Fandom After #MeToo/#BalanceTonPorc

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Call for Papers

Fandom After #MeToo/#BalanceTonPorc
Bilingual French/English symposium

1 July 2022, The University of Chicago, Paris

Keynote speakers:
Kristina Busse (University of South Alabama)
Alexis Lothian (University of Maryland)

In late 2017, in the wake of the widespread scandals surrounding American film producer Harvey Weinstein, the hashtag #MeToo started trending on social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. Using this hashtag, primarily (though not exclusively) female victims of sexual harassment and sexual assault shared their experiences and decried the ubiquity of these experiences even in a supposedly modern and egalitarian world.

Although the #MeToo hashtag has since been used to decry experiences of sexual violence in any context, the origins of the movement in the Weinstein scandal, and the subsequent sharing of the hashtag by various well-known actors, has ensured a continued focus of the movement on the entertainment industry. In the wake of the Weinstein scandal, actors/comedians such as Louis CK and Jeffrey Tambor also found themselves under public scrutiny in this context, with Tambor, for example, being fired from the Amazon Prime Video series Transparent in February 2018.

Similar movements also developed in other national contexts, such as France, where the Dominique Strauss-Kahn scandal in 2011 prompted increased public discourse on sexual harassment and assault, and where the hashtag #BalanceTonPorc started trending at the time of the Weinstein scandal, explicitly inviting women to name and shame their harassers and abusers. The movement quickly gathered steam in France, but also received criticism, for example in a public letter in January 2018, which was signed by over 100 French women in entertainment and which denounced the movement as going too far and punishing core French values such as chivalry. The letter itself was heavily criticised, as well, with particular signatories issuing apologies a week later.
Given this particular focus on the entertainment industry, it is not surprising that the global #MeToo movement has affected audiences and fans of media forms, including film, TV, music, video games, and more. Since fans often develop affective, parasocial relationships with the objects of their fandom—including the producers of particular content, actors, characters, etc—the accusations and scandals emerging in the wake of #MeToo have necessarily provoked discussion and even conflict within fan communities, have affected the ways in which fans relate to their fandoms, and have impacted even the “forms of cultural production” (Jenkins 2013, 1) these fans have proceeded to produce.

In recent years, these effects have not been limited to accusations of sexual violence within the context of #MeToo movement; indeed, this movement has become part of a wider trend toward holding popular entertainment figures accountable for particular views considered morally unacceptable or damaging. An example of this is, for example, Harry Potter author J. K. Rowling, who has come under scrutiny since late 2019 for her purported views on civil rights for transgender people; these views have impacted the Harry Potter fandom in various ways, with particularly LGBTQ fans vowing to cease purchasing licensed Harry Potter products, alongside other reactions of a similar nature (Yehl 2021).

While fan studies as an academic discipline has existed since the early 1990s and has since both proliferated and become increasingly mainstream in the anglophone world (Scott and Click 2018, 1) and in France (Bourdaa 2015), no academic work or event has yet confronted the important question of the impact of #MeToo, #BalanceTonPorc and their offshoots on fan communities and practices. This conference, then, aims to bring together international scholars interested in this issue. Potential topics for discussion may include, but are not limited to:

- Social media discussions and arguments between fans concerning revelations or accusations of celebrity sexual/sexist violence.
- Empirical research on fans' reactions to such revelations/accusations.
- Accusations of sexual/sexist violence within fan communities.
- Representations of, or reactions to, #MeToo/#BalanceTonPorc in fan works (fan art, fanfiction, fan vids...).
- Representations of the #MeToo movement in media works (e.g. The Morning Show, Promising Young Woman, Bombshell, The Loudest Voice) and fan reactions to them.
- Attempts by celebrities accused of sexual or gender-based violence to appease their fans.
- Posthumous reconsiderations of specific celebrities in the #MeToo/#BalanceTonPorc era.
- Reconsiderations of past works (including characters, themes, stories...) in the #MeToo/#BalanceTonPorc era.
- The position of the “acafan” (Jenkins 2011) when the object of their research is accused of sexual or gender-based violence.
- Writing and rewriting film and media history in the #MeToo/#BalanceTonPorc era.
- Teaching film and media studies in the #MeToo/#BalanceTonPorc era.

We invite abstracts of no more than 300 words for 20-minute papers, to be sent to eve.bennett@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr and l.lanckman@herts.ac.uk by 18 March 2022.
Please also indicate if you would like to present your paper face-to-face (in Paris) or remotely. We hope that the Covid-19 situation will enable us to offer both options.

Symposium attendance will be free of charge.

Contact Email:
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