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Video Game Fan-Comics as Multimodal and Multimedial Communication

Fan-Comics are a growing form of participatory fan culture left wholly under-researched. On the one hand, they provide content for many websites dedicated to art, fan-fiction, fandom, as well as for *up-and-coming* and hobby comic creators. As content, fan-comics cover many forms of popular culture and mass media, like televisions and film (especially cartoons and anime), video games, and other popular comics (and manga). On the other hand, however, fan-comics also serve as communicative acts that generate the negotiation and exchange of meaning between fan-communities and media producers. In this workshop, I will present research on *World of Warcraft (WoW)* fan-comics and the website that hosts them. In my presentation, I will redefine comics as a form of multimodal and multimedial communication that brings fan communities together and that connects consumers of popular media and culture to its producers.

In the first part of the presentation, I begin with a conceptualization of fan-comics as they compare to my object of research. This conceptualization is necessary in order to understand the multiple genres of communicative purposes fan-comics can assume. I start by looking at *WoW* fan-comics as a form of *fan-fiction*. Although these fan-comics can be categorized as a type of fan-fiction, most research on fan-fiction focuses on written texts, largely ignoring visual and comic style fiction. Fan-fiction can thus be expanded to include fan-comics. However, not all *WoW* fan-comics can be easily categorized as fiction, since they can represent *real* in-game stories and experiences. Thus, fan-comics on video games can also be considered fan-nonfiction. Next, I look at *WoW* fan-comics as closely related to fan-art. Fan-art is a graphic representation of fictitious characters and, as an online phenomenon, it is even more pervasive in fan-culture than both fan-comics and fan-fiction. Many so-called fan-comics in actuality exist in the gray area between fan-comics and fan-art, making them difficult to clearly categorize. However, despite these difficulties, it is important to define fan-comics in terms of fiction and representation in order to better understand their modes of communication.

In the second part of the presentation, I explain how *WoW* fan-comics serve as multimodal and multimedial forms of communication. First I focus on the fan-comics themselves as multimodal communicative acts using Alison Gibbons' (2012) concept of *multimodal cognitive poetics*. Next, I look at the fan-website that hosts the *WoW* fan-comics to exemplify the multimediality of communication surrounding them. Using James Gee's (2007) concept of *affinity space* and the concept of *symbolic interactionism* (H. Blumer, G.H. Mead), I explain how *WoW* fan-comics serve as

communicative acts that lead to negotiations and exchanges of meaning, modifying the relationship among comic creators, fans and *WoW* game developers.

In conclusion, by redefining comics as a form of multimodal and multimedial communication, I hope to shed light in this presentation on the rising phenomenon, and importance, of fan-comics for many online, participatory communities.

Kurzbiografie

Roger Dale Jones is a PhD candidate and research assistant in the English Department at the *Justus Liebig Universität* in Gießen as well as a member of the *International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture*. His dissertation, *Developing Video Game Literacy in the English as a Foreign Language Classroom*, focuses on leveraging the social narrative practices of gamer culture to develop English language communicative competences.