



# AN OVERVIEW OF FAN PRODUCTION AND PARTICIPATORY CULTURE in the digital age

Heidi Campana Piva

Department of Semiotics, University of Tartu

**Abstract.** Participatory culture has triggered a process of change in the relationship between the text and the reader. There has been a surge in the amount of fan-produced texts which circulate on the Internet, a space marked by the collective participation of individuals, and where the old communicational boundaries between production and reception are increasingly blurred. Given this scenario, the present article consists of a literature review on the topic of participatory culture, accounting for epistemological changes in the field, and shedding light upon the cultural practices and meaning-making mechanisms involved in fan production. It is also this work's objective to raise methodological questions on how one can analyse fan production in the context of participatory culture as it is conceptualised today. It is understood that, given the complexities surrounding cyberculture and its inherent characteristics, the meanings of both audience and production are continually re-signified. Furthermore, fan production can be interpreted as being part of the mechanisms of the memory and autocommunication of a culture since it is based on the reproduction and transformation of cultural texts. Thus, the role of the semiotics of culture in the analysability of fan production in the context of cyber- and participatory cultures is emphasised in this text.

**Keywords:** cyberculture, participatory culture, fan production, culture studies, literature review

## Ülevaade fännitootmisest ja osaluskultuurist digiajastul

**Abstrakt.** Osaluskultuur on käivitanud teksti ja lugeja suhete muutumise protsessi. Fännide poolt toodetud tekstide hulk, mis ringleb Internetis, on kasvanud inimeste kollektiivse osaluse kaudu, kus vanad suhtluspiirid tootmise ja vastuvõtu vahel hägustuvad üha enam. Seda stsenaariumi arvestades koosneb käesolev artikkel kirjanduse ülevaatest osaluskultuuri teemal, võttes arvesse valdkonna epistemoloogilisi muutusi ning valgustades fännide tootmisega seotud kultuuripraktikaid ja tähenduse loomise mehhanisme. Samuti on selle töö eesmärk tõstatada metodoloogilisi küsimusi selle kohta, kuidas analüüsida fännitootmist osaluskultuuri kontekstis, nagu seda tänapäeval mõistetakse. Arvestades



küberkultuuri ümbritsevat keerukust ja selle loomupäraseid omadusi, mõistetakse nii publiku kui ka produktsiooni tähendusi pidevalt ümber. Lisaks võib fännitootmist tõlgendada osana kultuuri mälu ja autokommunikatsiooni mehhanismidest, kuna see põhineb kultuuritekstide reprodutseerimisel ja ümberkujundamisel. Seega rõhutatakse siin kultuurisemiootika rolli fännitootmise analüüsitavuses küber- ja osaluskultuuride kontekstis.

**Märksõnad:** küberkultuur, osaluskultuur, fännitootmine, kultuuriuringud, kirjanduse ülevaade

## Una Visión General de la Producción de los Fans y la Cultura Participativa en la Era Digital

**Resumen.** La cultura participativa ha desencadenado un proceso de cambio en la relación entre texto y el lector. Ha aumentado la cantidad de textos producidos por fans que circulan por Internet, un espacio marcado por la participación colectiva de los individuos, donde los antiguos límites comunicacionales entre producción y recepción son cada vez más difusos. Ante este escenario, el presente artículo consiste en una revisión bibliográfica sobre el tema de la cibercultura, dando cuenta de los cambios epistemológicos en el campo, y arrojando luz sobre las prácticas culturales y los mecanismos de creación de significado involucrados en la producción de los fans. También es un objetivo de este trabajo plantear cuestiones metodológicas sobre cómo se puede analizar la producción de los fans en el contexto de la cultura participativa tal y como se conceptualiza hoy en día. Se entiende que, dadas las complejidades que rodean a la cibercultura y sus características inherentes, los significados tanto del público como de la producción se resignifican continuamente. Por lo tanto, corresponde al investigador que indaga los procesos de creación de significados en el contexto digital de la comunicación considerar metodologías y teorías basadas en su objeto, de manera ad hoc, ya que la producción de los fans parece dictar su propia analizabilidad.

**Palabras clave:** cyber cultura, cultura participativa, fan production, estudios culturales, revision literaria

## Introduction

Since the turn of the millennium, authors have agreed (Lévy 2001; Murray 2017; Jenkins 2006; Scolari 2009) that significant changes in communicative practices, modes of production, circulation, and consumption of cultural products, within the perspective of media convergence have occurred (Jenkins 2004), which has inserted the world into the transmedia era.

In this context, it is possible to see the emergence of a culture guided by the collective participation of individuals, where the boundaries between production and reception are increasingly diffuse, highlighting the empowered, productive, creative, and socialised consumer (Jenkins 1992). In the last two decades, new modes of production built from the coordinated use of different media seek to establish immersive universes, on the threshold between fictional



and non-fictional, with the purpose of engaging consumers, involving them in interactive and collaborative actions (Piva, Affini 2017).

New technologies provided an expansion of the limits of interpret fictional narrative content, which presupposes innovation and a change in the technical basis for dynamically supporting communicative processes (Murray 2017). Such changes emphasise the role of communication as a fundamental contributor to profound cultural transformations and in the organisation of society.

As such, the study of audio-visual language and processes of meaning-making in the digital context of communication, as well as in the aesthetic and sociocultural scopes, has been of increasingly greater importance, as we move further into the digital age. Given this ever-growing relevance, the present article aims to compile a comparative historical literature review on the topic of cyber- and participatory cultures, accounting for epistemological changes in the field, as well as raising some methodological problems that might emerge in this scenario. It is also the objective to shed light upon the cultural practice of fan production and how one can analyse said products in the context of participatory culture as it is conceptualised today.

This article is organised in three main chapters, namely:

- A discussion on how cyberculture enables participatory culture, of which fan production is a main characteristic.
- Issues pertaining to the analysability of fan production.
- A general overview of meaning-making mechanisms in participatory culture.

Furthermore, before diving into these matters, some distinctions might be useful for a better understanding of the main ideas underlying this paper. Cyberspace is here understood as the “medium of communication that arose through the global interconnection of computers. The term refers not only to the material infrastructure of digital communications but to the oceanic universe of information it holds, as well as the human beings who navigate and nourish that infrastructure” (Lévy 2001: xvi). Along the same lines, “[c]yberculture is the set of technologies (material and intellectual), practices, attitudes, modes of thought, and values that developed along with the growth of cyberspace” (Lévy 2001: xvi).

The notion of participatory culture used in this paper is the same one as described in the works of Jenkins (1992; 1994) as, basically, a productive, creative, and collaborative culture that allows free expression of artistic talent, and social engagement as well as the sharing of creations with others. In this context, the concept of fan production is intricately tied to Jenkin’s view of a ‘fan’ as being a person who translates the reading of a text into “some kind of cultural activity, by sharing feelings and thoughts [...], by joining a “community” of other fans who share common interests. For fans, consumption naturally



sparks production, reading generates writing” (Jenkins 1994: 49). Having established this basic terminology, the discussion may proceed.

## 1. Cyberculture as that which enables the expansion of participatory culture

Lévy (2001: ix) states that “the growth of cyberspace is the result of an international movement of young people eager to experiment collectively with forms of communication other than those provided by traditional media”. It is possible to argue that this statement is outdated due to the fact that it was made more than two decades ago and, therefore, does not consider the presence of large conglomerates such as Google and Meta (Facebook), for instance, whose presence on the Internet is incisive. Nevertheless, Lévy’s statement reveals the beginning of the overcoming of the old collective dimensions of mass culture from the previous millennium, a culture that was written by a somewhat individual intelligence and perpetuated the concepts of the author and the closed text. In new media, popular culture emerged as something more supportive of collective intelligence, as a new economy of narratives and representations (Vilches 2003: 158).

Given this collective character inherent to cyberculture, the strength that the act of sharing has gained within networks is emphasised, thus giving greater capability to participatory culture (Jenkins 1992). After all, according to Jenkins (2006: 193), the creation process “is much more fun and meaningful if you can share what you can create with others”. Although the increasing monopoly of the network by conglomerates such as Meta, Google, and other social media platforms cannot be ignored, the Internet still provides a determining infrastructure for the sharing of the productions of anyone who wants to produce something at home. As such, a characteristic of digital media is to provide a different type of interaction than mass media. Even though some of what is produced in digital media can still be characterised as mass media, in terms of media materiality, digital media is grounded on communication from many-to-many, whilst traditional mass media works on the basis of a communication from one-to-many. Therefore, cyberculture provides a crucial infrastructure for the sharing of fan productions that guide participatory studies, a network-shaped communication (Piva, Affini 2017: 155).

The collective participation of individuals, which seems to be discussed in almost all communicational studies post-2000s, is configured within the network as exchanges between subjects. For Machado (2007: 230), “in addition to multiplying, the subject who navigates in virtual space comes into contact with other virtual subjects, their counterparts in cyberspace, with whom they will carry out intersubjective exchanges”<sup>1</sup>. In this sense, the



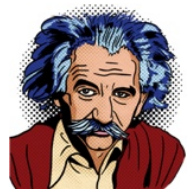
traditional opposition between the individual and the collective begins to change, so that unprecedented forms of previous identities are manifested.

Both in new media and in the still present traditional mass media, the consumption of products is part of the construction of the public sphere and configures an experience of interaction between subjects who engage with the same content (Cannito 2010: 20). Thus, even if a media product is considered to be extremely niche, there will always be a community character in relation to those who engage with it, as a collective of individuals whose shared interests provide the basis for a sense of belonging within a certain group.

These groups of individuals united by the affection for a media product can be called a fandom, a phenomenon that, despite having emerged before the age of networks, gained power with the ease of sharing provided by the technological and cultural scenario of cyberculture. In the early days of participatory culture, when visibility costs were high, subjects who wrote fan fiction, organised conventions, and produced fan-to-fan material had difficulty finding others with whom to share their interests (Shirky 2011). On the other hand, in a world where visibility costs are low due to the interconnection characteristic of cyberculture, people who are dedicated to certain activities can meet and interact more easily (*ibid*). In this way, fandom becomes a representative manifestation of participatory culture, as it is not only related to the individual behaviour of a fan, but rather to the collective experience of media consumption around a certain object, where sharing is a fundamental part of the cultural experience (Jenkins 1992).

At the same time, being part of a community or a fandom requires continuous and thorough dedication, something which those who do not belong in the community do not always understand (Shirky 2011). The vision of Lévy (2001), which is utopian to a considerable extent, states that cyberspace implies recognition, acceptance, cooperation, and association of the other, in a movement that goes beyond differences of interest, enabling peaceful and friendly contact for the transmission of knowledge around the world. Despite permitting these advances proposed by Lévy, cyberculture, understood as a complex system, also brought with it hate-mail, cyberbullying, cancel culture, and other practices related to intolerance, a side effect of the act of becoming a public person on the network.

For Clay Shirky (2011), 'becoming public' is understood as a strategy for the subject to find, primarily, people who think alike. This strategy has resulted in an increase, as never before witnessed, in the amount of material produced by fans for fans, or, as the author puts it, a "material that is available to the public but not intended for the public — its creators are looking not to reach some generic audience but rather to communicate with their soul mates, often within a sense of shared cultural norms that differ from those of the outside world" (*ibid*: 66). One could also approach this sort of material (text) through Eco's notion of the Model Reader (Eco 1979). Fan production can be understood as something whose Model Reader is its fandom, composed by



those who are able to recognise and observe the rules laid out by the text, and are eager to play by these rules. Even though practices such as hate-mail, cyberbullying, and cancelling are a result of this publicity provided by the networks, before being induced by behaviours of repression and prejudice, fandoms are awakened from the desire to feel as being part of a community composed of individuals who appreciate and are willing to get involved with the same playful universe (Jenkins 1992).

In the field of fan production, there is a wide range of this sort of material mentioned by Shirky, that are produced on a non-profit basis, for the satisfaction of the fan community, namely: wikis, online collaborative thematic encyclopaedias; fan videos, amateur videos distributed through platforms such as YouTube; fan fiction, written texts of narrative character; fan arts, artistic pieces ranging from paintings to photo montages, small animations in graphics interchange format (.gif), and artistic representations of quotes from character speeches (Piva, Affini 2017: 153).

Given the complexity of how participatory culture is organised, its origins, how it changed in the last decades, and the many characteristics of its products, a question arises as to how fan production can be analysed and on which terms.

## 2. Fan production analysability

For Peeter Torop (2006), a scientific analysis will always configure one single approach to culture, amongst many other possibilities, in a way that “the study of one and the same culture gives rise to numerous and different views and snapshots of that culture, and the analysis of culture as a fragmented object of study becomes the analysis of cultures” (ibid, 286). As such, the analysis of participatory culture and its products are no exemption. It becomes clear that “the plurality of the scientific research methods is complementary to the plurality of culture as a complex object of study” (ibid).

Thus, one way of analysing fan production is as belonging to a category of creative act that is relatively different from that occupied by those who hold the rights over media products. As an example, Shirky (2011) wrote about the difference between J. K. Rowling’s books, and the fan fiction written by her fans. For Shirky, Rowling inhabits a different world from that of her fans: the world of money, in which creators are paid for their productions. Meanwhile, fan fiction authors prefer to work in the world of affection, where the goal is recognition within the fan community of the fictional universe to which they belong (or, as I also understand, plainly for self-satisfaction). Nevertheless, this view from Shirky leads to some questionable conclusions, such as the supposition that authors who inhabit this ‘world of money’ and create so-called ‘original productions’, do not work for affection or recognition of their fans, which is not true. Besides, it is well-known that fan work can and is nowadays





also rewarded through monetary transactions, especially in the realm of fan art, where visual artists are often commissioned for the creation of fan content.

In this sense, it seems it is difficult to disassociate fan production from the problem of authorship, which dates back to the pre-digital age. In *Death of the Author*, Roland Barthes (1977) liberates the literary work from authorial-intention and control, leading to the decentralisation of the notion of authorship. For Barthes, the reading process dismantles the supposed unity and coherence of a text, which then explodes into multiple meanings. A reader is as much a function of the text as is the author, but perhaps what is more important is that the reader is a text's 'destination'. Although Barthes was referring to the literary work, his ideas can be transposed to the context of fan production of all sorts, raising many interesting questions, such as: is the notion of the author still applicable to so-called 'official' productions?

Some authors would like to do away with this question altogether by stating that "[t]here is a distinction between playing a creative role within an authored environment and having authorship of the environment itself" (Murray 2017: 152). In the aforementioned excerpt, Murray is addressing, specifically, the issue of authorship within interactive narratives for computers, where, according to her, the 'true author' of the narrative is the game programmer. However, it is permissible to extend this concept to talk about any other narrative and the fan productions that arise from them. After all, it is established by Umberto Eco's theory of textual cooperation (Eco 1979) that every narrative is, to some degree, interactive in the sense that it requires the reader to exercise semiotic judgment, actively participating in the processes of interpretation and meaning-making. Therefore, when an author of fan fiction, as well as the producer of any other category of fan production, operates within the limits of the narrative universe and rules created by its original author, this fan must be understood as an interactor, because it is not a phenomenon of authorship, but rather of agency (Murray 2017: 153).

This view proposed by Murray, as well as the one by Shirky are still centralised around the notion of authorship that a reading of Barthes could easily dismantle. Nevertheless, it is still interesting to consider Murray's ideas surrounding the concept of immersion and how we could relate it to participatory culture.

Fan production, as understood in this sense, contributes to the immersion of subjects in a fictional narrative through, for example, analytical writings for fanzines/blogs, which investigate the underlying assumptions of a certain fictional world. This type of behaviour (producing content related to the virtual universe) is favoured for the level of complexity and detail involved in the creation of the original work by its creator. Encyclopaedic writers such as George R. R. Martin (author of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, base-text for the television show *Game of Thrones*) awaken this type of production from their fans due to the massive detailing of their narration, which invites the subject to participate on the fictional world (Murray 2017). In this way, it is understood



that the phenomenon of immersion is closely related to the level of detail in the creation of the narrative universe, which is not to say that this is the only characteristic that provides for immersion, since the storyworld is but one aspect of a text.

The interaction with a narrative universe is, however, just as important as the interaction with the narrative itself. In other words, immersion arises in the course of relating oneself, not only to the universe, but also to the story. Regarding this interaction, Jenkins (2006: 247) writes about “a balance between fascination and frustration: if media content didn’t fascinate us, there would be no desire to engage with it; but if it didn’t frustrate us on some level, there would be no drive to rewrite or remake it”. It is in this latter sense that I would like to highlight the creative processes in which fans do not submit to the rules and limits created by the original author of the product. For those who go beyond what the author of the original work created and operate using transgressive logics, the discussion must be different.

Perhaps it is necessary to search for the origins and explanations of what makes a ‘fan’ in the first place, besides the quick definition offered in the introduction of this paper. Fiske (1992: 46) states that “the fan is an ‘excessive reader’ who differs from the ‘ordinary’ one in degree rather than kind”. In other words, the fan consumer differs from the common consumer based on their degree of involvement with the original narrative, in such a way that, while the common consumer thinks and imagines, the fan produces. In the decade of 1980, in his book *The Third Wave*, Toffler (1980) coined the term ‘prosumption’, generated from the expression ‘production by consumers’. From that, the term ‘prosumer’ emerged to designate this ‘consumer-producer’, the fan who produces from their appropriation of the original text.

Furthermore, fans tend to reread or rewatch their favourite archived content, accumulating more and more knowledge about fictional universes, which is also synonymous with prestige within a social group made up of other fans (Piva, Affini 2017). A fan’s commitment to a narrative extends beyond the text consumption period; it is greater than the airtime of an episode of a television show, or the number of pages in a book, as the fan joins fan clubs and fan societies, participates in conventions, engages with, and produces new texts related to the original product.

In this fashion, it is relevant, when discussing fan production, to think about the concept of virtuality, as written by Deleuze (1994). The scholar reflected on the existence of a series of virtual realities, possibilities, or potentialities that exist at the same time as canonical realities. While the canonical is what is happening, the virtual is what could happen at any time. This notion can be associated to what Eco (1979: 217) considers as ‘possible worlds’: “When one imagines a set of individuals (and of relations among them) that the text cannot finally admit, one in fact resorts to opposing to the world of the text a possible world not accessible to it”. Eco writes that a text is not a possible world in itself, but “a machine for producing possible worlds” (ibid,





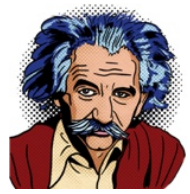
246), in a way that fan production can be understood as one of these possible worlds produced by the original text. In summary, the essence of some fan productions can, thus, only be found in the virtual, non-canonical<sup>2</sup> reality of the diegetic universe of a text.

So far, we have seen many varied frameworks and perspectives through which to look at fan production, and yet, I would like to highlight the possibilities offered by Lotmanian cultural semiotics. More than forty years ago, Lotman defined culture as the totality of non-hereditary information that is not only acquired and preserved, but also transmitted and transformed by societal groups (Lotman 1977) or, even more simply, a ‘collective memory’ (Lotman and Uspensky 1978). In the semiotics of culture, this concept of cultural memory is central to both the functioning and the continuity of culture itself. In their article bridging cultural semiotics with transmedia studies, Ojamaa and Torop (2014: 63–65) discuss how memory is fundamentally linked to the notion of repetition with variation. For the authors, “[r]epetition is a process and an entity that simultaneously underlines sameness and difference between the new text and the previous one” (ibid, 63). Furthermore:

texts, text fragments, meanings that are considered important from the point of view of a community’s identity are repeated not only in the natural language, but in different sign systems of the same culture [...]. Therefore, the principle of repetition or iteration is important both from the point of view of textual construction and of culture as a whole. Repeating a story across different sign systems is culture’s way of remembering and increasing the meaningfulness of a given text. (Ojamaa and Torop 2014: 63)

To such a degree, the survival of a culture depends on this continuous repetition and transformation of texts and codes that endlessly feed into each other, while at the same time providing renewal. Along these lines, it is possible to say that fan production functions as part of this mechanism. It has been established that fan productions are ways of transforming texts and creating new ones, whilst still propagating the source-text, prolonging its life inside culture. Moreover, as Ojamaa and Torop (2014: 63) state: “the more diverse media are incorporated into the process of (re)translation, the stronger is the text-sign’s or text’s potential to survive”. Given the fact that fan production occurs in a variety of media (wikis, fan videos, fan fiction, fan arts, and any other kind of fan production), it is possible to see how effective these texts can be as mechanisms of cultural memory, in the process of reproduction and transformation.

Finally, in this same line of thought, Ojamaa (2015: 33) writes: “in the process of transmedial repetition of a canonical text, not only the text is transformed but the cultural system itself is restructured by providing oneself with new ways of self-description”. In this context, fan production may be analysed in terms of the degree with which a text is capable of enabling dialog with its surrounding culture. It is possible to say that the more fan productions can be found regarding a certain source-text, the more said text has been interpreted and mediated and so, the more active the dialogue between this



text and its cultural environment is (Ojamaa and Torop 2014: 65). Similarly, this process can also work the other way around: culture can be analysed in terms of its own capacity to dialog with a source-text. Thus, fan production, as understood as one way for a culture to practice self-description, appears to be an integral part of the process of autocommunication of culture, that is, of the communication of a culture with itself (ibid, 2014).

### 3. Meaning-making mechanisms in participatory culture

Meaning-making in storytelling is closely linked to the way in which a subject engages in an immersive way with a fictional narrative (Arsenault 2005). In other words, through the formulation of hypotheses about the outcome of the plot, character motivations, and other aspects of the story that need to be filled with the cooperation of the reader (Eco 1979), immersion takes place through the emotional projection of the subject in the events of the narrative through an empathetic relationship with the characters (Arsenault 2005).

Similarly, Jenkins (1992: 158) writes about the “on-going process of fan rereading”, which results in a progressive elaboration of meanings about the fictional universe through inferences and speculations which go beyond the information conveyed explicitly in the original product. It is also possible to state, following this line of thought, that narrative is the basic mechanism for meaning-making, whether by an ordinary spectator or a fan, since every media product, even if it is not linguistic or even visual, is narratively structured (Scolari 2009).

Further, regarding meaning-making in cyberculture, Lévy (2001) writes about how it is still possible to read texts from hundreds of years ago, despite the loss of context surrounding such texts, due to a certain universality that arose from static writing. According to him, this ‘totalizing’ universality could only be constructed at the cost of a reduction or even a ‘fixation’ of meaning. In cyberculture, a new universality emerges that no longer depends on the self-sufficiency of texts, or the fixation of meanings. The reason for that is that it is a universality constructed and extended through the interconnection (intertextuality) of the messages within virtual communities, that give it varied meanings which are permanently renewed (Lévy 2001).

It is imperative for contemporary audio-visual and communication studies to understand that a fictional world or narrative is not, and could not be, a single text from which only a true meaning can be abstracted (Klastrup, Tosca 2004). The public is constantly not only in search of the understanding of what a media product means, but also aiming to generate a meaning connected to their own lives, experiences, and desires (Grossberg 1992). Thus, the same product has different meanings in different contexts, since all perceptual material depends on the subject’s unique perception. As Machado (2007) puts it, the audio-visual spectator acts as a second screen, separate



from the first, where the sequence of narrative events is composed, gains meaning, and allows the projected imaginary to ascend to the symbolic field.

All cultural objects and, therefore, all new media objects are images, representations of elements existing in the real world, however virtual they may be. It does not matter if it is a website, a computer game, or a digital picture, any new media object can be understood both as a representation and as a contributor to the construction of an external reference (Manovich 2001).

In this context, immersive narratives of complex universes must be approached as trans-discursive entities and, at the same time, as imaginary constructions shared by the public (Klastrup, Tosca 2004). Access to media facilitates the process of generating images, however, it is not just a matter of accumulative production, that is, the greater generation of images. Instead, there are creative processes of sharing imaginaries (Leão 2011).

Much more can be said regarding meaning-making processes in participatory culture, especially from the point of view of the semiotics of culture (which has been merely introduced in the previous section). Suffice it to say, for the purposes of the present article, that despite the vastness of studies, there are still many gaps to be filled, and so, possibilities for research on this topic will not be exhausted any time soon.

## Final remarks

Cyberspace enables the proliferation of non-canonical texts that make up the characteristic production profile of participatory culture (Jenkins 1992), which incorporates productive and socialised audiences. These fan-produced texts, which borrow from the media industry and rework pre-existing narratives, circulate on the Internet, a space marked by the collective participation of individuals, where the old communicational boundaries between production and reception are increasingly blurred.

Participatory culture has, thus, triggered a process of change in the relationship between product and public, text and reader. The network space allows for an expansion of the limits of creation, or even reinterpretation, of the content of fictional narratives. Production models from the decade of 2010 and forward seek to establish immersive universes, based on the coordinated use of different media, expanding the area of intersection between fiction and non-fiction to engage consumers, involving them in interactive and collaborative actions.

Therefore, it is important to understand that the relations between producer and audience can no longer be understood as the process by which subjects appropriate existing works in a context already constructed from their social positions and experiences, passively ascending to the predetermined nature of the media product (Grossberg 1992). On the contrary, the meanings of both audience and production are continually re-signified.



As this paper has hopefully displayed, the field of research on participatory culture has been growing ever since the 1990s, in a way that the amount of material one can find on the subject today is vast and often overlapping or even contradictory. It is possible to conclude from this quick overview, that there is an abundance of ways through which one can analyse fan production or understand participatory culture. Undoubtedly, these diverse methodologies might, at the same time, prove themselves to be both a hindrance and an advantage. On the one hand, a researcher will not find themselves lacking when it comes to content or theoretical framework. On the other, choosing what perspective to work from might be challenging given the vast amount of possible angles.

As a means of conclusion, this paper argues that semiotics as a discipline, being a historically transdisciplinary (cutting across linguistics, mathematics, cybernetics, logic, art, and cultural studies) is an adequate methodological tool to start from when it comes to the study of participatory culture and its productions. Notably, the semiotics of culture as founded by Lotman and carried out by the Tartu-Moscow School can surely provide new insights to this field (as it was already proved by the research carried out by Ojamaa 2015, on transmediality). The notions of cultural self-description, memory, and autocommunication, as introduced here, can contribute to new and deeper studies, warranting the attention of researchers aiming to investigate participatory culture.

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## Notes

1 Translated by the author from the original in Portuguese: “*além de multiplicar-se, o sujeito que navega no espaço virtual entra em contato com outros sujeitos virtuais, seus homólogos no ciberespaço, com os quais vai realizar trocas intersubjetivas*” (Machado 2007: 230).

2 The term “canon”, when used within fandom, has a different connotation from the one that is used here. Although fan-generated texts which follow official canon can be tagged as ‘canonic’ by a fan community, this essentially means canon-*compliant*. As such, fan production can be either canon-defiant or canon-compliant, but never truly canonic in the original sense of the word, that is, being officially part of the body of a work. Thus, the notions of canonical and non-canonical used in this paper are in this original sense (that which is or is not part of the official body of a work), and not in the sense of a fan production that can be understood as canon-compliant or canon-defiant within fandom.