

Popular Crime and Populist Investigation: The *CSI* Franchise and Multi-Media Participation

Elke Weissmann, Edge Hill University

Crime is often understood to be popular because it allows audiences to engage and participate in the investigation process (Neale 1990): readers and viewers are invited to guess along, and put themselves into the shoes of the detective. This is certainly true too with one of the most popular crime dramas of the 2000s: *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*. Whilst the franchise is starting to lose some of its popularity (the two spin-offs *CSI: Miami* and *CSI: NY* have now been cancelled), the franchise is still going strong with several other extensions, including a facebook game, a board game and an extensive number of novels. Such an extension of the franchise seems to offer a greater variety of participation to its fans; the facebook game draws on ideas of interactivity as participation (Ziegfeld 1989) and literally allows audiences to play at being investigators, as does the board game. But both games seem to fall short of the pleasures of the original series. The paper examines the notion of participation in relation to the popular and the populist. Drawing on political economy and new media theory, it will highlight conceptual shortfalls as well as struggles for power and control that revolve around the term 'participation' in relation to crime fictions. In particular it will examine the spaces for participation in different media and call for a more differentiated understanding of the term. Countering traditional understandings of new media in particular, which highlight the participatory nature of the internet (Jenkins 2006, Turkle 1997), the paper will examine how the need for data mining in the current business models of online media means that the more creative spaces of participation are limited. Whilst more traditional and linear forms of storytelling open up spaces for creative participation as a semiotic necessity, more recent, non-linear forms of storytelling close down creativity in participation precisely because they are interactive and misunderstand the role and agency of the individual in relation to a genre which is inherently social in function.