

Otherness and Transgression in Celebrity and Fan Cultures

Hosted by the Cultural Transformations Research Group, Aarhus University.

November 21-22, 2014

LOCATION: AARHUS UNIVERSITY, DENMARK.

CALL FOR PAPERS DEADLINE: AUGUST 8, 2014

Keynote speaker:

Matt Hills, Aberystwyth University –

"Fans as Celebrities, Celebrities as Fans: The Rise of an Affective Economy?"

The notions of otherness and transgression play an essential part in the cultural work and practices celebrities and fandoms perform inasmuch as these concepts are inseparable from the celebrity and fan cultural processes of social in/exclusion, identification and dissociation, uniformity and diversification, and forces both drawing and disrupting demarcations between normalcy and deviance. To the extent that these processes are actively shaped by and partake in shaping our desires, contempt, ways of thinking and being, otherness and transgression constitute pertinent sites for critical exploration within the two overlapping fields of research, Fan and Celebrity Studies.

A complex and multivalent term, otherness is conventionally signaled by markers of “difference” and the unknown. As difference remains a condition for any determinate sense of identity, otherness is also inevitably implicit and complicit in considerations of subjectivity, identity, and sameness rendering it a pivotal aspect in discussions on both their constitution and impossibility. Likewise, in the field of Fan and Celebrity culture – where categories such as class, gender, race, sexuality, and age dynamically intersect and interact in manifold ways – the identity work, social meanings, and cultural preferences informing both these cultures’ production and consumption of cultural and media texts are also constantly negotiated. Reflexive of the values, biases, and tensions of the social body, they are useful indicators of contemporary configurations and devices for othering; for example, the ways in which the discourses of immorality, pathology, monstrosity, impropriety, and cultism, among others, inform the construction of difference, and function as vehicles for othering that additionally cut diagonally across various imbricating “-isms,” such as racism, heterosexism, ageism, ableism, and lookism.

As difference often implies the perception of deviance, otherness is accompanied by the constant impending threat of transgression, to undo and redraw the differentiating limits determining the provisional identities of entities, behaviors, and bodies. While transgression refers to a violation and exceeding of bounds, it also ambiguously realizes and completes these boundaries as it helps define them and reaffirms a given social order by designating the illicit. This dialectic of the de/stabilizing effects of transgression summons further inquiry in relation to fandoms and celebrity cultures, in which

deviance is an attractive commercial component. Construed as particularly excessive, both celebrity personas and subcultural fan practices are defined by their distance from the norm, but where celebrity culture concerns the consumption of transgressive content and narratives of extraordinary personalities, in the case of fan culture, consumption itself is purportedly transgressive. Celebrities are conventionally conceptualized as power-saturated signs seductively reinforcing cultural norms – either through glossy portraits of charismatic individuals advertizing luxurious lifestyles and the censure of celebrities in the scandal genre respectively – and fandoms, conversely, as subversively contesting these norms through the fetishistic appropriation of cultural icons, media products, and playful textual poaching. However, hardly homogenous, both celebrity power and fandoms channel a multitude of contradictory and inconsistent ideological inflections, and entail a complex mesh of conformity and heterogeneity, which informs, for example, the social interaction among fans and their interpretive communities, whose internal fractions struggle over affect and meaning, as well as the pervasive circulation and currency of certain im/proper celebrity images and fan identities. Accordingly, the need to study, explain, and analyze the semiotic labor invested in the celebrity sign and by the fan in a given media product respectively only becomes greater.

In light of today's new socio-political subjectivities, prosumer and participatory culture, new technologies and distributive modes, expanding networks, and means of communication enabling transcultural proximity between individuals from different parts of the world, new encounters, expressions, and understandings have emerged and with it, transformed nuances of othering, saming, and transgression. As a result, Fan and Celebrity cultures, are in need of a reappraisal in which the new fickle and permeable boundaries between identities, cultural practices, private and public spheres, products and consumers, celebrity and fan bodies, intimacy and estrangement are investigated. Refracting otherness and transgression from overlapping prisms, the pleasures, representations, productions, and affects of celebrity and fan cultures opens up a fruitful and invigorating space for further research.

It is this variety of formulations which this conference wishes to convene on from divergent disciplinary and theoretical perspectives. The Cultural Transformations Research Group at Aarhus University therefore invites submissions exploring celebrity and fan cultures within the scope of the critical spaces and contexts offered by otherness and transgression.

WELCOME TOPICS INCLUDE BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO THE FOLLOWING:

The Intersection of Celebrity and Fan Studies

Sex, Gender, Sexual Differing, and Queering the Fan / Celebrity Body

Cross-Over Celebrities; Ethnicity, Hybridity, and Fandom in Transcultural Contexts

Celebrity Representations of Dis/ability and through Fan Works

The Intersectionalities of Social Categories in Celebrity and Fan Cultures

Notoriety, Infamy, Scandal, Deviance, and Excess

Social Media and the Construction of Celebrity as Other
The Construction of Otherness in Fandom and Fan Works
Monstrosity, the Abject, and Uncanny in Fan Fiction, Fandoms, and Celebrityhood
Pathology, Addiction, Cultism, Confession, and Therapy
Mashing and Vidding: Viral and Violating
Authenticity, Secrecy, Intimacy, and Publicity
Post-feminist Celebrity Narratives and Cultural Forms
Power, Prosumerism, and Participatory Culture
New Modes of Self-Other Relations within Para-social Contexts
Fan and/or Celebrity Shaming
The (Im)Material Other Worlds of Fandoms and the Alternative Spaces of Fan Communities

PUBLICATION OPPORTUNITIES

We are pleased to announce that qualified research papers are considered for prospective publication in a special issue of the peer-reviewed journal *Otherness: Essays and Studies*, <http://www.otherness.dk/journal/>. Submitted articles will follow the standard review process of the journal.

PROCEDURE FOR SUBMITTING PROPOSALS FOR PAPERS

The conference is open to scholars and students of all disciplines. Those wishing to participate in the conference are invited to submit an abstract of no more than **300 words** to the organizers at otcelebrityfan@gmail.com by **Friday, August 8, 2014**. The convenors will have reviewed the abstracts and notified the authors of whether their proposals have been accepted no later than August 22, 2014. Papers may be given in English with citations in any language, and are limited to 20 minutes.

All questions regarding conference content (abstracts, presentations, speakers etc.) may be directed to the organizers at otcelebrityfan@gmail.com.

CONFERENCE COMMITTEE:

Matthias Stephan, Ph.D. scholar Claus Toft-Nielsen, Ph.D.
Lise Dilling-Hansen, Ph.D. scholar Susan Yi Sencindiver, Ph.D.