

Book Reviews

Noble, Safiya Umoja. *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. New York University Press, 2018.

Safiya Umoja Noble's *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* critiques the power of algorithms to consistently reproduce racial stereotypes within the digitized public sphere. The book has been regularly lauded by early reviewers within both the tech world and among scholars of the humanities. In her popular work, Noble skillfully weaves widely dissimilar fields into an accessible narrative that is clearly prescient in the wake of both the Cambridge Analytica scandal and the continued repercussions of GamerGate. Although often quite vague on solutions, Noble's analysis offers an important interdisciplinary contribution that exposes structural racism within the digital realm through both personal anecdotes and important current events. Sometimes seeming an overly synthetic gilded lily, Noble's work provides the public significant awareness about how racism is encoded within algorithms, an essential step in overcoming the continued implications of digital discrimination.

Algorithms of Oppression applies discourse analysis of algorithms and scrutinizes the corporations that profit from a racialized internet. Following work by Helen Nissenbaum and Lucas Introna, Virginia Eubanks, and Cathy O'Neil, Noble argues that discrimination is embedded within the algorithms used by search engines that consistently profit from the reproduction of racist and sexist digital information. Due to a previous career in marketing, Noble keenly reads how racism specifically assists Google's profiteering through Search and PageRank.

Noble begins her analyses of algorithmic oppression through a consistently reiterated story about her searching the phrase "black girls" to find interesting topics to better connect with her stepdaughter and nieces. To her surprise, Noble discovered the pornification of the term "black girls" on her Google Search, which pressed the author to hunt for more discriminatory terminology that persists within Google's algorithms. To uncover these racialized digital spaces for her monograph, Noble applies black feminist critical theory to define the areas where Google reproduces these disturbing stereotypes. The many examples that Noble highlights

are often quite striking and alarming, including discussions of the links between animals and specific races found throughout the bowels of the internet.

In the first chapter, Noble examines how corporations, like Google, control public information that consistently reproduce stereotypes about beauty, animality, and race. The essential argument here is that the public is not solely to blame for the production of racial information on the internet. Rather, search engines should be blamed for profiting from the reproduction of such discriminatory knowledge. To denunciate these corporate powers, Noble portrays how the automated decision-making systems that emerged from initial human constructions are not racially neutral due to the way they represent the biases of the original coders and the continuing discursive power of the white patriarchy. To further explore the influence of these algorithms, Noble offers an analysis of how terms move up and down rankings on search engines, whether they are positioned on the first page or fall below those initial results.

In her following chapter, Noble enters deeper into these algorithmic weeds to explore how Google Search and PageRank specifically reproduce racial stereotypes. Noble points to specific areas where Google prioritizes advertisements as a means to both promote their search products and reap proceeds from the payments of other producers who want to publicize their goods next to search results. Because of this ability to prioritize for profits from advertisers, Noble argues that Google can also work to prioritize progressive racial ideals and delimit the occurrence of racist sites on search results. Through a discussion of search results related to Jewish populations and the Holocaust, previously analyzed by Siva Vaidhyanathan, Noble argues that Google has been willing, and is currently able, to directly control how results are ranked. Despite this important example of how search engines limit specific white nationalist search results, the reader is often left wondering where a discussion of censorship enters into Noble's requests for governmental regulation.

Algorithms of Oppression emerges from these technical discussions of Google Search to offer more pragmatic discussions of how the reproduction of racial terminology on the web directly alters cultural discourse beyond the internet. Chapter three provides a reading of how white supremacists circulate false information and racist discourse that led, in part, to the AME massacre in Charleston, South Carolina during the summer of 2015. The chapter continues with a discussion of the legality of the "right to be forgotten," as related to Noble's previous analysis of how information can be controlled to eliminate racist discourse

in similar ways that individuals assert a right to be forgotten when false stories or revenge porn persist on search engines.

Chapter four ties concerns with how information is collected and reproduced on the internet to earlier discourses of racism in previous public spheres. This analysis shows that the sorting mechanisms of modern algorithms resemble previous forms of information science and Scientific Racism and are therefore susceptible to similar institutional controls. Noble reads this narrative through the library sciences, offering how classification systems influenced modern web searches. Chapter five continues this discussion of library and information sciences to discuss the obligation of archives to better train their professionals about classification bias. Chapter six then summarizes Noble's desire for regulation through articulating how corporations should be delimited to alter their algorithms to better represent progressive racial knowledge.

A conclusion analyzes concerns with racialization on Yelp through an interview with a small business owner who has found their livelihood effected by racism within the digitized public sphere. A brief epilogue explores the 2016 election through an analysis of "fake news" as a threat to democracy. In these short concluding sections and throughout her work, Noble contends that technology is not neutral. Rather, it is white and patriarchal, born of a history of racial oppression that began in an Enlightenment obsessed with cataloging information as a means of racial control and labor appropriation.

That desire for cataloguing continues today in the corporate algorithms of search engines that represent a white and neoliberal order that circulates racial knowledge to reap the repetitious profits of late capitalism. To cure these deeply troubling issues, Noble hopes for a re-imagination of information culture that defines a way out of a digital world where the public domain is enclosed and reproduced for corporate gains. Her critical analysis is importantly situated for a public reading, however Noble consistently reveals problems that cannot simply be solved by her muffled solutions that include increased diversity in Silicon Valley, governmental regulation, and augmented communication between activists and scholars.

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Cowan, Douglas E. *America's Dark Theologian: The Religious Imagination of Stephen King*. New York University Press, 2018.

Douglas E. Cowan does not ascribe a systematic theology to the works of Stephen King. Instead, he asserts King probes “human questions” akin to those asked and answered by religions of all kinds: “*Who are we?*” “*How did we get here?*” “*Do we matter?*” (6, italics in original). For Cowan and, he argues, for King, religion, especially organized religion, “*has failed to provide meaningful answers*” (6). Cowan draws most of his examples from Christianity, but Judaism and Buddhism make occasional appearances as well. In contrast to the myths of organized religions, Cowan explains, King’s “storyworlds”

are *about* religion in that they consistently call into question the incomplete, insular, and self-congratulatory ways we so often imagine the unseen order and our place in it. [...] Put differently, Stephen King’s novels and short stories are horror fiction written *alongside* religion, and emerge from the same place in the human imagination. (9, italics in original)

Never offering doctrinal answers, King “raises profoundly religious questions, or, more accurately, profound questions about the nature of reality, questions that purport to have been answered by religious doctrine and dogma” (189). Cowan’s book explores these questions across eight chapters, loosely organized around religious themes, such as the nature of the spiritual world and the cosmos, “god-talk,” religious socialization, ritual, and theodicy.

Cowan’s lucid prose deftly carries readers from one idea to the next, and he has a real knack for making difficult concepts easy to grasp. He illuminates theories from religious studies, especially those of William James and Victor Turner, always explaining how a particular concept informs his reading of the text or vice versa. Cowan’s mastery of King’s work sparkles on every page. His summaries and paraphrases of King are so masterful that the book sometimes feels more like a novel than an academic monograph. He even makes the thoroughly unreadable novel *The Tommyknockers* and the absurd *Duma Key* seem worth revisiting (his explication of the myth of Persephone in *Duma Key* is particularly compelling, muchacho). To its great credit, *America's Dark Theologian* takes popular culture seriously, because, as Cowan argues, more real-world conversations about the

substance of religion begin with questions like “Have you seen the latest episode of *The Walking Dead*?” than with “Did you catch that article in *Pastoral Theology*?” (Celestini). Certainly, more Americans think about “human questions” through the novels of Stephen King than they do through the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Maimonides, or Simone Weil.

The immense size of King’s corpus, though, poses scholars a serious challenge. Cowan does his best to restrict his survey by focusing on King’s “horror fiction” and passing over its many television and film adaptations. Both sensible decisions, but what constitutes “horror fiction” remains murky. For example, Cowan reads *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*, *The Green Mile*, *The Tommyknockers*, and *Under the Dome*, each of which has its terrifying aspects but none of which fits as neatly into the horror genre as novels like *Christine* or *Cujo*. Cowan also makes odd choices about what “horror fiction” to leave out, all but neglecting *Salem’s Lot* (which features Catholic characters and much “god-talk”), as well as *The Dark Half* and *Thinner*. Others have complained about the absence of *The Stand*, an absence Cowan justifies in the book, but *Misery* presents another missed opportunity to explore theological questions, in this case having to do with morality, purity, and retribution as embodied in the deranged Annie Wilkes. Further, Cowan brackets all of the Dark Tower series, classing it “high fantasy” rather than “horror,” thus dismissing staggering evidence of King’s attempts to systematize his thinking about the relationship between stories and religion and reality. Indeed, the King of the Dark Tower books proves an altogether different theologian than the author of the horror fiction Cowan explores, if, that is, theologian proves a desirable label.

In an interview, Cowan accounts for the book’s title by explaining that academics, professors, and religious professionals (from priests to imams) have coopted the term “theologian,” applying to it a specialized meaning that excludes other practitioners of “theology.” This confusion distracts from the fact that “we all do theology every time we ask, ‘Why is this happening to me?’ Every time we wonder about, ‘Is there a God’ [...] Every time one of us asks these questions we are articulating a logic of God” (Morehead). Cowan’s other preferred term for this kind of discourse is “god-talk,” and throughout *America’s Dark Theologian*, he returns to the notion that every day “god-talk” amounts to theology: “Whether we are professional theologians, clerics, or laypersons—indeed, even if we are nonbelievers—the ways we talk about God, question God’s nature and will, and even wonder about God’s reality constitute our theology, our god-talk” (27). In some sense this is true, but the trouble with this line of thinking is that there is a

difference between “god-talk” among regular folks and the so-called “science of things divine” (Hooker qtd. in “Theology”).

King and any given theologian might be interested in the same questions, but, as Cowan points out, they have a different relationship to answers. We can bracket this concern to explore King’s articulation of questions, but the flaw in this equation should not be done away with or denied. Catholic or Jewish theologians, for example, tend not to explore questions of whether there is a creator deity, they begin with the assertion that one exists. They do not wonder whether the Bible or the Tanakh provides guidance for how believers should live their lives; instead, they explore how that guidance should be incorporated into daily life or whether it can be modified or rejected. This is an important distinction. Theology asks human questions, but it also provides answers and tries to make them functional for different groups in different times. King’s work certainly interacts with these conversations, but to call it theology implies King’s work has altogether different interests than it exhibits. In a world without answers, King offers more questions, empowering his readers to tackle their fears and explore those questions for themselves, which is precisely the artist’s role. Why, though, press his work up alongside “theology,” especially when that work itself offers no reason to think it aims to construe doctrinal positions? Even lay theology, after all, cannot be divorced from its attempts to define, explore, and promulgate specific answers to questions about reality and the spiritual.

America’s Dark Theologian undermines its project by never successfully justifying its methodology. The book exhibits little interest in the actual contexts of any given religion. For example, Cowan examines an incident involving Methodists in *Bag of Bones*, but never researches whether any of their specific practices or teachings contribute to King’s depiction of them or his questions about their moral credibility. A section on *IT* explains that Roman Catholics prohibit suicide, but never shows how such a prohibition might have been taught to the book’s young characters or what specifically Catholic vision of socialization King might be responding too. As Cowan himself concludes, scary stories “matter because of the questions we never stop asking, the ones that keep us up at night, staring into the dark, not because we are religious, but because we are human” (208). Because he’s more interested in the “human questions” King asks than in the real-world religious contexts for King’s many depictions of fallen preachers, Catholic priests, Methodists, ranting moralists, prophets, and the like, Cowan’s book offers little compelling reason to engage the artwork “alongside” religion as such. Many critical

methodologies plumb “human questions,” but religion (and thereby religious studies) must recognize and explore the specific restrictions, limitations, traditions, and premises any given theology offers as answers if it hopes to come to terms with the role religion plays in human life or artwork. Certainly, students of King’s writing will appreciate this contribution, it being among the first monographs to consider King’s relationship to religion and religious questions in any depth, but the book does not do enough to contextualize King’s place alongside twentieth-century American religion or theology, nor does it justify why such a placement would offer fruitful readings of the King works unexamined here.

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Jeffreys, Derek S. *America’s Jails: The Search for Human Dignity in an Age of Mass Incarceration*. New York University Press, 2018.

In *America’s Jails: The Search for Human Dignity in an Age of Mass Incarceration*, Derek Jeffreys develops a multidimensional argument that demonstrates the inherent presence of human dignity in all persons as well as the effective lack of human dignity in our nation’s jail system. Jeffreys shares several examples

depicting how “[j]ails are dehumanizing, degrading places where inmates experience repeated assaults on their dignity” (7). *America’s Jails* is, Jeffreys writes, “an attempt to encourage an interdisciplinary conversation about the jail” (3). Jeffreys’ attempt is deeply successful, with the potential to leave readers from a wide range of backgrounds feeling inspired to join this critical but too often silenced conversation.

In the United States, over 3,000 jails hold over 700,000 people daily (6.) Little is written about life in jail, however, as “[m]ost scholars focus on prisons” given their stable, less transient populations and comparative ease of study (3). In *America’s Jails*, Jeffreys demystifies assumptions about life inside our nation’s jails, drawing heavily upon visits with Chicago’s Cook County Jail as well as discussions with inmate advocacy groups. Readers learn of incomprehensible abuse, persistent system failures, broken lives, and damaged dignity.

Chapter 1 provides both a historical and present-day account that depicts a system replete with “asymmetry of knowledge and power” (146). Narratives offer glimpses into a world of “sensory assault,” darkness, and deprivation imposed upon what is primarily a population of innocence (“most people in jails are legally innocent”) (15-16). Jeffreys describes his early visits to Cook County as disorienting and confusing (16). Readers are left feeling a similar sense of shaken trust and disorientation.

In Chapter 2, Jeffreys explores jails’ powerful influences and writes of three primary functions of the jail system in U.S. society: “responding to those with mental illness, controlling poor people who cannot afford bail, and generating revenue for cash-strapped municipalities” (38). Jeffreys describes the “chasm between theory and reality” in the U.S. penal system and argues that “[f]ew of the standard philosophical justifications of punishment come anywhere close to legitimizing the contemporary penal system” (37). Readers learn of significant overcrowding, sanitation concerns (sewage filled water), violence (frequent tasing in response to slight expressions of disagreement), understaffed facilities, insufficient medical care (for acute and chronic conditions), “massive failures” regarding mental health care (53), and little if any rehabilitation. Jeffreys is careful to note that “[n]ot all U.S. jails are mismanaged hellholes” and that he is “not condemning all corrections personnel” (66) or “claiming that all jails are similarly unjust” (156). Rather, he argues that even in the most compassionate facilities, challenges persist in overwhelming and unfair ways. Jeffreys focuses on “a systemic question about the jail as an institution” (157).

In Chapter 3 (A Matter of Dignity), Jeffreys establishes inherent dignity as a fundamental human attribute (separate and distinct from human rights). Jeffreys distinguishes types of dignity (inherent dignity, dignity as status, and imputed dignity), responds to contemporary attacks on dignity, addresses how “we discover dignity affectively when we encounter other people”, and ultimately illustrates how jails “denigrate human dignity” (71).

Especially powerful are Jeffreys’ writings on both quantitative data (inmate numbers, available beds, money bail statistics, recidivism rates) and qualitative notions of values, “value essence”, and “personal self” (83). Documented, “widespread abuse and violence” and asymmetrical impacts on our nation’s poor fit uncomfortably with arguments that “we apprehend human dignity when encountering people” (97). This “juxtaposition” (even if “not directly contradictory”) inspires readers to seek answers to this disturbing reality (97). Answers, in the form of recommendations, eventually come, in Chapter 5 and the text’s Conclusion.

In Chapter 4, Jeffreys explores some of the reasons why “we often fail to perceive the dignity of others” (12). Jeffreys explores stigma, disgust, contempt, and fear, and examines how resulting “value blindness” manifests within, and as a result of, the conditions and interactions both within and beyond the U.S. penal system. Jeffreys writes of “convenient excuses or rationalizations” that hinder recognition of violations of human dignity (94). Through a phenomenological approach, Jeffreys artfully explores philosophical arguments associated with concepts such as “disgust, contempt, and fear” and associated negative affective responses (104).

Jeffreys shares hard data and disturbing experiences (a concrete example of a natural aversion and response to a mentally ill inmate covered in fecal waste, for example) in ways that are simultaneously disconcerting and personally moving (110). While it might have been helpful to review a more balanced coverage (perhaps a naive desire for examples of compassionate care and positive outcomes), there’s no disputing the depth and bleakness of the situation. The work leaves readers with no shortage of questions and prompts a desire for answers and next steps.

Jeffreys uses Chapter 5 to explore a variety of policy issues and associated proposals (described as short-term responses) for reform. He highlights decentralization of political power as a key source of challenges for long-term reform. At the same time, Jeffreys offers suggestions (enhanced jail monitoring,

greater Federal oversight, more “transparency to counter abuses of power,” investigative journalism, improved mental health care, and bond process reform, among others) to protect human dignity in our jails (128). Jeffreys argues for local focus and the recognition of the power held by local officials over inmates’ lives (131). Most importantly, Jeffreys gently directs readers’ focus and awareness inward (for example, by monitoring and responding to our own affective responses) and locally, with the hopes of initiating and instigating change.

By raising visibility and awareness of the harsh, inhumane, and often irreversible consequences of our penal system, *America’s Jails* does much more than simply inform; it confuses, angers, and inspires action to reject the “moral legitimacy” of current practice. Kudos to Jeffreys for shining light on a population, an institution, and an assault on human dignity that are too often hidden behind institutional walls.

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Phillips, Kendall R. *A Place of Darkness: The Rhetoric of Horror in Early American Cinema*. University of Texas Press, 2018.

The Universal Studios monster movies like 1931’s *Dracula* (Tod Browning) and *Frankenstein* (James Whale) may dominate popular American memory as pioneering texts of the horror genre, but Phillips reminds us that these texts participate in a larger genealogy of films that precedes the genre’s creation. To extrapolate this genealogy, Phillips utilizes rhetorical criticism, “a means of exploring public discussions and the complex ways in which ideas are forwarded, critiqued, and transformed” (9). Consequently, Phillips’s approach reads as a history text with chapters that are arranged in a chronological, teleological order.

“Chapter One: Superstition and Shock of Horrific Elements in Early Cinema” builds upon Lynda Nead’s work “on the interplay between the cultural fascination with spirits, séances, and magic and the rapidly transforming field of visual culture” near the turn of the twentieth century (29). Drawing from Jentsch’s version of the uncanny, the “unpleasant impression... evoked by the unsettling of our perception” (28), Phillips identifies the theatricality of spiritual mediums and magicians (38),

spirit photography (43), optical illusions including shadow pantomimes and Pepper's ghost illusions (39-40), and related theatrics in dramatic stage productions as antecedents to horror films in particular and cinema in general (40). Early cinema, Phillips notes, like these aforementioned texts and performances, relied on visual spectacle rather than narrative (45). The earliest films to contain horror elements, such as the *Uncle Josh* trilogy of films (1900-1902) and Méliès' *The Haunted Castle* (1896), disrupted the audience's sense of perception and provoked a sense of awe rather than instill in them abjection (50, 53, 60).

"Chapter Two: Weird and Gloomy Tales: Uncanny Narratives and Foreign Others" explores how Orientalist attitudes altered cinema's trajectory after the 1907 Nickelodeon Boom led to an increase in foreign-produced films in American cinemas and created a subsequent moral panic that films would lead the overlapping categories of children, the working class, and immigrants astray from American nationalist ideology (63-65, 82). Films of this period, which began to incorporate explicit storytelling structures into their texts, earned the moniker "weird" when their "narratives [were] based on the logics of superstition and the supernatural" and "attended to past, to mythic times of witches and knights, or to the ways in which elements of the past – ancient curses or ghosts – reemerged into the present" (65-66). This moniker served to differentiate weird films from other early cinema by shaping audience expectations in relation to genre (72), but Phillips explores how this genre's preoccupation with superstition, the supernatural, the distant past, and the outskirts of civilization resulted in films that framed Egyptians, Indians, and people from the Far East as magical Others whose presence is antithetical to American rationality (74). Phillips's survey of this period suggests that the weird film's downfall as a genre emerges from the conflation of weird with non-American subjects, including French film-makers (84, 86). Despite the mention of "gloomy" in the chapter's title, the references to gloomy tales is brief and barely factors into Phillips's discussion.

"Chapter Three: Superstitious Joe and the Rise of the American uncanny" explores the ramifications Americans' changed relationship with concepts of realism affected how audiences perceived the quality of the film (88). The American Uncanny is in line with Todorov's conceptualization of the marvelous, "a hoax" that allows "the existing laws of reality [to] remain intact" rather than disrupt that sense of reality (90). Like the weird films, the films of this era that utilized horrific elements also participated in the othering of people who did not fit the American nationalistic ideal, i.e. women, lower-class people, the uneducated (105), Black

Americans (106), Latinx peoples (107), indigenous people (107), Southern Europeans, and the same groups marginalized by the Orientalism present in weird films (108). Juxtaposed to these Others present in what Phillips calls the American uncanny film are protagonists that present as idealized masculine American males (104-105). Phillips does not mention if whiteness is another inherent characteristic of American uncanny films' protagonists.

"Chapter Four: Literary Monsters and Uplifting Horrors" explores films containing horrific elements that were produced in response to the moral panic surrounding the Nickelodeon Boom and the Orientalist Other during this era where audiences favored films that adhered to their understanding of reality (113-114). Adaptations of Shakespeare, Dickens, and Tennyson helped demonstrate to censors and the general public that films can serve "a potentially positive social force" (113), and adaptations of Poe, Irving, and Stephenson's work led to films featuring literary monsters to gain positive cinematic acclaim (118, 125), but Phillips specifically gestures towards Lon Chaney, Sr.'s performances in 1923's *Hunchback of Notre Dame* (Wallace Worsley) and *Phantom of the Opera* (Rupert Julian and Lon Chaney, Sr.), arguing that "[t]he emphasis on Chaney's bodily performances helped... escalate the level of [acceptable] gruesomeness in American cinema" (141).

"Chapter Five: Mysteries in Old Dark Houses" explores melodrama through mystery films from early American cinema and the specific role that Paul Leni served in creating the visual foundation for mystery thrillers (148, 156). Phillips presents the mystery thriller film as a mixture of "humor and horror" that utilized three archetypes from earlier films that incorporated horror elements (162): "the overly superstitious servant" (162), the "bumbling detective" (163), and the comic hero (165). Phillips also interrogates how innovations in sound technology in this genre of film led to the development of dramatic musical cues that allowed filmmakers "to signal audiences that there was more at hand than they could see" (168), and how the mystery thrillers implementation of the fantastic "established that fear could be a marketable pleasure within American film" (172).

Phillips's conclusion explores how 1931's *Dracula* draws on the aforementioned genres of film to help establish horror as a separate distinctive genre (184). Phillips's scope here is fruitful not just for horror scholars and scholars of rhetoric, but also for scholars of American studies, as Phillips is concerned with the ideologies in American culture that made horror's conceptualization as a cinematic genre possible. Phillips' work may not be comprehensive, but he

effectively illuminates cultural movements that impacted American cinematic history.

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Clara E. Rodríguez. *America, As Seen on TV: How Television Shapes Immigrant Expectations Around the Globe*. New York University Press, 2018.

Immigration receives a great deal of American media coverage and political attention. Using a survey consisting of foreign nationals and international college students residing in the United States of America (USA), Clara E. Rodríguez's *America, As Seen on TV: How Television Shapes Immigrant Expectations around the Globe* is a timely publication that examines the impact of American television (for example *Friends*, *Frasier*, *Sex and the City*, *The Cosby Show*, *The Big Bang Theory*) on their perceptions and expectations of the US. Her analysis is centered around representations of race, gender and class by American television which she terms US TV. Rodríguez's text is well structured and contains clear research questions and goals. The question she initially set out to answer at the start of her research was: "Given the patterning of race, ethnicity, class and gender in US TV scripted programs, and given the extent to which people in the United States and in other countries watch US TV, how does US TV influence the ways in which people in other countries think about race, class, gender, and ethnicity" (171)? Another major research question was whether perceptions and expectations of the US change when individuals who were raised on a steady diet of US TV arrive in the country (171)?

To answer these and other questions, Rodríguez conducted in-depth interviews over a three-year period between 2013 and 2015 with 71 foreign born adults who recently migrated to the US and who lived in the US Northeast (15). Transcriptions of these interviews are interspersed throughout the text. Rodriguez acknowledges the value of providing the point of view of the immigrants who can appear voiceless in media (4). In addition to interviews, electronic questionnaires were distributed to 171 US undergraduates at a university in the Northeast (15). Her sample of

foreign-born individuals originated primarily from the upper and middle classes in their home countries and were not only internationally diverse, but racially and ethnically diverse (172, 176, 180).

Underpinning Rodríguez's discussion is Stuart Hall's (1990) theory of how media encodes information for audiences to decode. She acknowledges the centrality of this theory in her book, particularly as it relates to how her foreign-born respondents viewed the US prior to and after their arrival to the country (154). Hall's encoding/decoding theory is also important in how the immigrants viewed race, class and sexuality in America which were dependent on how they were represented in US TV programs. Constructivism was implicit in much of her discourse. Throughout her text Rodríguez acknowledged that the immigrants' prior experiences in their home countries influenced their interpretation of and response to US TV. Other theories cited are: George Gerbner's cultivation theory, the drench hypothesis, uses and gratifications model and the social cognitive theory.

The narrative and chapters flow effortlessly and appeal to academic and non-academic readers. The book is written with a tremendous degree of self-awareness and palpable enthusiasm. Rodríguez repeatedly inserts her voice and acknowledges her pre-existing views and possible biases, some of which shifted based on her findings (63, 176, 182).

America, As Seen on TV is divided into three sections and eight chapters excluding the Introduction and Conclusion. Sections and their respective chapters answer pertinent questions which support the main ones. Each chapter contains an introductory portion which outlines the questions and a summation at the end which succinctly lays out its findings.

The Introduction acquaints readers with the primary research questions, the problem of ethnic and gender stereotypes in US TV, the debate over American cultural hegemony in countries where US TV is exported, the rationale and research methods for the study. Part I of *America, As Seen on TV* is titled Overview and is a review of pertinent literature that interrogates the implications of American influence through US TV outside its borders and the responses of the viewing audiences.

Part II, titled the Foreign Born is made up of four chapters and follows respondents from their US TV habits in their home country to the impact of American TV on their behaviors and identities. This is followed up by their arrival in the US and comparisons of the US on TV versus the US in real life. Many

respondents expected that the US would be an easy place to maneuver but were surprised by the high cost of living and racial and class divisions (89, 96, 98).

The final section of her book is Part III, titled Comparing US Millennials and their Foreign Born. The findings reveal that both foreign born and US millennials are influenced by US TV representations of race, class, gender and ethnicity (129). Rodriguez's data reveals that the social and cultural milieu in which respondents lived had a significant impact on how they received the information encoded in US TV programs. The final section is followed by an Appendix which details the research methods, sample, approach and theories.

America, As Seen on TV is good reading and one that is pertinent at this point in America's history. It tackles its subject with a great deal of sensitivity and self-awareness. The complexities in responses of migrants and US millennials from various backgrounds to themes such as race, gender, sexuality and ethnicity in US TV and real life were expertly juggled and made stimulating discourse. There is scope to expand this research beyond the US Northeast and to explore the impact of US TV shows that have emerged in recent years which present more diversified casts and settings. There is also room to evaluate more closely how the responses correlate to the television shows watched; the ethnicity and color of foreign-born respondents and how being an 'Other' in their home countries affect their perception of race, gender and class on US TV and in real life. In discussing "The Future: What's Next" Rodríguez herself indicates that this research is far from over. I look forward to future works which may very well address these questions more fully.

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Danesi, Marcel. *Concise Dictionary of Popular Culture*. Rowman and Littlefield, 2017.

Danesi's *Concise Dictionary of Popular Culture* is a welcome resource for a couple different kinds of readers. First, this book is a great resource for readers who are just getting started thinking seriously about popular culture. It becomes clear through a quick look at a sample group of listings that there are connections reaching across our pop culture experience. For people new to the consideration of popular culture this relatively brief—concise—treatment of the vast arena of popular culture offers small building blocks toward a picture of what has been considered important in making sense of the media world we share.

The other group of readers who will clearly find this 300-page book useful are those with some experience in exploring popular culture theoretically, but are still adding to their broad perspective. As Danesi warns in his Introduction, the perspective is English-speaking, and more particularly American. So a possible third audience would be people unfamiliar with U.S. popular culture, who would like an easy to use reference to what they may be seeing around themselves.

The entries include celebrity icons, significant cultural concepts (like “Freedom of the Press”), theoretical terms (such as genre, and phallocentrism), theorists (Radway and Haraway), popular authors and artists (the Fitzgeralds Ella and F. Scott), and significant cultural objects (pinball machines and kitsch). Several contemporary terms are covered, such as hacktivism, memes, and cyberculture. Each entry is a brief paragraph or two. Pulp Fiction (the magazine genre and book genre, not the film) gets about a page. The term “pop culture” itself gets two-thirds of a page. The entries also include bolded words indicating an entry elsewhere in the book, and most entries end with useful “see also” suggestions.

The book also sends out implicit challenges to readers that works something like a listicle (a term that ought to have its own entry in this book). What is and isn't included provides an interesting way that many readers will encounter this collection of definitions. Of necessity, some terms are not included, and as time passes this book might offer something more of a snapshot of a particular moment in popular cultural history rather than an eternal guidebook. There is no entry for “Fake News”, but perhaps that is why this ends up a snapshot of a time, since this

term has come into its “popular culture” own while this book was in production. It would be impossible to remain current in the form of a physical book.

Some readers will come to this book and wonder about their own favorite popular culture icons, theorists, objects, or occurrences. If we get Burt Bacharach, should we also not get Led Zeppelin? Big Bang Theory, but no M*A*S*H? But to focus on what may not be included becomes a little too much like an all-too-dedicated fan cross-examining a producer at ComicCon (which should also have an entry). But where is David Bowie? Billie Holiday? Tupac?

On the other hand, if we consider the role such a dictionary plays in culture it would be important to note that this is not E. D. Hirsch’s *Cultural Literacy*, neither in intent nor in execution. This does not set out to standardize a canon of popular culture, and despite the U.S.-centric position, the entries don’t suggest that ignorance of one term or another is a symptom of cultural incompetence. In fact, the breadth of what is presented encourages readers to explore an area further, perhaps to spend some time with the more detailed scholarly consideration of popular culture theory. They could look at a couple of Danesi’s previous books like *Popular Culture: Introductory Perspectives* (currently in its 4th edition), or his work on semiotics generally (*Of Cigarettes, High Heels, and Other Interesting Things*, 2008) or specifically (*The Semiotics of Emoji: The Rise of Visual Language in the Age of the Internet*, 2016).

I would suggest that the book has some oversights that ought to have been addressed when the whole scope of the book was in the final stages of editing. The entry on “Appropriation” suggests it means the same thing as “Assimilation,” which is really not the case. And the entry on “Cultural Studies” acknowledges that, “Unlike other disciplines, cultural studies is generally associated with some evaluative stance toward cultural systems, and is thus generally critical rather than descriptive.” But at the same time, attention to Native American popular culture, and LGBTQ popular culture have a presence only at a glance. I would also hesitate to call Cultural Studies a “discipline” since so many of the participants would resist the “assimilation” of these scholarly practices into formal institutions.

The text is also relatively free from imposing high culture and low culture judgments; in the entry on “High and Low Culture” Danesi suggests that the difference is “an intuitive notion, and very difficult to define in absolutist terms.” (p. 144). The book has an index of the entries at the beginning, and adds a series of useful appendices, which are either lists of a particular category (Superheroes),

Timelines of significant media industries (Advertising, Cinema), to terms (Textspeak).

I also have to take aca-fan issue with his list of James Bond films in Appendix 8: he does not include the (controversial and often dismissed) return of Sean Connery in *Never Say Never Again* (1983).

But that is, in many ways, the pleasant surprise in this text. It can have the effect of causing the reader to re-define what for her is the value of taking popular culture seriously. And this may be a moment where such reflection is critical. Our media experiences are increasingly fragmented, and the results of on-demand culture—experiencing what one wants, when one wants, in whatever form one chooses—are yet to settle into a routine.

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Stokes, Quesinberry and Wendy Atkins-Sayre. *Consuming Identity: The Role of Food in Redefining the South*. University Press of Mississippi, 2016.

Read the preface! There you will find delightful stories about the authors, an overview of the book, and a pure sense of joy concerning Southern food. For scholars, *Consuming Identity* demonstrates “how Southern culture is so clearly shaped by its foodways” (Stokes and Atkins-Sayre ix). For general readers, the book presents its message via stories about the authors’ travels to eating places in ten Southern states. *Consuming Identity* is a must read for those interested in food studies and the South. The book illustrates *how* food functions rhetorically to define a region and build identity.

Ashli Quesinberry Stokes and Wendy Atkins-Sayre attended the University of Georgia at the same time. They have Southern family heritage, and they now teach in the South. They speak from experience and from engaging in “rhetorical fieldwork” (Stokes and Atkins-Sayre 10). Their methodology (Stokes and Atkins-Sayre 9-12) combines rhetorical criticism of documents and films, with a creative

interpretation of other kinds of “texts.” One of the features of this book is how everything is fair game for closer scrutiny: objects, places, people, food, visual rhetoric, and all the senses. The section on “Sensory Experiences” (Stokes and Atkins-Sayre 31-44), for example, gives the reader an opportunity to experience the sound, smell, touch, sight, and taste of diverse eateries.

Consuming Identity presents several main arguments: (1) Food acts rhetorically, (2) Food serves an identity-building function, and (3) Food and the stories surrounding it are so important in Southern culture that they provide a way to open dialogue in the region. The book has seven chapters, divided into three parts. Part One is entitled: *The Rhetorical Potential of Food*. Herein, the authors describe the “constitutive” power of Southern foodways. Part Two is entitled: *Exploring the Southern Table*. Part Three bears the clever title: *After-Dinner Conversation*.

Chapter Three opens with an interesting perspective on the openness and the limitations of Southern hospitality as evident in the creation and consumption of several regional beverages (especially bourbon, mint julep, the Sazerac, sweet tea, and Texas beers). The authors perceive offerings of drink as a rhetorical invitation which “send an initial message of welcoming and serve to connect people in the face of separation, but they also say something about regional identity” (Stokes and Atkins-Sayre 100).

Barbecue, especially North Carolina barbecue, is the focus of Chapter Four. Stokes and Atkins-Sayre argue that barbecue is an appropriate text for their study because it tells stories and, more importantly, “incite[s] profound identification with regional styles” (Stokes and Atkins-Sayre 105). Drawing upon Kenneth Burke, the authors point to the dual processes of “identification” and “division” at work in barbecue foodways.

As in other chapters, Stokes and Atkins-Sayre delineate three key rhetorical themes at play in barbecue culture: (1) authenticity, (2) masculinity, and (3) rurality. The chapter ends with some speculation on how barbecue could evolve, retaining its Southern authenticity, but morphing a bit in response to health concerns and other trends. The authors’ speculations about the positive connecting forces of barbecue specifically and of Southern foodways in general raises the question if talk *about* barbecue and casual interactions at barbecue “joints” have enough force to significantly influence societal issues, such as racism and sexism.

In Chapter Five, the authors explain the ability of Southern food “to authenticate the existence of an area and to help define that area...” as well as to “reaffirm a sense of belonging” (Stokes and Atkins-Sayre 158). This chapter contains a lengthy

discussion of the concept of “authenticity,” which is associated with iconic Southern foods, such as greens, okra, pork, and cornbread. In turn, these foods are associated with the land, availability, abundance, simple ingredients, “honest,” “true,” and “pure.” Second, the authenticity of the region, as defined by its foodways, “lies in the *process* of authentication” (Stokes and Atkins-Sayre 157). This process is dynamic enough to include new foodways with traditional foodways and, amazingly, to engage in a fruitful, identity-building interaction with “Fauxthenic” Southern foods.

Chapter Six explores desserts and Southern baking. Chapter Six also tries to balance what may seem to be contradictions in the mostly positive narrative about Southern baking. First, the authors argue that *nostalgia* and *ritual* in Southern baking are empowering. Second, Stokes and Atkins-Sayre confront and counteract the fear that baking may “trap” women in a gender prison. For me, the extended examples about pound cake and other desserts are the best part of this chapter.

In Chapter Seven, “Redefining The South Through Food,” the authors reiterate their position that Southern food *does* rhetorical work and is one of the most powerful symbolic forces in shaping Southern identity. They argue that the very “flexibility” of Southern foodways makes the cuisine more rhetorically powerful (Stokes and Atkins-Sayre 189). To support their flexibility argument, Stokes and Atkins-Sayre present two convincing examples: tamales (195) and the “kolache trail” (196), demonstrating how Southern foodways can adapt, change, and move from region to region.

In a fitting conclusion to this chapter (and the book) on redefining Southern identity by looking back and looking forward, the authors recount their experience at the *Nat Fuller Reunification Banquet* (1865-2015). What a remarkable gathering, celebrating 150 years of Southern foodways and offering the possibility of regional *reconciliation* through food. The careful analysis of Southern foodways goes down very well with the admixture of optimism and hope.

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Ankerson, Megan Sapnar. *Dot-Com Design: The Rise of a Usable, Social, Commercial Web*. New York University Press, 2018.

Not that long ago, scholars and industry professionals alike referred to internet, web, and digital technologies as “new media.” At the time, the term was appropriate. Considering that the World Wide Web is now 30 years old (launched in 1989), the term was dropped long ago. Yet, we often still think of the internet as a new, paradigm-altering space. Against this backdrop, Megan Sappan Ankerson’s *Dot-Com Design: The Rise of a Usable, Social, Commercial Web* chronicles the early years of the web, sometimes dubbed “Web 1.0.” Tracing major developments of the American (and to a lesser extent, British) web between 1991-2005, Ankerson takes readers from the humble, techie beginnings to the unbridled optimism of the electronic frontier; from the euphoric and commercial heights of the “dot-com boom” to the calamitous bust of 2000-2001; and ends with the beginnings of “Web 2.0,” when web developers were picking up the pieces of the crash and forging new online experiences.

Extensively sourced and supplemented with interviews from key players during the dot-com era, Ankerson’s central argument is that today’s web (social, user-friendly, participatory, collaborative) did not arrive fully formed. In fact, today’s current configuration of the web was by no means planned or inevitable. Rather, through fits and starts, dead ends and fortunate accidents, the trajectory of the web is a zigzagging, messy line. Ankerson explains her mission by writing: “By cataloging and analyzing examples of web design produced in different moments of the dot-com bubble, I explore how and why dominant discourses of web aesthetics emerged, stabilized, and changed. The cultural forms, styles, and modes of production that I identify [...] are neither naïve attempts by early producers to create the early web nor chronological stepping stones that led the way to ‘better’ design” (p. 19). Although the book’s title features the word “design,” this is not a how-to manual. Instead, through a curated selection of case studies, Ankerson examines the competing designs present in the early web, and not only how these designs affected the look and feel of the web, but how they affected people, the users and creators of cyberspace.

These case studies showcase the quality of Ankerson’s writing most clearly. Each of the five chapters begins with a rather high, scholarly overview of a specific period of history. While necessary, the real meat of the book is the case studies. Though not written quite as straightforward as popular nonfiction, these case studies are easy to follow and enjoyable to read. As somebody who came of age during the dot-com bubble, I remember some of these happenings. Even in the 1990s, the web was a big place, so likely few readers experienced everything the

web had to offer during this period. I was surprised to learn, for example, that people used to publish massive paperback directories of web addresses, like a phone book. That mode of organizing the vast amount of data sure became obsolete quickly!

Chapter 1 features cases on the early competitors to the web, such as Gopher, and how web inventor Tim Berners-Lee struggled to explain and articulate the need for a web built on hypertext. Then came the idea of the “information superhighway,” which was not a singular idea, but multiple visions of what the web could or should be. In Chapter 2, Ankerson dissects the early issues of finding and organizing the exponentially growing number of websites. In the days before search engines, numerous websites featured hand-picked lists of “cool sites.” Mama’s Cucina, a site for Ragu pasta sauce, seems like it would be a delightful place to visit, were it still around. Chapter 3 tells the story of two competing “the internet in a day” events that approached user interaction in polar opposite ways: one event was more communal and amateur, the other featured content created by highly skilled media professionals. This debate over user participation vs. professionalism is still with society today, such as in the realm of citizen journalism. Chapter 4 provides a wonderful overview of the myriad causes and consequences of the dot-com boom and bust years, then transitions into a detailed case study on the rise and proliferation of Flash-based websites. Chapter 5 concludes with a continuation of the Flash storyline, showing how the excesses of a design philosophy that privileged spectacle over substance eventually gave way to a new theory of user-centered design, the foundation of Web 2.0.

Today’s freshman college students and younger were born after the collapse of Web 1.0. They have no experience with the Wild West years of cyberspace. Ankerson’s most valuable contribution is in preserving some of this history. By no means is this history complete: the arrival of Web 2.0 has not heralded an era of a “completed” web. The web is still being built, every day, by all of us who use the web. Likewise, Ankerson acknowledges that more perspectives, particularly from outside the United States, are needed. This book captures only part of this history, and it is a fine start indeed.

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Hart, Casey B. *The Evolution and Social Impact of Video Game Economics*. Lexington, 2017.

A different social scientist contributes to each chapter of *The Evolution and Social Impact of Video Game Economics*, which addresses the economic structures involved in video games. There is a major emphasis on the overlap of cultural influences and how these influences can affect the success or failure of a video game. The authors also discuss how game designers take advantage of the cultures in which they operate. The text is easy to read and engaging, even for people with only a casual interest how video games become successful.

Chapter 1 focuses on the last ten years of video games development during when the field shifted from console-based to mobile gaming. There has been a rise in “freemium” gaming whereby game developers offer free game applications but make their money through additional in-game purchases. The chapter also considers how crowdfunding has emerged as a way for game developers to secure financing for their games before they are released.

Chapter 2 discusses the cultural impact of Nintendo and the success the gaming company enjoyed in the 80’s and 90’s. The chapter delves into Nintendo’s recent attempts to capitalize on nostalgia by selling the remastered versions of their classic games. For example, Nintendo recently released their virtual console along with character figurines to enhance the gaming experience of previous releases.

Chapter 3 provides an approachable overview of how video game creators use planned obsolescence and the razorblade business model to keep consumers coming back and purchasing new products. Nintendo, Sony, and Microsoft continually update their consoles and sell individual games to supplement the base system. The chapter details how each of these big three console developers have implemented their economic success.

Chapter 4 applies Foucault’s concept of bio-power to the video game industry. By allowing players to restart their progress in a game for an increased public rank, designers utilize the psychological need for prestige to keep players interested in playing the same game. The author uses *Call of Duty* and *Tap Titans* as examples.

Chapter 5 explores microtransactions with freemium games. Over seventy percent of revenue in these games is earned through a small minority of players, known as “whales.” Video game developers design their games to maximize the number of whales they can attract and the amount of money these whales spend.

The chapter includes several methods, including currency distancing, impulse buying, and sunk cost bias.

Chapter 6 examines how video game designers may reinforce gender bias in the wider culture through gender-targeted marketing. TabTale is a mobile gaming company that targets young girls with fairytale themes. The games involve glorifying stereotypical beauty standards through in-game tasks of using beauty products, cosmetic surgery, and a bit of magic to improve the looks of princesses.

Chapter 7 analyzes online discourse on video game forums to discover the narratives surrounding microtransactions. Depending on how they are implemented, microtransactions can appear as a pleasant benefit to get more out of a video game or be seen as an unfair advantage only certain players can afford. The chapter looks at how six specific games use microtransactions and downloadable content to determine how players feel about the diverse ways to implement the concept.

Chapter 8 explores how video games trigger emotions, creating different levels of satisfaction. For example, whereas some games make players excited, others have a calming effect. The emotional pleasure and arousal of players affects how they interact with in-game advertising. The chapter ends with theoretical and practical implications of these findings.

Chapter 9 concludes the book with an overview on video game gold farming. The practice of hunting for valuable in-game products to sell to other players for real-life currency was popular in China, peaking in 2008. Western audiences looked down upon these players and, in some cases, conducted in-game assaults to prevent them from earning resources. Meanwhile, Eastern players, even those who did not conduct gold farming, viewed the practices as a clever strategy to earn wages. The chapter shares both academic and popular responses to the practice.

The Evolution and Social Impact of Video Game Economics is an interesting read on how culture influences, and is influenced by, the economic practices in video game development. The chapters include ample research that can help graphic and game design students prepare for careers in the gaming industry. The content may also be useful to cultural studies professors who want to demonstrate how culture impacts the economy.

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Ross, Steven J. *Hitler in Los Angeles: How Jews Foiled Nazi Plots Against Hollywood and America*. Bloomsbury, 2017.

Steven J. Ross argues that Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels “saw Hollywood as central to their efforts to win over the American public and the world to their cause” (3). The Nazi regime’s belief in the potential political and propagandistic power of Hollywood is not necessarily new, but it has been the subject of several recent studies, including Thomas Doherty’s *Hollywood and Hitler, 1933-1939* (2013), Ben Urwand’s *The Collaboration: Hollywood’s Pact with Hitler* (2013), and Laura B. Rosenzweig’s *Hollywood’s Spies: The Undercover Surveillance of Nazis in Los Angeles* (2017). Ross’ *Hitler in Los Angeles*, a finalist for the 2018 Pulitzer Prize in history, is an engaging and thoughtful addition to the field that draws attention to the contentious relationship between Tinseltown and the Third Reich, with an emphasis on Jewish responses to the growing threat posed by Nazi sympathizers in California.

Ross’ highly readable account utilizes a chronological approach to bring to life the work of Leon Lewis, who developed a cohort of spies and informers to monitor the proliferation of fascist and anti-Semitic organizations in southern California and, when possible, to pit such groups against one another as they vied to propagate a pro-Nazi agenda. Lewis’ efforts earned him a reputation as the “most dangerous Jew in Los Angeles” in the eyes of fascists, both in Germany and America (16). As Ross notes, Lewis understood the need to mitigate the threat posed by pro-Hitler groups, including but not limited to the German American Bund and the Silver Shirts, in large part because the local police and federal agencies prioritized attacking Communists and were indifferent to fascist political activities in the United States. Through their efforts, which Ross recounts in a writing style that occasionally emulates that of a spy thriller, Lewis and his colleagues helped prevent a multitude of subversive plots hatched by influential far-right figures in Los Angeles, including some who had direct or indirect ties to the Nazi regime in Germany.

Three elements of Ross’ historical account of Lewis’ espionage campaign are noteworthy for scholars interested in popular culture studies. First, many of the key actors on both sides of the spy game had connections to the film industry. Prior to forming the fascist Silver Legion of America, William Dudley Pelley penned scripts in Hollywood, while Joseph Roos, Lewis’ fellow spymaster, served as a

story editor for the likes of Carl Laemmle and Mary Pickford. More importantly in the eyes of Lewis, the crews for Hollywood's major studios featured numerous Nazi sympathizers, which may have occasionally resulted in various accidents on set that endangered the health and well-being of notable critics of Hitler, the Nazi party, and their supporters in southern California.

Second, *Hitler in Los Angeles* shows that "anti-Nazism emerged as a focal point of political action" within Hollywood, most notably through the creation of the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League in April 1936 (192). Featuring a range of Hollywood celebrities of various political stripes, including the likes of Edward G. Robinson and John Ford, the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League organized a star-studded anti-Nazi rally at the Shrine Auditorium and boycotted visits by Leni Riefenstahl and Benito Mussolini's son. Lewis, in addition to serving as a spymaster, functioned as the liaison between the League and the powerful movie studios, a position that simultaneously benefitted from and aided Lewis' espionage.

Third, Lewis financed his spying program by securing the financial support of Hollywood's moguls, many of whom acted out of economic self-interest as opposed to a sense of Jewish identity or vulnerability, according to Ross. Here, much of the narrative centers upon the moguls' frustration with Georg Gyssling, the "most hated Nazi in Hollywood" (214). The Nazi regime sought to police the content of Hollywood films through the Production Code and the threat of blocking off the lucrative German film market. Gyssling, in his capacity as German consul in Los Angeles, successfully compelled studios to cut and reshoot scenes "deemed offensive to the Nazi regime" in films such as *The Road Back* and *The Life of Emile Zola* (217). The heads of the major studios supported Lewis' efforts to neutralize Gyssling as an agent of the Nazi state. However, Gyssling's overall function within the history of Nazi activities in Los Angeles is far more complicated and fascinating than his work as "the long arm of Adolf Hitler" (216).

Unlike Urwand's *The Collaboration*, which Ross claims "could not have been more wrong" for accusing the Hollywood moguls of "cowardice, complicity, and collaboration" (347), *Hitler in Los Angeles* portrays figures like Louis B. Mayer as doing anything but turning a blind eye to the dangers posed by the racial ideology of Nazism. Interestingly, Ross also suggests that Gyssling was not simply a cog in the Nazi bureaucracy. Instead, the German consul is eventually revealed to have had a close, secret relationship with Julius Klein, an American Jew who met with Lewis, was a member of the Illinois National Guard, an aspiring screenwriter, and had ties to General George C. Marshall (128).

Ross' *Hitler in Los Angeles* and Rosenzweig's *Hollywood's Spies* cover much of the same material and both serve to shine a deserving light on the valiant efforts of Lewis, Roos, and their assorted spies. Anyone interested in the history of Hollywood and American Jewish responses to Nazism will find valuable material for lectures here, while Ross' writing style also means that *Hitler in Los Angeles* is accessible to undergraduate students.

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Tweedy, Jeff. *Let's Go (So We Can Get Back): A Memoir of Recording and Discording with Wilco, etc.* Dutton, 2018.

Fans of the American rock band Wilco recognize two versions of lead singer and songwriter Jeff Tweedy. There's the one who "assassins down the avenue," sings about domestic violence, and suggests that "you have to learn how to die." That guy is serious, dark, and often in pain. And he's all about the music. But fans also know the Jeff Tweedy they see between songs on stage. He's the one who quips to NPR staffers at a "Tiny Desk" concert: "We can play one more and then you guys need to get back to work solving this Trump problem" (Biolen). He's the one who told an audience in Minneapolis, "We missed you too. I couldn't sleep last night because I missed you so much, all of you" (The Current). He complains to the audience if they talk too much during his show. That guy is funny and sardonic. And he's all about the music.

Both of those versions show up in full in Tweedy's engrossing memoir *Let's Go (So We Can Get Back)*. Tweedy is funny, or at least he tries to be, like when he jokes about not how the book won't address his addiction to painkillers, only to later say, "I'm pulling your leg." And the book is genuinely funny. He describes confronting former bandmate Jay Bennett about his ketchup addiction: "This is too many empty ketchup packets. It's making me uncomfortable" (Tweedy 149). Tweedy is serious in the book. He describes his wife's cancer battles, struggling with being a new parent, and of course his painkiller addiction. This book is not just a rollicking rock 'n' roll memoir—it's a complicated look at the relationship between creativity and suffering and the toll that can take on those nearby.

Tweedy starts his book in his hometown of Belleville, Illinois, where he and his mother would stay up late watching television while his functioning-alcoholic father would shout at them to turn the TV down. Tweedy's relationships with his father and mother are central currents throughout the book, and he writes about their deaths with honesty and care. In Belleville, Tweedy met Jay Farrar, an outcast like Tweedy who also listened to obscure punk music. The two formed a friendship, then a country-punk band called Uncle Tupelo. After four albums, the relationship had run its course—Tweedy summarizes the break-up by connecting two lyrics from Uncle Tupelo's final album—Tweedy writes: "If the record was a conversation between us, I was all 'We'll get there eventually,' and he was 'The time is right for getting out while we still can'" (104).

Tweedy describes how he formed Wilco out of the ashes of Uncle Tupelo and met his wife, Susie Miller, an owner of music venue Tweedy played at. Their first kiss is depicted in comic form. Susie's battles with cancer play a significant role in the second half of the book. Tweedy wrestles with the fact that he was never the dad he hoped to be—too much time on the road and too many struggles with addiction. Many of those details are revealed in dialogue between him and his son. Readers will love Tweedy's description of songwriting—"melody is king," he writes (166). He mumbles along until the melody is just right, then he starts working on lyrics.

While those moments are moving and insightful, the power of the book comes in a few gut punches as Tweedy talks about his addiction. Things began to spiral when a pharmacy employee/Wilco fan tripled Tweedy's Vicodin prescription, ending the transaction with, "Listen, man, if you ever need anything..." and the universal gesture for "call me" (202). Tweedy writes, "Even in what felt like a lotto-winning moment of euphoria, I knew that making this connection was one of the worst things that could have happened to me" (203). Tweedy neared rock bottom—he stole morphine from his dying mother-in-law. He writes, "I barely remember that, and I wish I didn't remember it at all. I want the memory to disappear forever, to be expunged from my permanent record. But there it is." The final gut punch lands when Tweedy describes a conversation with a fellow resident of a rehab facility. Tweedy felt that his suffering didn't compare to the other residents. One man confronted him in an expletive-laced tirade, saying, "Mine ain't about yours. And yours ain't about mine. You don't get to decide what hurts you. You just hurt" (224). That idea is echoed in "Bombs Above," the lead track Tweedy's 2018 solo record *Warm*:

A man so drunk he could hardly stand
 Told me once holding my hand
 Suffering is the same for everyone
 He was right but I was wrong to agree
 (Tweedy, “Bombs Above”)

Pain—like grief, joy, anger, and nearly all aspects of human life—is simultaneously universal and individual. That might be what draws us to art about pain—we recognize it, but still learn something. We expect what we see, but are still surprised. We’re not on our own, but we own our experiences.

Tweedy’s book works to demystify the tortured artistic cliché. He argues that substance abuse doesn’t make you a better artist and that suffering is not essential to creativity, but is a universal human condition. Artists, he argues, might have just found a positive way to deal:

Because I think that artists create *in spite* of suffering, not because of suffering. I just don’t buy it. Everyone suffers by degrees, and I believe everyone has the capacity to create, but I think you’re one of the lucky ones if you’ve found an outlet for your discomfort or a way to cope through art. (90, italics in original)

Longtime Wilco fans will find a lot to love about this book—details about break ups, songwriting, rehearsals, family-life and fame. I found myself many times setting the book down to look up Tweedy’s references on YouTube, including a lounge act with an incredible bass solo. But anyone who wants to learn more about creativity, addiction, loss, and art will learn from Jeff Tweedy’s book.

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Tweedy, Jeff. “Bombs Above.” *Warm*. dBpm Records, 2018.

Auxier, Randall E. *Metaphysical Graffiti: Deep Cuts in the Philosophy of Rock*. Carus Publishing Company, 2017.

There is a fine line between irrelevance and death in the culture industry. And despite the optimism of an aging, devoted and often cultish fan base, it is clear that in our era of unmitigated digital servitude, rock and roll stands on the precipice between the clearance bin and the mortuary.

As goes rock music, so go its fans, whose aging aesthetic passions reflect the continuous decline of a once-dominant cultural institution, foreshadowing the social obsolescence of its disciples in short order. For this reason, Randall Auxier’s *Metaphysical Graffiti* reads less like a compilation of high-minded music criticism—which it occasionally strives to be—and more like a philosophical ode to a cultural enterprise that is well into its sunset years.

Despite the reference to deep cuts in the book’s title, Auxier’s playlist is mostly familiar and radio-friendly: Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, David Bowie, Bruce Springsteen, The Who, and other bands whose ten songs you hear repeatedly if you still listen to FM stations in your car during rush hour. These are the greatest rock bands of all time, as declared by DJs, suburban dads, and VH1 documentaries that have been playing the same songs on repeat for the past five decades—convincing the public through sheer dogmatic force that this stuff is, like, classic, man.

Like these dads and DJs, Auxier dates himself early in the book. “I think there is a lot of philosophically interesting stuff going on in the music that was made from the onset of the rock era and up through the 1980s,” Auxier says. “I sort of checked out in the 1990s, but then, so did the good music” (xix). It’s an old man joke, dismissing the entirety of the grunge movement and the subcultural explosion of rock-driven sub-genres in the 1990s—post rock, punk rock, desert rock, riot grrrl, hardcore, and all the other counterculture sounds that never made it past college radio. Of course, Auxier is philosophically accomplished enough to

recognize and admit that he's being tongue-in-cheek, but the joke nonetheless winnows down his audience straight out of the gate. He's a classic rock fan writing for other classic rock fans, period.

Though rock is Auxier's medium, philosophy is his mode. And unlike his music selection, his philosophical referents are refreshingly diverse: Susanne Langer, Alfred North Whitehead, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Giambattista Vico, Ernst Cassirer, Arthur Danto (and of course the regular western canon of Sartre, Kant, Kierkegaard, Plato, Augustine and the others). This range of philosophical composition also underscores Auxier's more visionary intentions for this book. "Philosophy is often practiced as a kind of literature," he says. "You are reading such an exercise" (Auxier 235).

Thus, *Metaphysical Graffiti* is an attempt at original philosophical literature, and at times, it works. The book's eighth chapter, "It's All Dark: The Eclipse of the Damaged Brain," is one such example where Auxier's philosophy meets the road. Here he posits a phenomenology of musical appreciation, with Pink Floyd as the subject. Even if you are not a fan, the exercise works, because Auxier is not just talking about music; he's talking about how we experience it. So, for the classic rock fan, what better band than Pink Floyd to represent the soundtrack of subjective experience?

"We are in awe of this music, we respect it, we appreciate it, but it has not been made for love or fondness or affection," Auxier writes. "[Pink Floyd] is about black holes and dark sides and shadows; it's about hanging on in somewhat noisy desperation, but the noise has to be closely arranged for maximum effect" (131). The understanding of this arrangement forms the basis of Auxier's phenomenology, putting in sober, contemporary philosophical terms the psychical and mildly hallucinatory experience of his first encounter with *The Dark Side of the Moon*. He is talking about Pink Floyd the way his younger self thought he sounded like when he was talking about Pink Floyd.

Auxier's chapter on Paul Simon, "Emptiness in Harmony," also contains rings of originality. "This isn't exactly an essay," Auxier says at the opening. "It's several vignettes that trace connected themes in and through the music and life of Paul Simon [...]. When you finish the first vignette, you're going to think I don't like Paul Simon. That isn't true" (253). It continues from there, in that self-reflexive way. This might have something to do with how Auxier perceives Paul Simon's musical canon, which he describes as "immense," but it also has to do with Auxier's own style. He is figuring it out as he goes, at one point venturing into a self-

described Zen moment, via American philosopher Crispin Sartwell, while at the same time admitting that he knows next to nothing about Zen philosophy.

“Sartwell knows way more about Zen than I do, but I think neither of us lives in a Zen life,” Auxier says. “Still, the world may forgive a hopeless dilettante who confesses his ineptitude in advance. Even Goethe said ‘the dilettante’ is what he wanted to be. Well, then, damn the torpedoes.” (257).

Maybe Auxier does not know much about Paul Simon, either, which is why he approaches his music so broadly and haphazardly. Or perhaps it is because Simon’s work as an artist is indeed so immense and vast that it takes more than essay to summarize its supposed significance. Either way, Auxier’s haphazard method works to do philosophy-as-literature. There are no answers here, only process. It is something curious philosophers may have patience for, just as musicians have the interest to be able to stand through warm-ups, sound checks, and opening acts. For a general audience, however, Auxier’s motley approach may be a bit too heterogeneous to stimulate profound conversation. Sort of like how Paul Simon makes some people want to plow a heel into their car’s radio.

Despite the occasional hit from Auxier, *Metaphysical Graffiti* resembles other philosophy-and-pop-culture books currently dominating the contemporary philosophy scene; *The Ultimate Game of Thrones and Philosophy*; *The Avengers and Philosophy*; *The Simpsons and Philosophy*; ad infinitum. Usually the “Philosophy of [Cool Thing]” model plays like a bait and switch—teasing something commercially relevant and swapping it out for something commercially unviable—which is why most books in this genre fail.

What sets Auxier’s book apart from other works in this nascent genre is that he is not using popular culture artifacts to teach about philosophers’ interesting ideas. Instead, he uses the music to work out ideas of his own. With a different editor and more creative publisher, *Metaphysical Graffiti* could stand a chance at broader appeal. It has the necessary humor, self-awareness, and plainspeak that is necessary for bringing philosophy down to ground level. But then, this book could never have been pitched as philosophy. It is also too heady to stand alone as music criticism, thus becoming a deep cut of its own.

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Baym, Nancy K. *Playing to the Crowd: Musicians, Audiences, and the Intimate Work of Connection*. New York University Press, 2018.

What does it mean to be a musician fan in times when digital communication platforms are redefining how artists and their audiences connect to each other? These are no trivial questions once the social media have disrupted the “normal” channels of distribution in the records industry, affecting how people listen to music and when they buy it.

Through her ethnographic research of the relationship between musicians and their fan base, Nancy Baym explores these questions to tell a story of “the intimate work of connection” that now makes a cornerstone of a successful musical career. She proceeds in three movements, first focusing on music and musicians, then revealing the norms of participation that have formed in the fan culture, and, finally, discussing the role of platforms in the new ecology that has evolved around popular music.

With music functioning both as a commodity to be sold for profit and a means of fostering relationships, musicians are positioned as laborers as well as communicators. Baym notes however, that relating to “crowds of strangers” is not a novel part of being a musician and that the profession has a long tradition of being “feelingful” (40). Nevertheless, with the advent of social media, actively relating has been elevated to the new heights and become key to a musical career. This is no longer enough to be a good performer. Equally important is to promote oneself and to make one’s work visible. That is why, to stay in business, musicians reach out to their fans, cultivate emotional connections with them, and keep those alive constantly, consistently, and enthusiastically in hopes that the listeners will eventually buy their music. Such work of relating is never complete, Baym reminds us. Moreover, it comes at a price. Here, she joins Arlie Hochschild, whose book *The Managed Heart* published in 1983 emphasized the consequences of blurring work and personal life. Like Hochschild, Baym arrives at a conclusion that the practices of connecting with the fans are emotionally draining. Curiously enough, in this new economy of intimate connections, music itself has fallen by the wayside: and is no longer the main “product” or the “gift” of the musicians to their listeners.

Part two of the monograph examines the new norms of participation that have formed in the fan culture once the old forms of engagement—the stage and the merchandise table—became supplemented by the connectivity of the social media platforms. Building on theories of interpersonal communication, Baym describes relationships between musicians and fans as dialectical, that is, oscillating between a series of opposites, the most prominent of which being distance and closeness. Examining how artists and their audiences negotiate the pull and push of relational dialectics, the author finds an intricate combination of strategies of control and strategies of participation that individual musicians devise to “set the boundaries of participation” and to effectively claim the part of the conversation to themselves (110).

Finally, the book explores the challenges and opportunities offered by various communication platforms in addition to concerts and direct encounters of artists with the audience. Here the discussion addresses the issue of authenticity and its complicated nature as a carefully calculated effect of “a personal sense in social relationships” under the conditions of altered “standards of realness” (171). Acknowledging that relating is now a new norm, the author lists several goals striving for which will allow all parties (musicians, audiences, and platform developers) to flourish.

Students of popular culture as well as the general public will find the book quite accessible and engaging, with a narrative rich in vivid examples and anecdotes and serious questions worth tackling. For instance, does music engender special relationships between musicians and the audience that are inconceivable in other genres, say, literature, painting, film, etc.? If intimate connections have already taken root in other genres and spheres of life, it will be crucial to reveal the circumstances (cultural, economic, social, political) that are conducive to their development and the forces that resist them. Equally important is to figure out whether the music industry is an anomaly or whether it is a showcase for a new phase in the global circulation of money, workers, and commodities. Sociologists, political scientists, and critical cultural scholars will also be interested in learning how technology is implicated in the formation of new publics and which old norms of participation refuse to give in. Lessons learned by musicians in managing their relationships with the fans have broad implications for the spheres where relationships between actors are being restructured after the model of fandom. Contemporary policies is a fertile ground for such innovation and experimentation. An increasing number of politicians engage with voters via social media, bypassing

the traditional media, borrowing from celebrities' playbook, and developing their own "brand"—all contributing to a new political ecology and novel ways of pushing political agendas. In these circumstances, strategies used by music fans in accepting, negotiating, and contesting their relationships with musicians may translate well for citizens who seek to claim their stand in public conversation and to negotiate their terms of engagement.

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Benacka, Elizabeth. *Rhetoric, Humor, and the Public Sphere: From Socrates to Stephen Colbert*. Lexington Books, 2017.

Perhaps Stephen Colbert's ascendance to cultural stardom foregrounded the intersection of entertainment and politics more than any other comedian or television personality in recent history. In fact, more than providing political commentary through mocking the news, shows such as *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* actually became a source for the news. In *Rhetoric, Humor, and the Public Sphere: From Socrates to Stephen Colbert*, Elizabeth Benacka examines the ways in which Colbert's use of humor encourages citizens to participate in the democratic process. While Colbert's television persona solidified his presence as a public figure, Benacka is concerned with the comedian's forays into other public venues such as his "Address at the 2006 White House Correspondents' Dinner," his "Testimony on 'Protecting Our Nation's Harvest' in 2010 Before the Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration," and his discourse surrounding *Citizens United*. Colbert's use of humor in addressing these public controversies, Benacka argues, functions "to inspire conversations about matters of importance to our deliberative democracy" (24).

As the title suggests, the book begins with an examination of humor from the classical perspective, but then situates it within a contemporaneous political context. In the first chapter, "Wisdom from the Ancients," Benacka traces the evolution of humor and rhetoric from Ancient Greece to Colbert's deployment of parody, irony, and satire in our modern political era which, she argues, positions Colbert as both an "inheritor and innovator" of the ancient tradition (2). Taking the

reader through Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, Benacka demonstrates the extent to which humor has historically served as a corrective in democratic societies. It is from this historical foundation that Colbert used humor “to bring forth an active and engaged citizenry critical of a variety of institutions in need of correction” (129). In addition to an adept knowledge of theory, Benacka demonstrates a mastery of context in the second chapter, “Damn Yankees,” where she outlines the history of humor in the American public sphere and chronicles the rise of Colbert. Colbert’s use of humor in the public sphere, she argues, stems from a discontent with the broader institutions that govern the public, which in turn wages an acknowledgement among the citizenry of the inefficiencies and shortcomings of those institutions.

The potential for humor to galvanize civic participation in matters of the state comes alive in the three case studies offered in the book. Chapter three, “Correspondents and Colbert,” examines Colbert’s performance at the 2006 White House Correspondents’ Dinner to illustrate the potential for parody to create disenchantment, or what Benacka calls “an affective state” that enables citizens to become actively involved in democratic deliberation (45). “Colbert’s parody of a fact-rejecting media pundit,” she asserts, “enabled him to question the ideological bias and lack of journalistic integrity in a post-9/11 environment, and simultaneously called out the Bush administration for its policies that limited free speech and open inquiry” (45). In doing so, Colbert encouraged a debate about the underlying objects of ridicule—President Bush’s disdain for facts, government surveillance, and corporate media’s lack of critical inquiry—among groups who did and did not recognize the underlying critique. In chapter four, “Congress and Colbert,” Benacka argues that Colbert’s use of irony revealed not only the partisan gridlock that prevents Congress from working towards solutions to benefit immigrant labor, but also the inability of the legislative branch to work in accordance with the national interest. Amid the division that prevents our politicians from reaching across the aisle, irony functions as a rhetorical catalyst that illuminates the lack of dialogue between parties and has the potential to help wage consensus. In the final case study, “*Citizens United* and Colbert,” Benacka examines the comedian’s use of satire to expose the dangers of Super PACs in his appearances on news shows, in front of the Security and Exchange Commission, and in political ads. Through the creation of his own Super PAC, “Americans for a Better Tomorrow, Tomorrow,” Colbert used satire to stimulate a dialogue and raise awareness about how campaign finance laws negatively impact political elections.

Thus, similar to his use of parody and irony, Colbert's utilization of satire called attention to the inefficiencies of our political process and placed the responsibility for changing these problems in the hands of American citizens, "making awareness and action . . . a civic responsibility" (132).

While the book shines in providing the contextual backdrop that precipitated the rise of Colbert and the unique circumstances that enabled him to exploit humor's potential within the public sphere, it is absent any mention of Colbert's successors. Given the robust field of comedians who traffic in the business of political commentary, a few nods to the John Olivers and Trevor Noahs seems only appropriate. That said, the book's only flaw is that it leaves you wanting more. Although the lack of recent scholarship leaves the book feeling somewhat dated, Benacka concludes with an examination of Donald Trump and the role of humor in the 2016 election, illuminating for the reader the key differences in the use of humor for rhetorical instruction between Colbert and Trump. While Colbert utilized the discourses of irony, satire, and parody to generate a discussion among the electorate about the efficacy of our civic institutions, Trump hurled "improvisational jabs and comic insults" that worked to scapegoat and demean individuals and organizations rather than incite citizens to collaborate in seeking out ways for correction (142). In all, *Rhetoric, Humor, and the Public Sphere: From Socrates to Stephen Colbert* has broad implications for scholars interested in the history of rhetoric, rhetorical theory, and the rhetoric of contemporary comedy. In an era in which entertainment and politics have become synonymous, Benacka provides a compelling account of how humor might change the ways we conceive and enact civic engagement.

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Zeisler, Andi. *We Were Feminists Once: From Riot Grrrl to Covergirl®, the Buying and Selling of a Political Movement*. Public Affairs, 2016.

Andi Zeisler chronicles the influence that American feminist movements have had in shaping popular culture and in helping to normalize ideas of gender equality. Simultaneously, she argues that in the process of their incorporation, feminist

movements have lost much of their liberatory potential. Zeisler ties relevant examples from advertising, film, television, music, and fashion to significant events in history, politics, and culture. Each chapter is supported by a breadth of examples and an insightful discussion of their implications. She brings to life the examples in an accessible, witty writing style as she draws on a variety of thinkers in gender and cultural studies including Bordo, Douglas, hooks, Kilbourne, McRobbie, and Showalter.

In her introduction, Zeisler lays out the stakes: While the incorporation of feminism into mainstream culture may herald its success as a political movement, the issues that are crucial to feminism (sexual harassment, reproductive freedom, wage equality, and so on) remain in great jeopardy. She argues that an explicitly political feminism of earlier eras has transformed into marketplace feminism that is mainstream, cool, and fun. Above all, it is consumer oriented and divorced from an actionable politic. The book then charts the development of marketplace feminism and discusses its implications in the path to gender equality.

Zeisler begins by exploring the ways in which concepts of liberation introduced in first-wave feminist movements were manipulated by advertising campaigns. She addresses the significance of the turn of the twentieth century New Woman and how quickly her intellectual, independent, creative, modern ideals were co-opted. The discussion is teeming with descriptive examples of advertising campaigns for a range of consumer goods (cigarettes, sweaters, perfumes, etc.) that have exploited a progressive feminist ethos. Such “empowerizing” incorporates ideas of liberation, but only offers empowerment to women as consumers, not as political agents.

Zeisler next explores women’s roles in American film. She proceeds historically by citing specific films from the silent era through the Hays Code, then independent cinema to blockbusters. She probes how audiences determine the feminist worth of a film by critiquing questions that ask if certain films are “feminist.” Here, she argues that questions in the “is it or isn’t it feminist?” discourse divert focus away from structural causes of gender inequality, and consequently, will not be effectively progressive.

From trends in undergarments to trends in T-shirts, chapter three probes the complex and often problematic relationship between feminism and fashion. Using neo-liberalism as an interpretive lens, Zeisler provides an in-depth exploration of Feminist Majority Foundation’s (FMF) “This is What a Feminist Looks Like” T-shirt campaign. The campaign began to counter the stereotype of feminists as

unattractive, humorless man-haters and seeks to normalize a variety of feminists and feminisms. Zeisler does not view the FMF campaign as wholly progressive and identifies the problem that marketplace feminism has become something to wear rather than something to do. Thus, individual fashion choices in such campaigns supplant collective political goals.

In a televisual landscape where women are depicted in a variety of roles (fighting zombies, fighting crime, doctors, politicians, etc.), Zeisler argues that women can have it all...but only on TV. The central critique of chapter four is that seeing a Strong Female Lead® is not the same as seeing equality in the public sphere. Yet Zeisler does not dismiss the importance of women on television. Citing *Maude* and *All in the Family*, she looks to programs in the 1970s that wrestled with feminist issues such as sexism and abortion. She then points to the 1980s backlash and 1990s telecommunications deregulation as factors in reducing nuanced depictions of feminist issues and inciting a rise of reality-based television programming.

Chapter five addresses the phenomena of celebrity feminism. Zeisler argues that focus on the personal empowerment of individuals such as Beyoncé or Emma Watson pulls attention from the ways in which the industries they participate in give them the platform to create – and profit from – stereotypes and structures of oppression for women. She situates celebrity feminism as important for bringing exposure to ideas of gender equality, but also as negating because its political message is diluted.

Charting out movements of backlash, post-feminism, and the emergence of intersectional feminism, she analyzes the ways in which 1980s-1990s popular culture portrayed “liberated” women as unhappy and manipulative (*Fatal Attraction* as the example *par excellence*), and expressions of female power as individual struggle/achievement (in primetime soaps like *Dynasty*). Zeisler situates her discussion in Reagan-era conservatism and the “anti” agenda. Feminist responses to anti-choice, anti-affirmative action movements, and especially intersectional feminism subsequently helped to move feminism toward the third-wave.

Chapter seven critiques the discourse of empowerment in “choice feminism.” Zeisler firmly argues that consumer agency is not equal to political agency. Central examples come from contrasting the countercultural movement of Riot Grrrl to the pop trend of the Spice Girls. She analyzes “girl power” which elevates girls as consumers, but not as political actors. Zeisler maintains that feminists must, at the

very least, acknowledge the limitations of the consumer-choice-plus-empowerment-equals-feminism agenda.

Focusing on gender essentialism, chapter eight analyzes the “difference industry.” Citing rich and varied examples, she discusses how gender essentialism is articulated in the marketing of everything from pink pens and power tools to the gendering of children’s toys and even trends in women’s empowerment conferences such as MAKERS and S.H.E. Another key example comes from women-oriented concert series of the 1990s, namely Lilith Fair. She posits that what began as a counter-movement to the male-dominated music industry ultimately employs gender essentialism in ways that benefit the greater corporate, not political, good.

Next, Zeisler addresses beauty ideals as exemplified in the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty. Here, she analyzes the processes through which feminist critiques of beauty standards are co-opted, re-packaged, and then sold back to women in the form of cosmetic goods. She charts the rise of various cosmetic products and procedures (botox, vajazzling) that are marketed to women as “choice feminism.” Zeisler firmly states that “choice” does not dismantle beauty standards, but instead foregrounds the “right” to purchase whatever products are necessary to achieve those standards.

Zeisler concludes by acknowledging both the achievements of political feminism and the setbacks of marketplace feminism. Ultimately, she remains hopeful that a post-marketplace feminism can benefit more than just the commercially empowered few. The book is a worthwhile read for the incredible breadth of examples presented. Zeisler historicizes popular culture in a way that clearly demonstrates the social and political implications for feminist movements. She explores multiple facets of a central problematic and skillfully reinforces her main argument in each chapter. Her writing is clear and clever, making it engaging for both scholars and fans of popular culture. The text is of interest to a general audience and can be an excellent resource for an undergraduate classroom, especially when coupled with the wide range of source material cited. For the classroom, incorporating primary sources is advised because although Zeisler properly applies feminist and cultural theory, she doesn’t explain concepts to the same extent as she explains the artifacts of popular culture. With this in mind, the book could be an excellent companion text and gives faculty opportunities to develop theory and concepts in depth and with ease. Although her work is clearly critical, Zeisler remains optimistic that feminist movements can be reconfigured as

a force for social justice. Her work is useful and appealing because she foregrounds popular culture as the primary forum for public engagement and a significant field for the negotiation of gender equality.

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Bennett, Lucy and Paul Booth. *Seeing Fans: Representations of Fandom in Media and Popular Culture*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2016.

Seeing Fans, a recently published edited volume from Bloomsbury Academic, challenges unidimensional representations and interpretations of fans and fan practices. In their introduction, Lucy Bennett and Paul Booth frame fans as “a compelling, ever-changing audience with multiple layers that are often more dimensional than the overarching and limited ways they have been historically represented in media and popular culture” (1). Representations of fans, as the volume shows, has been important to the development of fan culture as fans themselves seek to riff on or control fandom practices that some deem outside the appropriate realm of behavior. Fan representation can lead to fan empowerment and fan (self)discipline, reflecting how “fandom sits in an uneasy position in the media industries...courted and held at arms’ length” (3). Divided into twenty-five chapters, Booth and Bennett get inventive with fan representation in *Seeing Fans*. The editors include interviews with those who represent fans, such as the directors of *Trekkies* (1997) and *Bronies* (2012), among other inventive interviews with media creators. Likewise, the volume includes two “Spotlight On” sections, which center on specific fan-media ecosystems of representation.

Seeing Fans contains many interesting chapters, but only several standouts will be addressed here. Sam Ford’s intriguing article on professional wrestling, “‘I Was Stabbed 21 Times by Crazy Fans’: Pro Wrestling and Popular Concern with Immersive Story Worlds,” shows how most scholarly and mass media have missed some of the most important aspects of pro wrestling fandom. According to Ford’s analysis, based on his interviews and experience in professional wrestling, live attendees move fluidly between engaging the show “as spectators, as critics, as theorists, as community members, and as performances” (40). Fan are key

performers in maintaining the fictional story world of professional wrestling, such that one cannot reduce them to passive spectators.

In chapter eight, “Fans on Primetime: Representations of Fandom in Mainstream American Network Television, 1986-2014,” Lincoln Geraghty shows how fan stereotypes on network TV increased with the rise and familiarization of fandom. Setting sitcoms like *Frasier* alongside the documentary *Toy Hunter*, Lincoln effectively proves that even primetime TV was invested in responding to fans, such that the sitcom becomes far more intertextual than scholars have realized at first glance. Meanwhile, in chapter eleven, “Marking the Line between Producers and Fans: Representations of Fannish-ness in *Doctor Who* and *Sherlock*,” Melissa A. Click and Nettie Brock show how TV producers both are fans and represent fans, condoning and disciplining certain fan behaviors. Divergences in power between producer and fan, as well as fan frustrations over narrative depiction, can lead to unauthorized fan productions, or can help reinscribe the divisions, if those divisions are found useful in some fashion. In another interesting chapter on how fans intersect with media environments, “Hero-Boy and Fanboy Auteurs: Reflections and Realities of Superhero Fans” (chapter twelve), Ellen Kirkpatrick shows that at all levels of superhero films fans are demanding greater representations of minority fans on the comic page. Minority fans have also advocated for more diverse off-page and off-screen representations of minority fans as well, in creative teams and other industry settings. “Outdoor Queuing, Knicker-Throwing, and 100th Birthday Greetings” (chapter nineteen) by Ruth A. Deller looks at how newspaper coverage of mature female fans of male singers tends toward mocking their fandom, while also suggesting the mature women in question are quaint, and thus their fandom is rendered less risky than other fan populations or fan practices.

Many of the other essays were worth noting for their robust engagement with identity, theory, and fan representation, such as Mel Stanfill’s “Straighten Up and Fly White: Whiteness, Heteronormativity, and the Representation of Happy Endings for Fans,” Rukmimi Pande’s “Squee from the Margins: Racial/Cultural/Ethnic Identity in Global Media Fandom,” and Nicolle Lamerich’s “Otaku: Representations of Fandom in Japanese Popular Culture.”

Overall, the editors hope that the volume will be of use to instructors teaching theoretically about fans and fan practices. The collection definitely accomplishes this task, as its many original research articles and interviews could be of use to a variety of scholars who talk about fans and fandom in varying contexts. Similarly,

each of the essays generally challenges simplified understandings of fans and fandom, showing how fan bases are diverse, complex, and represented in a variety of ways. At times, the media portrays fans as nerds or geeks; at other times, they are portrayed as violent or crazed (using such language themselves on occasion). By explicating fandom representation in all its forms, the collection edited by Bennett and Booth goes far in addressing complicated fan-media relations, fan-fan relations, and fan-celebrity relations. Since the volume can only cover so many topics and theories, there is definitely a need for expansion into other areas of analysis, even returning to long-recognized and often legitimized fandom, such as sport figures.

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Abrahamsson, Christian. *Topoi/Graphein: Mapping the Middle in Spatial Thought*. University of Nebraska Press, 2018

MAPS ARE WEAPONS-National Security demands Accurate Maps
(Map-Chart Division of the Army Air Forces, 1942)

“I’m escaping to the one place that hasn’t been corrupted by capitalism: space!” (Tim Curry as the voice of Anatoly Cherdenko in *Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3*)

With all the talk of bodies (racialized and otherwise) and spaces (safe and otherwise), it is a delight to encounter a work that takes the spatial metaphor seriously. Christian Abrahamsson’s *Topoi/Graphein: Mapping the Middle in Spatial Thought* is just that: a trenchant and insightful piece of scholarship located on the bleeding edge of theory. I mean that as more than just a turn of phrase: thinking at (and through) the limit is one of the major focuses of the work.

The text’s origin is Abrahamsson’s doctoral thesis in geography at Uppsala University (Sweden). While containing a critique of the obsession with diligence to form commonly found in Western thought, the book maintains a definite structure throughout. The author addresses the seeming paradox between his goal of “counter[ing] any attempt to fix, delimit, or stabilize” with the “strict formalism” of the work itself by pointing out that “it was not enough to say something: I had to

show it to be understood” (120). The book has three components: an introduction, the core text, and an epilogue. The core text is divided into three parts (each containing five chapters) centered on a specific *topoi* followed by a *graphein*.

Despite inconsistency in how it has been theorized (Žagar, 2010), *topoi* is derived from the ancient Greek word (τόπος) for place and is used throughout Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*. They are warrants that attempt to connect arguments with the conclusion (Wodak and Meyer, 2001). Three films serve as *topoi*: Michael Haneke’s *Code inconnu* (2001) for the first part focusing on the fixed point, Peter Brook’s *Lord of the Flies* (1963) in the second part’s discussion of lines, and Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* (1979) in the final section’s fascinating analysis of a world beyond Euclidian geometry. Relevant segments from each corresponding film are presented and followed by the *graphein* (the present active infinitive version of the Greek verb for scratch γράφειν) or writing.

The specter of the War on Terror permeates the book. The introduction begins with the author gagging at news reports of Lynndie England et al’s handiwork at Abu Ghraib. He identifies the core subject of his book – the middle, the in-between, the limit itself – with the leash in England’s hand in the one of the most infamous photographs to come out of the black site. This does an excellent job of foreshadowing one of the main claims: that “discrete points...are foundational elements of an abstract violence...that always privileges certitude over ambivalence, identity over difference, and unity over multitude” (xxi). It is entirely understandable why someone trying to grapple with matters of mapping distinctions and beginnings/ends would be drawn to a conflict that has no discernable termination conditions (Zimmerman).

Attempting to summarize the arguments made here is a difficult task. Not because the writing is opaque (as I soon argue, just the opposite), but because the claims do not lend themselves to slogans or taglines. That is very much to its credit. Virtually everyone knows the essential building blocks of geometry: lines, points, vectors, spaces. Not many are able to engage in a sustained analysis of these seemingly self-evident concepts and make it compelling.

I have already touched on the theme of the first section of the book: that the role of the fixed geometric point is to “order the world” (11). The second section moves to the line as the object of analysis. Those familiar with Deleuze and Guattari’s writing on lines of flight will recognize many of the moves made, though there is much that is novel nonetheless. The idea here is that the line as a unit establishes both a relationship and a difference. Tethered, but kept apart. That establishment of

a relationship based on difference leads inevitably to asymmetries and ultimately hierarchy. This is where *Lord of The Flies* is aptly deployed to demonstrate that even on a desert island, the *terra nullius par excellence*, arose the establishment of difference (giving the conch symbolic value, electing a chief). And, of course, this difference also led to the creation of The Beast. The third and final section of the core text upholds Colonel Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now* as the embodiment of what happens when we move beyond the spatial metaphor to the plane of where “the compass needle incessantly turns” (114) and all zones and limits disappear.

One of the most praiseworthy elements of *Topoi/Graphein* is how it manages to maintain a remarkable level of accessibility where many writings on similar topics and fields fail. I was struck by the time I got to the endnotes that there was not a single passage that seemed even remotely like hand-waving. Despite coming in with some awareness of this line of inquiry from taking a class with David Wittenberg at the University of Iowa, I appreciated the lucidity with which Abrahamsson explained, interpreted, extrapolated, and interlinked Gunnar Olsson to Schmitt to Deleuze to Michel Serres. This is even more impressive considering: 1) the paradoxes intrinsic to the project at hand, 2) the theorists themselves, and 3) English not being the author’s mother tongue. Managing to circumvent the linguistic pitfalls endemic to the topics being discussed is no small feat.

Given the author’s emphasis that everything in the world is ultimately contingent, I suspect Abrahamsson might take issue with the adjective “timeless” being used. But so far as the value of the films chosen is not reliant on their historical context, and the spatial metaphor continues being used, I suspect this book will continue to be read and pondered. It has much of interest to say on subjects that we so often take for granted. What more could one ask for?

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