fans, haters and artists to uncover intersectional oppressions of race and gender based on the online rejection of the song 'Rumors', by Lizzo and Cardi B.



## Final Remarks

In this first part of our Special Issue on Pop Cultures, Fan Studies and Creative Industries the central discussions and research questions were focused on Fan Engagement, Identities, and Representation in Pop Culture from production, consumption and circulating to shaping the cultural and entertainment industries, to challenge representations and social changes in terms of gender, race and other identities. In these 12 papers, we have had most women and LGBTQIA+ authors coming from different regions of Brazil (South, Southeast, Northeast) and one paper from Mexico.

This variety of contributions demonstrates a broad understanding of popular culture. They all highlight a unique aspect of the 'forces' that fandom and pop culture can be in today's Creative Industries. Despite discussing global phenomena, each of these studies also pertains to the local and invites us to reflect on this in various national, regional, and local contexts.

In part 2 of our Special Issue—which will be released in December 2024—our main emphasis will be the discussion of Production, Technology, and Globalization in Pop Culture. Again, these are three vital themes for discussing the intersection and development of popular culture, fandom(s), and the Creative Industries. We are looking forward to discovering new studies on Pop Culture and sharing them with all the readers.

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