

Comicsgate (2018)

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“Stan wouldn’t stand for it”

That is one of the accusations fans have for Marvel’s editor in chief Joe Quesada (Twitter; @anytom8). With this statement they twist Stan Lee’s fierce stand for inclusion and diversity to demand of Marvel that it has to serve all its paying customers, even if this means to go back to predominantly white and male heroes—after all, Trump’s supporters are fans too!

I wonder if this constellation brings some new challenges for us as researchers in fan studies. Historically fan activism has often called for more diversity or stood up for queer characters while corporations’ capitalistic interest drove them to cater to a more conservative mainstream. Very often this lead to academic research that sided with the fans—defending fandom as cultural space for marginalized groups and criticizing the formatting influence of the industry on how to be a proper fan (Booth 2015). This does seem to be different in the recent ‘comicsgate’ debate. Here fans even accuse Marvel of “anti business actions towards their consumers in service to an ideology” (Twitter; @StarkBlackBat). With accusations like this the movement claims to be about the capitalistic principle of entertainment instead of having their own political agenda.

Is this just another form of antifandom (Gray, 2003)? Or do we need new concepts to describe altercations like this? Furthermore, in the light of the more and more polarized ideological climate, we have to ask ourselves if this is an isolated case. What does it mean for pop culture when it becomes an open battleground for ideological fights in which the fans actually take an open right-wing position against developments towards more diversity? (Here comicsgate certainly follows ‘gamergate’ in 2014 or the protest against an all-female version of the Ghostbusters in 2016) How do we as academics deal with this? In other words: how political can/should fan and comic studies be?

Works Cited:

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Biography:

Following an education as a film, photography, and multimedia professional, Vanessa Ossa worked for several film and television productions. She studied at the University of Cologne and at Washington University in St. Louis. Since September 2016, she has been working as a research associate at the Collaborative Research Center 923 “Threatened Order—Societies under Stress” of the University of Tuebingen, Germany, where her research focuses on narrative representations of post-9/11 terrorism and transmedial narratology with particular interest in films, television series, comics, video games, and related participatory practices.