

Textual Reception: Exploring Audiences' Writing Practices from a Gender Perspective

Gender in Series: cinema, television and the media / Genre en séries : cinéma, télévision, médias
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Call for Paper – Special issue #7

Special Issue Editors:

- **Sébastien François**, PhD in Sociology, Postdoctoral researcher for the academic cluster ICCA (EXPERICE, Université Paris 13 and CERLIS, Université Paris Descartes)
- **Thomas Pillard**, PhD in Cinema and Media Studies, Associate researcher at the IRCAV (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3)

Overview of the Special Issue:

Whether through fan mail sent to celebrities and the popular press, critical pieces, derivative narratives such as fan fictions and other outlets, media audiences have often chosen writing as a privileged way to extend their experiences of reception. In very different contexts indeed, individuals have written about the cultural objects they loved or execrated, using various media to express themselves. If preserved and accessible, all these texts can reveal a lot about their authors, but also about the composition and structure of the audiences they belong or have belonged to (Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998; Cefai & Pasquier 2004). Above all, they are spaces in which the making of gendered identities and relationships within these audiences can be observed (Buckingham 1993; Maigret 1995; Sellier 2009), providing scholars valuable resources to study media reception from a gender perspective (Kearney 2011; Biscarrat 2015).

This special issue of *Gender in Series* aims to gather works dedicated to the analysis of such writing practices through the lens of gender, broadly speaking, to illuminate both the media cultures and the social discourses produced by these specific audiences. Previous works have already showed how “ordinary”, “domestic” or “fan” writings may be highly gendered (Jenkins, 1992; Lahire 1997; Lyons 2013) and researchers are therefore invited to provide new case studies. Contributions that focus on the writers’ profiles, their writing and, if applicable, publishing conditions, are particularly encouraged, as well as those interested in the social meanings and uses of audience’s texts from individual or collective perspectives. In the line of works that have explored the relation between reading and gender (Radway 1984; Long 2003; Albenga 2011) or the construction of identities through mass media (Kearney 2006; Cann 2014; Hilton-Morrow & Battles 2015), it seems essential to understand how these writings can be means of self-presentation or how they convey ideological representations and determinations about gender. It is all the more important since they are inspired by cultural contents which are themselves embedded within social and gendered norms. Besides, as writing forms continue to have a central role – offline and online – in reception practices, this special issue also welcomes comparative works establishing bridges between different kinds of writing materials or between heterogeneous eras or contexts: identifying the proximities or ruptures within forms of textual reception will be helpful to discuss how media cultures and gender issues interact and how these interactions may change in time.

Suggested Research directions:

Suggested below are three research directions which may serve as guidelines for the contributors, but should not restrict their interpretations of the issue's theme:

1) Texts Between Cultural Consumption and Participation

Writing practices are a way for people not only to express their relationship to certain media objects, but also to take part in the cooperation networks that shape the artistic and cultural “worlds” (Becker 1982). It seems therefore relevant to examine the general contexts in which particular discursive strategies emerge as well as their possible effects from a gender perspective: for example, the establishment of the American star system would never have been the same without the generation of movie-loving teenage girls who wrote letters to fan magazines and popular newspapers in the 1910s (Anselmo-Sequeira, 2015). Moreover, through incidental remarks (in diaries, letters, etc.), spontaneous messages or declarations (privately sent by mail or publicly revealed on Twitter) and argued critiques (in fanzines, articles, blog posts, etc.), some audience members vie for a more active role in their relationship with the creative industries, but to what extent do they actually interact with them and do they manage to influence media contents, especially regarding gender? Contributors might address such question or be inspired by the following (but not limited) list:

- *gender roles and written cultural participation in various historical contexts;*
- *forms of writings and gendered specialization;*
- *media consumption, enunciative strategies and reflexivity in relation to gender issues;*
- *gendered audiences and the strategies of cultural industries;*
- ...

2) How to Write the Politics of Identity?

The second research direction considers written communication as a powerful tool for self-expression and an intimate space in which writers can craft a better sense of their multiple identities. In the wake of historical works on the social uses of cultural contents such as the novel (Thiesse 2000; Hunter 2002), contributions could highlight how scriptural practices are involved in the creation of sites of autonomy, learning or even empowerment for individuals, by focusing either on feminine, masculine or queer identities. Themes of interest might include:

- *writing, intimacy and gendered self-expression;*
- *the reception and politicization of social relationships, fan activism, etc.;*
- *sexual norms and representations, textual reception and democracy;*
- *mediatization and gendered discursive strategies;*
- ...

3) Amateurs' Writing Practices as Collective Activities

Reception is far from being a purely personal and idiosyncratic experience. Even alone, facing their sheet of paper or their screen, writers generally know that others have engaged with the same cultural objects, which is not without consequences on their writing practices. Consequently, this third research direction is a call to studies which focus on interactions, forms of cooperation and possible frictions between the participants of these writing communities,

especially when gendered dynamics are involved. From this perspective, fan fiction which is a predominantly female collaborative activity, has been and remains a rich area of fieldwork (Bacon-Smith 1992; François 2009; Jamison 2013), but contributors are encouraged to submit proposals about other types of writings inspired by media reception and to deal with a wide range of issues. For instance:

- *textual receptions, sense of belonging and social organization;*
- *writing practices and their conventions;*
- *interaction, collaboration and/or conflicts among writers;*
- *gendered publications and regulation (including forms of censorship);*
- ...

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Contributors should feel free to focus on any type of written textual reception, whatever its content (correspondence, commentary, fiction, etc.) or media (paper, digital, etc.), and whether the texts were supposed to be publicly released or to remain in the private sphere. This special issue wishes to address textual reception in its diversity: articles may deal with objects of affection (or disgust) from literary, musical and audiovisual fields or deal with celebrities related to arts, sports or even politics. Proposals from any of the different social sciences (sociology, history, film and television studies, cultural and media studies, etc.) will be considered, provided the analysis is based on empirical material, derived from archives, ethnographic research and/or digital research. Articles may deal with the most involved amateurs, such as “fans”, but may also focus on more “ordinary” cultural consumers, as long as they have taken a pen or a keyboard to express themselves. Finally, even if studies about writings produced between the end of the nineteenth to the twenty-first century are preferred, more comparative works or approaches relying on older writings will, when appropriate, be taken into account.

Article submissions:

The submitted article must not have been previously published in another journal or media. Article proposals should be sent before November 30. They should present the area of research, the theoretical framework, the research materials and how the author(s) intend to analyze them. They should include a title, an abstract of 500 words minimum (max 800), an indicative bibliography and a short biography of the author(s). They should be submitted in English or in French to the coordinators of the issue:

- **Sébastien François:** sebastien.francois@rocketmail.com
- **Thomas Pillard:** thomas@pillard.nom.fr

Provisional timetable:

- Deadline for submissions: November 30, 2016
- Notification of acceptance or rejection: December 15, 2016
- Reception of full papers: March 1, 2017
- Reviews sent to authors: May 2017
- Reception of final articles: September 1, 2017
- Online publication: Fall 2017