



Katherine Kekelidze

Conference Report

Fan Practices of Memory and Remembrance

ABSTRACT

The workshop “Fan Practices of Memory and Remembrance” was held by the Participation and Fan Studies working group of the German Society of Media Studies (GfM) in early 2026. The event highlighted various fan activities intended to preserve existing memories and forge new ones regarding audiovisual media, as well as personally significant historical figures, events, and eras. In the process, it provided a venue for the exchange of ideas and networking between German and Dutch scholars in fan studies, media studies, and related fields.

KEYWORDS

fan studies, fan fiction, nostalgia, history, archiving, reinterpretation

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On February 27, 2026, the Participation and Fan Studies working group of the German Society for Media Studies hosted the workshop “Fan Practices of Memory and Remembrance” in Marburg, Germany, in cooperation with Jennifer Ehrhardt, doctoral researcher at Justus Liebig University of Giessen. Building on existing knowledge of fans’ curatorial roles, its aim was to provide an overview of the strategies and activities fans pursue to preserve, circulate, and (re)shape personal, collective, and cultural memory. The workshop consisted of three panels featuring three contributions each, as well as accompanying discussions, and concluded with a final general discussion. Philipp D. Keidl (Utrecht University), Nina Heise (Goethe University of Frankfurt), Anne Deckbar (University of Siegen), Anne Ganzert (Philipps University of Marburg), and Jennifer Ehrhardt chaired the sessions.

Session 1: “Record, Rewind and Remake: Media Remixes and Retro Practices”

Nicole Braidā (Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz): “Caring Supereighters: Networks of Super 8 Amateur Collectors in Germany and Europe”

Nicole Braidā opened the first session with her talk on fans of Super8 reduction prints (cf. Schneider 2019), i.e., small-gauge and commonly abridged versions of films distributed from 1965 to the 1980s. The main object of this fandom is the format with its distinctive aesthetics, haptics, and sound. Braidā’s research applied an ethnographically informed methodology consisting of analysis of fannish media products and interviews, as well as personal correspondence with Super8 collectors. The observed practices included collecting and reviewing film copies, collecting memorabilia, attending conventions, and engaging with fanzines, social media groups, and websites. Braidā’s interviewees were prominent fans, e.g., creators of a fanzine, a database, and a YouTube channel. Digital discussions regarding the film copies notably covered practices to maintain and restore the quality of the copies as well as transformative practices (creating digital covers or adding a preferred language). The shortened nature of the films was a topic of fan controversy. In sum, Braidā identified a ‘network of care’ whose emergence was aided by the onset of digital media, namely a nostalgic community that resists the obsolescence of the format and keeps it alive through mutual support and self-organized archival practices.

Christian Alexius (Philipps University of Marburg): “Everyone’s Favourite Movies in 1950s Super Panavision 70: AI Generated Fake-Retro-Trailers on the YouTube Channel Abandoned Films”

Christian Alexius continued the session with an analysis of the content and reception of AI-generated fake-retro-trailers on YouTube, i.e., trailers remaking existing films in the style of a particular historic period. Drawing on Abigail de Kosnik’s (2021) notion of archontic fan production, he explained that producers of such trailers use the original content as a starting point for creative remixes, with AI as the

tool of execution. Alexius identified the most popular template as 1950s Super Panavision 70, referring to 70mm film material. He noted that this classification implies cinematic spectacle, is sometimes subject to self-mythologization of the American dream as factually inaccurate nostalgia, and is a manifestation of analogue nostalgia, namely employing digital media to mimic an analogue aesthetic (cf. Schrey 2017). Alexius' observations from the often well-received trailers and comments include a nostalgia for practical effects that preceded digital filmmaking, the simplification or loss of themes from the original source material, and the reproduction not only of styles and aesthetics but of social norms and values, including misogyny. Alexius argued that the trailers and their commentary show both an implicit critical reflection and a longing for ostensibly 'simpler' times, including gender stereotypes. Furthermore, Alexius posited that fake-retro-trailers turn contemporary films into nostalgic objects.

Jana Zündel (Goethe University of Frankfurt): "Memes as Working Memories of Audiovisual Media and Fan Cultures"

In the next contribution, Jana Zündel introduced memes as ubiquitous examples of collective memory that showcase fans' media literacy in requiring extensive knowledge of both specific media texts and digital practices. Zündel positioned memes as working memories, using meme trends with taglines referencing the movie *Challengers* (2024) and the TV show *Heated Rivalry* (2025-) as case studies. Zündel argued that memes, like working memory, actively organize or change information, paralleling learning processes of working memory to the adaptable, transformative nature of memetic content. Specifically, memes showcase how fans (as a subcategory of media users) construct similarities between previously unrelated audiovisual media texts via headcanons (personal imaginative interpretations or theories). The objects of memory become both the original artifact and the newly generated content linked to it through iterative and retrospective reinterpretations and reimaginings. Thus, Zündel showed that the memory effect of memes is multidirectional, and she classified memes simultaneously as mashups and as archives.



Philipp D. Keidl, Nicole Braida, Jana Zündel, and Christian Alexius (left to right)



Session 2: “Imagined Futures and Remembered Pasts: Fanfiction and Memory”

Dana Lissmann (Justus Liebig University of Giessen): “‘As of Today, 221 Baker Street Is Essentially in Home Quarantine:’ COVID-19 and Its Impact on Fictions (and Their Authors)”

Opening the second session, Dana Lissmann presented an analysis of wendymarlowe’s *Quarantine* (2020), an alternative universe *Sherlock Holmes* fan fiction set during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Quarantine* is a romantic comedy simulating John Watson’s blog during the first lockdown. Based on a combination of theoretical influences, Lissmann argued that the chosen subject matter and literary techniques positioned comedy as a coping strategy, aimed to increase readers’ social cohesion and resilience, and may result in a cathartic effect. Lissmann identified fan practices of collective refiguration: the emergence of new tropes, hyperlinked tags, and collections, a podfic (audio-recorded fan fiction), a translation of the original work into Russian, and post-pandemic comments indicating feelings of nostalgia, escapism, and hindsight. A key takeaway was the suitability of COVID-19 fan fiction as a platform for narrating memories and perpetuating fictionalized but realistic values relating to regulation and consideration, enabling the genre to store cultural memory.

Linnea Gehlert (University of Münster): “(Re)Writing Schoethe: (Re)Modeling Literary Processes and Characters in AU Fanfiction”

Linnea Gehlert’s presentation examined fan fictions that put historical figures in a modern setting—specifically four Real Person Fiction (RPF) works about Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Schiller. Remembrance of the historical figures and their literary corpus manifest within the fan fictions by (re)modelling and (re)writing practices. Gehlert showed the incorporation of both modern literary practices and historical cultural knowledge in these texts: the reproduction and alteration of direct quotations from Goethe and Schiller’s works as part of the story (e.g., for political statements), a queer reading of the protagonists, references and comparisons to other writers and literary events from later temporal contexts, and the protagonists’ discourse on literature and the writing process. Gehlert also recognized the modernization of literary activities portrayed within the fan fictions. In one of the chosen texts, the poets’ fictionalized versions wrote and discussed fan fiction, therefore becoming vessels for meta-discourse on fan fiction, including legitimization and academic theorizing.

Anastasia Glawion (Friedrich-Alexander University of Erlangen-Nuremberg): “Nostalgia and the Imagined Past in Bible Fictions”

Concluding the second session, Anastasia Glawion presented her research on Bible fan fictions in the context of nostalgia and the imagined past. She observed that these stories are often about encounters with the divine and incorporate prophecy as a narrative device in either a comedic or a reverential manner. Glawion analyzed a body of texts tagged with “Bible” or “Christian Bible,” stemming primarily from fanfiction.net and including a wide range of text lengths but excluding crossovers. BookNLP was used as an annotation tool. Based on Obradović and Baron (2025), Glawion’s measurement of nostalgia builds upon communality, achievement, and power/status as categories of longing. Glawion’s assessment of the fan fictions revealed that the most frequent characters were men, unspecified characters (e.g., everyone), and family roles (e.g., father), while locations were mostly abstract or natural and power



Nina Heise, Dana Lissmann, Linnea Gehlert, and Anastasia Glawion (left to right)

status only manifested at low/high extremes. As the data also indicated a longing for a simpler, idealized past, Glawion framed nostalgia itself as a narrative strategy and a form of resistance to the irreversibility of time. She posited that Bible fan fictions provide a venue for participatory theology and moral negotiation, with the imagined past becoming a further affective driver.

Session 3: “Fan Practices of Remembrance and Historical Memory”

Reïnda Hullij and Floris Schuiling (Utrecht University): “Batavia, a Swinging Town! Jazz and Colonial Nostalgia in Indo-Dutch Culture”

Reïnda Hullij and Floris Schuiling presented a project on Indo-Dutch musicians focusing on the book *Batavia, a Swinging Town!* (1987) about dance orchestras and jazz bands in the Dutch East Indies during its last decades as a Dutch colony. Hullij and Schuiling conceptualize the book as a textual product of fandom and an element of fan history due to its exploration of jazz within Indo-Dutch cultural memory. Book author Allard J.M. Möller’s research strategies included contacting musicians via a magazine as well as calling for reader contributions of memories (e.g., anecdotes) and photos of Batavian bands, which contributed significantly to the book. In their analysis of the book’s production process and context, Hullij and Schuiling shed light on the ambiguous whiteness and westernness of jazz, jazz fandom as an investment in whiteness in Batavia (present-day Jakarta), and, most notably, jazz fandom as a central ingredient of postcolonial memory and colonial nostalgia of repatriated Indo communities in the Netherlands. Jazz, colonial nostalgia, and their interplay contribute notably to complex Indo-Dutch identities.

Suman Jha (University of Passau): “Scrolling Through History: Social Media Fan Discourse and Postmemory in Bollywood Biopic Reception”

Suman Jha delved into biopic fandom, which is characterized by fan authentication practices and includes interrelated objects of engagement (e.g., the actor, the portrayed historical figure, historical events, and the genre). Jha’s subject of analysis was *Sardar Udham* (2021), a critically acclaimed Bollywood



biopic based on revolutionary Udham Singh's pursuit of revenge after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. Jha assessed selected news articles and social media posts on three platforms as sites of memory using targeted search strings. She distinguished three types of contributions to diasporic memory. First, verification and contestation refer to audiences negotiating historic memory by comparing it to their existing knowledge and providing corrections. Second, intergenerational transmission occurs by watching the film in families and contextualizing accounts from older relatives. Later generations relating to the event exemplifies postmemory. Finally, collective affective processing (e.g., fans validating each other's grief) gives rise to shared emotional frameworks that connect communities further to the historical events. Jha's key insight was thus that memory reception and responses to memory narratives transition into the production of new diasporic memory through online interaction.

Jennifer Ehrhardt & Charlotte Kitzinger (Justus Liebig University of Giessen): "We Are Constantly Producing the Past:" Historical 'Fan' Fiction and/as Practices of Holocaust Memory?"

The workshop's last presentation focused on Holocaust commemorative practices. Ehrhardt and Kitzinger highlighted that the term 'fan,' if used as a self-identifier in this context, is distinct from its traditional connotation of admiration, instead denoting people emotionally and interpretatively engaging with mediated representations such as specific testimonies or films. While the identified practices included the creation and reception of summaries, essays, collections of facts, quotations and guides on Holocaust media, Ehrhardt and Kitzinger focused on 'fan' fiction on digital storytelling platforms as an expression of the 'practical turn in Holocaust remembrance.' Texts with Anne Frank as the main protagonist were a notable subcategory; they intersperse direct quotes with fictionalized dialogue and provide counterfactually happy and sometimes romantic resolutions. Analysis of other 'fan' fictions revealed two distinct trends: the centering of historical figures overlooked in mainstream Holocaust literature and the rise of alternate histories that place contemporary celebrities in the era. In these cases, the historical period often serves merely as a backdrop for dark or forbidden romance narratives.



Reïnda Hullij, Floris Schuiling, Suman Jha, Charlotte Kitzinger, and Jennifer Ehrhardt (left to right)

Ehrhardt and Kitzinger also discussed controversies regarding Holocaust ‘fan’ fiction by analyzing comments and authors’ notes. They concluded that such (re)interpretations may foster empathy, raise awareness, and serve as a pedagogical tool. However, they may also be perceived as appropriation and trivialization of the atrocities and scale of the Holocaust, creating distortions, and potentially feeding into denial. Consequently, Ehrhardt and Kitzinger argued that a responsible approach is imperative.

Conclusion

Overall, the contributions of the workshop highlight the interdisciplinary nature of fan studies, drawing on fields like memory studies, film studies, and theology to provide diverse theoretical lenses. The workshop demonstrated that memory practices are incredibly diverse, requiring both academic and ethical scrutiny. Discussions deepened the conceptual understanding of nostalgia, revealing how memory can sometimes produce ‘positive misrepresentations’ of the past. Key artifacts and platforms for these mnemonic practices—such as fan fiction and digital discourse—were analyzed alongside niche meaning-making strategies. Furthermore, the different objects of analysis show how easily the lines between individual and collective memory, as well as between fiction and reality, are blurred. The results of the workshop offer an elaborate foundation for further conjecture and draw attention to data sources for future empirical research.

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