Martin Feld

How did you first get into podcasts? What's your earliest memory of experimenting with or experiencing the medium?

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Anne Korfmacher

That's a good question. I think actually, looking back, it's closely connected to my dissertation project in a way that I yeah, I think my first podcast I ever listened to was Pottermore. So it was a fan podcast discussing Harry Potter. And then I kind of fell into listening to other podcasts as well. So I think the next one the Mugglecast, so all like Harry Potter podcasts. And it was when I first moved away from my family home to study. So I studied in Freiburg, which is about four-and-a-half hours via train away from from where I grew up. And it was very... it was lonely at first. I think that's why I started listening to podcasts, so it's very much like a classic story of podcasting, helping to fill the time and have some people in my ear that I could kind of.

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That's interesting that I never thought about it like that, because afterwards all of the podcasts that I listened to were comedy podcasts when I had finished the... wait, I mean, I'm not sure how familiar you are with fan podcasts and how they work, but mostly they follow a specific series from beginning to end. So with the Harry Potter podcasts, it was mostly rewatching or rereading the books and then rewatching the films. And afterwards, the podcasts generally tend to focus on more the wizarding world in general and the kind of transmedia experience. And I wasn't really interested in that, so when they stopped going through the media text, I kind of fell off the bandwagon and I started listening to other stuff. And so the next podcasts I listen to were all comedy podcasts. Up until today, I think most of the stuff that I'm consuming is comedy content, which in some cases connects with fan podcasts. So many of them have this comedic approach because they are chumcasts, and I think that's the

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Anne Korfmacher (continued)

general format of these podcasts, that they are very funny and that they are based on banter. Yeah, nowadays I mainly listen to comedy podcasts, actually, yeah…

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Martin Feld

That's fascinating. So you used the word chumcast there, which stands out to me personally because I'm a fan of chumcasts as well, except the kind of fan podcasts that I'm listening to fall within the tech genre. But you're talking about following along a story or some kind of media text. Given that you highlighted the word 'chumcast', what do you think it is about the banter or hearing that kind of conversation that drew you in? I mean, you were already a fan of Harry Potter. Naturally, I assume, as that's what appealed to you, but what was it about the banter or the format that appealed to you?

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Anne Korfmacher

I think part of it is the parasocial relationship that you form with the host that is, I think, heightened by the chumcast format. I don't think I've ever had the need or the want to connect to any of the hosts of most of the other podcasts that I've listened to, but with the chumcast format, because it's so casual and because a lot of it is based on personal experiences and personal life kind of being shared by the hosts, I think that's a way of really connecting with, with these people. And in terms of... I thought a lot about parasocial relationship recently because in fan podcasts, I think it's something else. It's different to how it is with normal podca… (huh, 'normal') any other podcast, because in fandom generally, you would assume that there's a non-hierarchical structure, right? That fans are kind of on the same level and the parasocial relationship that you're creating is with the creators of the show and the creators, maybe the actors and somebody that you really admire. But in fan podcasting, you have fans

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Anne Korfmacher (continued)

creating podcasts and then you're creating this relationship with them. So in a way, these creators, these fan creators become kind of cultural celebrities of themselves. So you form a relationship with other fans that normally would look completely different to that. I remember when I moved to Freiburg and I listened to these Harry Potter podcasts that I actually sent an email to one of the hosts. Like that was the only time I've ever contacted a podcast host.

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Martin Feld

Wow…

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Anne Korfmacher

And I was like, 'Oh, I'm sorry for disturbing you, but I really enjoy your podcast and it has really helped me'. And I remember when I received an answer how special that felt, even though I know, of course, that he doesn't remember me at all. Like there's so many people contacting him probably every day because it is such a huge… like these Harry Potter podcasts in like fandom in general, are very popular and very famous. And so you have these big-name fans is what they're called, that everyone really kind of knows their name of. But it felt special. And I think that's part of the chumcast format, is this feeling of you are not just one of the crowd. You could be their friend and you could have this personal relationship with the hosts. And I think that's what drew me in. But that's also what in the end, I don't know. I still like to listen to these podcasts, but I've never felt as connected as I felt during those months where I was quite lonely. So I think, yeah, that's a huge part of it.

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Martin Feld

And when you say Freiburg, you mean in Baden-Württemberg, that state?

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Anne Korfmacher

Yes, the southern....   00:06:14

Martin Feld

That's exactly where I did my own student exchange, so it's a beautiful   00:06:15
city, I can relate to you.

Anne Korfmacher

It is, yeah... and it's very easy to find friends in Freiburg because it is   00:06:19
such a small town. But at the beginning, I mean, if you move and   00:06:25
you've never lived somewhere else, I think I've also listened to more
podcasts now that I think about it when I was abroad as well. So every   00:06:34
time I was somewhere new and I was kind of lonely and trying to figure
out where I fit in, trying to make new friends, having those voices that
are very familiar, that don't respond to you, but you know, you have
them as, as this familiar presence in your ear that really helps.

Martin Feld

Yeah, and were those podcasts that you listened to while you were   00:06:52
travelling, did they fall into the same category of fans following media
texts, or was this in the comedy genre that you mentioned?

Anne Korfmacher

I think it was... I don't actually remember. I have to say I think it was   00:07:03
mostly probably comedy, but chumcast comedies, so people talking
like the I think the McElroy content. So anything that the McElroy   00:07:18
brothers do, I think those work really well. And I think in a way they, for 00:07:23
me at least, they are the perfect example for what chumcasts are
because they normally don't really have a topic that they're talking
about. It's just random stuff that comes to their minds and it has this   00:07:35
comedy aspect to it. So, following along with their kind of shenanigans   00:07:41
and whatever they are currently interested in, that's something that I
was interested in. And then part of it was also listening to, and this is   00:07:49
something that I've struggled with while thinking about my own

Anne Korfmacher (continued)

dissertation topic—fan podcasts: is where does a fan podcast start and where does it end? Because one of the podcasts I really enjoyed listening to was 'The Besties', which is a couple of former or current game journalists talking about their favourite video games. And so is this… would this be considered a fan podcast? I don't think I would call it a fan podcast because most of them are still active journalists, game journalists. But of course, they have this personal connection to the text that they're talking about and the title in itself tells you that it is about like, what are the best games, what are we enjoying? But yeah, that was something that I also really liked to to listen to during that time.

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Martin Feld

So that's an interesting thing that you said just there about the status of a fan, because what I've gathered from you so far is there's relatability, there's interaction, there's sharing this interest. Would you say that if someone is a journalist or at least thinking about the experiences that you've listened to, if someone's a journalist or being paid to do this elsewhere, professionally, does that mean that they're not a fan in the same way?

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Anne Korfmacher

I don't think it necessarily precludes you from being a fan. I think to a certain extent it's about self-identification. So if you yourself call yourself a fan, I think you are a fan. However, at a certain point, especially if you're making money from what you're doing, you're not a fan in that area anymore. So I'm thinking about people like J.J. Abrams who call themselves 'fan' and who started out as a fan. But then if you're making millions and millions of your fanhood, I'm not quite sure if I would consider that fandom, still. Maybe you can still be a fan of other things or sci-fi in general or something like that, but not of your

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own content, of course. And there's this… in fandom studies, you often	00:09:51
talk about how it's a lot about gift economy. So whatever you're	00:09:58
producing as a fan is given as a gift to the fan community. So normally	00:10:03
you don't make any money from that. So the moment you make money	00:10:06
from it, people go, 'Well, that's commercial now', even if it's just a tiny	
amount of money. It's also, of course, connected to it not being legal	00:10:14
to produce transformative work about copyrighted material. But there	00:10:22
has been a precedent to fans making some money from their fandom,	
which is fanzines… so magazines by fans created since the 60s, I	
think, where you have kind of a critical, often metacritical material that	
is being produced by fans and then being sold for a very low amount	
of money, normally just to cover the costs of making this because it	
was printed and then actually sent out to people. But I think in some	00:10:52
way, the podcasts today are an extension of that fan work that was	
being done or is sometimes still being done today, in terms of these	
fanzines, where some of the podcasts are making money, some of the	
fan podcasts. Most of them are too tiny, they don't have enough	00:11:09
followers. But then you have these giants like the Gilmore Guys who	00:11:13
have live shows and merch, and they can make quite a bit of money	
from, from their podcasting endeavours. And I would still consider	00:11:23
them to be fans because they started this project not with a goal in	
mind: 'Oh, we're going to be these celebrities creating content, but I	
love this show and I want to talk about this show'. So, I don't think	00:11:37
there's a clear-cut definition of what makes the fan and kind of at what	
point you're talking about professionals. I think there's also something	00:11:45
to be said about professional fans. So people who create content	00:11:49
because they are fans, but then they realise making that content	
makes them money, and so they kind of transition slowly. So there's a	00:12:00
lot of YouTube buzz that I'm not sure if you're familiar with that	

Anne Korfmacher (continued)

content, but they do like unboxings and they buy a lot of fandom merch. And at what point is this not about their fandom anymore, but just about like making content for other people? I don't know. I think this is a case-by-case basis. Probably you'll have to decide that depending on who the creators and maybe how much money they make. But, yeah, I think there's not a clear-cut definition.

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Martin Feld

That transition that you mentioned, going from just being a fan to being a professional fan or producing in some way is very interesting. You mentioned that you're doing a dissertation on fan podcasts. How did that transition from being just a listening fan to what is essentially an academic fan or an investigative fan, how did that turn out for you? Can you tell me the story about how you went from just listening to wanting to research it?

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Anne Korfmacher

Yeah, for sure. There's actually a term for that. If you're familiar with 'aca-fans', which I think is really fun.

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Martin Feld

Mhm, yep….

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Anne Korfmacher

This transition was quite natural for me because I wrote my master's thesis about two different podcasts, 'My Dad Wrote a Porno' and 'Fangasm', which used to be a Potter… Harry Potter fan-fiction podcast, really niche, but really fun. And so that was kind of my first foray into actually doing fan studies. So before I had never really done that, and my dissertation was about, or so my master's dissertation was about post-feminism, so I really wasn't focussed on any kind of fan studies focus. It was mostly cultural studies and gender studies. But then I realised while researching that podcast that that was

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something that I was interested in exploring more. While I had listened   00:13:54

to some fan podcasts, I hadn't actually listened to that many, so it was

just like a handful of podcasts. And while researching for my master's   00:14:02

thesis, I came across so many different fan podcasts that I noticed

there must be some literature on this. There's so many of these   00:14:11

podcasts. There must be something that anyone has written. And I   00:14:13

realised that nobody had! And so I think it was the lack of academic   00:14:18

research done on fan podcasts that kind of inspired me to do it, to say,

'Well, if nobody else is doing it, somebody has to do it'. I have some   00:14:30

knowledge in my kind of personal connection to the topic, but also

having read a bit in fan studies. And so I thought, *OK, this is   00:14:39

something that I find interesting that I think is valuable for the study of

podcasting in general, but also fan studies*. And so this is kind of what   00:14:47

inspired me: to have studied a fan podcast in a different context and

then to see how can we look at this from a fan studies perspective

more. So that's kind of what inspired me and something that   00:14:59

particularly interested me in my topic, which is I'm calling these fan

podcasts 'commentary podcasts', is that they all engage in a popular

or media commentary format. And I'm not sure if you've been around   00:15:14

YouTube recently, but in the last like two years, so many commentary

channels have popped up and people are talking not just about

politics, but also, and social issues, but also specifically about media

texts. So you have people rewatching their favourite series or favourite   00:15:30

films from their childhood. Some channels are specifically about   00:15:35

riffing, so kind of making fun of these texts… rewatching, I don't know,

'Twilight' for the third time and making fun of the series. And so I   00:15:44

noticed that a similar trend was popping up in podcasting and that is

very much connected with fan communities, which makes sense, of

course, talking about media texts, you have to have some kind of

Anne Korfmacher (continued)

personal attachment to the text without it getting very boring if you have to analyse, I don't know, eight seasons of 'Friends'. And so that was kind of how, I thought, it's not just about fan podcasts booming, it's also about this format booming. It's also about commentary, popular commentary, amateur commentary being something that people seem to be very interested in currently. My dissertation is kind of trying to connect that and trying to figure out what is it about this format that interests people, and that interests me because I'm obviously someone who has seen a lot of these YouTube videos and listened to a lot of these podcasts. And so I have this personal connection to it that I, I find it so fascinating that people create this content.

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Martin Feld

It is fascinating. When people hear the word 'commentary'—and I know that I do—when I hear the word 'commentary', sometimes in the context of a piece of media, a media text, you think of something like DVD commentary where someone's talking along to the thing that is being watched. How many of the things that you're talking about are stand-alone podcast episodes that people would listen to to hear about a certain topic or media text and how many of them, if at all, are something that you would listen to while watching something else?

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Anne Korfmacher

I'm focusing on podcasts that are retrospective. So in the sense that they have listened or watched or in some way consumed the media content and then they're talking about it afterwards. There are a couple of podcasts that are supposed to be the kind of director's commentary but made by fans that you have to start at the same time. But not many, actually, because I think most of these podcasts and that's part of I think the, the charm is you don't actually have to listen

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or watch or read the source material to be able to consume them. So there's a difference between fan podcasts that are very much targeted towards an audience who, who know the text by heart. And some of that is connected to those, those huge fandoms like Harry Potter, where most of the podcasts are targeting an audience that is very familiar with the text. But then you also have fan podcasts that go... most of the time they actually state that at the beginning of the podcast that they say, 'We want this to be very accessible, even to people who have never listened or read or watched any of this content, and we want to provide kind of an, an entry point for new fans, potential new fans, or just those interested in joining the podcast'. And so many of them provide very detailed summaries because they're not allowed to, to, of course, legally reproduce the whole... the whole text. So they often have like audio clips that are taken from the TV show to show what they're talking about, maybe explain what is that a joke sounded like, even if they can, of course, show the scene. And then the, the commentary kind of follows that. So it is a mixture of a commentary track where they mention what the scene was and then they talk about it. And then you also have the media commentary in the sense of criticism or critical discussion about the text. So it has very different... and this is why I'm, I'm considering it from the perspective of formalism, so I'm considering commentary as a form because all of the different genres that we've mentioned now, so the director's commentary, the kind of media commentary that you find in maybe journalism, journalistic media commentary, all of these different genres, they don't exactly describe what these podcasts are doing. So what I'm trying to figure out is: is there a core to all of these genres, a kind of form that is portable across these genres that we can use to make sense of podcast commentary? And part of that is literary

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Anne Korfmacher (continued)

commentaries, which are just another way of making sense of a text by offering comments on the side of your, I don't know,

hundreds-of-years-old Aristotelian text. And so I think it's quite funny   00:20:17

how many of the strategies that these podcasts use are very similar to like, literary commentaries trying to make sense of Plato or something

like that. So it's looking back, going, 'Oh, well, what did they mean by   00:20:29

this one sentence here in Harry Potter? What does this word mean and   00:20:36

how can we make sense of that, not just in the context of the text, but

historically and maybe even relate that to our personal lives?' And so,   00:20:46

yeah, that's something that I find particularly interesting.

Martin Feld

Given the sheer variety of types of commentary podcast that you   00:20:50

referred to….

Anne Korfmacher

Yeah...   00:20:56

Martin Feld

How did you actually come to select what I assume is a number of   00:20:57

case studies for your dissertation. You've listened to a lot?   00:21:03

Anne Korfmacher

Yeah….   00:21:04

Martin Feld

Clearly… How did you narrow it down?   00:21:04

Anne Korfmacher

Well, the first decision I had to make was: was I going to, to only do   00:21:07

British or American podcasts, which I couldn't narrow down because

most of these podcasts are American, but I am mostly British studies

in my scholarly interests, so I'm doing both. The next decision then   00:21:25

was: there are so many media texts being discussed, so you have

these, I mentioned video games, you have television shows, you have

films, you have music being discussed by music fans, all of these things. And I decided to go for narrative media texts, so nothing interactive. So I'm not doing music. I'm not doing video games, mostly books. So literature, film and TV, because those are the majority of fan podcasts. So I was trying to be representative in that sense. And then I decided to divide this genre into four subgenres. Some of these have been discussed in, in podcasting studies before, which is really cool. So you have the reread and rewatch podcasts that have this nostalgic register that are kind of going back to a text. Then you have recap podcasts, which are also very popular and which you find as the recap format, I think is quite established. You have currently-running TV shows, for example, that are being discussed when the new 'Game of Thrones' episode was coming out, people were discussing it after the fact. And then the third category I chose to do was review podcasts. So that's different in that the hosts pick, for example, a genre. So they do sci-fi comics, let's say, a genre and a medium, and then they look at a different sci-fi comic each episode and kind of discuss it and judge it and see if they like it, if they would recommend it to other fans. And they kind of create this canon of accepted or good media content that they would recommend to someone. And then finally, you have this riffing category, which is, I think, particularly interesting because it raises questions of who is a fan and who isn't and can we make fun of something and still enjoy that content. Does it make us a fan of the material of the, the commentary may be of the banter, of the riffing, and so these are kind of my four categories of podcasts that I'm looking at and I'm currently trying to reduce my corpus because right now I have 16 case studies, which is [sigh] which is a lot. But I'm writing a German dissertation, which is also a lot. So I'm supposed to write about 300 to 350 pages and it's 1.5…. What's it called?

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Martin Feld

Line spacing? 00:24:03

Anne Korfmacher

Line spacing, yes. So it's quite got a lot of writing that you have to do. 00:24:05
And a third of it is just my theory. But then I still have like 200 to 250 00:24:11
pages left for my case study. So it's not like I don't have the space for 00:24:17
a lot of case studies. But I think right now I'm thinking about maybe 00:24:22
reducing it to 12 for now and see how far I can get with that, because it
is a genre analysis, I feel like it has to be representative and I can't just
pick and choose and go, well, these three podcasts are representative
of the whole genre, especially because there are so many subgenres
and kind of specifications of how they approach these texts. So, yeah, 00:24:48
I'm hoping that this will work out for me. We'll see. 00:24:50

Martin Feld

I'm sure it will. I'm sure it will. 00:24:53

Anne Korfmacher

I'm sure. 00:24:54

Martin Feld

But I understand what you mean about having to be representative. 00:24:54
You mentioned that you angle more towards the British side of things, 00:24:58
but you've had to acknowledge or really include the American. I 00:25:07
understand because...

Anne Korfmacher

Oh, yeah? 00:25:08

Martin Feld

...from personal experience with tech podcasts that I'm interested in, 00:25:09
there's going to be a bit of an American focus or American
involvement. What's the difference for you in that British versus 00:25:16
American approach and why do you personally gravitate towards the
British side?

Anne Korfmacher

I don't think it has anything to do with podcasting specifically. It's just my interest is in, has always been more in British studies than it has been in American studies, especially because I am from a literary studies background. So most of the literature I consume is still British. However, when it comes to popular culture, it's really difficult to restrict yourself to British studies because most of the really interesting stuff that's happening is from from America or at least more international. And so that's kind of what I have to really look at American podcasts. And I would also argue that the difference between these fan podcasts isn't as stark as one might think. So I think the, the British podcasts often don't have an audience that is as big sometimes because they have very specific texts that they're looking at which are British. So one of the podcasts I'm, I'm currently analysing is 'The Fawlty Towers Podcast'. And so it's engaging with a TV series from the '70s, which is British and has a very British humour as well. And so not many people around the world might be familiar with the programme in contrast to things like 'Supernatural' or the Gilmore Guys, the 'Gilmore Girls' show. So that's kind of one difference that I've noticed. It's just the texts that are being talked about. But the general chumcast format is very... I think they share that across the board. The difference might be in how closely they work with the text, in contrast to how much they send to their personalities and centre this banter. And so I think in American shows, you often have very long episodes, often longer than the British podcasts. So I always pick the 'Gilmore Guys' podcast as this great example of having like two-hour podcast episodes where they talk not just about one specific episode, but they talk about so much more. And at the end, the podcast really evolved into this show that was more about the hosts than about anything else. Whereas 'The Fawlty Towers Podcast', for example, is

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Anne Korfmacher (continued)

very focused on the text. You don't learn too much about the hosts	00:27:54
throughout the show. So it's… the episodes are quite short and they	00:27:57
you learn some titbits about them. So you learn that their fathers, for	00:28:04
example, so they have kids, but you don't really know who these	
people are and in the way that you do with the American ones. So	00:28:14
maybe the parasocial relationship is more pronounced in those. But I	00:28:18
wouldn't want to generalise that simply because you don't have the	
same amount of fan podcasts being produced in the UK than in the	
US, so….	

Martin Feld

I'm going to have to check out this 'Fawlty Towers Podcast' because I	00:28:27
absolutely love that show.	

Anne Korfmacher

Oh really? That's nice!	00:28:32

Martin Feld

Etched into my brain. I love it! But that's interesting. You mentioned	00:28:33
the the difference in the level of parasocial interaction, this feeling of	
connection that you have to the hosts, given that you have this	
background in studying texts or literary studies, how has it been for	
you to develop this angle of looking at the audio commentary of the	
text? Has it been difficult for you to separate the commentary itself	00:28:56
from the text that is being discussed, or is it kind of difficult to unwind	
that? What can you say about that?	00:29:06

Anne Korfmacher

I think I've been struggling a bit with simply, with analysing audio.	00:29:08
That's something that I had to figure out for myself how to do,	00:29:14
because I'm… this is yeah, this is new to me. I mean, as I mentioned, I	00:29:21
did some podcast analysis in my master's thesis. So I, I figured out	00:29:27
how to analyse transcripts. So that's kind of the way to go about it, if	00:29:32

you're a literary scholar, you, you make the audio into a text. But I	00:29:38
don't find it particularly difficult to... to focus on the commentary	00:29:43
instead of kind of to, to figure that out, because the, the text itself, I'm	
consuming that to a certain degree. So I've watched 'Fawlty Towers' as	00:29:51
a series, but I'm not really interested in the text itself, so I'm really only	
interested in the commentary. So what did the hosts talk about? So	00:30:00
even if they mentioned something that is not mentioned in the	
television series, that doesn't really matter to me. So if they, the focus	00:30:07
really is on what did the hosts centre and what are the things that they	
are interested in when they're talking about the text. And in 'The	00:30:17

Fawlty Towers Podcast' particularly, I'm currently looking at the
nostalgic angle that the hosts take and how that reflects in their
registers in the way they talk, what they talk about as well, so the
content and the form, and how that kind of negotiates their position
towards the text, but also towards the audience because they, they
mention a couple of critical points so that they have an introductory
episode where they go, 'Well, we we really love this television series,

the sitcom, and we find it very funny. And we grew up with it'. So it was	00:30:53
kind of they have this childhood connection to the show, but then they	
go, 'Well, this is 2000...', I think in 2018 is when they recorded it. And	00:31:04
so there are a couple of jokes that don't really land anymore and that	
we find important to point out. And so a lot of the show is actually	00:31:12
them criticising particular jokes or going, 'Wow, this is something that	
wouldn't happen today. You wouldn't be able to write this joke	00:31:20
anymore because it's racist or this is a homophobic joke or this is a	
sexist joke'. And so they tried to negotiate this position between: 'I'm a	00:31:26
fan and I really like this and I'm sorry, please don't come at me. But I'm	00:31:34
also going to be a bit critical of this'. And so they they try to do this.	00:31:37
And some of the comments and some of the reviews on Apple	00:31:39

Anne Korfmacher (continued)

Podcasts were actually like, 'Oh, I really enjoy this, but you're... this is   00:31:46
actually a nostalgic podcast, so could you tone it down with the
criticism?' or one...   00:31:51

Martin Feld

Really?   00:31:53

Anne Korfmacher

Yeah, and one actually mentions, 'Oh, this is very   00:31:53
social-justice-warrior-type-y, we don't really need that'. And so that,   00:32:00
that was something that I found quite interesting in how the
commentary then manages to negotiate that position and to go, 'Well,
we're fans, but mmm... it's critical. But then again, we still really like   00:32:14
this show'. So, yeah, the kind of negotiation of who is the audience   00:32:17
that you're catering to that you're recoding this text for, which is part
of how commentary works, is you're trying to bridge a gap between
the text and the audience, but then you're catering to that audience.
You're kind of a mediator in this commentator position, but you're also   00:32:35
a fan. So you have a personal connection to that text. So how do you   00:32:40
make sure that you're doing yourself a favour and also your audience?

Martin Feld

The word 'audience' is a very interesting one, and you've made me   00:32:48
think there are different levels of, I think, interactivity that different
listeners engage in....

Anne Korfmacher

Yeah.   00:32:57

Martin Feld

...on podcasts. And no doubt it's changed for you in the course of   00:32:57
doing this dissertation that you're engaging much more deeply in
certain content within these podcasts than other listeners would be.
But can you tell me a little bit about your experience as a listener and   00:33:09

maybe how it's changed over time? Are you someone who listens   00:33:15

purely to the podcast or do you engage in review-writing or any

supplementary or connected media, social media accounts or anything

like that? Who are you as a listener for different podcasts?   00:33:27

Anne Korfmacher

That's a really interesting question, because I think the way that I   00:33:31

engage with podcasts is very similar to how I engage with fandom,

which is very passively. I'm a consumer and I'm not really someone   00:33:41

who engages with the content that I consume, at least not in kind of a

supplementary way of writing reviews, and so this is why I mentioned

the email-writing I did at the beginning of my podcast listening,

because that was something that I was unfamiliar with. I had never   00:34:02

really done that before. And it took me... it took podcasts for me to do   00:34:03

that, which is interesting. So before that, I had never really, also in   00:34:08

fandom, never really engaged too much. I was always someone who   00:34:15

was consuming things, who was... I really enjoyed discussing media   00:34:18

texts with other people in real life, but not via chat or via Internet

forums. So I was always someone who was consuming content. And I   00:34:25

think the same goes for podcasts, that the only time that I engage with

it is for academic reasons. And then I think the only other exception   00:34:37

might be 'My Dad Wrote a Porno', which has this cult following at this

point because I had this academic interest in it. And then I was   00:34:50

researching their kind of social media profiles and then I found more

content and sometimes when they mentioned something on the

podcast actually go look for it. So, so if they mentioned a website that   00:35:00

they think is really interesting to fans and then I go and check it out,

but that's it. So I'm really not someone who engages a lot. And I think   00:35:07

a lot of podcast listeners actually don't engage with the podcast that

they listen to on that level. So I don't have too many, I don't have a   00:35:17

Anne Korfmacher (continued)

study in my head right now. But I think in the... Hannah McGregor   00:35:21

wrote wrote about these Harry Potter rewatch podcasts. So that's   00:35:27

always kind of my touchstone. And I think from what she said is that   00:35:29

their Harry Potter podcast of which please has a lot of listeners who

don't actually engage on social media. So from her personal   00:35:41

experience, I know that there seems to be a disconnect for many

listeners who just consume and who don't really engage. And then the   00:35:49

question is in how far that impacts the parasocial relationship. Of   00:35:54

course, because I think if you engage with the hosts and they respond

to you, you feel much more deeply connected than if you're someone

like me and only listens to something.

Martin Feld

So it's really an either-or situation. You're either all in....   00:36:05

Anne Korfmacher

Yes!   00:36:10

Martin Feld

...or more of a consumer of the audio. OK, so given that you had this   00:36:10

stark contrast between the rest of what you listen to and the example

of 'My Dad Wrote a Porno', what were some of the things that you

enjoyed following or looking at that they mentioned whether it was

their own accounts or otherwise? Because, I mean, you've got the   00:36:27

possibility of linking in show notes or perhaps just mentioning it in the

audio. How did the experience broaden for you as you were listening to   00:36:34

that show?

Anne Korfmacher

I think in part it was... I think in part it's connected to me studying the   00:36:39

podcast that I was just really engaged in it for such a long time for a I

think a whole year that I felt like all new content that was being

produced was still super-interesting to me on a level that it wasn't for

Anne Korfmacher (continued)

other podcasts. And so going on these different websites and kind of following their social media profiles, which I don't really do with other podcasts, I'm not sure how it really impacts my personal relationship to the podcast, except that I feel more... invested in general, and I feel a sense of ownership because I wrote about it, which I realised in the... in actually their last episode that they published, which was a footnotes where they talked to a couple of listeners. So they phone them up and ask them what they wanted to talk about. And one of the listeners they talked to told them, 'Oh, I actually wrote my master's thesis about you guys!'. And in that moment, I felt this sense of, oh, that's me. But also that's not me. I felt the sense of I should have, should have told them? Should I talk to them about what I did? That was really an aca-fan moment, so an academic-fan moment where I thought on the one hand, I'm a fan of the show and so I feel like I want to engage with these people. On the other hand, I'm a scholar and for all of the other things that I'm doing, especially when I'm writing something in literary studies about like a novel, I never have the same sense of, oh, I now want to talk to these authors about my work. So that's something that I've noticed that writing about this podcast has... strengthened my fan experience, but also my scholarly experience of the podcast, so it's kind of a feedback loop of, oh, I enjoy this, I have to read more about it or I have to write about it or I have to enjoy it more. And so, yeah. If that makes sense....

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Martin Feld

And the fan practice continues.

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Anne Korfmacher

Yes, exactly.

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Martin Feld

That's perfect. Yeah, because it's interesting to think about, to me, you have these visual media surrounding the audio medium and you know, there's this feeling that the audio is central, but the nature of the Web, all of these things are kind of interconnected and sprawled and you can come at it from different directions. So it sounds to me like it always starts with the audio for you and then occasionally it's branched out. Is that fair? You've either had an interest in the media text or you've listened to the podcast then gone from there. It's not like you were on Twitter or something and then got pulled in that way.

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Anne Korfmacher

No, that really doesn't work for me as much. I think it's also because I'm... I use Twitter very much for academic purposes and not really for looking for recommendations, though I have to say, I don't think the starting point is necessarily always audio, just in terms of how I think the podcast cover art has a huge impact on more than we think on if we click on something or not. And I notice with my fan podcast that you can see the level of like how professional they are and how invested they are in having a huge audience, just in how professional their podcast artwork is. And some of the artwork, for example, 'The Fawlty Towers Podcast' is quite fun in that it kind of jokes about... the cover art is the sign, the Fawlty Towers sign that the show uses to show the hotel, the hotel sign, and then it has 'podcast' underneath, but the 'a' I think, is kind of crooked, just like how in the show the sign is crooked. So it plays with that. It's kind of a mimetic way of of doing transformative fan art and saying, 'Oh, I'm using this from the show and transforming it, but it's very plain otherwise'. So it has a white background. It's not, nothing kind of special. And then you have some podcasts, fan podcasts, where you have professional photos being taken at some point because they're really famous and popular and so

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Anne Korfmacher (continued)

that they have the money for that. And I think it has an impact on who   00:41:15

clicks on these podcasts. For me personally, I think most of my   00:41:20

listening comes from recommendations or listening to one podcast.

And then they mentioned something else, something similar. And   00:41:28

that's the way that I find new podcasts. But I do think that some   00:41:34

people are more open to just simply clicking on a podcast app and

going, 'Oh, this looks nice'. I just look for... that's something I wanted   00:41:41

to talk to you about, actually, because I think....

Martin Feld

Sure.   00:41:47

Anne Korfmacher

...the finding things on platforms was one reason why I decided to do a   00:41:48

genre analysis, because you, for me at least, I think it's weird how... not

weird, but most of the genre categorisation that you find on these

apps and on platforms like Apple Podcasts and Spotify are very, very

broad. And I think to a certain degree, don't allow you to find new   00:42:09

content that is very specific, especially if you have these niche

podcasts in the fandom area. Either you're looking for, 'Oh, I want to   00:42:21

listen to a podcast about 'Twin Peaks''. And so you go looking for 'Twin   00:42:25

Peaks' or you're going, 'Oh, this is TV and Film'. And so the category is   00:42:31

huge and it encompasses basically everything. And that's kind of one   00:42:36

of the reasons why I thought there has to be a way to kind of

categorise these podcasts that is more accurate, accurate than just

going, 'Oh, this is a culture podcast', because what the hell is the

culture podcast? Like, that's, that could be anything.   00:42:50

Martin Feld

Yeah, we're we're swimming in culture.   00:42:52

Anne Korfmacher

Yeah....   00:42:54

Martin Feld

That's right, or I hope... I hope we're swimming in culture. So that's   00:42:54
interesting. So you would say that directories on different apps. I   00:42:57
mean, you might come up with a word that you prefer, but catering
broadly or to the mainstream or not really facilitating discovery of
more niche topics—is that is that what you're saying?

Anne Korfmacher

Yeah, I think so, because what you find is like a comedy category, a   00:43:13
journalism category. Those are kind of the main genres that are being   00:43:22
talked about. But then I think it was in, in the Podnews mail where they   00:43:27
talked about who listens to what kinds of podcast dramas. So they did   00:43:37
some kind of empirical research. And just the way it was structured as   00:43:40
like TV and film, literature, and I was like, but what does that mean? A   00:43:47
literature podcast can look so many different ways. Is it a review   00:43:50
podcast? Is it a reread podcast? Is it a fan podcast that is rereading   00:43:52
something? Is it a journalist talking to me about... is it a book club?   00:43:56
Like what's the, the format? And so I just thought it was very broad,   00:44:01
very all-encompassing and maybe not facilitating, kind of finding
something that is more niche and more, more specific. I mean, it   00:44:17
makes sense in terms of commercial success. Like, of course, you   00:44:21
don't want to I mean, it doesn't really make sense to have a category
that's just fan podcasts, probably because it is the long tail of
podcasting. But yeah, for academic purposes at least, I think it makes   00:44:31
a lot of sense to try to find some kind of categorisation and figure out
how we can analyse different genres without just going, 'Oh, this is the
comedy podcast and all comedy podcasts work the same'. So looking   00:44:46
at not just content, what these categorisations do, but looking at
format as well. And I think that will come just with the maturing   00:44:52
medium and podcasting studies being more established that people
will just be more interested in genre analysis as well.

Martin Feld 00:45:04

No, you make a great point, ah both on the content and the form, because a literature podcast, as you said, could take so many different conversational styles or types of focus, not to mention that, you know, someone might be into French literature from 500 years ago or contemporary British literature.

Anne Korfmacher 00:45:20

Yeah….

Martin Feld 00:45:21

So who knows? On the topic of your dissertation, where are you right now and what's the journey ahead?

Anne Korfmacher 00:45:28

I finished my theory draft two months ago, I think… It's been a while and I'm currently writing my first analysis, which is the 'Fawlty Towers' analysis, and I mentioned I started one-and-a-half years ago. I have 00:45:44 two more years to go, so it should be enough time. I'm currently 00:45:50 struggling a bit because my, it is my first analysis chapter and I haven't done any analysis in a while, and so I'm trying to figure out kind of how to go about it and how to work with my methodology and how to make it productive for, for my thesis. But I think, yeah, I'm excited to see 00:46:09 where it goes. And also if, if there's any surprises ahead, maybe I'll 00:46:13 have this famous like, 'aha' moment where I have this epiphany and something clicks. But yeah, that's kind of where I am at the moment. 00:46:25