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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: Why Popular Culture Matters 1
CARRIELYNN D. REINHARD

**Special Entry: Multimedia Presentation of
“Why Popular Culture Matters” 4**
CARRIELYNN D. REINHARD

**Editorial: I’m So Bored with the Canon: Removing
the Qualifier “Popular” from Our Cultures 6**
SCOTT M. BRUNER

ARTICLES

Special Entry: 2017 Gary Burns
Graduate Student Travel Grant Award Winner
**Watch, Go, Now: “TV Everywhere” and
the Promotion of Liveness..... 17**
CARTER MOULTON

**“What’s the Difference Between Men and
Women?”: Hegemonic Masculinity in
The Walking Dead 36**
GRAEME JOHN WILSON

“Breaking Bad”: Periodically Justifiable 58
M. N. ROBERTS

**“It Was Amazing to Be There to Witness It”:
Online Fan Reactions to Rufus Wainwright’s
All Days Are Nights: Songs for Lulu Live Tour..... 81**
STEPHANIE SALERNO

***Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* in Print and
Film: Imaginations, Catastrophes, and the
Being-with of Being..... 104**
MIKE PIERO

**Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story?:
Gendered Legacies in *Hamilton*..... 125**
JESSICA SEYMOUR

***Sin City* and Color: Comic Adaptation and
Shifting Meanings 143**
ERIN B. WAGGONER

REVIEWS

The *Popular Culture Studies Journal* Reviews:
Introduction..... 165
Malynda A. Johnson

Book Reviews 166
Safiya Umoja Noble. *Algorithms of Oppression:
How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. New York
University Press, 2018 166
Andrew Kettler

Douglas E. Cowan. <i>America's Dark Theologian: The Religious Imagination of Stephen King</i> . New York University Press, 2018	169
Kurt Edward Milberger	
Derek S. Jeffreys. <i>America's Jails: The Search for Human Dignity in an Age of Mass Incarceration</i> . New York University Press, 2018	172
Jennifer Schneider	
Kendall R. Phillips. <i>A Place of Darkness: The Rhetoric of Horror in Early American Cinema</i> . University of Texas Press, 2018	175
Matthew Sautman	
Clara E. Rodríguez. <i>America, As Seen on TV: How Television Shapes Immigrant Expectations Around the Globe</i> . New York University Press, 2018	178
Nicole Plummer	
Marcel Danesi. <i>Concise Dictionary of Popular Culture</i> . Rowman and Littlefield, 2017	181
Ralph Beliveau	
Quesinberry Stokes and Wendy Atkins-Sayre. <i>Consuming Identity: The Role of Food in Redefining the South</i> . University Press of Mississippi, 2016	183
Michael S. Bruner	

Megan Sapnar Ankerson. <i>Dot-Com Design: The Rise of a Usable, Social, Commercial Web.</i> New York University Press, 2018	185
Dennis Owen Frohlich	
Casey B. Hart. <i>The Evolution and Social Impact of Video Game Economics.</i> Lexington, 2017	188
Bradley Wolfe	
Steven J. Ross. <i>Hitler in Los Angeles: How Jews Foiled Nazi Plots Against Hollywood and America.</i> Bloomsbury, 2017.....	190
Kraig Larkin	
Jeff Tweedy. <i>Let's Go (So We Can Get Back): A Memoir of Recording and Discording with Wilco, etc.</i> Dutton, 2018	192
Theodore G. Petersen	
Randall E. Auxier. <i>Metaphysical Graffiti: Deep Cuts in the Philosophy of Rock.</i> Carus Publishing Company, 2017.....	195
Benjamin van Loon	
Nancy K. Baym. <i>Playing to the Crowd: Musicians, Audiences, and the Intimate Work of Connection.</i> New York University Press, 2018	198
Natalia Kovalyova	

Elizabeth Benacka. <i>Rhetoric, Humor, and the Public Sphere: From Socrates to Stephen Colbert</i> . Lexington Books, 2017.....	200
Scott Anderson	
Andi Zeisler. <i>We Were Feminists Once: From Riot Grrl to Covergirl®, the Buying and Selling of a Political Movement</i> . Public Affairs, 2016	202
Amy M. Corey	
Lucy Bennett and Paul Booth. <i>Seeing Fans: Representations of Fandom in Media and Popular Culture</i> . Bloomsbury Academic, 2016.....	206
Matthew Brittingham	
Christian Abrahamsson. <i>Topoi/Graphein: Mapping the Middle in Spatial Thought</i> . University of Nebraska Press, 2018	208
Christopher Jackson	
Film and Television Reviews	212
<i>Green Book</i> . Universal Pictures, 2018	212
Amy Absher	
<i>The Kindergarten Teacher</i> . Pie Films, 2018	215
Gordon Alley-Young	
<i>Shoplifters</i> . Aoi Pro, Inc., 2018	218
Miyabi Goto	

<i>Udaari</i> . Momina Duraid Productions, 2016.....	220
Sakina Jangbar	
Game Reviews	224
<i>The Mind</i> . Pandasaurus Games, 2018.....	224
Alexis Pulos and Kristen L. Cole	
<i>Poké Ball Plus</i> , Nintendo, 2018.....	226
David R. Stanley	
<i>The Thing: Infection at Outpost 31</i> , Mondo Games and Project Raygun, 2017	229
Christopher J. Olson	
Theatrical Reviews.....	232
<i>Soft Power</i> . Center Theatre Group, Los Angeles, 2018	232
Stephanie Lim	
ABOUT THE JOURNAL	237

Introduction: Why Popular Culture Matters

CARRIELYNN D. REINHARD

This is my first issue as the new editor for this journal, so please grant me some leeway to address the question of why popular culture matters being highlighted in these pages, including with our first attempt at a multimedia, interactive component. Please indulge my brief time on the soap box to explain my perspective to hopefully clarify my approach as the Editor of this journal.

I come to this—field? discipline? interest? passion?—from three separate perspectives: communication studies, fan studies, and psychology. I am fascinated with how people make sense of themselves, each other, and the world around them. Being a fan provides a particular slant to these sense-makings and can shape, and be shaped by, communication. I see all interactions with others as communicating because meaning is always exchanged. Sometimes that meaning is exchanged in a word; sometimes a picture; sometimes a cake; sometimes a slap. As a part of a person's identity, fandom informs, is created through, and impacts others through communication. The context or situation in which the communication occurs also shapes these interactions. Time of day. Place. Participants. So many factors impact what we communicate, how, and why.

Popular culture comes in through our fandoms and our situations. Popular culture is popular. It is for the public. The masses. For everyday working folk who perhaps could not afford the “finer” things of a society or culture but still find meaning and solidarity through so-called “low culture.” Popular culture helps people handle the drudgery of labor for the profit of others. Popular culture provides an education, a socialization to further people's interactions and, perhaps, people's status in life. Popular culture can reassure people that they are not alone, and it can challenge the status quo. Popular culture can unite, either in a narrow way around a specific text or activity or location or person, or in a more general way, through a network of thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors that interrelate to constitute it.

We are not merely members or citizens of popular culture as we are other cultures or societies. To those we are born or naturalized. To popular culture we are converts or migrants. We move in and out of popular cultures as our lives change. We are fans of popular culture, primarily in the broadest sense, and then for all the

The Popular Culture Studies Journal, Vol. 7, No. 1
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specific forms that change during our lives. We willingly adhere to the tenets of popular culture, or else we leave it.

But to convert or adhere or leave, all these actions require communication as we interact with other fans, anti-fans, and non-fans. Writ large or narrowly focused, popular culture is the common language that weaves us together to help us find and make meaning, to discover ourselves and each other, to build community and solidarity, and to make sense of these things we call reality and life.

Admittedly, all of what I just wrote is celebratory, even pie-in-the-sky and rose-colored idealism. As a counterpoint, Scott M. Bruner provides an invited editorial in this issue to challenge our ideas about what popular culture is and why it matters. While we may disagree on the necessity for “popular” culture studies, we agree on the need for studying the cultures people live their lives in and through. In a world full of religious divisions and political partisanship, where people have a hard time communicating because of differences in beliefs and terminology, popular culture has become the means through which people can find connections and to have conversations on topics that—usually—do not lead to the same acrimony as religion or politics. Thanks to the online nature of popular culture, these connections and conversations can occur on a globalized transcultural or transnational level, creating empathic experiences and relationships heretofore unknown in human civilization. We can find our commonalities, and embrace our differences, through the popular culture we consume.

And in a world that perpetuates inequality in sociocultural, political, and economic power, popular culture can reify those inequalities, but it can also work to upend those traditional hierarchies and dynamics. Popular culture texts, practices, industries, communities and more can reflect the public’s values and beliefs at a particular time. Along with mirroring what the masses feel and think, understanding popular culture can illuminate these inner workings better than other aspects of life as it encompasses art and anthropology, ritual and exceptionality, the material and the metaphysical. Studying popular culture can reveal what is unknown in the known, what is unseen in the seen, and what could be empowerment among the disempowered.

These “coulds” and “cans” drive those who study popular culture, as gathered in these pages. Such as Carter Moulton, whose analysis of current television practices demonstrates a new approach to understanding how the technology undergirding our popular culture is changing, and perhaps changing us. Then Graeme John Wilson, whose work on *The Walking Dead* focuses on a problematic

representation of masculinity in contemporary American culture. And M. N. Roberts, whose examination of *Breaking Bad* suggests a challenging moral education coming through the series. With Stephanie Salerno, who explores fans' push and pull when dealing with the conflicting emotions of a Rufus Wainwright performance. And Mike Piero, whose work in this issue on the adaptation of *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* suggests an issue with capitalistic values being taught to children. And then with Jessica Seymour, whose consideration of the musical *Hamilton* challenges the intersection between gender and legacy in American culture. Finally, with Erin B. Waggoner, who explores the use of color in Robert Rodriguez's film adaptation of Frank Miller's *Sin City* graphic novels. All these articles help us to understand our world in new ways.

Of course, we may not always agree with what the analysis shows us, and we each may read the texts of popular culture in different ways. Such differences are fine—wonderful even—as long as we remain in open communication about them to learn with and from one another. Such communication, however, is becoming challenging, as popular culture causes the problems that align with the political partisanship of culture wars and fan wars. Thus, while we celebrate the various ways that popular culture allows us to emote, to create, to reflect, to illuminate, to reveal, to connect and to converse, we should also consider these more negative aspects. We should study popular culture to understand how it involves dividing, silencing, disempowering, stereotyping, exploiting, and more.

Popular culture is popular. It is of the people, by the people, for the people. And sometimes that means it does great things with and for the people. But because people are people, sometimes those things are horrible. Good or bad, popular culture remains important.

Popular culture matters not because it is something external to us to study, but because it is a part of us—all of us, whether we like to admit it or not. To borrow from the most important fandom in my life, popular culture is the force that surrounds us and penetrates us; it binds the world together. Sometimes in good ways, sometimes in bad ways.

But whatever the way, it is there for us to study, and because we are always in flux, so is it. Studying popular culture will never be done, and if that isn't a sign of its importance, then I don't know what is.

Special Entry: Multimedia Presentation of “Why Popular Culture Matters”

CARRIELYNN D. REINHARD

For my first issue as editor, I wanted to begin experimenting with how to conduct and present public scholarship. Popular culture studies exists at a unique intersection of disciplines and theoretical and methodological perspectives while being focused on examining elements of our world that people outside of the academy experience and construct every day. Popular culture studies is, and should remain, a field open to dialoguing with the general public, to learn from each other and to help each other make sense of the world and our places in it.

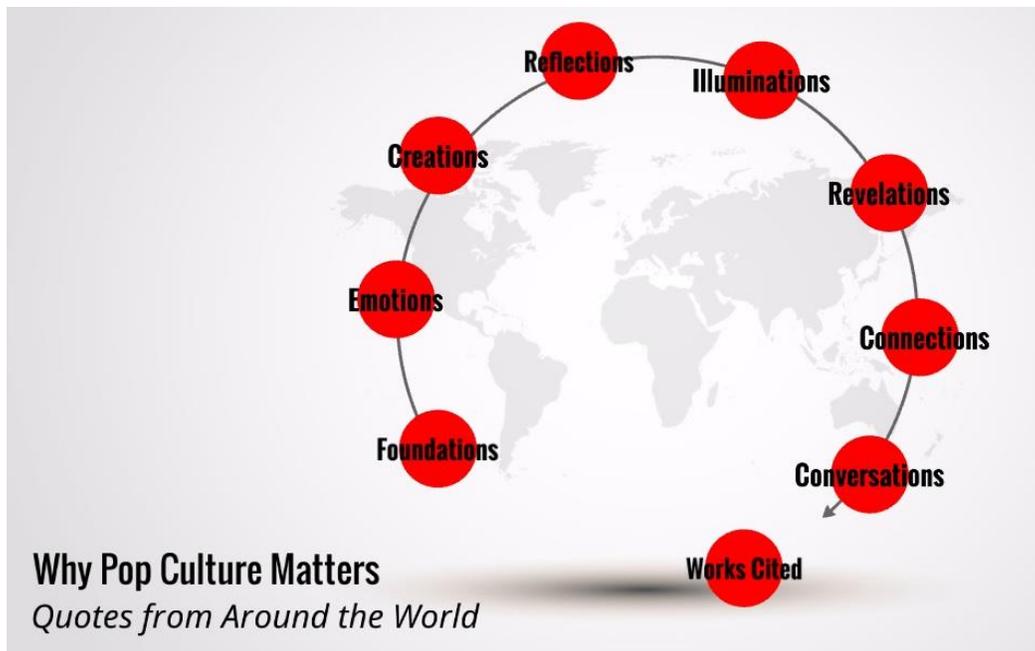


Fig. 1: Prezi Presentation

To that end, I put out a request via Twitter asking people—academics and non-academics—to consider how they see popular culture. I created the hashtag campaign #WhyPopCultureMatters to encourage these opinions. I even engaged my spring semester students with the same request. After collecting thoughts from a wide variety of people, I also consulted our published literature to find quotes from scholars who helped developed this field, as well as this journal’s founder.

An interactive Prezi (Fig. 1) collects these quotes for you to access and share: <https://prezi.com/view/75z5jrzoMU3NxQuILRpu>. As more thoughts and quotes come in, we will add to this presentation to hopefully inspire young scholars and communicate with the public the importance of popular culture studies. If you are interested in participating, use our Twitter account @ThePCSJ to contact us. Because, in the 21st century, we recognize that knowledge is not done just because something has been published.

EDITORIAL

I'm So Bored with the Canon: Removing the Qualifier "Popular" from Our Cultures

SCOTT M. BRUNER

"The enemy of art is the absence of limitations."
– Orson Welles

Two weeks ago, I was running a panel at a gaming convention about the literary inspirations for *Dungeons & Dragons (D&D)*. After it was over the panelists and I discussed how the early 20th century fantasy pulp novels which inspired *D&D* were receiving academic attention for the first time. One of the panelists in the conversation, Jason Ray Carney from Christopher Newport University, is about to release his first book, *Weird Tales of Modernity*, which explores ephemerality within the works of Robert E. Howard, Clark Ashton Smith, and H.P. Lovecraft. He claimed that works which had previously been written off as lurid avenues of escape were finally receiving the critical attention they deserved. I concurred and trotted out my favorite Orson Welles quotation (above), which I do often, and made the off-hand remark that there was no aesthetic alterity, or difference in value, between the pulps of the weird tales and our "great" works of literature. I argued that much of the commercial limitations placed on pulp writers led to works of uncanny fiction which would never have been possible with more freedom. Pulp writers were forced into writing within narrow genre conventions to meet draconian deadlines while often living on meager salaries. The work is distinctly a product of those contexts. I implied in the conversation that those pulp fictions were as worthwhile as our canonical works of literature.

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Another panelist, the historian Jon Peterson, took slight umbrage to this remark.¹ He brought up Michael Moorcock, the scribe of the Elric fantasy cycle, who is infamous for completing novels about his sorcerous albino swordsman in three days. Peterson's response was that Moorcock's writing is awful because of the limitations he was working under. Forced to labor under absurd deadlines, Moorcock's capacity to edit and revise his prose was virtually non-existent. Peterson's point is well-taken: even the most charitable critic will recognize Moorcock's prose as relentlessly turgid.

I am not entirely convinced, however, that these limitations made Moorcock's product "worse" but rather that they created something different and singular. The limitations placed on Moorcock, including his own personal limitations of talent and experience, led to something that could not have been produced otherwise. No matter how poor we might think of the prose, the Elric saga is undeniably compelling, interesting—and popular. The books have now been in continuous print for forty years. I would argue that limitations—whether it's the strict syllabic count of a Zen haiku or the realities of Hollywood production—are more responsible for great art than unfettered opportunity.

We have languished within the idea that great works of art come from artists set free to do whatever they would like. While great art does come from pushing boundaries, those boundaries are absolutely essential to the realization of great art. Nearly every one of our species' great works of art, from the plays of William Shakespeare to the great pyramids of Egypt to the Pirates of the Caribbean ride at Disneyland—even Moorcock's own mythologies—is a transcendence of its medium that is catalyzed only through the limitations of its artist, the exigencies of society (and capitalism), or the medium itself. These limitations include the abundance or paucity of an artist's talent, her need to produce capital to exist, interference from publishers and studios, and how individual mediums constrain our ambition for true, mediated intersubjectivity (such as novels force us to interpret our experiences through language, films through incomplete visual modalities). The art of our "popular" culture merely represents art which endures greater limitations than the elitist art of a privileged culture who can afford to ignore them.

When I was recently asked to explain why popular culture was important, I became slightly incensed. With all respect to the title of this journal, the use of the term "popular" culture by those who study art made for (and usually produced by) wider audiences only reinforces the idea that there are two different cultures. It implies that there is a culture without an adjective, a canon of works which represent the best of our civilization, are a credit to our species, and should be the

¹ Jon Peterson is responsible for the most comprehensive and compelling treatise on the history of roleplaying games, *Playing at the World*. The opportunity to meet him was an honor. The fact that we had a minor disagreement shows a pitfall of meeting your heroes.

rightful representatives of humanity if we ever needed to justify ourselves to a conquering alien race. When we launched the space probe Voyager among the stars, for instance, no one complained that we had selections from Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven, while the inclusion of Chuck Berry's "Johnny B. Goode" was almost heretical². An "adolescent" art form, rock and roll belonged to the juvenile canon of popular culture. By making this distinction, we imply that popular culture is the culture we should be slightly ashamed of. We need it and it's worthy of study, but only to understand the reasons why a species would ever have been obsessed with the Cardi B and Nicki Minaj feud. If (when?) the aliens invade, it is presumed we should hide our Cheap Trick vinyl collection.

This presumption has a number of problems. First: it's historically inaccurate. The majority of our most important works of art were created for a wide audience with the countless aesthetic limitations placed on their construction by their societies, artists, and media. Second, this presumption only reinforces perspectives of aesthetic subjugation based on elitism. By separating certain forms of culture from the entire corpus of artistic achievement, we brand certain texts, no matter what they might mean to their audiences, as less valuable. We situate their audiences' subjectivities and attractions as banal, mundane, and shameful (while also creating a need for an elite aesthetic caste to help us know the difference). Finally, the very concept of aesthetic worth is so subjective as to be utterly impossible to determine. We have spent centuries attempting to establish the canons of Western civilization, only to realize how Quixotic a dream it was in the first place. Until true intersubjective mediation actually exists, we will have to make do understanding that we all experience every text in our own way—through our own specific set of limitations, capacity, and talents.

It is terrific that we are finally studying pro wrestling and video games; however, if their scholars continue to situate these texts as cultural curiosities—as embarrassing little displays of imperfect, dirty, little cultures—we perpetuate the idea that they are not as valuable as our other art forms. We buy into the notion that true art is not meant for everybody and must be defined, and those definitions belong to a select class of academics and intellectuals. By adding any limiting signifier before culture, we erase art from its primary position as liberatory, and place it into one of subjugation.

Unnecessary Hierarchies of Mediation

The move that we have made from dividing true art from popular kitsch is recent and unwelcome. Most of our civilization's greatest works of art were created under similar limitations as our works of contemporary pop culture. Leonardo

² Smithsonian.com.

DaVinci did not paint Francesco del Giocondo's wife to ensure his immortality through the existential analysis of mysterious smiles, but rather so that Leonardo could eat. William Shakespeare, who has become (for better and worse) the model for transcendent and immortal literature, wrote all his plays for the squalid rabble which filled the Globe Theater. His plays were funded by aristocratic patrons not interested in art, but rather the filthy lucre the masses placed into their pocket for admission to the bard's lurid productions. Beethoven's performance and compositions were vehicles which allowed him to make rent. The art we consider part of the Western canon of great work has always been identified as transcendent only in hindsight. Great art has rarely—if ever—been premeditated. We have often placed historical texts within our canons because of their initial popularity; we justify their inductions because they were so important to their contemporary audiences—a recognition we strangely do not provide to modern “popular” works.

Nothing is more deadly to the importance of a work of art than creating it with the pretension that it will be immortal. The limitations placed on George Lucas, both budgetary and based on his paltry 1970s cinematic ethos, were responsible for the triumph of his first three *Star Wars* films. The lack of limitations, based on studio's willingness to bankroll any of his ideas because of his 1990s hyper-inflated cinematic ethos, led to the disaster of the *Star Wars* prequels. Even *Citizen Kane* would not have been possible without checks to Orson Welles' oversized imagination. Many of the films he would direct later suffered less from studio interference and more from Welles' own inability to reign himself in (largely based on his own frustration to understand his contemporary audiences' capacity). In order to dismiss the idea that there are two forms of art—the transcendent and the disposable—we need to recognize that we are unable to judge “great art” in the present moment.

The only art movement that I can think of it which was successful and artistically pretentious is the modernist novel (possibly owing to literature's long reign as our undisputed champion of media). From that movement, we consider James Joyce's *Ulysses* the finest literary work in the English language. However, one of the foundational arguments of Joyce's book is a critique against the elitism of valorizing particular experiences. The grand title of his book evokes our grand tradition of great works of art, while the book's story contextualizes the hero's journey through the wonderfully intimate level of the everyman. *Ulysses'* hero Leopold Bloom is a man who loves eating offal, moving his bowels, and living in the past. His wife is cheating on him, his business acquaintances view him as trivial, and he wanders around Dublin in a vain attempt to fit in. Leopold, whose banal experiences reflect all of our lives, is a hero precisely because the act of wandering aimlessly through this world of insanity, magic, and loss makes us all heroes. I would like to extend this argument to art. The fearless act of creation

itself is an act of heroism. It should be enough that we encourage its creation, support its creators, and continue to be appreciative and critical of it. It is not just impossible to determine which creations will become immortal; it is condescending and patronizing to view any creation as disposable. We denigrate our own subjectivities and experiences in the process. Life is hard enough without ridiculing how people share their lives and experiences through media. Mediation is simply the only currently available vehicle we have for sharing our perspectives, and it is ultimately an imperfect one.

The experience of mediation through art is so dynamically subjective that any attempt to parse standard, shared experiences of a text is equally impossible. Too often critical approaches to art are based on the idea that, even if there is not one perfectly static experience of a work of art, there is a range of experiences within a work that defines its value. In *How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read*, Pierre Bayard brilliantly dissuades us from this notion, by examining how a multitude of different readers, and non-readers, can experience the same narrative. For instance, to an 1884 reader of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, it might be a simple adventure tale; to a 2019 academic, it's an evisceration of class inequality; for my two-year-old son, it is a paper artifact full of meaningless glyphs that has as much artistic value as Ivan Van Norman's *The ABCs of D&D*. Roland Barthes admonished us that the mediation of a text does not happen at its origin point (the author) but rather its interpretation through its audience (reader). As long as the communion of our thoughts, emotions, and perspective requires their translation and conscription into incomplete and imperfect languages and modalities which are interpreted by completely disparate consciousnesses, authentic intersubjectivity will always elude us. Until we can break down the barriers imposed on us by semiotic and physical conscriptions, sharing our interpretations is beyond our artistic capacities.

And it might get worse. We currently live in a world where assumptions about our shared reality are becoming increasingly fractured. With the advent of #fakenews and the proliferation of social media echo chambers, our engagement with the world is only becoming increasingly subjective, solitary, and isolated. The separation of art into popular culture and valuable art fuels that isolation. Artistic sub-cultures, such as the video game community, have become intensely defensive of their communities because they have labored for so long under larger sociocultural assumptions that their expressions are worthless. We should not be entirely surprised when they lash out at critical approaches. We have spent years denigrating their community. It is insulting for a community's work to be acknowledged only when it reaches a level of cultural popularity that it can no longer be ignored. I am reminded of the bumper sticker which reads, "No one is free while others are oppressed." I would argue that no form of art is free, if we continue to oppress artistic creation through the elitism of classification.

The genesis for this distinction between popular art and the transcendent comes from an attempt to justify cultural classes who claim that they have the capacity for identifying great art. If we separate art into popular and culturally valued, it stands to reason that would need people who can tell the difference. This ability, historically, has proved impossible: *Citizen Kane* was not nominated for a single Academy Award. In an attempt to correct that mistake, the MPAA attempted to convince us that the passable, and interesting, *The Magnificent Ambersons* is one of the greatest films of all-time. We are terrible at recognizing great art when it is created. Mozart died a pauper and is buried in an unmarked grave while Antonio Salieri's grave resides in the second largest cemetery in Europe. We are not able to determine which pieces of art are truly transcendent until enough time has passed to judge how important they are.

Our bodies impose a great number of limitations on us, including how we construct an illusion of linear time. We are unable to forecast which modern works of art will transcend their current moment because we continue to be unable to see how today will impact tomorrow. Contemporary cultural scholarship, which attempts to make those judgments, bases their criteria on historical assumptions. Canonization is always a work of revisionism and compulsory construction. To paraphrase Voltaire, if great art did not exist, it would be necessary to invent it. The limitations of our experiences, constrained by time and physicality, should be acknowledged. To claim we can transcend their limitations by ignoring them is to miss the opportunity that comes from recognizing the space between them.

However, the people and institutions which rely on cultural capital justify their existence by making the claim that they can identify great art. Worse still, they believe their own hype. As an academic, it is easy to point the finger at our higher learning institutions. Much of the work done in research and the classroom is based on creating taxonomies of art. What works belong to 20th century modernism? What films can we classify as post-colonial? Which authors belong to which wave of feminism? Many of these taxonomies are useful. They allow us to be able to share a critical lexicon and they identify common ideas and philosophies which unite movements throughout the history of art. However, when those classifications are used to create distinctions between subjective experiences of mediation, when we decide which specific subjective experiences are more valuable than others, we construct social stratifications, based on cultural value, we reify the power hierarchies Marxist theorists find so abhorrent in economics.

The Problem with Popular

We run into another final problem here: the word “popular.” The word simply means appealing to a large audience. When we populated our great canons of art, this was exactly the definition used to determine which works we considered worthy of critical study. Shakespeare was transcendent because his characters, narratives, themes became embedded within society and because he presciently chose to present characters, themes, and narratives which were already embedded. The popularity of *Paradise Lost*’s story within popular society made John Milton’s poem as canonical as the biblical fable which inspired it. The pyramids are considered wonders of the world because the Egyptians made them so big everyone wanted to visit them. These works were created to entertain, seduce, mollify, inspire, and mesmerize as many people as possible. They were not created specifically for a class of elites fit to recognize their immortality; they were all created to be seen, read, and experienced. To antagonize Indiana Jones, they were never intended to “belong in a museum.”

Only in our contemporary era have we decided that popularity is no longer the best measuring stick for great art.³ We laud Odysseus and Achilles’ bloody battles with the Trojans, but we denigrate Thor and Captain America’s combat against the alien Chitauri in *The Avengers* (2012) or the “Macho Man” Randy Savage’s conflicts with WCW’s New World Order. *Paradise Lost*’s take on Lucifer is brilliant but the *Left Behind* novels are banal and witless evangelizing. We revere the tragic love story of two underage Italians in *Romeo and Juliet* but vilify a similarly tragic love story in *Twilight*. The affective grandeur of the pyramids is breathtaking, but Michael Bay’s Transformers movies are mindless spectacle.⁴ Why are our contemporary works not considered as important?

We fetishize the great works of our past because they were written in languages or styles that seem extraordinary now. *As You Like It* is written in iambic pentameter, the *Odyssey* in dactylic hexameter. These decisions were not originally artistic decisions but choices made to enrapture their audience. The power of those works comes not only from their narrative arcs and universal themes, but also from the spectacle of their material construction; what captivated us then was different, but our desire for Debordian spectacle has remained constant. Homer’s dactylic hexameters are the antiquarian equivalent of Bay’s CGI special effects. The texts that have endured were texts that people remember, and they will always love a great show.

³ This argument requires us to accept the curious perspective that the audiences of antiquity were more discerning judges of artistic expression, which interestingly conflicts with common conceptions of ancient audiences’ lack of education and capacity for complex perspectives.

⁴ Bay’s second Transformer’s movie, *Revenge of the Fallen*, has its climactic battle take place among the pyramids. The spectacle of antiquity meets the spectacle of the contemporary!

What we ascribe to the genius of Shakespeare or Homer were simply their responses to the limitations of their time; their audiences expected—and desired—poetry for the spectacle to emerge, and they gave it to them. They gave the masses what they wanted (and perhaps, snuck in a little of what they needed) because they wanted to be heard, read, and shared. Only the conventions of epic poetry were available to Homer to do so. Such poetry was the only lexicon his audience would understand for his tales made about mythic heroes. It was the language he knew well enough to create his narrative. Shakespeare never had the option to choose between blank verse or imagist symbolism. While both poets certainly possessed tremendous talents, they also worked under the social mores and conventions of their time. We understand, only today, that they were brilliant because what they created within their contemporary contexts and limitations seems to transcend those restrictions.

The other problem is that like art itself, the term popularity is subjective. When I mentioned my argument in this essay to my advisor, Stuart Moulthrop, his response was to ask me, “popular to whom?” Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* is a wildly “popular” book among my academic peers. Outside of academia, I do not know anyone who has read it. Do we consider *House of Leaves* a work of popular culture? Keith Sanborn, my film professor at SUNY-Buffalo, assigned all of Ed Wood’s films to our analysis class. He considered them works of genius (and convinced me). We could say Ed Wood’s films are popular, non-ironically, to Sanborn and myself. As I understand it, we use the term “popular” to refer to texts that are attractive to people outside of the institutions we have allowed to define our artistic canons. That audience is so large as to also be intellectually unsuitable. I am opposed to all distinctions on the valorization of art, but if we want to make taxonomies based on artistic modalities of production and their audiences, we need smaller categories than simply the billions of people who do not belong to the artistic elite, such as finding differences between fans of *Harry Potter* and *Twilight*, which both fall under the useless “popular” genus.

It is also inherently problematic, for any reason, to stereotype people as masses. When we contextualize people simply as the consumers of an intrinsically worthless spectacle, we begin to erase people as the dynamic, individual subjectivities (and heroes) they are. Our creation of hierarchies of artistic value have exalted many works of art but also deprecated others. By debasing an enormous catalog of human media by dismissing it as “popular,” we dismiss an entire range of human perspective, experience, and affect. We are not fit to judge the importance of media because we are not fit to judge the importance of anyone’s personal experience. As the WOPR taught us in *War Games* (1983), when it comes to making distinctions or definitions to valorize aesthetic subjectivity, “the only way to win is not to play.”

Undoing the Hierarchy

Throughout this essay, I have referred to the importance of limitations during the creation of art. Those limitations could refer to literally any obstacle which might impede the mechanics of artistic creation. The necessity to build economic capital is one limitation on artists but there are countless others: studio interference, limited access to materials, an adherence to a specific genre, and so forth. Some are chosen, some are elements of a text's rhetorical situation, others are based on the specific artist: The boundaries of an artist's capacity and talent limits her. The capacity of an audience's capacity to parse texts limits an artist (perhaps 2001's *Freddy Got Fingered* was simply beyond our ability to grasp it?). Like Orson Welles, I believe it is these limitations—and an artist's ability to navigate between (and sometimes beyond) them—that is the catalyst for true art.

“Popular” culture simply refers to art forms which exist under different limitations, and usually a much larger number of them than the texts which we consider “great” art. Popular texts attempt to reach larger audiences, are created by artists with less formal training (and in Bay's case, a considerably smaller pool of talent), and are created with a more immediate concern for acquiring capital. I posit that those limitations, however, often lead to greater works of art (which simply cannot be predicted) than forms of art which labor under none. *Citizen Kane* and *Touch of Evil* are better films than *Mr. Arkadin* and *F is for Fake* because of the limitations that the studio placed on them and Welles' capacity to acknowledge that. When it comes to the creation of art, freedom is simply too oppressive.

I propose a punk rock solution to the dilemma of cultural distinctions for artistic expression: Let's burn our canons down.

The study of pop culture, from video games to professional wrestling to eSport, is important because the study of our culture is important. We have spent thousands of years creating manuscripts, scrolls, symphonies, novels, films, television shows, blogs, and tweets in a vain attempt to bridge the material gaps which separate our subjectivities. The study of our failure to connect may be the most important field of all to explore; we might find a solution by studying all our failed experiments rather than trying to convince ourselves that we have ever succeeded (we haven't). The distinctions we have placed upon our cultural artifacts—by separating them into useless categories of genre, modality, and value—have only perpetuated the failures of our media to unite us.

The canonization of certain texts is abhorrent because the price of admission ensures the exclusion of equally worthy texts. No form of media should be considered worth more than any other. I will never be fit to judge what experience is revelatory, transcendent, or sublime for you; I expect that you will not be able to do the same for me. As long as we are unable to share our experiences and

perspectives through an authentic communion of intersubjectivity, our approach to every form of art and expression should be one of curiosity and wonder. We are fascinating creatures, let us sing in any key we like.

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SPECIAL ENTRY: 2017 Gary Burns Graduate Student Travel Grant
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Watch, Go, Now: “TV Everywhere” and the Promotion of Liveness

CARTER MOULTON

ABC’s broadcast of the 2017 Academy Awards was constructed and experienced as “live” television at its most potent. From the spatially-bound, exhibitionist, yet mundane “attractions” of liveness on the red carpet; to the intentional, reflexive exploitation of liveness in a skit that saw a tour bus of “ordinary people” stumble unknowingly into the Dolby Theatre during the middle of the broadcast; to the unintentional gaffe and direct-address apologies after presenters announced the wrong winner for “Best Picture,” this particular Oscars show provides multiple points of entry for an article on liveness (Bourdon; Feuer; White). My interest, however, springs from my own experience attempting to access this liveness.

For myself and other cord-cutters who do not own a digital antenna, watching the Academy Awards in “real time” required a multi-step process involving multiple remotes, codes, downloads, devices, screens, accounts, and geographies. A few hours before the show, I, sitting in my apartment in Chicago, turned to my over-the-top (OTT) device, Amazon FireTV, and downloaded a free-trial of the DirecTVNow streaming application. This particular package promised to deliver me sixty “live” channels including CNN, TNT, BBC America, and, of course, the all-important ABC. However, upon opening the app and cross-referencing the channel guide, I noticed that ABC was not among my available channels. I popped open my computer and searched to find that ABC, FOX, and NBC were only available to customers in select cities with local affiliates, and, notably, CBS was simply not available. Frustrated and without answers—“but I am currently in

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Chicago!”—I switched gears and downloaded the WatchABC app. I entered the activation code on my computer and was promptly notified that live-streaming was only available in “supported markets” and through a participating television provider such as Xfinity or DirecTV. This was a problem, for though I was physically positioned in Chicago, my Xfinity account was linked to a Michigan address. Aware of the availability but unreliability of “underground” live streams, I gave up and went to my friend’s Oscars-viewing party.

I share this anecdote to point out both the viewer assumptions and industrial inconsistencies that typify the ever-evolving climate of contemporary media convergence. I first assumed that I would be able to access live television through an OTT platform—a recent assumption which has only taken shape within the last few years. Moreover, as I found, the act of accessing live network television through OTT or “TV Everywhere” apps may actually be more difficult than binge-watching a time-shifted show or live-streaming a cable channel such as TNT or FX—even more-so for viewers living outside of major metropolitan areas.

These confusions, frustrations, and inconsistencies speak to the reformation of television’s “commonsense intelligibility” and help to contextualize the contemporary moment of television distribution and reception in the United States as a “kind of kluge,” an “an era of prolonged transition and transformation in the way media operates” (Gitelman 4; Jenkins 17, 24). As television’s migration onto new platforms, apps, and devices intensifies, the protocols associated with television screens, remote controls, cable boxes, and other televisual devices are re-structured and re-articulated. By “protocols,” I am referring to the “vast clutter of normative rules and default conditions which gather and adhere like a nebulous array around a technological nucleus” (Gitelman 4). For Lisa Gitelman, “protocols express a huge variety of social, economic, and material relationships” which shape “how and where one uses” and experiences a given media technology (4-7).

To date, scholars have primarily explored how the digital delivery of television content affords practices and protocols of time-shifted viewing, mobile spectatorship, binge viewing, and ubiquitous accessibility. Chuck Tryon, for instance, situates platforms like Hulu, Netflix, and Crackle as actively shaping today’s “on-demand culture,” which is driven by a new logic of media distribution that emphasizes “platform mobility,” or the idea that “movies and television shows can move seamlessly between one device and another with minimal interruption” (2, 60). Consistent with Jenkins’ notion of media convergence, Tryon writes that although most streaming platforms “still distinguish between television and

movies, in a menu-driven, on-demand culture, these categories begin to lose their significance” (56). If this is the case, how and in what ways can we continue to think about television’s medium specificity?

The television industry’s various marketing and branding strategies for their TV Everywhere apps, I will show, consist of three primary discursive appeals: “appeals of mobility,” both the physical mobility of viewers and the technological mobility of programming onto various screens; “appeals of accessibility;” and, most recently, “appeals of liveness.” While Tryon’s work evidences how promotional discourses of television actively sell a “culture of media mobility” in which audiences can easily move and personalize media content across spaces, times, and platforms, my project is to outline the ways in which television networks and providers have begun reviving “liveness” as a key mode of distinction and product differentiation from other video-on-demand (VOD) services like Hulu, Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Disney’s upcoming streaming service (Sørensen; Van Es 4). Of course, the harnessing of “liveness” as a promotional and rhetorical strategy to claim “superiority over film, photography, and earlier visual media” is well documented (Bourdon; Bolter and Grusin 187; Caldwell; Levine; Van Es; White) and has been an ongoing industry practice for over half a century. However, as my second section explores, these discourses of “over-the-top” liveness, as I call them, reference not the simultaneity of a filmed event and its (near) real-time reception but a mode of *access* to the live transmission of programs through a remediated “on-the-air” interface.

Scholarship on the app-based live-streaming of television is virtually non-existent simply because it is still so nebulous in form. Ethan Tussey notes the emergence of “TV Everywhere” apps, but nowhere in his short paragraph dedicated to the subject is there any mention of live-streaming “on air” content; moreover, apps like Hulu Plus are jammed into the same category as those from ABC and CNN (206). Amanda Lotz conceptualizes live-streamed television as “mobile television” but contends that time-shifting, controlled viewing, and place-shifting “emerged to have far greater desirability than the ability to view live television outside the home” and that “though regular live mobile television has caught on in other countries, in only two situations is there much of a desire for live, mobile television in the United States: sports events and unexpected events” (54, 81). Add to this the finding that live television viewing is in decline with the availability of time-shiftable and downloadable media, and it appears that the majority of existing

media scholarship takes a skeptical tone when considering the future of live-streamed television (Bury and Li 606).

Updating this scholarship, I amend Lotz's concept of "mobile television" to one of "livestream television," which I feel more adequately accounts for the constructions and experiences of mobility, accessibility, and immediacy in today's culture of app-based or web-based television viewing. Drawing from Karin Van Es' work on constellations of liveness, I illustrate how livestream television as a category also references the interactions between various technologies, institutions, and users which construct liveness "around and through" different media platforms (21). This enables us to locate other forms of livestream television outside of the "over-the-top" liveness explored in section two.

The final portion of this article analyzes one such space: the forms of livestream television which are being utilized by television networks on Facebook Live. Comparing the two constellations reveals important differences between and among the current forms of livestream television and provides an update to Michele White's observation of the "similarities in television and internet narratives about live transmission" (341-342). In sum, this article provides a snapshot of television's contemporary discursive landscape, highlights the ever-shifting quality of "liveness" as a commodifiable style, and, by advocating for the category of "livestream television," calls on scholars to interrogate new media temporality while also addressing the ways in which televisual liveness is entangled and distinguished across multifarious platforms and media. It also underscores the ways in which the protocols and affordances of "old" media (the phenomenological experiences of viewing televisual "liveness" and flow) may be at times de-emphasized (in favor of accessibility and mobility), picked up, and re-articulated as "new."

"TV Everywhere" Apps and Their Appeals

Tryon maps how Netflix, via various promotional strategies, sought to distance itself from broadcast television "through the language of exclusivity and cultural distinction[s]" of plentitude, participation, prestige, and personalization ("TV Got Better"). Today, television companies like DirecTV, Xfinity, ABC, CNN, and HBO are formulating their own forms of product differentiation. Scanning the names of "TV Everywhere" applications and platforms provides an easy first step for

thinking about the way in which this differentiation is being constructed, which I provide in the table (Fig. 1) below.¹

The various rhetorical tags attached to these applications point to specific appeals being made by networks and providers, and we can divide them into three categories: mobility across spaces and devices, accessibility of an abundant archive, and immediacy of an unfolding event. Similarly, a survey of the marketing campaigns for TV Everywhere apps reveals a batch of common rhetorical devices which enunciate this appeal of “going” while “watching” what is being broadcast “now.” The most common enunciations include: announcing a new era of television—an ad for SlingTV tells viewers that it is “time to say goodbye to the way TV used to be,” while USANow likens traditional television to the vinyl record; emphasizing mobile viewing in various public and private spaces or while literally in transit, such as ads for CNNGo and DirecTV that take place in hybrid spaces where public buses meld with the “live” newsroom and the wintry tundra of *Game of Thrones*, respectively; and highlighting multi-platform accessibility, using terms like “anytime,” “anyplace,” “everywhere” as heard in commercials for DirecTV, Xfinity Stream, Showtime Anytime, and PBS Anywhere (“TakeBackTV: Old TV Company”).

Mobility	Accessibility	Immediacy
HBOGO	WATCH TNT	FX NOW
CNNGO	WATCH ABC	FOX NOW
FOXSPORTSGO	WATCH HGTV	USA NOW
PBS ANYWHERE	WATCH ESPN	HBONOW
TLC GO	XFINITY STREAM	UNIVISION NOW
DISCOVERY GO	PLAYSTATION VUE	DIRECTV NOW
	SHOWTIME ANYTIME	HULU LIVE TV
	CBS ALL ACCESS	

Fig. 1: The branding of televisual experience.

¹ Note that I am focusing on downloadable applications for streaming television rather than SmartTVs or OTT devices such as Apple TV, Amazon Fire TV, AndroidTV, Google Chromecast, and Roku.

As previously mentioned, the notion that streaming services and apps allow for mobility from the television set, instantaneous access to a large archive of programs, and opportunities for “second screen” viewing and “media-meshing” have been explored by numerous scholars (see Bury and Li; Giglietto and Selva; Holt and Sanson; Jenkins et. al; Lee and Andrejevic; Lotz; Tryon; Tussey; Van Es; Ytreberg). Alone, these appeals of accessibility and mobility do not do much to differentiate TV Everywhere offerings from other VOD services like Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime, since they too can be accessed across multiple devices and on the go. In search of a more compelling mode of distinction, networks and providers are turning to liveness—a category long enmeshed with the ontology and ideology of the television medium—to carve out exclusive spaces within today's ostensibly anytime-anywhere media environment.

Over-The-Top Liveness

The industrial packaging and selling of "liveness" as a source of distinction from other media has existed since television's inception (see Bourdon; Feuer). Writing in 2008, Elena Levine shows how "liveness" —though it is still used to conjure up nostalgia for television's “Golden Age”—can also be used to construct difference and distance from lower, other “denigrated” genres and types of TV (394-9). More recently, Inge Sørensen notes the way in which the BBC and Channel 4 utilized multi-platform liveness to gain “a clear competitive edge” over other VOD platforms and suggests that liveness is “once again becoming one of the defining characteristics and unique selling points of television in a crowded multi-platform mediascape” (381-5).

At the time of my writing, the majority of TV Everywhere apps supplement VOD catalogues with "live" streams of content which match—supposedly in “real-time”—the content being traditionally broadcast on their respective channels. Access to TV Everywhere live streams is structured one of two ways. First, subscription-based services offer access either to a single channel (e.g., PBS Anywhere, CBS All Access) or to various bundles of channels (e.g., DirecTVNow, SlingTV, Xfinity Stream) for a monthly fee. The second structure occurs with apps like CNNGo, FXNow, and WatchESPN and provides live streams for “free” to users with existing television providers such as Xfinity, Verizon FiOS, DirecTV, Time Warner Cable, DISH Network, and Cox Cable.

Both the structures and promotional strategies of these services continue to evolve as large media conglomerates merge and negotiate new contracts with television networks. AT&T's acquisition of DirecTV in 2015, for instance, has led to the natural pairing of DirecTV's catalogue and the mobility of AT&T's cellular network. The announcement of the merger, which allowed DirecTV subscribers to watch "live" television on their phones without being charged data, was accompanied by a blockbuster-scale advertisement which articulates a new world of mobility and emphasizes live transmission as a path to social harmony and connection. Set in New York City—a space with obvious ties to mobility and modernity—the commercial begins by stressing the fragmented nature of city life pre-merger (DirecTV). Here, the electronic billboards of Times Square are merely background noise, and the similarly noisy crowds below them, though standing shoulder to shoulder, are disconnected and distracted. Many look at their phones, some at the screens above. Suddenly, a power outage. When the lights come back on—and a “new era” begins—all of the screens throughout the city are synched. The crowds, too, are now synchronized, gazing up in silent awe, connected to an unfolding, "live" world of images.

Here, liveness is presented as a cultural solution, making possible a transition from fragmentation to social connection; put another way, the DirecTV-AT&T ad directly confronts and resolves the idea that digital distribution practices “contribute to a more fragmented, individualized media culture” in which viewers are “isolated” from one another (Tryon 39). It also engages with what Jim Webster calls the "marketplace of attention" on two levels. First, the ad suggests that today's "limitless media environment” has led to an intensified “poverty of attention” in contemporary society (Webster 4-6). Second, as a form of promotion, the ad seeks to “draw attention” to this poverty's remedy, that is, to a mode of media consumption which both pre-exists and regains novelty in an ever-expanding digital media environment: simultaneous transmission, viewed collectively. Although the ad goes on to showcase that this "live" unfolding world can be portable and accessible across multiple devices (e.g., watches, tablets, smartTVs, phones) and spaces (e.g., bedrooms, bars, parks, and buses), these multiplicities are no longer rendered as contributors to social distraction or fragmentation. Instead, liveness reintroduces structure, connection, and meaning to the city: a man on the bus glances over his shoulder to laugh along with another viewer seated behind him, children sit together on the edge of their bed, and in the most extreme case, audiences are seen gathering at an open-air screening in the park to watch

Casablanca projected onto the side of a skyscraper—the city literally cloaked in a single image.

Crucial here is the fact that almost all of the media content in the advertisement—save a New York Yankees baseball game—comes from films (*The Wizard of Oz*, *The Matrix*, *Home Alone*, *Casablanca*, *Penguins of Madagascar*) rather than "live" media events (see Dayan and Katz 1992). Other commercials for DirecTV, CBS All Access, SlingTV, and Xfinity Stream also pair the appeal of "live" viewing experiences and "live channels" with images from prerecorded shows and movies like *Game of Thrones*, *Sex and the City*, *Rocky*, *Sesame Street*, *Seinfeld*, and *Ghostbusters* ("Slings"). SlingTV, which proudly proclaims itself as "America's #1 Live TV Streaming Service," tells viewers they can "instantly stream over thirty live channels, including the most popular sports and shows for just \$20 a month!" ("Slings"). Apart from TV Everywhere apps for sports networks (e.g. WatchESPN, FoxSportsGo) and news outlets (e.g. CNNGo), "over-the-top" liveness is thus being promoted not as a correspondence between the time of the filmed event and the transmission and time of viewing (Bourdon 534; Feuer) but rather as a correspondence between the stream and its simultaneous broadcast on digital cable channels.

More broadly, then, "over-the-top" liveness, or liveness in the contexts of "TV Everywhere" is discursively constructed to mean "not-VOD," as liveness is "always contrasted to a 'non-live' counterpart, and its meaning is informed by that contrast" (Van Es 114). The contrast between over-the-top liveness and not-VOD, though, is also one of access: access to various interfaces of "on-the-air" world-space which, once entered and subscribed to, offers users the "potential connection to shared social realities as they are happening" and a powerful awareness that others are watching at the same time (Bourdon 553; Ellis 31-32). This affective sensation has been approached by some scholars as representative of a larger human need to connect to something bigger than ourselves (Bourdon 552; Scannell). Framed another way, the construction of "over-the-top" liveness also involves spectatorial belief in the capability of live transmission to connect viewers to a larger social sphere (Auslander 9; Bourdon 534). For Nick Couldry, this belief is symptomatic of the way in which liveness as a category naturalizes and reproduces the media's power as both "a central institution" and "the primary access point for representing social 'reality'" (354, 359).

Once accessed, "over-the-top" liveness is mediated on various apps through a number of "cultural interfaces." These cultural interfaces draw from both traditional

televisual interfaces, such as channel indicators and listing grids (which themselves were first encountered on pages of “TV Guide” magazines before being incorporated into the “TV Guide Channel” and remediated again through digital cable boxes), and graphical interfaces informed by logics of hypermediation, spatialization, modularity, windowing, and “click through” interactivity which provides an intensified, multi-directional mode of “flipping through” content (Bolter and Grusin; Manovich; Tryon). Additionally, DVR-style buffer bars and LIVE buttons reinforce the idea that “live” is a phenomenological space in which “someone in the transmitting media institution could interrupt it at any time and make an immediate connection to real events” (Couldry 355).

This construction is somewhat deceitful because the content of “live” streams does not yet match those of “live” broadcasts. Most obviously, streamed commercials often differ from broadcast commercials and are even substituted with commercial break title-cards resembling screen-savers. Similarly, WatchESPN simulcasts differ from ESPN’s cable broadcasts, at times absent of instant replays, sideline reporters, and “in-the-studio” updates and featuring alternative half-time shows (ABC). Moreover, streamed content on WatchABC “may differ from what’s on your TV screen”—according to the app’s website—and thus may lack the local weather/amber alerts and breaking news found on regional broadcast affiliates. Nevertheless, by borrowing “existing logics” of broadcast television and DVR devices, these over-the-top interfaces and menus reshape the “careful balance between file and flow” observed by J.P. Kelly in his early work on Hulu (131, 135).

In sum, the constructions and experiences of over-the-top liveness pertain more to live transmission than they do live performance. Access to this live world is acquired via multilevel paywalls and logins. Its interfaces are combinations and remediations (Bolter and Grusin) of traditional cable-box menus, desktop windows, and DVR interfaces which both present the “live,” ephemeral, unpredictable moment as a mode of social connection and possibility, and work to smooth over the differences still found between live-streamed content and its cable/broadcast counterparts. These observations illuminate the importance of Sørensen’s assertion that scholars can no longer approach liveness “solely in terms of the temporal immediacy between the transmitted event and the receivers of this TV coverage” (396). Instead, we must situate its specific formations within the “entire multiplatform and interactive mediascape that it is a part of, and evolving around, as well as in relation to the dynamics between devices, platforms and content providers” (396). To do this, I introduce the category of “livestream television” in

the following section and then compare the "over-the-top" liveness outlined in this section with the construction of livestream television on Facebook.

Livestream Television

Amanda Lotz's notion of "mobile television" gestures toward a future of live-streamed television in that it describes "access to live television outside the home" (54). She makes the careful distinction between "mobile" television and "portable" television by asserting that the former refers to live, linear viewing and the latter to time-shifted, non-linear viewing. Pointing to Lynn Spigel's work on portable televisions of the 1960s, Lotz argues that the idea of pairing mobility and immediacy is firmly grounded in television's history.

Yet, by choosing the words "mobile" and "television," Lotz's category undervalues two key aspects of contemporary television culture. First, as my Oscars experience illustrates, the desire to stream "live" programs today often has nothing to do with the desire for physical mobility. Contemporary ads point to this tension as they jump back and forth between mobile and non-mobile forms and spaces of viewing. Indeed, some advertisements do frame live-streaming as an escape from the domestic sphere, such as an HBOGo ad which offers younger generations refuge from annoying parents who misidentify *Game of Thrones* character Robb Stark (Edward Madsen) as Paul Rudd (HBO). Others, conversely, re-claim the home as the ideal viewing context; a DirectTVNow ad, for instance, emphasizes the app's ability to provide viewers with an escape from awkward work meetings, dance parties, odorous elevators, and other public spaces. The second problem with "mobile television" as a category is that its title makes no mention of liveness, therefore implying that "liveness" is part of television's ontological essence as a medium rather than—as I have approached it—a persistent and functional discursive category employed across a wide range of media including radio, cinema, internet, television, and mobile data networks (Couldry; White; Van Es).

Thus, I propose amending Lotz's concept to that of "livestream television," a term which refers to the industrial (and consequently discursive) constructions, technological structures, and phenomenological experiences of the live transmission of a televisual program which is streamed to viewers and users in "real

time” (Sørensen 383; Van Es 25).² Here, “stream” refers the specific technologies capable of delivering audiovisual content through Wi-Fi and cellular networks (e.g., SmartTVs, mobile phones, computers, tablets, OTT devices); “television” refers to the institutions, that is, the self-identifying television networks and providers who actively shape and re-shape the discourses and meanings associated with liveness; and, the “live” in livestream television may be best approached through what Karin Van Es calls constellations of liveness.

For Van Es, who seeks to synthesize existing ontological, phenomenological, and rhetorical approaches to liveness, constellations consist of three main “domains”: “the metatext,” or promotional and paratextual material which “frame how users interpret,” anticipate, and value liveness; the “space of participation,” comprising the technologically, economically, and legally-shaped structures and interfaces through which audiences access and navigate “liveness;” and “user responses” involving audience phenomenologies and agencies (153). The weight of these domains “may vary per constellation” and therefore each particular constellation—she examines specific cases like eJamming, *The Voice*, and Facebook feeds—necessarily takes its own form (26). Consequently, the following section takes up her call by attempting to compare these specific constellations and to locate the industry and societal tensions between them so that we might better “understand the (changing) relations between media institutions and users around media content” (22).

Livestream Television on Facebook Live

As I have shown, constellations of “over-the-top” livestream television take shape through a “metatext” which emphasizes live transmission, a “space of participation” which is structured through company contracts, channel bundles and various remediations of cable menus and DVR interfaces, and a user’s belief in the potentiality of the LIVE button to open a door into a phenomenological space of social connection and cultural participation. However, this specific “over-the-top” constellation is just one form of livestream television. The ability for users to broadcast “live” images over the internet has been outlined in relation to webcams

² As noted by numerous scholars, ‘real time’ is subject to scrutiny, as lags and delays are always occurring on both the ends of transmission and reception. I use ‘real time’ to refer to the viewing context suggested by ‘real time’ rather than the actual temporality itself.

and web spaces like Ustream, Livestream, and Justin.TV. In 2015, discourses of social-media "liveness" intensified with the release of Meerkat and Periscope, mobile applications which allowed anyone with a smart phone to transmit real-time images to thousands of followers at once. While Meerkat has since shut down, Twitter-owned Periscope faces challenges by live-broadcasting features on popular social media apps like YouTube (first available in 2015), Facebook (early 2016), and Instagram (late 2016).³

The initial announcement and marketing of Facebook Live framed liveness as an intimate way for users to share hidden talents or special moments with other Facebook friends. This promotion of liveness as a means of linking "smaller groups of people" evokes Couldry's notion of "online liveness" in that it detaches the concept from the "institutional 'center' of transmission"—think *Casablanca* on the skyscraper—and thus in a small way decentralizes the experience of social "reality" (357). Yet, while Facebook Live is still used for personal sharing, its utilization is slowly drifting back to various institutional "centers," such as official Facebook pages for celebrities, sports teams, brands, and, of course, television networks. News networks, in particular, are mobilizing Facebook Live to live-stream media events such as press conferences, protests, interviews, and political speeches.

The metatext of liveness on Facebook Live is very much linked to the simultaneity of production, transmission, and reception upon which television studies has traditionally theorized "liveness." Handheld "catastrophes" which capture police racism and brutality make national news, while many of the most watched Facebook Live videos of 2016 and 2017 were merely "sparse images," maps and charts of election results and countdown clocks which simply "showed" things as they occurred (Doane; Spangler; White 85). Here, unlike in over-the-top livestream television, live transmission of pre-recorded content does not constitute "live."⁴

The Facebook Live interface structures user participation and phenomenology significantly differently than does over-the-top livestream television. For one, it

³ "Official" live streams of presidential debates and special events have been hosted on YouTube since 2008.

⁴ Certain fan communities are mobilizing Instagram's live capability to hold "live" screenings of pre-recorded shows. For instance, followers of the 'costanzagrams' Instagram account tune into "live" screenings of *Seinfeld* episodes, mediated by a phone camera pointed toward a television monitor. Viewers then leave comments as the show screens, sometimes pre-announcing lines from the show moments before they are heard resonating from the television monitor.

displays the size of each viewing community through an overlay on the upper-left corner of the streamed image. It also entices users to leave time-stamped comments in a feed that auto-refreshes with each new comment. Furthermore, users can react to the video in real-time using one of Facebook's five reaction emojis: "like," "angry," "love," "sad," and "wow." As a user selects one of the emojis, it floats upward from the selection menu and onto the screen before slowly drifting from view, thus underlining the stream's ephemeral, unfolding temporality. Other members of the live viewing community can see this reaction, and so the spectatorial mood of any particular moment can be, through its own hypermediation, assessed and potentially reified. Facebook stores live videos once they end so that they may be re-accessed by anyone at a later date, affording an experience that Wendy Chun has referred to the "nonsimultaneousness of the new" in which "an older post can always be 'discovered' as new," while "a new post is already old" (169). Subsequent viewings of these originally-live videos, however, are not always accompanied by real-time emoji reactions and viewership counts.

Livestream television on Facebook is thus constructed and experienced through hyper-mediations which add social dimensions to the viewing experience, make knowable the size and tenor of each videos' "live" world-space, and consolidate "second screen" viewing practices onto a single screen. This user activity can also lead to what Martin Barker calls an "experienced risk" wherein the live "performance is not 'locked,' and might be shaped by the audience's responses" (57). In personal Facebook Live videos this may arise when a user responds to a question in the comment feed or a performer takes song requests from viewers; but, at the time of writing, television networks have yet to incorporate this "risky" interactivity.

Conclusion

The differences between the constellations of "over-the-top" livestream television and those of livestream television on Facebook Live are clear enough. The latter differs from the former as it clings to traditional conceptions of "live" media events (rather than solely live transmission) and structures multiple modes of social interaction which crystallize specific viewing phenomenologies and communities (rather than relying on a spectatorial belief in the capacity of pre-existing medium). Michele White's important work concluded that television and internet producers invoke liveness in similar ways "in order to suggest that their form is unique" (342).

The differences noted above, however, suggest that the polysemy of liveness can only be disentangled by locating its distinct discursive, technological, and experiential formations as media companies and content jump across the various thresholds of digital convergence (342).

Regarding the future of "over-the-top" livestream television, I share skepticism with Levine as to whether liveness in its current constellation will provide a sustainable marker of distinction for television networks and providers (397). Hulu and YouTube have recently responded by launching their own "live" TV subscription services, while Amazon Instant Video has enfolded TV Everywhere apps into its own platform (Tryon). It is worth noting that, for now, Netflix seems content with emulating liveness through "full drop" releases of media content (Tryon). Instead, as media industries continue to experiment with and make sense of convergence culture, new constellations of liveness will surface and recede. Some will find their structure through remediation, some through hypermediation, some through barely any mediation at all; some will be crowd-sourced, some intensely-centralized; some will highlight local spatiality, some a global scale; some will bring high degrees of "experienced risk;" some will swing toward voyeurism—and some of these may be incorporated into livestream television as users, technologies, and corporations continue to redraw the parameters of cultural production and experience.

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“What’s the Difference Between Men and Women?”: Hegemonic Masculinity in *The Walking Dead*

GRAEME JOHN WILSON

The Walking Dead is an undisputed cultural phenomenon. The horror series, which airs on cable channel AMC, follows a group of survivors during the aftermath of a zombie apocalypse. *The Walking Dead* is the most-watched cable series in television history, and is notably the only drama series to be listed among the 50 highest viewed cable telecasts of all time, with the rest consisting entirely of sports broadcasts (Rice 26). The program premiered in 2010, during a period many television critics and scholars refer to as the current Golden Age of Television, characterized by a wealth of acclaimed and innovative American drama series (Albrecht 6; Damico and Quay viii; Sepinwall 41; Wood 11). Many eminent series of this Golden Age, such as *The Sopranos* and *Breaking Bad*, are concerned with themes of masculine identity and power. Such themes resonate with male audiences due to ongoing “cultural shifts regarding the dominant idea[s] surrounding masculinity,” such as the increased visibility of feminism in the new millennium (Wayne 206).

While feminism has experienced an increased acceptance in mainstream American society during recent decades, feminist movements seeking to advance women’s rights continue to be dismissed and rejected within conservative communities that ascribe to traditional gender hierarchy and neoliberal philosophy. Neoliberalism describes a political and economic system “in which state policies synchronize with cultural practices to apply market-based individualism as a governmental rationale across the institutions and practices of everyday life” (McCarthy 21). Neoliberalism thus emphasizes strong individualism, a traditional marker of classic conservative masculinity. The

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relationship between neoliberalism and masculinity is well established, and “in recent years there has been a qualified return of interest in the concept of patriarchy and thus neopatriarchy, neoliberal patriarchy, and ‘neoliberal neopatriarchy’” (Hearn 17).

In her seminal text *Sexual Politics*, feminist scholar Kate Millett defines patriarchy as culturally reinforced male domination, demonstrated through the power relationships men have with women (25). Patriarchy exists as the societal manifestation of hegemonic masculinity, which encompasses the cultural practices that serve to ideologically validate the dominant societal positions of men and subordinate societal positions of women (Connell and Messerschmidt 832; Trujillo 291). Although *The Walking Dead* has enjoyed a generally positive critical reception over the course of its broadcast, it has also attracted criticism for its regressive portrayal of gender (Steiger 100).

Horror fiction traditionally espouses patriarchal dominance. Literary critic Tzvetan Todorov explains that the basic narrative structure opens in a state of equilibrium, which is then disrupted by the events of the plot. All narrative, then, “is a movement between two equilibriums which are similar but not identical” (163). At the conclusion of the narrative, a new equilibrium is established, transgressors are punished, and normalcy is reestablished (164). Although horror narratives may subvert and question institutions, “the return to normalcy at the end of many horror [texts] is often a reinscribing of white, male, patriarchal authority” (Wetmore, Jr. 3). The ultimate aim of this essay is to demonstrate how *The Walking Dead*, which is recognized as the most commercially successful horror series in television history, reinscribes “white, male, patriarchal authority” and reinforces conservative patriarchal ideology (Rice 26).

Rationale for Study

Generally, horror narratives are driven by “the presence of a foreign or unfamiliar Other,” a phenomenological concept describing an individual whose deviant appearance or characteristics violate dominant social norms, and thus belongs to a separate and subordinate social category (Bishop 96; Miller 587). The zombie is a quintessential example of the Other and possesses near-unlimited narrative potential as a metaphor. Zombie narratives have historically explored the tension between conservative and progressive ideologies, with the zombies themselves “manifest[ing] the predominant cultural anxieties” of the time-period (Bishop 26;

Browning 45). Divergent from other forms of classic horror, however, zombie fiction does not necessarily reinforce the status quo. Instead, because it frequently explores the failure and destruction of traditional patriarchal power structures, such as the military and government, zombie fiction is instead regarded as “one of the most politically invigorating narrative paradigms in genre fiction, [critiquing] conservative ideology and the political status quo, while also creating a space within its narrative where (sometimes radical) social alternatives can be explored,” yielding either positive or negative outcomes (Hassler-Forest 345).

Following the September 11 attacks, zombies in popular media were frequently interpreted as a collective metaphor for terrorism (Bishop 29). However, the zombie has also varyingly been interpreted as a metaphor for the potential danger of liberal causes such as feminism and gay rights, both of which are recognized as contemporary factors “that challenge the validity of male privilege” (Wayne 206; Bishop 26). Many contemporary Golden Age dramas that engage the cultural zeitgeist of “white masculinity in crisis” have already enjoyed critical analysis amongst scholars regarding their themes and presentation of gender, particularly how they reinforce or subvert notions of idealized masculinity in society (Albrecht 9; Wayne 206). *Breaking Bad* in particular has been heavily dissected regarding its portrayal of masculinity, arguably “the primary theme of the series” (Cowlshaw 6). The protagonist of *Breaking Bad* is Walter “Walt” White, a former high school chemistry teacher who begins selling methamphetamine to support his family. Although Walt commits numerous crimes in *Breaking Bad*, the character that notably inspired the most outrage from fans of the series was Skyler, Walt’s wife (Cowlshaw et al. 132). Upon learning of Walt’s occupation as a drug dealer, Skyler directly confronts her husband and threatens him with divorce, arguing that Walt’s actions will endanger their children. Subsequently, Skyler became the target of intense, misogynistic vitriol on social media. Anna Gunn, the actress who portrays Skyler in the series, suggests that despite Walt’s various crimes, Skyler still attracted a greater degree of hostility from fans because she was portrayed as an equal to Walt instead of his subordinate, and did not “conform to a comfortable ideal of the archetypical female” (“I Have a Character Issue”). Gunn further suggests that Skyler and female characters in other popular dramas could serve as “a measure of [societal] attitudes toward gender.”

Despite the widespread popularity of *The Walking Dead*, the complexities of how hegemonic masculinity is portrayed in the series have not enjoyed the same

level of exposure as *Breaking Bad* or other similarly themed dramas. However, due to its high ratings success, *The Walking Dead* could serve as a worthy barometer for how audiences interpret gender in the current television landscape, as proposed by Gunn. This is particularly important due to the influence that popular television dramas exercise in formulating societal perceptions regarding idealized masculinity (Moss 29). Such dramas “provide models of relations with women and solutions to problems of gender relations. ... To the extent they do this, they contribute to hegemony in the society-wide gender order as a whole” (Connell and Messerschmidt 838).

In *The Walking Dead*, the collapse of government and society “seem[s] to require a parallel return to social norms of gender and racial difference that are foundational to the dominance of white men in collective life” (Sugg 795). Like many of its peers in the current Golden Age, *The Walking Dead* is heavily concerned with contemporary notions of masculinity. However, whereas *The Sopranos*, *Breaking Bad*, and many of its peers critique regressive models of hegemonic masculinity within contemporary sociocultural contexts (Albrecht 9), *The Walking Dead* instead embraces them. Rather than utilizing the subversive elements of the zombie subgenre to critique and examine the limitations of its subject, *The Walking Dead* instead endorses patriarchal masculinity and power structures. Such endorsement is evident through the program’s portrayal of conservative gender roles, gender stereotypes, and political leadership.

Framework and Methodology

For its theoretical framework, this critical essay utilizes feminist film theory, which “came into being in the early 1970s with the aim of understanding cinema as a cultural practice that represents and reproduces myths about women and femininity” (Smelik 1). Informed by structuralism and women’s studies, feminist film theory is utilized by scholars to demonstrate how popular texts reinforce and promote dominant stereotypes of femininity, such as the myriad stereotypes that *The Walking Dead* has been accused of perpetrating throughout its run (Steiger 100). Narrative rhetorical criticism is also utilized for this essay’s methodological approach.

Rhetorical criticism functions as a method of social criticism by identifying the persuasive messages embedded in media texts, and the resulting influence these texts have in regards to how their audiences perceive reality (Botan et al.

235). This essay's specific form of rhetorical criticism is recognized as narrative criticism, which media scholars employ to determine how popular texts reflect "the [current] state of culture" (Gronbeck and Sillars 212). This is accomplished by identifying the specific persuasive message of a text, as well as "the features of the [text]" that substantiate this message (Foss 326-27). Such features are expressed in scenes, which can be interpreted as rhetorical mechanisms that allow researchers to study drama; cultural critic Steven W. Schoen explains:

[The scene is] a dynamic mechanism of connection, structuring possibilities for innovation at the intersection of cultural meaning and identity. That is, scene structures meanings: it locates us, with that location doing work to help define who people are, what they do, how they do it, and why they do it. (145)

Narrative rhetorical criticism is applied to specific scenes from the first six seasons of *The Walking Dead* that feature prominent gendered interactions, content that is subsequently thematized for this research. Specific character dialogue, action, and other textual elements of these scenes are identified and analyzed to convey how *The Walking Dead* promotes values characteristic of conservative hegemonic masculinity.

Hegemonic Masculinity in *The Walking Dead*

Conservative gender roles. Gender is distinct from sex in that it is not a biological construction, but rather a wholly social one. Specifically, gender roles "focus on behavioral aspects of being a woman or a man (as opposed [...] to biological differences between the two)" (West and Zimmerman 126-27). Stereotypical gender roles in American society include women "working full-time within the home" and men "making important family decisions" (Blackstone 337). Because female gender roles largely "derive from the domestic and lower status occupational roles that women more often hold," gender thus serves "a primary way of signifying relationships of power [between the sexes]" (Carli 346; Scott 1096). *The Walking Dead's* own endorsement of masculine authority and dominance is primarily embodied, and continually validated, through the leadership of Rick Grimes, the primary protagonist of the series.

Rick is first introduced as a deputy sheriff from rural Georgia, working alongside his best friend and partner, Shane Walsh. Their occupation as law enforcement officials is notable, as “white heterosexual middle- and upper-class men who occupy order-giving positions ... produce a hegemonic masculinity that is glorified” in American culture (Pyke 531). In particular, law enforcement officials must be able to project a commanding presence and exert physical control. The historical idealization of this particular masculinity is culturally rooted in America’s frontier history. Notably, the American cowboy is an archetypal representation of hegemonic masculinity, specifically as “a white male [possessing] working class values” and capable of violence if required (Trujillo 291). Andrew Lincoln, the actor who portrays Rick in *The Walking Dead*, has specifically likened the series to a contemporary western, with Rick as a metaphorical cowboy or similar western protagonist (Jeffrey “Andrew Lincoln”). Frank Darabont, who originally developed *The Walking Dead* for AMC and served as showrunner for its debut season, similarly acknowledged drawing inspiration from various western films during his tenure on the series (Marshall “Frank Darabont”).

The earliest zombie narratives were influenced by colonialism, with the zombies themselves alluding to savage and unintelligent “colonial objects” that cannot be reasoned or negotiated with and thus must be destroyed (Canavan 437). Similarly, the western genre also “has its roots firmly in a context of colonialism [...] From this perspective, making the connection between the western and its threatening world of savage colonial subjects and the world of the zombie makes perfect sense” (Hassler-Forest 342). However, unlike zombie fiction, western fiction is regarded as an explicitly conservative genre, due to its emphasis on individualism, “extreme versions of masculinity” and traditional gender hierarchy (McGee xiv, 48). Rick’s appearance in *The Walking Dead*, specifically his trademark sheriff’s hat and cowboy boots, evokes classic western iconography, while both his and Shane’s personalities are rooted in frontiersman aspects of hegemonic masculinity, particularly regarding their roles as family protectors. Similar to the westerns from which the series draws inspiration, white heterosexual masculinity is presented in *The Walking Dead* as the natural protector of femininity. Instead of utilizing the subversive elements of the zombie narrative, *The Walking Dead* rather “uses its zombie motif to re-articulate the fundamental narrative paradigm of the western: that of the lone hero struggling to

establish a safe and tranquil community in a pastoral frontier surrounded by perpetual savagery and danger” (Hassler-Forest 342).

At the start of the apocalypse and series, Rick is separated from his wife Lori and their son Carl. In “Tell It to the Frogs,” which aired Nov. 14, 2010, Rick finally tracks down and is reunited with Lori and Carl, who are now part of a group of survivors camped outside Atlanta and led by Shane. The plot of this episode largely focuses on introducing Rick to other survivors in the camp, including: Andrea, a former lawyer; Daryl Dixon, a redneck-like hunter; Dale Horvath, a former car salesman; Glenn Rhee, a former pizza delivery boy; Carol Peletier, a meek housewife; and Ed, Carol’s abusive husband. However, this episode continues to reinforce conservative gender roles: while Rick, Shane and other male survivors are trained to use weapons and hunt for food, Andrea, Carol, Lori and other female survivors in the group are shown taking care of children, washing laundry and preparing food, all stereotypically feminine responsibilities similarly rooted in America’s frontier history (Bianchi et al. 195). When Ed slaps Carol, accusing her of neglecting her chores, Shane exerts his masculine role as protector by brutally beating Ed into submission, threatening to kill him if he harms Carol again.

The designated responsibilities of the women in the camp, as well as Shane’s punishment of Ed, both demonstrate the program’s endorsement of hegemonic masculinity, particularly the notion that women require masculine protection. The only character who challenges this notion is Andrea, who begins studying and practicing with firearms. Guns and masculinity are closely intertwined in American culture, with the former popularly viewed “as a form of cliché for the male penis” that signifies both “masculinity and male potency” (Tolley-Stokes 363; Faucette 76; McGillis 76). Therefore, Andrea’s use of firearms violates acceptable gender roles, and she is punished accordingly. While defending the camp perimeter in the season two episode “Chupacabra,” which aired Nov. 13, 2011, Andrea mistakenly shoots Daryl in the head, having mistaken him for a zombie. Andrea only succeeds in grazing Daryl’s head, indicating that despite her extensive training and practice, her skill with firearms is entirely lackluster anyway. This incident turns Rick and the rest of the group against Andrea, animosity that Andrea agrees she deserves. Cultural critic Charing Ball criticized how Andrea, being the sole female character in *The Walking Dead*’s ensemble to challenge the program’s limited gender roles, was portrayed as a transgressive gender deviant who violated acceptable feminine norms:

Traditional gender roles have been standard issue throughout the whole series where women are there exclusively to cook, do laundry, and screw while the men comb the earth, scrounging for supplies and killing zombies, like good caveman hunters. [Andrea] took exception to the traditional roles [by] choosing to step down from the pedestal and kill zombies like the boys [...] Despite her noble efforts of try to claim some independence for herself, Andrea just wasn’t smart enough to hack it out in the real world all alone. (Ball “Forget the Zombies”)

Andrea is thus ultimately portrayed as a gender deviant, an individual who violates popular presumptions regarding gender roles and gender identity (Dirks and Worthen 281).

The “traditional gender roles” described by Ball, which encompass the perceived “‘normal’ and ‘natural’ attributes and responsibilities of men [and women]”, have been used to legitimize patriarchy in the United States (Gross 62). Power dynamics are encoded in popular entertainment, which have historically promoted misogynistic and sexist representations of women (Bacue and Signorielli 543). Such representations of women in American entertainment “make inequalities and subordination appear natural and just and thus induce consent to relations of domination” (Kellner 7). Unfortunately, *The Walking Dead* continues to promote such regressive gender roles, rather than challenging them. Although the women are finally trained in the use of firearms in subsequent seasons, it is entirely at the behest of Rick, thus preserving traditional gender dynamics. Notably, conservative delineation of “proper” gender roles and attributes are rooted in regressive and enduring gender stereotypes, ones that Rick and other protagonists of *The Walking Dead* continued to endorse.

Gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes describe “stereotypic beliefs about the attributes of women and men, and prescribe how men and women out to be” (Northouse 358). Such “stereotypical beliefs” include men being inherently more assertive, confident, and rational, while women are more emotional, sensitive, and hysterical (Carranza and Prentice 269-70). Gender stereotypes such as these are pervasive in American society due to their continued presence in popular television programs, *The Walking Dead* being a prominent example (Bacue and Signorielli 543).

In the series pilot “Days Gone Bye,” which aired Oct. 31, 2010, Rick and Shane are introduced while on patrol and discussing their relationships. Rick initiates the conversation by asking Shane, “What’s the difference between men and women?” Shane, quoting from the “guy gospel,” relates a story about a past girlfriend, demonstrating misogynistic tendencies by labeling her a “bitch” and a “pair of boobs,” reducing her to an object. Shane also mocks her intelligence, which Rick finds humorous. Rick then proceeds to relate his frustrations regarding his relationship with Lori, specifically that she is emotionally manipulative by questioning Rick’s commitment to her and Carl, and affirms that he “would never say something that cruel to her.” Unfortunately, this scene serves as an encapsulation of the representation of gender within *The Walking Dead*. Both protagonists share the philosophy representative of hegemonic masculinity that women are inferior due to their innate emotionality. Displaying emotions is a stereotypically feminine trait, while the classic masculine myth of strong men, derived from American frontier mythology, requires them to control their emotions and appear unconcerned (Monaghan and Robertson 142). This is made explicit when Shane mockingly asks if Rick “shared his feelings” with Lori, questioning his partner’s masculinity.

Later in the episode, after the apocalypse begins, Rick returns home to search for Lori and Carl but instead encounters Morgan Jones, another survivor. Rick deduces that his wife is alive, as his family’s photo albums are all missing, which looters would have ignored. Morgan, whose own wife was killed by a zombie, laughs ironically, explaining that his wife did the same thing: “I’m out there packing stuff for survival and she’s gathering photo albums.” This exchange similarly demonstrates *The Walking Dead*’s “regressive conception of gender,” as the series repeatedly emphasizes the “nurturing and protective nature” of women while men like Rick and Morgan are “shown to be level-headed, quick-acting, and good at perceiving and planning for dangers” (Sugg 795). Although zombie narratives can often demonstrate “alternative visions of femininity [...] that do not rely significantly on gender stereotypes,” *The Walking Dead*’s presentation of gender unfortunately does not progress far from such historical stereotypes: men are portrayed as rational and practical, while femininity is characterized by inefficient and unproductive sentimentality (Patterson 111; Frueh and McGhee 182-83).

As white hegemonic masculinity is constructed as normative in American society, all alternative forms of masculinity are measured and contrasted against it

(Atkinson and Calafell 3). In contrast to Rick, Shane, and Daryl, Glenn – notably the only Asian-American character in the entire series – is initially portrayed as a feminine figure, mocked by Shane and Daryl for his lack of bravery and discomfort towards violence. During *The Walking Dead*’s second season, the group settles on an isolated farm in the countryside, owned by Hershel Greene. Due to it being primarily set in the American countryside, this narrative arc of *The Walking Dead* heavily draws from western tropes:

The archetypal American western [...] traditionally stages the establishment of thriving settlements on the frontier between civilization and savagery. The fantasy that informs this type of narrative [...] is one of the most obvious cultural myths articulating the successful reinforcement of patriarchal power. (Hassler-Forest 345)

During the group’s tenure on the farm, Glenn begins a romantic relationship with Maggie, Hershel’s daughter, whom he charms with his humor. However, in the episode “18 Miles Out,” which aired Feb. 26, 2012, Maggie admits to Lori that she suspects their relationship is affecting Glenn’s capability as a fighter and causing him to lose focus. In response, Lori orders Maggie to help Glenn “man up.” This exchange continues to reinforce regressive notions of gender by portraying emotions as inefficient by negatively impacting the ability of men to properly function as hunter-gatherers. Glenn is only treated as an equal by Rick and the other men in the group after he sheds what they perceive to be his feminine characteristics. In subsequent seasons of the series, Glenn becomes more stoic and comfortable with “risk-taking practices,” thus conforming to what has been historically recognized as a more acceptable model of masculinity, especially within conservative communities that celebrate the cowboy archetype (Connell and Messerschmidt 851).

Despite the mythic status the cowboy enjoys in American popular culture, the archetype does demonstrate traits of toxic masculinity. Toxic masculinity is an exaggerated form of masculinity composed of “socially regressive male traits that serve to foster domination [and] the devaluation of women” (Kupers 714). Many scholars have improperly employed hegemonic masculinity as shorthand in accounting for toxic male characteristics such as aggression and violence, although this line of thought is understandable (Collier, 1998). While toxic

masculinity and hegemonic masculinity are distinct, unique concepts, it is not uncommon for them to overlap:

Because the concept of hegemonic masculinity is based on practice that permits men's collective dominance over women to continue, it is not surprising that in some contexts, hegemonic masculinity actually does refer to men's engaging in toxic practices [to] stabilize gender dominance in a particular setting. (Connell and Messerschmidt 840)

Throughout *The Walking Dead*, Rick demonstrates toxic masculinity by devaluing the women in the group, determining for himself what is in their best interest and thus depriving them of any agency.

Notably, Rick engages in mansplaining to Lori in the episode "Secrets," which aired Nov. 20, 2011, upon learning that Lori is pregnant and considering an abortion. Mansplaining describes any condescending exchange between a man and woman, where the man "explain[s] the good reasons why women should be satisfied with, if not downright grateful for, their present status in life" (Cockburn 48). Rick argues for Lori to keep their baby, stating that "You want this baby, I know you do," despite Lori's fears that the baby will live "a short, cruel life" before inevitably being eaten by zombies.

Writer Katherine Don criticized how Lori was portrayed "as a sniveling, downtrodden person whose perfectly reasonable protests are framed as nagging whines" ("Bringing up baby"). Lori's protests are presented as hysteric and irrational, derived from the inherent fragility of femininity, a dominant gender stereotype (Northouse 358). In contrast, Rick's attempts to exert his will over Lori's reproductive rights are wholly normalized. This instance represents larger patriarchal social norms, which limit women's rights "to use any or all methods of fertility regulation such as artificial contraception or abortion" (Dixon-Mueller 14). Historically, conservative societies have prioritized male influence over women's bodies and marginalized female reproductive freedom. Lori's own feelings and wishes regarding her pregnancy are marginalized in favor of Rick's, due to the influence and privilege he enjoys as a product of hegemonic masculinity. This plotline further reinforces *The Walking Dead's* "gendered division of narrative grammar in which identification and agency are investments [only] in male characters" (Sugg 803).

Ultimately, popular television is a profound pedagogical source, “provid[ing] materials out of which we forge our very identities, our sense of selfhood; our notion of what it means to be male or female” (Kellner 5). Therefore, the portrayal of gender in popular entertainment is a crucial influence on gender relations in society. Although modern feminism continues “to deconstruct gender stereotypes [and] emphasize equality between women and men” (Blackstone 337), popular entertainment texts such as *The Walking Dead* continue to propagate problematic gender stereotypes among a wide, impressionable audience. The program’s conservative gender dynamics are similarly reflected in the sparsity of female leadership represented in *The Walking Dead*, with the few who do manage communities and settlements subscribing to liberal politics that are portrayed as woefully ineffective.

Political leadership. In the third season of the series the group settles into an abandoned prison, which gradually evolves into a thriving community consisting of refugees and survivors from across the state. Rick absolves himself of leadership, wanting to instead focus on raising Carl and his newborn daughter Judith. In Rick’s stead, a governing council is established in an attempt to restore a democratic government. However, the vast majority of these refugees are unfamiliar with firearms and incapable of self-defense, and thus incompatible with the cowboy archetype or other idealized models of hegemonic masculinity. Many of these refugees are also old and frail, and ergo unable to work. Therefore, the prison functions like a liberal welfare state, with its governmental system exerting significant effort to provide and care for its expanded population, even those who are unable to contribute to the community. The prison is subsequently devastated when a heavily armed rival community launches an attack in the episode “Too Far Gone,” which aired December 1, 2013. Lacking the capability to defend themselves, Rick and the other survivors are forced to abandon the prison, confirming the inherent ineffectualness of the liberal welfare state, a core belief within conservative ideology (Feldman and Zaller 272). *The Walking Dead* instead affirms the conservative philosophy that “individuals are sovereign beings best ruled under circumstances in which they are encouraged to self-manage, taking on responsibilities for their welfare, growth, and security that might otherwise be assumed by the state,” a philosophy rooted in romanticized notions of frontiersman masculinity (McCartney 25).

In the fifth season episode “Remember,” which aired Mar. 1, 2015, Rick leads the regrouped survivors to Alexandria, a protected settlement in Virginia. The

leader of Alexandria is Deanna Monroe, a former congresswoman from Ohio who shuns violence. Because Alexandria is a walled community, its inhabitants have not experienced any external threats, and are thus ignorant to the dangers posed not only by zombie hordes, but also human marauders. Deanna welcomes the group and, as a show of goodwill, appoints Rick to serve as a constable for Alexandria. However, Rick is dismissive of both Deanna and her model of leadership. To Rick, the Alexandrians, unfamiliar with firearms and violence, represent the feminized liberal society that was originally annihilated during the zombie apocalypse, and later failed again at the prison. The Alexandrians are thus perceived by Rick to be weak and impotent.

After settling in Alexandria, Rick soon grows fond of Jessie, the abused wife of Pete Anderson, the town's local surgeon. Rick and Pete gradually become rivals competing over a sexual relationship with Jessie, reducing her to a mere object and trophy to be won to signify dominance as the community's alpha male. Such conflict reflects a core tenet of hegemonic masculinity, where "women provide heterosexual men with sexual validation, and men compete with each other for this [validation]" (Donaldson 651). In the episode "Try," which aired Mar. 22, 2015, Rick finally establishes his dominance over Pete in a public fight. Deanna is horrified at Rick's violent actions and puts him on trial in the season finale "Conquer," which aired Mar. 29, 2015. However, before the trial can commence, Rick encounters a herd of zombies that have penetrated Alexandria's defenses. Rick kills the zombies and presents their bodies to Deanna, thus justifying his advocacy of violence. After an intoxicated Pete inadvertently murders Deanna's husband Reg at the trial, Deanna also permits Rick to execute Pete. This is the first instance of Deanna endorsing Rick's use of violence as a means to maintain societal order. Later, in the sixth season episode "Now," which aired Nov. 8, 2015, Rick personally rescues Deanna from a zombie. Deanna then decides that Rick is more capable of leading Alexandria due to his capability as a warrior, something she entirely lacks, and concedes her position to him.

Within the context of the episode, Deanna's concession acknowledges the impotence of the liberal welfare state within *The Walking Dead*. As a whole, the entire series can be interpreted "as a fantasy template for social and individual action after [the] destruction of the welfare state" (Sugg 796), with individual action being a tenet of classic cowboy masculinity. *The Walking Dead* continually validates Rick's actions and position of authority within the group, thus continually endorsing conservative patriarchy and traditional gender dynamics.

At this point in the series, Carol, Maggie, and the other women in Rick’s own group are now all capable of self-defense. To be considered viable contributors to the group, the women must demonstrate their own violent capability and thus metaphorically shed their feminine weakness. Despite the women having adopted characteristics associated with hegemonic masculinity, specifically toughness and aggression, their authority almost never supersedes that of the male survivors, and especially never Rick’s, and thus they remain subordinate to masculinity (Donaldson 645). This hierarchy is indicative of conservative patriarchal power structures, where men monopolize leadership and even women in positions of authority are mostly relegated to agentic roles (Carly and Eagly 101).

Conclusion

David Fincher, the director of the 1999 film *Fight Club*, which has been acclaimed for its exploration of masculine identity, has described the film’s resonant appeal by explaining that men are “designed to be hunters and we’re in a society of shopping. There’s nothing to kill anymore, there’s nothing to fight, nothing to overcome, nothing to explore” (Kimmel 220). However, male audiences experiencing such a masculine crisis can achieve catharsis through *Fight Club*’s portrayal of mythologized violent combat:

[*Fight Club*’s] portrayal of violence and hyper-masculinity resonates with the reactionary mythology of warrior culture that reached its heyday during Ronald Reagan’s presidency and found its cultural embodiment in figures such as John Wayne and Oliver North as well as in a host of Hollywood movies celebrating rogue warriors such as *Lethal Weapon*, *Missing in Action*, *Robocop*, and *Rambo*. (Giroux 22)

Fincher’s quote can also neatly apply to Rick Grimes and other male protagonists of *The Walking Dead*, which portrays similar violent, hypermasculine themes. In *The Walking Dead*, society failed during the zombie apocalypse because it had been emasculated by feminine consumerism and liberal ideology, and thus was incapable of defending itself. In contrast, the apocalyptic wasteland of *The Walking Dead* is untainted by feminine influence, and only hunters with keen masculinist survival skills are capable of surviving its constant dangers, akin to the American frontier.

Like *Fight Club*, *The Walking Dead* portrays a male fantasy, with “the emasculation and crisis of white masculinity [...] at the center of the drama” (Sugg 799). However, while *Fight Club* critiques traditional machismo displays of hegemonic masculinity, *The Walking Dead* instead endorses them through its survivalist scenario. The series affirms the neoliberal philosophy “that individuals are sovereign beings best ruled under circumstances in which they are encouraged to self-manage, taking on responsibilities for their welfare, growth, and security that might otherwise be assumed by the state” (McCarthy 25). *The Walking Dead* represents a conscious resistance to feminist and liberal ideologies, with its main protagonist Rick instead exemplifying masculine leadership within a neoliberal framework. The program’s endorsement of patriarchal hierarchy is primarily demonstrated through its portrayal of conservative gender roles, gender stereotypes, and male political leadership. Women in *The Walking Dead* are, at best, portrayed as subordinate to the men, or relegated to providing domestic support; at worst, as represented by Lori, they are emotional and wholly inefficient.

Due to the enormous cultural influence that the series exhibits within the current media landscape, *The Walking Dead* is a ripe text for analysis regarding its perception of gender. Although feminism has witnessed an increased influence in mainstream American society, many conservative communities continue to reject feminist ideology and advocate for traditional gender roles (Clatterbaugh 10). *The Walking Dead* notably embodies various conservative values, including “Christian sacrifice and the restoration of traditional marriage,” limited government and the naturalization of hegemonic masculinity (Nuckolls 102; Sugg 796). Thus, *The Walking Dead* is especially interesting for the questions it raises regarding how contemporary audiences interpret gender roles and masculinity’s relationship to femininity. Future research that could expand on these questions could include an audience analysis of *The Walking Dead*, analyzing socio-demographic characteristics of the show’s audience. Such analysis would yield specific numbers on how many of *The Walking Dead*’s audience identify as conservative. Focus groups could then be utilized to complete the analysis, asking viewers if they derive enjoyment from the series based on perceived alignment with their own personal politics. Popular media texts and the audiences that consume them are a rich source through which to gauge both current and future sociocultural trends and ideals, especially media texts as culturally significant and influential as *The Walking Dead*.

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“Breaking Bad”: Periodically Justifiable

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In December 2018, I moved into a little casita in Albuquerque, New Mexico (aka “the ABQ”) located two blocks north of the Crossroads Motel, one of the landmark filming sites for the Emmy award-winning series *Breaking Bad*: a crime drama created by producer, Vince Gilligan (with co-producers Mark Johnson and Michelle MacLaren) airing in 2008 on the AMC cable network. *Breaking Bad* tells the story of Walter White (Bryan Cranston), a high school chemistry teacher diagnosed with terminal lung cancer who enlists the help of a former student Jesse Pinkman (Aaron Paul) to cook illegal methamphetamines to accrue as much money as possible to leave behind for his family. I moved to “the ABQ” in the summer of 2013 amidst *Breaking Bad*’s fifth and final season and found myself immediately immersed in both the fantasy and the reality of the criminal backdrop that *Breaking Bad* aided in generating to define what it means to be a Burqueños (an Albuquerque native). From T-shirts to decals to signs posted in store windows stating—Yes! *Breaking Bad* was filmed here—I found myself lost in a mediated reality of what I had perceived Albuquerque to be while watching *Breaking Bad* versus my lived experience walking the streets of Knob Hill, the International District, and the Brickyard District (neighborhoods of the city).

Prior to watching *Breaking Bad* and before moving to “the ABQ,” stopping at intersections along the main strips of Albuquerque, I came to the realization I had never been particularly aware of the condition of people’s teeth and their correlation to drug use. Yet, it began to be the first thing I noticed when I handed out water and cigarettes (instead of change) from my car window to people standing on the corners of Lomas and University and Central and Yale, which are major intersections for the crossing of students at the University of New Mexico. From this collision of fantasy and reality, a rather expected question emerged: What is real? Were these people playing some role in my version of what *Breaking Bad* had

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taught me to believe about Albuquerque? Or were these people an embodiment of realities that were simply recreated through script and dialogue?

As I pondered the plotline of *Breaking Bad*, I mused over Walter's transformation from passive rule-follower to aggressive rule-breaker and the show's framing of Walter's initial involvement in his new profession as latent, even harmless, because he was simply producing a product that would help his family survive after his passing. But by the second episode, "Cat's in the Bag..." Walter's harmless involvement in the drug industry escalates to murder, placing Walter dead center in the middle of a moral conundrum. This kind of moral dilemma lies at the heart of social ideologies affected and created by the all-invasive roll of media (Hepp, Hjarvard and Lundby 223). Andreas Hepp, Stig Hjarvard, and Knut Lundby suggest the role of media in social and cultural change is not merely present in institutionalized forms of communication, but that it "has become an integral...context of human life" (223). Etienne Villiers reviews the connection between media and morality suggesting moral responsibility becomes expanded through an increased awareness of social moral values being represented in the media (16-17).

Expanding upon this, this article examines not just the connection between media and reality, but assesses the role of media in shaping moral codes within realities. To accomplish this, I investigate how television plots driven by illegal and/or immoral behavior address conflicting moral values. Specifically, *Breaking Bad* exists an exemplar artifact to examine the role media plays in shaping moral codes because the show's very premise is a series of scenes locating the moral underpinning of illegal behavior. Kathryn Reklis summarizes the particular genius of *Breaking Bad* as a moral touchstone: "Most complicated of all is the way the viewer is taken into the moral ambiguities of the show... [the] moral bait-and-switch is the point of the whole series" (42). This bait-and-switch is precisely the juxtaposition of moral dilemmas that makes this show an ideal subject for this research.

I utilize a philosophical framework to guide the research questions, because as Corey Anton discusses, philosophical problems are becoming increasingly symptomatic of media and technology (225). I focus on research questions steeped in the philosophical paradox between deontology and consequentialism. These two perspectives provide an answer to the question: Do the ends justify the means? Accordingly, this research seeks to answer the extent to which *Breaking Bad* supports a deontological or consequentialist perspective as well as how these

concepts create a relationship between legality and morality. Additionally, it explores how the plot, character development, and dialogue in *Breaking Bad* work to promote or deter illegal and/or immoral behavior based on the philosophical assumptions of the tension between deontological and consequentialist perspectives.

Deontology and Consequentialism

To understand the scope of the research questions, a brief overview of the theoretical constructs of deontology and consequentialism is necessary to contextualize the tenets of each and how they apply specifically to this research. This section provides an overview of primary literature and theories in the development of these two philosophical traditions. Additionally, through examples of plotline, character development, and dialogue, this section provides a justification for utilizing these elements to interpret the moral codes present in the show.

Deontology can be summarized as the study of the nature of duty and obligation to society or a system of rules to determine right from wrong. Consequentialism, by comparison, is a doctrine suggesting that the morality of an action is best judged by its consequences. The quintessential example often used to describe the tension between deontology and consequentialism is a hypothetical situation of an individual harboring a criminal who is innocent. One day the police knock on the door and ask: Are you harboring this criminal? The deontologist would argue the protection and safety of the innocent criminal justifies the act of lying—regardless of the individual's subscription to the moral value of honesty and thus dishonesty in this situation is morally warranted. For the consequentialist, the criminal's innocence cannot and should not take precedence over the inherent moral value of honesty; for the consequentialist, the moral value of honesty is indeed inherent and thus individuals have a duty to uphold the moral value of honesty regardless of the external circumstances.

In Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*, he discusses the role of duty as a facet of morality and frames the conflict between consequentialism and deontology as an inherent facet of this duty; furthermore, without restraint of freedom, people lack virtue. Kant further argues that consequences are not in-and-of-themselves right or wrong but, rather, the motives of the individuals/actors determine the morality of actions; this perspective aligns most fully with

deontological perspectives. This conceptualization of duty underscores the plotline of the artifact under examination. Michael Lacewing extrapolates the two major classes of duty represented by deontology. First, he argues for "general duties" grounded most readily in prohibitions: don't lie, steal, cheat, or murder. Second, he suggests "specific duties" linked to our individual personal and social relationships. For example: "If you make a promise, you have a duty to keep it. If you are a parent, you have a duty to provide for your children" (1). Returning to the show's synopsis, Walter is caught between the specific duties he must provide for his family and the more general duties he has to society in upholding the law.

From the deontological viewpoint, the consequences of Walter's actions do not determine the morality; rather, specific duties (at times) may supersede general duties if the actions in-and-of-themselves are moral. Michael Lacewing further contextualizes this through an examination of intentionality. That is, if the action is intended to do harm, it will be morally wrong necessarily; however, if the consequences are unintentional (e.g., manslaughter versus first degree murder), moral ambiguity applies to the action. This notion of intentionality lies at the very heart of the tension between deontology and consequentialism present in *Breaking Bad*. As will be extrapolated in the analysis, a juxtaposition of intentional actions followed by unintentional consequences drives the plotline and dialogue of the series. For example, in one scene Walter intentionally seeks out a distributor without understanding the drug trade well enough to know its dangers. Later, the episode reveal that Walter's eagerness to distribute his product too quickly leads to the unintentional death of two drug distributors.

On the other end of the spectrum, the consequentialist school of thought holds that the consequences of any given action becomes the ultimate basis for any judgement about the rightness or wrongness of the action. While many approaches to consequentialism exist¹, the most common application is rooted in utilitarianism; this approach is an ethical philosophical tradition that prioritizes the good of the many over the good of the individual in the tradition of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill (Habibi). From this consequentialist perspective, the individual needs of Walter's family cannot morally supersede the larger consequences of Walter's actions in harming society at large. In *The Principles of Morals and Legislation* by Bentham, the nature of consequentialism suggests that "nature has placed mankind

¹ See state consequentialism, ethical egotism, ethical altruism, rule consequentialism, two-level consequentialism, motive consequentialism, negative consequentialism, teleological ethics, and acts and omissions.

[sic] under the governance of two sovereign masters... On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their thrown. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think” (1). This kind of dialectical positioning of right/wrong with cause/effects develops the tension present in the question: Do the ends justify the means?

I argue *Breaking Bad* supports a consequentialist perspective by juxtaposing deontological and consequentialist perspectives, which equates morality with legality as it relates to drug law in the United States (US). Major themes emerge from the plotline, character development, and dialogue that deter illegal behavior based on the tension created by pairing scenes that justify breaking the law with scenes that show the harm caused by the illegal behavior—thus, conflating breaking drug laws as immoral behavior. Further, I argue this equation of legal with moral, especially when located and filmed in the real location of Albuquerque (rather than a soundstage or stand-in), has the possibility of shaping the very laws it critiques. To substantiate this argument, I now turn to the method and analysis of this research.

Method and Analysis

To answer the research questions, I executed a textual analysis of the television series’ scripts. After watching and analyzing the show’s content, I use specific examples from the series as evidence of the accuracy of my argument in favor of the consequentialist perspective. I focus my analysis on the show’s structure. *Breaking Bad* uses juxtaposition of scenes promoting deontology with scenes promoting consequentialism to isolate specific justifications and compare those justifications to the negative consequences that are tied to the immoral action.

For this analysis, I focus on five episodes from Season One of *Breaking Bad* where I saw the most salient examples of deontological and consequential perspectives. A narrower focus on specific examples from a limited number of episodes increases the clarity of the units of analysis: plot, character development, and dialogue. By using multiple examples from a limited number of episodes, this research develops a more detailed landscape of how these elements support the aims and arguments. The final step will demonstrate how these elements change over the course of the series.

Season 1: Episode 1 “Pilot”

In the opening scene of the pilot episode, Walter White is found emerging from the wreckage of his portable meth lab, wearing only a gas mask and white underwear. Walter, hearing sirens and assuming it is the police coming to arrest him, records a video for his family. While Walter never explicitly admits to participating in the manufacture of methamphetamines, his declaration to his family that, "I only had you in my heart," coupled with the presence of methamphetamine paraphernalia, creates a space for the viewer to assume the presence of illegal behavior. This scene provides the backdrop upon which Walter's life prior to this moment can be viewed retrospectively and with compassion.

By providing this background, the producers provide a space for the philosophical conflict between consequentialism and deontology to react to each other as a means of supporting a consequentialist view that supports an inherent rightness or wrongness attached to specific behaviors. The deontological view that sees actions as morally relative depending upon the situation, however, is necessary for the plot to thrive; as *Breaking Bad* creator Vince Gilligan states: "We are telling a story of transformation in which a previously good man, through sheer force of will, decides to become a bad man" (MacInnes). That is, a reason must exist for the character break the law and the audience must "always be able to understand why" (MacInnes). As Worstall describes in *Forbes* magazine, *Breaking Bad* was not well received in countries with socialized medicine; the presence of an oppressive healthcare system is necessary to identify with Walter's character and justify his behavior.

The episode further develops this compassion by shifting back three months prior to a scene that depicts Walter teaching an introductory chemistry lesson to his high school chemistry class. The dialogue of this scene (a conversation aimed at defining what chemistry "is") functions as an element of foreshadowing, providing a landscape upon which Walter's character will be forced to travel and navigate.

WALTER. Chemistry. It is the study of what? Anyone? Ben.

BEN. Chemicals.

WALTER. Chemicals. No. Chemistry is... Well, technically, chemistry is the study of matter. But I prefer to see it as the study of change. Now, just...Just think about this. Electrons. They change their energy levels.

Molecules. Molecules change their bonds. Elements. They combine and change into compounds. Well, that's... That's all of life, right? I mean, it's just... It's the constant, it's the cycle. It's solution, dissolution, just over and over and over. It is growth, then decay, then transformation. It is fascinating, really.

In this scene, the plotline drives a deontological perspective by suggesting that the ends justify the means. The scene represents Walter's transformation as something cyclical and predestined. It provides a gradient upon which the changes in Walter's character can be seen as not simply bad or wrong or immoral, but inevitable.

Later in the episode, after being diagnosed with cancer, Walter works at his second job—a car wash managed by an owner who treats Walter poorly. Walter is contemplative, looking out the window, when the owner insists that he perform work outside of his job duty. Instead of conforming as he normally would have, Walter declares: “Fuck You, Bogdan,” displaying extreme anger while ripping down air fresheners and car accessories as he leaves the building. This scene is the opening of an internal conversation regarding consequences. The knowledge of imminent death created a situation where the consequences of Walter's actions were diminished, providing the space for Walter's justification of using his chemical knowledge to make meth to provide for his family before he dies.

In the following scene, Walter calls his brother-in-law, Hank (a DEA agent) and asks to go on a previously offered “ride along” to see the take down of an active meth lab. It is on this ride along that Walter discovers his soon-to-be partner—a former student, Jesse Pinkman—is involved in the meth operation. Walter seeks out Jesse's help, stating that Jesse knows the business and he knows the chemistry. Jesse questions Walter's motives in the following dialogue:

JESSE. Wait. Wait. Hold up. Tell me why you're doing this. Seriously.

WALTER. Why do you do it?

JESSE. Money, mainly.

WALTER. There you go.

JESSE. Nah, come on, man. Some straight like you, giant stick up his

ass all a sudden at age, what, 60, he's just gonna break bad?

WALTER. I'm 50.

JESSE. It's weird, is all. Okay, it doesn't compute.

This interaction highlights the inconceivability of a transformation so large and cataclysmic, that it creates dissonance in the audience in their capacity to believe that Walter could possibly "break bad" to an extent that the audience would view Walter as immoral.

The end of Episode 1, however, already places Walter, having cooked only one batch of meth, in a kill-or-be-killed situation. Jesse's attempt to distribute Walter's product to his former partner, Emilio, is unsuccessful, and Emilio and his cousin, Krazy 8, attempt to kill Walter after recognizing him from his "ride along" with the DEA. Walter offers to teach them his formula if they let him live. In the RV, Walter concocts phosphine gas, which is fatal when inhaled. This concoction kills Emilio and severely incapacitates Krazy 8. This scene provides the realization that even though Walter's motives were well-intended, it was not possible for him to cook even just one batch of meth before he needed to kill another human being. This act highlights the consequences and minimizes the justification of Walter's actions, thus supporting a consequentialist perspective.

Season 1: Episode 2 "Cat's in the Bag"

During another chemistry lesson, Walter's lecture provides another element of foreshadowing into his changing character:

WALTER. So the term "chiral" derives from the Greek word "hand." Now, the concept here being that just as your left hand and your right hand are mirror images of one another, right, identical and yet opposite, well, so, too, organic compounds can exist as mirror-image forms of one another all the way down at the molecular level. But although they may look the same, they don't always behave the same. For instance...Thalidomide. The... The right-handed isomer of the drug thalidomide is a perfectly fine, good medicine to give to a pregnant woman to prevent morning sickness. But make the mistake of giving

that same pregnant woman the left-handed isomer of the drug thalidomide and her child will be born with horrible birth defects. Which is precisely what happened in the 1950s. So chiral, chirality, mirrored images, right? Active, inactive, good, bad.

Returning to the question of assessing the role of dialogue to deter illegal and/or immoral behavior, this monologue creates a space for the audience to interpret Walter's subtle change as justifiable, or at very least unnoticeable: a mirrored image of his presented self as an upstanding chemistry teacher and his hidden self as a producer of methamphetamines. This interpretation is possible because his change is "chiral" in nature; although he "looks" the same, his behavior has changed. By providing the example of the Thalidomide, the audience can conceive of Walter as both *good* and *bad* simultaneously.

As the episode progresses, however, this balance between good and bad shifts to the consequentialist perspective when, upon discovering that Krazy 8 did not die from the effects of the phosphine gas, Walter and Jesse face the deeper dilemma of killing a man who no longer poses an imminent threat. Walter attempts to rationalize the possibility of letting him live in the following dialogue:

WALTER. In other words, what is his reputation for violence?

JESSE. Well, um, he did try to kill us both yesterday, so there's that.

WALTER. Look, what I'm trying to say is that he's a distributor, right? He's a... He's a businessman. He's a man of business. It would therefore seem to follow that he is capable of acting out of mutual self-interest, yes? What? Do you think he is capable of listening to reason? I mean, what...? What kind of reason? You mean, like, "Dear Krazy-8, hey, listen, if I let you go, you promise not to come back and waste my entire family? No Colombian neckties? You mean that kind of reason? No, man, I can't say as I have high fucking hopes where that's concerned.

This interaction highlights the dilemma that Krazy 8 is still a viable threat to Jesse, Walter, and his family. Yet, Walter's moral impulse still seeks to discover a viable alternative to killing. In this interaction, Walter attempts to ward off thoughts of justification and to persuade himself that a possible way to allow Krazy 8 to live

and to protect himself, his family, and Jesse exists. The simple fact that Walter wants to not kill Krazy 8 allows the audience to identify with the character. It creates space for justification to arise. That is, as long as Walter exhausts every possible resource and idea to avoid killing Krazy 8, if in the end it is not avoidable, then murder is justifiable.

Jesse attempts to help assuage Walter's guilt about the prospect of killing Krazy 8 in the following dialogue:

JESSE. So, hey, have you, um? Have you done the...? The thing?

WALTER. Yeah, I'm... I'm working up to it.

JESSE. You know what? I bet he doesn't even wake up. You know, not even if you took him to the hospital right now. Now, if it was me, I would just try and think of it like I was... I was doing him a favor.

By framing the situation hypothetically as a "no-win" situation, Walter can view the murder as a kindness instead of an immoral act. In a similar vein to putting down a dying dog, Walter's actions can be viewed as humane, rather than depraved, if death is certain regardless of when it happens or whether or not Walter is involved. However, this logic is dislodged as Krazy 8 wakes up when Walter attempts to kill him. Krazy 8 asks for water, and in all of his humanity, Walter brings him not only water, but food as well—even a bucket for a toilet, toilet paper, and hand sanitizer. In essence, this scene, in juxtaposition to Walter's conversation with Jesse, humanizes Krazy 8 at the same time that it humanizes Walter. This diminishes the capacity for justification and increases the audience's awareness of the consequences Walter faces if he chooses to kill Krazy 8. Thus, the scene supports a consequentialist perspective, even in light of the deontological perspective witnessed in the previous scene.

Season 1: Episode 3 "...And the Bag's in the River"

The beginning scene of Episode 3 opens with a bird's eye view of Walter and Jesse cleaning up the dissolved remains of Emilio, Jesse's former partner. Filmed through a pane of glass, Walt and Jesse wipe the glass clean of blood, tissue, bone, and partially disintegrated body parts. The grotesque nature of the scene settles in the

viewers' stomach as both very real and unbelievably horrific, drawing a hard line between the realities of life and death. The visceral scene reduces the human form down to inanimate matter and trace elements. This accomplishes a disorientation, because even though what lies within the eye of the viewer was once a living organism, it is now nothing more than the chemical elements of the human body broken down by acid.

Dialogue of a flashback from Walt's memory as a graduate student overlays this scene. Together, he and a friend begin to list all of the chemical elements that make up the human body: hydrogen, nitrogen, oxygen, carbon, calcium, iron, magnesium, and so forth. But they still come up short of the complete mass of the human body:

WALTER. So the whole thing adds up to...99.888042 percent. We are 0.111958 percent shy.

GRETCHEN. Supposedly that's everything.

WALTER. Yeah? Mm-hm. I don't know, it just... It just... It seems like something's missing, doesn't it? There's got to be more to a human being than that.

This reduction of life to the sum of chemical elements evokes a dehumanization of the victim, causing the viewer to see him as only a combination of lifeless elements. This desensitization is left hovering in the minds of the viewers for nearly the entire episode before the show juxtaposes a consequentialist perspective of the situation. Later, the episode again flashes back to Walter and his friend's experiment to discover the entirety of the human form and, being unable to account for the smallest percentage, Walt asks the question: what could possibly be left? His friend replies: the soul. Entering this discussion about the existence and presence of a soul minimizes the dehumanization of Emilio in the opening scene and reestablishes the moral conflict of murder.

This idea is explored further in the episode when Walt is faced with killing Emilio's partner, Krazy 8, who survived the chemical exposure Walt used to defend himself against the attack of Emilio and Krazy 8. Jesse and Walt chain Krazy 8 to a pole in the basement by his neck using a bike lock. Walter faces the problem of whether to kill Krazy 8. At a pinnacle moment, Walt begins to make a pro/con list

to determine whether or not he should kill him. This list epitomizes the conundrum of the deontological/consequentialist stance. Essentially, Walter must ask himself if saving himself and his family was a "good enough" justification for breaking his moral code of believing that murder is wrong. Throughout the entire episode, Walt tries to humanize Krazy 8 in an attempt to eliminate the risk of death to him and his family if he lets him go.

KRAZY 8: You hope I just drop dead and make it easy on you, don't you? Walter, I don't know what you think you're doing here, but trust me, this line of work doesn't suit you.

Here, Krazy 8 foreshadows the monumental change Walter will have to go through to adapt to the ruthless nature of the business. He cannot casually enter the world of methamphetamines and expect that it does not have consequences—although that is exactly how Walter is approaching the situation. He seeks to eradicate any part of the overall system that does not fit within his schema for the rationalization and justification of his involvement. Krazy 8's statement highlights this dissonance and contradiction by pointing out the fragile nature of Walter's character. He is not capable, at that moment, of committing murder; however, Krazy 8 points to the fact that within the drug business, murder is simply a consequence. It is necessary. It is common. It is inevitable.

Season 1: Episode 6 "Crazy Handful of Nothin"

Two significant exchanges happen in Episode 6 that pertain to the conversation of moral codes. The first occurs at the beginning of the episode. As Walter and Jesse attempt to start fresh after the Emilio and Krazy 8 fiasco, Walter attempts to lay down "ground rules" about how the operation will run. In the following dialogue, Walter tries to separate himself from the consequences of his involvement. What he does not see, does not exist:

WALTER. Let's get something straight. This, the chemistry, is my realm. I am in charge of the cooking. Out there on the street, you deal with that. As far as our customers go, I don't want to know anything about them. I don't wanna see them, I don't wanna hear from them. I want no interaction with them whatsoever. This operation is you and

me, and I'm the silent partner. You got any issues with that?

JESSE. Whatever, man.

WALTER. No matter what happens, no more bloodshed. No violence.

In this interaction, Walter attempts to set moral ground by eliminating the presence of any knowledge of the effects of his “product.” Later in the episode, Walter’s efforts to moralize his part in the process disintegrates when he can no longer finish the batch of meth because of his lungs. It is also at this juncture that Jesse learns of Walter’s cancer and comes to understand the reasons for Walter’s involvement:

JESSE. God. I get it now. That's why you're doing all this. You want to make some cash for your people before you check out.

WALTER. You got a problem with that?

JESSE. You tell me. You're the one that looks like he just crawled out of a microwave. You gonna be able to finish the batch?

WALTER. Yes.

JESSE. All right.

WALTER. No. You do it.

JESSE. Me?

WALTER. Yeah. What happened to your mad skills? Go on. Here. You do it. You can do it. If you have any questions, I'll be right out here.

In this interaction, Jesse highlights the importance of why Walter is involved in the operation as he provides dialogue that justifies Walter’s actions. Through the perspective of Jesse, you get the reinforcement and confirmation that what Walt is doing is acceptable. The ends justify the means. Yet, the consequentialist view remains as Walter’s invisible lines between production and distribution disintegrate

and he is forced to ask Jesse to finish the batch. Those lines drawn at the beginning of the episode start to blur. He cannot physically make the meth, and therefore must rely on Jesse to do it for him. This dependence highlights the fact that Walt cannot separate out what he is doing from what Jesse is doing. He cannot escape the consequences.

A second interaction of importance comes, again, from Walter's teaching as he explains the difference between slow and fast change in chemical reactions:

WALTER. Chemical reactions involve change on two levels: Matter and energy. When a reaction is gradual, the change in energy is slight. I mean, you don't even notice the reaction is happening. For example, when rust collects on the underside of a car, right? But if a reaction happens quickly, otherwise harmless substances can interact in a way that generates enormous bursts of energy. Who can give me an example of rapid chemical reaction? Hint, hint. Right here.

STUDENT. Like, an explosion?

WALTER. Yes, good. Explosions. Explosions are the result of chemical reaction happening almost instantaneously. And the faster reactants, i.e. Explosives...And fulminative mercury is a prime example of that. The faster they undergo change, the more violent the explosion.

This dialogue acts as a metaphor for the change that Walter is going through. It is a slow transformation—so slow that you will not even notice until it actually happens (like the rust). This dialogue serves a combination of both justification and consequentialism. It is easy to justify a change that we do not see happening. Yet, at the same time, the end product is still damaging, even if it comes on slowly, instead of an enormous assaultive explosion. So, while Walter's change is metaphorically happening in gradual terms, this dialogue foreshadows the consequences to come from Walter's actions. Additionally, it foreshadows the random bursts of energy that will accelerate Walter's change.

This episode also depicts Walter's first major physical change. Walter is found in his bathroom, taking dozens of pills for his chemotherapy, and looks at himself in the mirror to notice his hair falling out. At this juncture Walter decides to shave his head. This physical transformation is an insight into the consequentialist view.

This perspective is reflected in an interview with Gilligan discussing his pitch to producers saying: “I told them: ‘This is a story about a man who transforms himself from Mr. Chips into Scarface.’” (MacInnes). Walter’s attempts earlier in the episode to separate himself from the distribution portion of the work, saying “no matter what, no more bloodshed,” with a full head of hair, followed in sequence by a scene of Walter emerging from a burning building with a fully shaven head, draws attention to this movement from Mr. Chips to Scarface as indicated by Gilligan. That is, the change in Walter’s appearance operates as an indicator of the internal moral changes happening within Walter.

This change, in turn, leads to the last interaction of the episode between Walter and Tuco, the “new” Krazy 8. In attempting to sell the product to Tuco, Jesse is beaten to the point of hospitalization. From guilt, Walter blurs the lines even more by going to Tuco to make right for Jesse. His emotional connection to Jesse forces Walter to cross his own boundaries by participating in the distribution side of the business. He cannot “just” be the cook; by the very nature of the business, he must be a part of the entire operation. In doing so, Walter cannot remain blind to the consequences of his role in producing the meth. This scene also portrays the first mention of Walter’s alter-ego, Heisenberg. The presence of an alias provides a vector of transformation. Walter can leave behind his identity as “Walter White,” high school chemistry teacher, father, husband, and law-abiding citizen, and can transform in and out of this alter ego to deal with the immoral aspects of his contribution to the production of meth.

Ultimately, the presence of the alter ego is an indicator of a consequentialist perspective. The only way that Walter can blind himself from the consequences of his actions is to split off the part of himself that cannot morally deal with the consequences of his actions. Thus, the alter ego, Heisenberg, allows for Walter to justify his actions, while at the same time, still promoting a consequentialist perspective.

Season 1: Episode 7 “A No-Rough Stuff-Type Deal...”

An interesting conversation begins to emerge in Episode 7, beginning a conversation that problematizes the conceptualization of laws and its ties to morality. The episode is a series of conversations and events that bridge the gap between justification and moral consequences. The first interaction is between Walter and Skyler. While in a school meeting, Walter puts his hands between

Skyler's legs and attempts to please her sexually under the table. Later, in the parking lot, Walter and Skyler have sex in their car.

SKYLER. Where did that come from? And what was it so damn good?

WALTER. Because it was illegal.

In this interaction, Walter draws to light the appeal of breaking the law. This highlights the excitement and enjoyment that can accompany doing something that is not supposed to be done. In the context of a sexual encounter between husband and wife in a high school parking lot, the audience can dismiss the moral implications of the rules broken simply based on physical location of where the act happened. The severity of the infraction was small; therefore, the breaking of the law can be justified.

Another moral indicator of this episode comes when Skyler's sister, Marie is revealed as a closeted-shoplifter—something that Hank has covered up with his law enforcement privileges. In another scene, Walter and Hank sit on the patio, and Hank takes out a Cuban cigar:

WALTER. Now, I was under the impression... ..that these were illegal.

HANK. Yeah, well, sometimes forbidden fruit tastes the sweetest, doesn't it?

WALTER. It's funny, isn't it? How we draw that line.

HANK. Yeah. What line is that?

WALTER. Well, what's legal, what's illegal. You know, Cuban cigars, alcohol. You know, if we were drinking this in 1930, we'd be breaking the law. Another year, we'd be okay. Who knows what will be legal next year.

HANK. You mean like pot?

WALTER. Yeah. Like pot. Or whatever.

HANK. Cocaine? Heroin?

WALTER. I'm just saying it's arbitrary.

HANK: Well, you ought to visit lockup. You hear a lot of guys talking like that. "Hey, man, what you busting me with these 14 bales of ganja? It's all going to be legal next year when Willie Nelson's president. " Say it, buddy. It don't only go one way either. I mean, some other stuff is legal that shouldn't be. I mean, frigging meth used to be legal. Used to sell it over every counter at every pharmacy across America. Thank God they came to their senses on that one, huh?

In this interaction, Walter's perspective represents lawmaking as arbitrary and inconsistent when he mentions prohibition. From this perspective, breaking the law can be justified if laws have arbitrary definitions, purposes, and affects. Walter's perspective undermines the connection between legality and morality insofar as it ignores the difference in severity of harm between alcohol and cigars comparative to the harm of heroin, cocaine, and methamphetamines.

But Hank promptly points out the flaw in Walter's logic when he reverses the analogy and suggests then that if somethings are illegal that should not be, then does it not also follow that there are some things that are not illegal that ought to be? This perspective follows the viewpoint of the consequentialist perspective by highlighting the purpose of the law: to protect. The determination of what is legal and illegal may not always be logical, but it is not as arbitrary as Walter portrays it to be. This reveals the fact that, again, Walter is struggling to justify his involvement with producing meth. The fact that the internal struggle exists indicates the consequentialist perspective. If the action were truly "harmless" or without consequence, then Walter would not feel the need to justify his actions.

Mirroring/Making Reality

This research posed three research questions related to the relationship between media and morality and proposes an argument that *Breaking Bad* supports a consequential perspective on moral codes pertaining to legality and morality. Additionally, I argue the analysis of the plotline, character development, and

dialogue reveals a relationship between popular television and moral codes and promotes a relationship between legality and morality as entwined, thus, deterring illegal behavior based upon the theoretical frameworks of deontology and consequentialism. This argument is supported by the analysis that demonstrates that the juxtaposition of Walter's attempts to justify his involvement in producing meth is outweighed by the overarching presence of the consequences of him doing so. With each attempt he makes to eradicate the consequences of his actions, his justifications cannot withstand the moral demands of reality.

Ultimately, the show creates dissonance in the audience about whether or not to "root" for a main character whose foreshadowed transformation can only lead to that which the audience abhors. It is both frightening and enticing to the audience to watch this transformation happen, but, ultimately, the consequentialist perspective must be upheld in light of the dialogue, interactions, and scenes highlighted in this article. This provides a rich data set to interpret, particularly as it relates to the show's receptivity and physical location in current political conversations on the war on drugs and the necessity of a border wall between the United States and Mexico to prevent the movement of drugs across the border.

Returning to the fundamental elements of consequentialism, *Breaking Bad* creates in its audience not only a reality which subscribes to a utilitarian mindset, but also reinforces cultural myths correlating immoral and illegal drug activity to actual physical places and spaces due to it being set in Albuquerque rather than a fictional location. New Mexico remains (before and after the series) the second most impoverished state, and Albuquerque ranked as the eleventh most dangerous city in the United States in 2018 (Federal Bureau of Investigation Crime Data Explorer). Additionally, nearly five years after the concluding episode of *Breaking Bad*, Mike Gallagher of *The Albuquerque Journal* investigated drug crimes in New Mexico particularly as they are related to New Mexico's proximity to the Sinaloa and Juarez Mexican cartels. Gallagher comments that "while we in New Mexico focus on drug-fueled property crimes...our state is much more than a local market. It is a primary corridor for the cartels to ship drugs nationwide" (*Albuquerque Journal*). The article goes on to report that "They made 104 cases in four months, almost overwhelming the ability of the U.S. Attorney's Office to handle," yet this remains a nationwide problem pinned on border states such as New Mexico.

In an interview with *Press-Enterprise*, Gilligan stated that *Breaking Bad* was originally intended to be set in Riverside, CA. But *Breaking Bad* producers relocated its shooting location because of a tax credit offered by New Mexico,

initially intending to film in New Mexico and retain the setting of Riverside; however, once producers arrived in Albuquerque and investigated drug crimes in New Mexico, a new vision for the development of a story surrounding methamphetamines and drug trafficking quickly emerged (*Press-Enterprise*). This relocation created an even bigger tie between the poverty of New Mexico and drug-related crimes. When paired with a consequentialist perspective linking legality and morality, this decision creates a reality which promotes a vision of border states/cities as deficit in moral codes and character. While the lived reality of high crime rates in New Mexico are arguably an accurate depiction of certain actualities, the consequentialist perspective promoted in *Breaking Bad* reinforces a myth which isolates drug problems in the United States as a border issue.

Placing this within the context of a political climate in the United States under the Trump administration promoting a border wall between the United States and Mexico, the implications of these ideological assumptions being fostered in *Breaking Bad* arguably have the potential to impact not only the perceptions of its viewers but also has the potential to alter the very laws of which it is in judgement. As noted by Alan Gomez in mainstream news media, the Trump administration has “repeatedly pointed to the flow of drugs across the southern border as proof that a [border] wall is needed” (USA Today). Yet, as pointed out in an NPR interview with Donald J. Trump, “the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration has reported that the vast majority of drugs, illegal drugs, come through legal ports of entry,” questioning the role of a border wall in preventing illegal drug trafficking (Newsday). In the same interview, former Deputy Drug Enforcement Administrator Jack Riley noted the impracticality of large shipments of drugs being moved across the border at non-entry locations and that while he believes a wall would “slow down...illegal immigration...it will have little effect on the large amount of narcotics that are coming into the country” (Inkeep). Pulling these facts together demonstrate the rhetorical strategy predicated on fear tactics linking the drug trade industry to morally bankrupt cartels—with inseparable racial and nationalist ties—as a means to rationalize a border wall.

In tandem with these rhetorical maneuvers to justify a US border wall, *Breaking Bad's* portrayal of Albuquerque as a methamphetamine hub between the United States and Mexico, while simultaneously promoting a consequentialist view that denotes immorality, has the potential to reinforce cultural myths surrounding nationalism. Gallagher reports drugs from cartels supplies heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and marijuana to locations as far and wide as New York

City, Chicago, Los Angeles, Phoenix, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Alabama, Oklahoma, Minnesota and parts of Texas (*Albuquerque Journal*). And while many of these drugs are crossing at border entry points, the widespread drug problem across the United States becomes invisible through media representations such as *Breaking Bad* that give these drug problems a specific location—enhancing the rhetorically-constructed vision of morally corrupt drug dealers from Mexico crossing our borders bringing not just drugs but crime and delinquency. This rhetoric can be seen littered in media outlets and press conferences. When announcing his candidacy for President of the United States, Trump stated: “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best...They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists.” (Washington Post). Phillip Bump of the *Washington Post* notes that “Trump has tied illegal immigration to the opioid crisis specifically and illegal drug smuggling broadly” (Washington Post). Thus, returning to the third and final research question, this analysis demonstrates how the specific elements in *Breaking Bad* carries with it rhetorically-salient and philosophically-grounded perspectives that support current political arguments backing racially-driven policies, having widespread impacts.

Future research into other popular television series with similar themes such as *Narcos*, *Queen of the South*, and the popular spin off *Better Call Saul* could substantiate a consistent pattern of consequentialist perspectives being used to reinforce dominant ideologies surrounding the connection between morality and legality as it pertains to cultural myths sequestering drug-related crime as a regional issue. Furthermore, future research has the potential to look closer at issues of race, gender, and sexuality as it pertains to the consequentialist themes present in drug-related crime television.

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“It Was Amazing to Be There to Witness It”: Online Fan Reactions to Rufus Wainwright’s *All Days Are Nights: Songs for Lulu* Live Tour

STEPHANIE SALERNO

Witnessing an artist give himself over entirely to live performance is mesmerizing. Every movement, every breath, every fleeting emotion or thought becomes meaningful. Audience members still their bodies and quiet their breathing, fixing their gazes on the artist as he bares his soul. In one electric musical moment, a connection is made; the artist’s emotional freedom and vulnerability cuts through the natural barrier of strangers in a room together and the fan is captivated.

Canadian-American singer/songwriter Rufus Wainwright’s 2010 *All Days Are Nights: Songs for Lulu* international tour became a polarizing experience for his devoted fans. For the first time in his twelve-year career, Wainwright performed twelve original songs purposefully ordered as a classical song cycle rather than a set list of original songs with colorful between-song banter. A two-part show, the *Lulu* tour presented the song cycle without interruption; Wainwright performed wearing a lush, Victorian-inspired mourning gown to a nearly silent concert hall (the audience was given instructions prior to the beginning of the concert to hold all applause). After an intermission, Wainwright reappeared onstage to audience’s applause in bright clothing, full of stories about his travels and self-deprecating jokes. It was an evening of extremes with his mother and folk-singer Kate McGarrigle’s suffering and death from sarcoma in January 2010 underpinning every moment of the performance.

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Audiences took sharp notice of Wainwright's intensity, perceiving the unutterable grief accompanying the *Lulu* tour. The Rufus Wainwright Message Board (RWMB), the official fan forum housed on rufuswainwright.com, became the primary digital space where fans compared performance details and emotionally processed witnessing *Lulu*. As one Oslo fan proclaimed:

I think we sometimes forget that Rufus really is a very melancholic soul. Though we hear it in his music, he is always happy and perky on stage and meet and greets. I think his choice of doing the two parts was an excellent choice, where he can really live out his blue composer side in the first half, and completely focus on the music, and then come back and sort of change persona. (Mariannesn)

The deep connections with Wainwright's music and performances that fans expressed went far beyond celebrity obsession or harmless crushes; they were moments of self-discovery and mutual identification with Wainwright that created space for fans to mull over personal trauma, loss, or pain through shared musical performance.

This article explores the relationship between Wainwright and his audience during live tour performances of *All Days Are Nights: Songs for Lulu* to emphasize the significance and poignancy of Wainwright's grieving process, a journey that used art as a conduit to healing and visibility as a means of breaking down the stigma of male public grieving (Decca 2010). Not only did Wainwright's tour immediately following his mother's death, the work was marketed and performed live as a classical song cycle, a significant departure from his previous album releases and touring norms. The performances Wainwright gave disturbed, dismantled, or rerouted fans' expectations, ultimately queering the performance space. Taking "queer" to mean alternative, resistant, or "odd, bent, twisted", *Lulu* was a queer vehicle through which Wainwright processed grief (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 161).

Through a phenomenological approach, concerning myself with the lived experiences that shape how people act and react to different situations, I consider how Wainwright's audiences shared with the digital fan community their impressions of the performance and reactions to the emotional vulnerability that he displayed onstage. Two contrasting themes emphasize Wainwright's emotional vulnerability: 1) the emotional hangover, or the long-lasting impact of the

performance on the audience members, and 2) disorientation, or the rejection of emotionally aligning with the performance. While disorientation signals a refusal to connect emotionally with Wainwright, the emotional hangover is a sign of affective power and the emotional residue that stuck with audience members once they left the theater. The emotional hangover is thus one response to “sticky feelings that Wainwright’s fanbase carried with them, yielding feelings of sympathy and empathy” (Ahmed, *Promise of Happiness* 44). Though those who expressed displeasure with the *Lulu* performance rejected the vulnerability Wainwright displayed, their negative reactions indicate that affect stuck to them as well, driving them to share acerbic thoughts and bitter feelings on the message boards. Thus, any emotional response fans shared and discussed resulted from spending time within the queer performance space.

The emotional responses examined in this article allude to the great care and effort Wainwright fans took in engaging with each other digitally as they attempted to understand their individual concert experiences. Fan forum comments served as documented digital sources of fan reactions to the *Lulu* live performances, offering firsthand knowledge and accounts about Wainwright and his music while the reactions to performances were fresh. Using virtual ethnography, a practice that recognizes that the “field” is not a physical location where the researcher goes to study human interactions, allowed me to survey hundreds of fan forum posts about live performances. This “field” is within digital space, where users give the space meaning and purpose, interacting and creating connections based on their technological communication (Cooley et al.). This collection of digitally surveyed comments provides a framework for interpreting the intricate relationship between orientation, the circulation of affect, and emotional reactions within the performance space. In effect, the emotional vulnerability of the room is shaped and, at times, compromised by the silent, but palpable, connections between the artist and his audience.

Reading into Feelings: Phenomenology, Affect, and Fandom

How audiences negotiated their entertainment expectations and the actual intense emotional experience Wainwright provided is best investigated using a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology, as I apply it, draws on Edmund Husserl’s 1913 theory that considers how the “lived body” understands life through intentional consciousness; in other words, it’s a way of knowing through one’s

existence (*Ideas*). In the thirty plus years that scholars continued to build upon and deviate from Husserl's work, phenomenology focused on several different areas, including transcendentalism, realism, and existentialism (with Alfred Schutz, Max Scheler, and Martin Heidegger respectively publishing major works in these areas of philosophy). Maurice Merleau-Ponty, of the existential school of thought, considered embodiment to be the primary source of knowing the world and interpreting one's interactions within it (*Phenomenology of Perception*). Building upon phenomenological epistemology, late 20th century feminist scholars interrogated the relationship between the body and power dynamics in society (see Bartky; de Beauvoir; Butler). Sara Ahmed's work expands upon the idea of embodiment and affect, putting the "lived body" in conversation with queer experience and examining the relationship queer bodies have in the world as both within it and living outside of normative expectations (*Queer Phenomenology*).

For Wainwright, a gay man, performing as a vocalist and pianist was not merely a direct response to grieving; it served as a way of communicating and describing his pain to his audience. Linking music, space, and audience experience to phenomenology, Schutz notes that musical knowledge is both socially approved and socially derived; in other words, audience expectations of music, performances, and composers are tacitly agreed upon (*Collected Papers II*). Queering the performance space broke this social contract for Wainwright fans, privileging melancholy over jovial fan favorites. Fan conversations on the message board represent a collective effort to understand what Wainwright was experiencing. For example, a Melbourne fan thoughtfully reflected upon the atmosphere of the performance space:

[The silence] is a wonderful device on a lot of levels though – it forces each member of the audience to be alone with their own thoughts and feeling, to not be able to take their cues from the people around them, to experience some of that loneliness and aloneness that comes with grief – being surrounded by people yet unreachable. (roman_candle)

Another from the same tour stop disclosed their relationship to terminal illness: "Thanks Rufus for bringing me up when I've been down. My sister has cancer and its [*sic*] quite a traumatic time and we are hoping for the best outcome, but don't know" (vida). Not everyone was willing to take this journey, however, and their disorientation adversely affected other audience members, as a fan from Sweden

expresses: “Idiotic tardy people came in, sat close to me -and one of them started giggling! And he giggled through the rest of the set! I mean like a school girl! [...] *it really killed my buzz*” (Katzenjammer, italics in original). As these comments demonstrate, fan discourse went far beyond set list reports. Vulnerability and honesty became a pillar of fans’ online interactions, with responses ranging from gushing adoration to spiteful criticism.

Fans’ emotional responses result from what is felt but not seen within the performance space. Affect and its transmission have been defined, theorized, and applied to a dizzying array of concepts across several disciplines, including psychology, sociology, philosophy, and cultural studies (Gregg and Seigworth 6-7). My use of the term considers the ways in which affect “sticks” to the body, causing an emotional reaction to a particular stimulus. In this case, Wainwright’s music and his grief affect his audiences, for better or worse, in very personal and individual ways. This affect is possible as a result of the “inbetween-ness” in which affect arises, or “in the capacities to act and be acted upon” (1). As a result of being “found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise),” affect moves in, around, and on bodies (1). Bodies react, consciously or subconsciously, to the things (feelings, emotions, attitudes) that go on around or stick to them, but those reactions are not always logical or predictable (Ahmed; Brennan; Ticiento Clough). The so-called stickiness that Ahmed and Ticiento Clough discuss is a different theoretical take on the transmission of affect that, unlike Brennan’s, does not delve too deeply into the physicality of bodies that share physical space (e.g., the functions of pheromones and hormones, smell and room temperature). My concern is what fans identify thinking, feeling, and carrying with them once the performance is over, or what “sticks” to or slips “inbetween” audience members. This residue, so to speak, was recognized and then transferred online to the fan forum where individuals shared their interpretations of Wainwright’s performance with like-minded and passionate followers of his music.

The Rufus Wainwright Message Board (RWMB) exists as more than a fan site that is devoted to Wainwright’s musical fandom; it exists as a community of Wainwright fans and music lovers who use the digital space to process their own experiences and relate to others who share musical tastes and interests. Musical fandom is defined as a collective group that is self-recognized, performed, and encompasses a range of tastes, roles, identities, and practices (Duffett, *Popular Music Fandom* 7). Previous studies of fan culture and popular culture fandom have interrogated digital participatory culture, issues of identity, and meaning-making

within fan cultures (see Duffett; Grossberg; Hills; Jenkins; Radway). Fandoms are inherently social spaces in which individuals seek out like individuals who find enjoyment and meaning in the same modes of cultural expressions (Jenkins). Individuality and identity are not erased within fandom, but the group dynamic often supposes a lack of isolated interaction. As Mark Duffett explains, fans connect and compare their identities in group environments (e.g. online, at conventions, etc.), but their “initial identifications do not always (or therefore necessarily) appear... as the result of shared experiences” (*Understanding Fandom*, 27). Though Wainwright fans congregated at *Lulu* shows, collectively supporting this artist, their individual tolerance for and acceptance of emotional vulnerability marked some fans as empathetic and others as combative.

Sensing the Virtual Field

With fans strewn all over the world, RWMB becomes a common digital space that links these individuals’ tastes, interests, and philosophies. The field of ethnomusicology recognizes digital space, the ubiquity of the Internet in the 21st century, and the role of phenomenology as integral to reaching communities and understanding the way that people use technology to relate to one another. Ethnomusicologists define, explore, and employ virtual ethnography as a methodology to study musical communities, musical practice, and phenomenology (Berger; Rice; Titon). Other scholars of popular music have employed (either wholly or in part) virtual ethnography mixed with discourse analysis to explore fan/participant interactions within popular musical communities, including the fandoms of Bruce Springsteen, Lady Gaga, Muse, the surfing subculture, and *American Idol* (see Baxter-Moore; Bennett; Click, Lee, and Holladay; Cooley; Dilling-Hansen; Meizel; Williams). Two graduate projects on Rufus Wainwright also employ virtual ethnography and discourse analysis, both emphasizing queer identity, but do not discuss emotional reactions to grief specifically (Jones; Schwandt).

While some of these scholars—such as Nick Baxter-Moore, Timothy Cooley, Matthew Jones, and Katherine Meizel, for instance—took an active role in the research by interviewing fan communities about reactions to performances and live experiences around the time of the performance or event, my work uses discourse analysis to read the room, so to speak, after the fact. Virtual ethnography with a phenomenological approach uplifts the Wainwright fan community as a global

example of how affect circulates and sticks to people after a performance. My research took place over five years from the conclusion of the *Lulu* tour, with the largest bulk of surveying and collection taking place in late 2015. I took note of the major themes that reoccurred throughout the posts about the 2010 *Lulu* tour and categorized the fan comments accordingly as they related to emotional hangover or disorientation. Upon returning to the “Live” *Lulu* threads in 2018-2019, despite a general update to rufuswainwright.com, the fan forum threads that had long grown silent remain intact. As of March 2019, 47,400 total members belonged to RWMB, and users must login to view any forum posts, though anonymity is allowed. The fan forum is broken down by topic, ranging from “General Rufus Discussion” to “Live” (where fans talk about live performances, the section that proved instrumental in my research) to “Family and History” (a thread devoted to Wainwrights, McGarrigles, and other family friends like the Cohens) to off-topic threads such as “Other Music You’re Listening To.” At the time of publication, the “Live” section had 113,517 total posts with over 3200 separate topics; the newest threads were devoted to Wainwright’s 2019 tour and the oldest date back to summer 2003. “Live” posts yield thousands of user replies, including pictures, video clips, press releases, and superfluous comments about Wainwright, other artists, and off-topic banter. The earliest thread about the *Lulu* tour was posted in mid-December 2009 and extended through the official end of the tour in mid-December 2010; these threads announced ticket sales, posed questions about the Wainwright live show, shared speculations about the tour, and discussed fans’ plans to meet up at various concerts continuing over the next four months.

For this study, I focused on around 300 threads that talked about the *Lulu* tour stops and concert-goer experiences. Of these, I closely reviewed 112 threads; many were dead ends with limited fan engagement or false starts to what would eventually become lively and substantial threads. The posts that stayed on-topic yielded the most robust discussions pertaining to specific performances. The quotes used in this article are drawn from a total sample of 74 posts from the pool of 112 threads concerning performances in the United Kingdom, Europe, Canada, and the United States. These examples demonstrate how some Wainwright fans communicated (and still do communicate) about post-*Lulu* performance (April 2010 through December 2010). The fan forum, after all, is not only a space to debrief among attendees about a show that happened, or anxiously countdown the upcoming performance; it is a space where fans who were not there could go to vicariously experience the performance. During the *Lulu* tour, this common fan

practice also became a way for fans to emotionally confront an extraordinary musical event set against the backdrop of the undeniably human process of grieving.

About Last Night: Negotiating "Sticky Affect"

Fan reports from shows around the world reinforced and validated the emotionally complex feelings attendees reported and grappled with after a *Lulu* show. Wainwright has indicated in a personal interview via email with the author that he was sensitive to his audience's emotional reactions to the song cycle performance. From the no clapping request to the overwhelming emotions that circulated within the performance space, Wainwright reflected on how his audiences silently expressed their feelings during the performance:

...[C]oming out and requesting specifically for no one to applaud at all actually fully gave me a much better sense of what the crowd was actually feeling at the time. That wasn't always a positive experience. There was [*sic*] definitely some people who resented the fact that I kind of muzzled them slightly and that they didn't really have the chance to unload their emotions and discard whatever feelings they might have had for a particular song. They had to treat it as a sole, broad experience. A lot of people enjoyed that or were into the concept of taking that voyage but there were a fair amount of people who felt kind of kidnapped and resented that fact. So I definitely had a better sense of how the audience actually felt and it was very interesting because it was a combination of that palpable emotion, which I couldn't really sense physically meaning with the sound or visuals--I didn't really see the audience so it was really kind of an instinct, but then also very much combined with the theatres themselves. I found that the better theatre I was in, with better acoustics, the more grandiose presentation or with the greatest history like Carnegie Hall and the Royal Albert Hall--that even kind of heightened the experience as well. I had a much better sense of both where I was and who [*sic*] I was

performing for and what they were really feeling. (Wainwright, Personal Interview)¹

As Wainwright's comments reveal, he was an extremely focused, yet emotionally vulnerable performer during the *Lulu* song cycle. His demanding music, in a way, freed him from focusing too much on his audience's reactions, allowing him to harness his physical endurance and maintain his professional and performative distance, eschewing eye contact with his audience. Audiences witnessed Wainwright play without stopping for longer than a moment to take a sip of water and prepare for the next song in the cycle. The performance practice challenged the audience/artist relationship, either overwhelming audiences with intense emotional reactions (the emotional hangover) or turning them off completely (disorientation).

“Still a Wreck this Afternoon”: The Emotional Hangover

The way an audience feels within a performance space is an important component to theorizing the queer aspects of Wainwright's performativity. In many instances, shared grief results from the circulation of affect within Wainwright's performance space, including the music itself, lighting, costume, and the projection of Douglas Gordon's film (featuring Wainwright's heavily made-up eye that was magnified, and alternated between opening, closing, weeping, or morphing into a kaleidoscopic array). Audiences who are receptive to pondering the process of death, dying, or grieving express strong post-performance feelings. Yet, these feelings are not necessarily identifiable. These posts declare emotional hangovers, or the experience of feeling bowled over by the performance and not having the language to adequately articulate those feelings. The emotional hangover is an intense feeling that comes as a result of Wainwright's sensitivity, vulnerability, and bold performance style in the *Lulu* song cycle. The culmination of the visual aspects of the performance (i.e., costume, Gordon's unsettling film), the sonic aspects of the performance (i.e., the *Lulu* text and piano part), and Wainwright's interpretation of the material (i.e., complicated by grief and technical performance challenges) led some audience members to a byzantine emotional space.

¹ I received HSRB approval for an interview with Wainwright in December 2015. Wainwright's management team facilitated this interview via email in April 2016.

I propose that the emotional hangover is a concept that encompasses many thoughts, feelings, and impressions leading to a delay in the ability to articulate what one is feeling accurately. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes that affects are “attached to things, people, ideas, sensations, relations, activities, ambitions, institutions, and any number of other things, including other affects. Thus, one can be excited by anger, disgusted by shame, or surprised by joy” (19). I suggest that Sedgwick’s descriptions of affect imply affect’s dynamic nature, and posit that audiences experiencing the *Lulu* song cycle were stimulated positively and negatively by the grief, intense concentration, and fatigue that Wainwright felt during these performances. The confusing and unclear feelings fans express on the message boards are part of their emotional hangover. For some, recognizing a stellar Wainwright performance does not solely yield joy or admiration, but devastation, an inability to clearly recognize an intense emotion, or the powerlessness to articulate any feeling through language.

These nameless or misunderstood feelings manifest due to the nature of the concept itself. No matter how decorated or dressed death is, it is a difficult concept to reconcile with the all-consuming fear or misunderstanding of the unknown and unknowable. Speaking to the general enthusiasm and approval of Wainwright’s audience that night in London, one poster explains that they “didn’t hear one negative comment – a guy next to me said to his friend that he didn’t know how he felt, he was stunned beyond words” (Domino). One fan describes this performance as having “emotion... passion, and... determination,” going on to share that they were “so taken by the whole thing that I could not move from my seat” when the song cycle concluded (aliceblue).

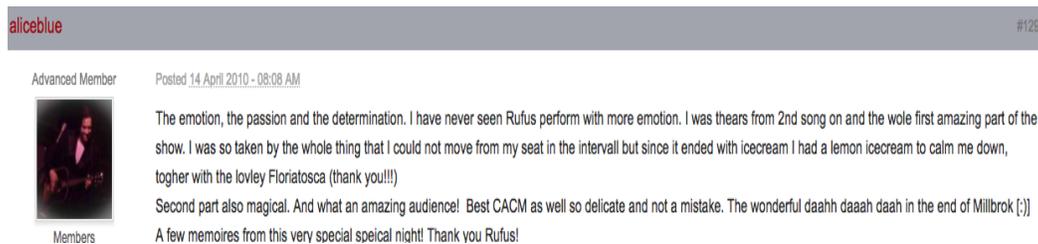


Fig. 1: aliceblue’s impassioned post after the Sadler’s Wells performance on April 13, 2010 in London.

Bowled over audience members who are left with an inability to express themselves post-performance embody the concept of queerness in relation to the circulation of affect. They walk into the theater expecting entertainment, and walk out marked by the performance they experienced, yet unable to adequately express the emotions they felt. Nameless or misunderstood feelings could potentially enhance disorientation for some, while for others orientation is merely redirected, a type of deterritorialization. The term “refrain” within affect studies links affects across “temporal contours,” allowing various “intensities” to morph, change, and extend in several directions (Bertelsen and Murphie 145-147). People reacting to multiple circulating affects likely feel many things at once rather than a single emotion or mood that encompasses them. As it takes time to sort out many different thoughts that bounce around the mind at times of stress or anxiety, audience members who followed Wainwright on his emotional journey were unable to compartmentalize the emotions after the song cycle was completed and could not simply move on. Many struggled to detach themselves from the concert experience, explaining in their posts on RWMB that they were left unsure of what to do with the emotions the performance evoked.

An audience member could choose to disengage themselves from the object (Wainwright’s emotionally vulnerable performance), thus failing to participate in the reorientation that occurs as a result of reacting to the performance. But those who engage, turn toward, or orient themselves toward Wainwright become disoriented and part of the queer space. Put another way, they share in the grief, McGarrigle’s presence and absence, and Wainwright’s act of performing for an audience while experiencing the constant turmoil that is fresh, or even waning, grief.

The Sadler’s Wells April 13 performance exemplifies how an audience member might lose their sense of emotional orientation due to an enthralling performance. “Is anyone else still a bit dazed and emotional?” a poster asks the day after the London concert (LMusic). Another individual reflects on their inability to articulate how Wainwright’s performance made them feel: “I still feel rather stunned after last night – when we came out I couldn’t quite put what I was feeling into words” (bella_vista). A different concert-goer describes Wainwright’s performance as “stunning,” noting that “Rufus was outstanding – he played and sang beautifully. It was so intense I am still a wreck this afternoon” (Nutmeg3000). The audience’s theatrical experience and Wainwright’s queer performance are entangled, contributing to the creation of aforementioned queer space that directly affects the

audience. Ann Cvetkovich writes in *An Archive of Feeling*: "Queer performance creates publics by bringing together live bodies in space, and the theatrical experience is not just about what's on stage but also about who's in the audience creating community" (9). The "public" created during *Lulu* performances is a community of audience members who together experience the transmission and circulation of affect.

This, of course, does not mean that each audience member has the same emotional experience or orients themselves positively toward Wainwright's performativity. In other words, some fans did not connect with Wainwright's *Lulu* performance, but instead perceived it as self-indulgent, incohesive, or simply boring. To be clear, affect circulating amongst an audience is not the same as emotional contagion. Ahmed acknowledges that emotional contagion is similar to the circulation of affect in a shared space, explaining that emotions involve "miscommunication, such that even when we feel we have the same feeling, we don't necessarily have the same relationship to the feeling. Given that shared feelings are not about feeling the same feeling... it is the objects of emotion that circulate, rather than the emotion..." (*Cultural Politics*, 10-11). Emotions appear to travel amongst a crowd, but *objects* in the room become sticky or laden with affect, and each person will relate to that object differently. With so many different emotions circulating within the same space, audience members were not only influenced by their own internal impressions of the performance, but the first impressions of their fellow audience members as well. Thus, one person's emotions as well as the feelings of those around them become crammed together in emotional space, making it difficult in the moment to distinguish one from another. This is the pitfall of the emotional hangover—intense joy might mingle with intense loathing, masking both and resulting in a confounded affect.

The relationality of emotion is the central focal point in regard to orientation or disorientation within space. In other words, emotions such as excitement, sadness, happiness, or anxiety travel through the *Lulu* audience in performance space, but Wainwright's grief and pain (being the object) is what becomes sticky. A fan that also attended the Glasgow performance reflects that the London performance was "brave, honest, and moving... which left me quite stunned and reflective" (samboss). A Sadler's Wells attendee shares that the performance affected their emotional connection to Wainwright's music: "My love for Rufus has expanded to new places after last night, I'm still on a high from the concert and can't seem to get out of it.... I have no more words" (mariemjs). Audience members who relate

to his grief and pain orient themselves positively toward him but are also suspended in their ability to totally process the performance. The emotional hangover confounds, likely temporarily, the lasting impact of the performance, giving an overall impression of a feeling rather than a crystal-clear reaction.

“He is a tit!”: Disorientation and Ugly Feelings

The disorientation, or failed orientation, toward Wainwright’s emotional state is the result of a person not feeling as if they belong where they are currently situated, whether in a particular space or hegemonic culture at large. For Wainwright’s less enthused audience members, their disorientation directly related to Wainwright’s grief-influenced music and the affect circulating within the performance space that made so many other fans empathize with his loss and pain. Not every fan loved *Lulu*, and those who were displeased with the album enthusiastically critiqued it on RWMB. Negative responses, however, indicate more than not enjoying the music; these comments show that audience members did not value how it was performed (as a song cycle with conceptual visual components), the restraint that Wainwright asked of the audience, or the mood of the first half of the show overall.

Resistance to the circulation of affect in the performance space revealed itself in myriad ways, but often came across most clearly in fans’ blunt reactions to the performance. A perplexed fan tries to find the word to adequately describe the live experience: “If I’m totally honest... the playlist of tracks from start to finish was hard to ‘enjoy’ being the best word I can find. [...] [W]hen he played the last note I was relieved knowing it was over” (Anto37x). Though this individual’s entire post is not wholly negative, the prevailing theme is that *Lulu* is not a gratifying collection of songs to sit through, does not mesh with the public image of Wainwright as charismatic, and the second half of the show (which employed “normal” pop/rock performance practice that encourages audience participation and enthusiasm) was what people paid to see. The fan’s comment thus represents a turn away from Wainwright (the object in mourning) and a failure to empathize as other audience members had. Similarly, a Los Angeles audience member bemoans the structure of the song cycle and the rigidity it brings to the performance space, saying that they were “not a huge fan of this show. The no-applause thing is a bit too much, it’s very uncomfortable and I felt like going to sleep due to the lack of audience participation” (xgunther). A common complaint about Wainwright’s decision to perform *Lulu* as a classical song cycle is that the prohibition of applause was jarring.

This decision left a lot of fans, particularly those not well-versed in classical performance practice, asking why a popular artist who loves attention and admiration would ask audiences not to praise his performance.

The refusal to accept his performance practice is precisely where the friction between bodies oriented toward and away from Wainwright's affect exists. While examples of fan comments up to this point have suggested overwhelming alliance with Wainwright's affect, and even empathetic and sympathetic feelings, audience members who failed to turn toward Wainwright react negatively and see the performance as an expression of hubris, self-indulgence, or even disrespect toward an audience's time and money. At a performance in Birmingham, England, which many forum members agree was one of Wainwright's best, a very disappointed individual shares their thoughts: "Looking at the sad faces around me, I know I'm not on my own making these comments. Perhaps others will follow with their cmmnts [*sic*]. It was a self indulged [*sic*] narcissistic performance. I go to be entertained and this time I wasn't" (lashurst). This person's play on the phrase "sad faces" is particularly biting given the thematic material of *Lulu* and the publicity surrounding Wainwright's grief over the death of his mother. Fans who react unfavorably may not have aligned themselves with similar emotions to Wainwright's or other audience members' affects, but they prove that affect worked on them within the performance space. Whereas they expected to spend an enjoyable, relaxing evening listening to Wainwright's music, *Lulu's* melodrama stressed out, bored, or enraged these fans.

Rather than embracing the change and attempting to relate to the affect in some way, negative fan reactions imply that some individuals went the opposite direction, echoing Sedgwick's description of affects being attached to other affects. In the above examples, fans attach disappointment and sarcasm to Wainwright's grief and other audience members' empathy or sympathy. They did not have tender or sentimental feelings but are unmoved or disgusted that they did not get what they signed up for (i.e, an entertaining night of song, chatter, and well-known favorites). For them, the affect transmitted "sticks" to them, but is attached to ugly feelings or sensations. Some of these undesirable feelings may in fact be related to loss, grief, or pain, but these individuals' resistance to vulnerability transforms whatever they are relating to in their minds to outwardly projected displeasure. Sedgwick's concept of "beside" within space sheds light on the murky concept of circulating affect that translates to strong or confusing feelings as described above. For Sedgwick, "beside" "compris[es] a wide range of desiring, identifying,

representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations” (170). The notion of “beside” within queer space bonds individuals who experience intense, though not necessarily similar or even identical, emotional reactions to the affect in the performance space. The shared experiences of Wainwright’s audience members yielded moments of recognition with the affective object so powerful that they stuck with these individuals well into the next day or possibly longer.

An angry audience member who attended the Ipswich performance posts several negative views: describing the show as “rubbish,” noting that they walked out of the performance; lobbing thinly veiled insults at other posters on the thread; and referring to Wainwright as “Mr. Wainwright Jr,” a dig at Wainwright’s folk-singer father, Loudon Wainwright III. “Mr. Wainwright Jr” may have been an honest error, though his belittling comments about Wainwright’s songwriting suggest otherwise. This poster’s strong dislike for the performance, the artist, and the online community are apparent in the initial post: “Rufus’ dad was right - He IS a tit man - well he is a tit!!!...Well done to the heckler who repeatedly pleaded for him to ‘just sing his songs’. But I had better things to do with my time than listen to caterwailing [*sic*]. How disappointing” (Emperor).² This outright resistance to the group affects in Birmingham and Ipswich exemplifies how some audience members experienced disorientation despite their choice to attend the performance. For these people, the song cycle performance failed to cohere as other performances had, and thus became unrecognizable.



Fig. 2: Emperor’s scathing review of the April 29, 2010 Ipswich, UK performance.

² The song “Rufus is a Tit Man” was written by Wainwright’s father, Loudon Wainwright III; it appeared on the elder Wainwright’s 1975 album, *Unrequited* (Columbia Records).

Further, the pervasive “stickiness” of this type of affect is not a value judgment, and thus is not only associated with positive orientation. As several fans expressed, the discomfort and disappointment of the performance affected audience members as intensely as those who had an extremely memorable and emotionally powerful experience. Positive or negative, enjoyable or miserable, audiences had an emotional reaction to Wainwright’s performance night after night, city after city. Men and women were left with the “stickiness” of Wainwright’s gutsy and, at times, fragile performance, emphasizing the power that emotional vulnerability has cross-culturally. Disoriented audience members rejected the emotional engagement one needed to comprehend the song cycle as a narrative that was born of trauma, drama, and the fearlessness to confront death directly. Yet, in the end, the performance still succeeded in moving them.

Conclusion

Audiences all over the world connect with Wainwright’s performances in ways that foster a perceived personal connection with him. *Lulu* evoked empathy through Wainwright’s careful and vulnerable performances of grief. Moreover, the circulation of affect within the performance space influenced audience members’ relationship to Wainwright’s emotional expression on stage. Some fans readily and willingly opened their hearts and minds to Wainwright’s performance, finding themselves stunned and wading through a muddled collection of feelings. Emotionally hungover, these fans lost the ability to adequately express themselves and define their *Lulu* experience. Such inadequacy resulted, in part, because affect clung to everyone in the room, knitting contrasting emotional reactions together and leaving strong but ill-defined impressions on individuals. Fans who utterly rejected Wainwright’s performance, disorienting themselves from his performance practice and musical narrative of grief, contributed to shifting the mood of the musical community and unsettling the performance space as a whole. Those who turned away from Wainwright’s emotional expressions left the performance closed off and unwilling to engage with the feelings the performance evoked.

Digital fan forum engagement allowed audience members who witnessed Wainwright’s emotional vulnerability to express how *Lulu* resonated with or repelled them. In a culture that fixates on online identities, recognizing that

emotional pain affects people both online and offline is a step toward reconciling the relationship between lived experience and temporality. Just as grief is a long-term journey, the emotional side effects of a musical performance that stir up memories, experiences, and feelings cannot be simply or quickly catalogued and forgotten. Artists such as Wainwright draw upon intense, scary feelings to express painful, traumatic, or uncomfortable emotions using musical performance to connect with as many people as possible. Audiences who engage with the performance are left to grapple with that which they may not understand, a test of empathy, introspection, and vulnerability in the sometimes isolating digital age.

There is value in this process. Attempting to understand the intricacies, hierarchies, and identities that exist within a musical fandom gestures toward recognizing and negotiating difference that is mirrored in society. Carrying “sticky feelings” and sharing emotional responses online encourages individuals to engage and interact with people who might otherwise never speak to them in everyday life. As people increasingly disengage in public spaces, focusing their attention on their digital devices through headphones, online debate and discussion creates an opportunity for people to explore their humanity and interact with strangers without having to reveal themselves. This safety net is particularly useful for the exploration of subjects that are difficult to discuss, and in deconstructing stereotypical perceptions.

To this end, RMWB is a model of digital safe space in which fans can present unabashed responses without suffering combative abuse from internet trolls. In a small but significant way, the fan forum elevates human fragility and emotional vulnerability, subtly encouraging visitors to connect with one another.

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Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs in Print and Film: Imaginations, Catastrophes, and the Being-with of Being

MIKE PIERO

“There are no more natural catastrophes: There is only
a civilizational catastrophe that expands every time.”

—Jean-Luc Nancy, *After Fukushima*

This article sketches some of the narrative, visual, and ideological tensions between the print and film versions of *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* in how they disparately appeal to “imagination” in an era of ever-expanding, networked catastrophe(s). With over forty years in print, Judi and Ron Barrett’s *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* (1978)—hereafter *Cloudy*—and Phil Lord and Christopher Miller’s film adaptation (2009) tell tall tales of food falling from the sky. While the book still captures the imagination of children and adults, the *Cloudy* film, its entertainment value notwithstanding, functions to restrict the imagination of the child-viewer by refusing the pleasure of suspending disbelief, and thus forecloses imaginative capacities for rethinking the world and its problems. This article analyzes how the texts differ in portraying natural disasters and demonstrates that this popular culture text perhaps does a disservice to our world as we face the incoming natural disaster of climate change.

Through its narrative reworkings and adaptation, the cinematic *Cloudy* conflates the book’s emphasis on what I refer to throughout as “unproductive imagination” with a productive imagination centered around neoliberal innovation

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and commodified invention. The film also illustrates that the story's natural catastrophe is more far reaching as it involves interconnected economic, political, technological, cultural, social, and geographical networks, producing networked catastrophes. In this article, I trace changes from the print to film version through a series of tensions between shared imagination and individualistic invention; between *being-with* and *being of*; and between neoliberal capitalism and unproductive imagination. My intent is to show how these tensions foreground the need for imagination uncoupled from current socio-economic determination with the capacity to imagine new relations, positions, and political paradigms more closely aligned to just relations among beings, whether human or otherwise.

These changes document the historical changes in social relations occurring today, more specifically the increasingly technological mediation of social life. The grand narratives of techno-scientific progress under late capitalism stifle the unproductive imagination of childhood experience. Without attempting to fetishize imagination, I consider unproductive imagination and the ability to think new worlds and realities into existence toward more just social relations to be the best chance humanity has to counter the neoliberal commodification of everything, including all aspects of culture and thought (Harvey 47, 165). In a world that has fashioned technology as its new mode of existence, people become entangled in an environment of ever-expanding networked catastrophes (Nancy, *After* 34). The differences between the print and film version indicate tensions in how the texts frame the changing landscape of social relationships and their impact on shared imagination, which includes unproductive imagination. Drawing upon critical theory, Marxist thought, post-structuralist semiology, and phenomenology, along with Jean-Luc Nancy's "singular plural" ontology, I navigate these tensions to understand the nuances present in this particular film adaptation.

The Barretts' *Cloudy* continues the imaginative religious tradition of raining food through a much-loved bedtime story that a grandfather tells his grandchildren the night after a breakfast mishap causes one of the pancakes he has prepared on a Saturday morning—"Pancake morning" (1)—to fly through the air and land upon young Henry's head. The laughter enjoyed by the family after the flapjack incident—who "all laughed, even Grandpa" (3)—ushers the reader of this framed narrative from a deceptively simple domestic scene to the tall-tale world of Chewandswallow, where food just falls from the sky. After the heavenly

food menu becomes a threat, the residents of the small town must abandon their homeland and migrate to a new coastal town that welcomes these refugees.

Food falling from the sky—reminiscent of the narrative of God’s providence for the starving Israelites in Exodus—requires an imaginative suspension of disbelief as well as the self-control to resist the temptation to “explain” everything.¹ The bedtime story of Chewandswallow, and the children’s experience of suspending disbelief, later transforms their perception of the sun rising over a snowy hill: “we thought we saw a giant pat of butter at the top, and we could almost smell mashed potatoes” (29). This imagery illustrates how narrative iconography enables new ways of seeing. Every thought is a “virtual reality,” able to “oppose reality” through its imaginative constitution (Schaeffer x). The overarching problem taken up in this essay is how the potential for imaginative creation is largely lost in the film adaptation, and what that communicates about the social and cultural changes since the original children’s book was published.²

Shared Imagination and Individual Invention

The film adaptation of *Cloudy* begins with a harmony of stringed instruments and choral voices moving toward a crescendo that creates a mood of opportunity and progress, and includes this narration: “Have you ever felt that you were a bit different, like you had something unique to offer the world if you could just get people to see it? Then you know exactly how it felt...to be me.” The cultural script governing the film’s opening moment deals with the lonely, isolated child-scientist Flint Lockwood, who wants to change the world through his inventions and innovations.³ From the opening moment, the film overwrites the book’s communal engagement, favoring a strictly individualistic positioning of the scientist who invents alone. Flint’s mom, who dies early in the film, encourages

¹ Like Barrett’s framed narrative, the Biblical narrative of manna functions to frame the forty-year period the Israelites spent in the wilderness. The connotative meaning and mythology surrounding this falling food has captured the imagination of scientists, artists, worshippers, and scholars for several millennia. Food falling from the sky—whether imaginary, misunderstood, or otherwise known—presents a space for one to think and imagine what else might also be possible (Wooley 175).

² A few thoughts developed throughout this essay appeared in a short, occasional piece published in the *MediaCommons Field Guide* in 2016. See Piero “Cloudy.”

him by saying, “The world needs your originality, Flint” after one of his experiments—spray-on shoes—goes terribly wrong. Laughter, however, in the film is condemned to isolation, public humiliation, and human-robot relations (as in Flint’s simian lab assistant, Steve, who speaks via a robotic voice modulation gadget). Gone is the representation of laughter as a shared, social solidarity. In the book, the family shares laughter, making it part of a narrative frame that emphasizes play. The playful laughter of the flapjack incident opens the narrative, and the book closes with the playful activity of the family sledding in the snow in a playful state happening on the threshold between reality/fiction: they reimagine the sledding hill and sunrise as a mound of mashed potatoes with a pat of butter atop it. The child-reader is invited by the book to imagine a world that does not exist, to imagine with others, and to refashion the world around them through the playfulness of fiction.

For the child-viewers of the film, they construct meaning in a different way. Wolfgang Iser discusses narrative gaps as open spaces for literary readers to construct meaning imaginatively (280-281). Iser calls this phenomenon “the virtual dimension of the text” that occurs when text and the reader’s imagination collide to produce meaning in those narrative spaces that require the reader to fill in the gaps (284). These “gaps” can also be conceived as invitations to read and construct meaning. The primary invitation in the *Cloudy* film is to follow an isolated, lonely, and individual scientist who, in a sense, is very imaginative, though such imagination takes a much different form.

The film replaces the book’s invitation to imagine and play with material and market-driven innovation. Flint uses science not to imagine a possible future but to receive social acclaim for a profitable, public good. Unproductive imagination involving defamiliarization, daydreaming, and play (*paidia*, not *ludus*) is replaced by innovation and invention subjugated to three largely invisible demands (Caillois 14). First, Flint’s “imaginative” inventions must meet the demands of market capitalism, like when the film positions the spray-on shoes as meeting the need of an epidemic of untied shoes amongst his peers. Secondly, imagination in the film often figures as improving already existing objects in the adult world, hindering the imaginative and demiurgic machinations of children who play with linguistic signs as their capacity for thought develops in the sociocultural realm (Vygotsky 94; Bathes, *Mythologies* 54). Thirdly, imagination is confined to the realm of technology, and which points the viewer to technology as the primary means of solving social problems. Gone is the invitation present in the book to

imagine a world that does not (yet) exist, or even that could not exist. Gone is the shared experience of such imagination during a bedtime story, replaced with the starkly individual pursuit of “changing the world” through productive, individual, and techno-scientific inventions. Imagination, in short, is condemned in the film to the adult world of objects, institutions, discourses, and problems.

It comes as no surprise, then, that the imaginative story in which food magically falls from the sky becomes reformulated into a more individualistic and pseudo-scientific narrative. Individual invention requires reliance on facts as depicted in *Cloudy*, with sensory observation and bodily-rooted perception pushed to the background. The film presents viewers with a very tangible, probable situation in part to “entertain” adults who take their kids to see the movie. The film explains how food falls from the sky because audiences have grown to expect the “scientific” explanation, the unknown made known, and the comforting resolution of ambiguity: in the “restless rush of facts,” as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer write, “no scope is left for the imagination” (127). The film even erases an economic or environmentally sound reason for the sardine market crash (like systematic depletion due to fishery exploitation [Zwolinski and Demer]), preferring instead the whimsical notion that people suddenly found sardines “super gross.” This explanation indicates a hidden anxiety and preoccupation with capitalist cycles of production, consumption, image, and resiliency. Tastes change, and while that becomes a problem in the town of Swallow Falls, those changes present new markets and opportunities on which the town might capitalize.

The *Cloudy* film subjugates imagination to the universalizing, self-legitimizing, self-propagating, and self-reproducing “grand narratives” of Enlightenment thought and modernity, mediated by, in Jean-François Lyotard’s words, “success [as] the only criterion of judgment technoscience will accept” (18). Always afforded the role of “delivering” people from suffering, technoscience has developed an aura in its discourse that is at once collective—scientific advancement will save us—and individualistic. Flint embodies the faith placed in individualistic progress via his isolated work as a child-scientist. The book’s emphasis of shared, communal relations that mediate an imaginative life—from “Pancake morning” and bedtime stories to “sledding with Grandpa”—becomes reduced to an individual, techno-scientific pursuit that the town’s community can either despise, as occurs early in the film in response to Flint’s inventions, or embrace, as they eventually embrace the food-producing machine.

To be sure, the representation of “science” in *Cloudy* is thoroughly unjust to science proper, as the scientific process is often collaborative and not isolated in the ways depicted in the film. Whether the representation matches “reality” or not is less important than precisely how the film’s representation both expresses and influences the cultural zeitgeist of lives lived as technological subjects and of the faith placed in grand narratives that come to resemble religious belief more closely than any scientist would ever admit. This “image” of technoscience—one illustrative example among many aimed at garnering faith and trust in the idea of advancement and development—erases the reality that scientific research is largely contingent on reproducibility, self-interrogation, and resolution of conflicting data (and the emergence of new data). This representation of technoscience, however, also brings about a comfort and ease within viewers at the thought that science has the world, nature, and uncertainty under human control. The cinematic world of *Cloudy* positions the viewer as necessarily complicit in progress-driven projects of modernity.

The opening question posed to the audience of “Have you ever felt that you were a bit different...?” works to indoctrinate children to see themselves for their use-value in a capitalist structure and prepare them to experience life with and as technological objects. Roland Barthes addresses this very dynamic in *Mythologies*, writing that “faced with this world of faithful and complicated objects, the child can only identify himself as owner, as user, never as creator [...] there are, for him, actions without adventure, without wonder, without joy” (53-54). Imagination is reduced to neoliberal innovations that result in material or non-material commodities for consumption (and waste). Unproductive imagination is imagination that does not serve the market and is not tied to production/consumption, to affluence, or to some necessarily practical end. This shared, unproductive imagination has already largely been dispensed with to favor individual, materialistic invention.

This emphasis on use-value presents itself in the narrative and iconographic shifts surrounding the iconic “Jell-O sunset” scene in *Cloudy*.⁴ The scenic view of the Jell-O sunset in Barretts’ *Cloudy* is appropriated as a Jell-O castle in the film, created by Flint as a strategic move to seduce Sam Sparks (a stereotypical science “nerd” at heart turned “attractive” weather reporter). The creation and use of the food-producing machine acts as a kernel event in the film’s narrative, insofar as it

⁴ Both the book and the film narrate this scene in idiomatic American fashion by referring to commodities by their brand names instead of generic nouns, as in using “Jell-O” instead of gelatin.

signals the shift from Flint's "useless" inventions to an invention that is incredibly useful—in seduction, in resuscitating the town's livelihood, and in providing food—and redeems his past inventions. Success becomes singular, and failure is "positivized" as not only necessary to life but as part of some personal journey, at the end of which awaits a full redemption through success. Once more, the film focuses on offering a plausible explanation of the original story's kernel events. The very essence of explanation involves imposing singular meanings that foreclose the polysemic potential of the text, which reach the reader's imaginative capacity through the gaps in the text (Iser 285). These self-legitimizing, self-perpetrating, and self-fulfilling terms (e.g., progress, objectivity, success, factuality, etc.) of techno-scientific advancement promise advances to help meet all human needs and usher in a more just, equitable world (Žižek, *Violence 2*). And it is precisely these facts that offer the false comfort of a world more progressive and under "our" control. For this reason, the film version of *Cloudy* bases its narrative structure on explanation of "scientific" fact, instead of on imagination, even while it proffers itself as an expression of imaginative innovation.

Imagining Shared Ways of Being: *Being-with* and *Being of*

The film's narrative explains food falling from the sky through Flint's technological achievement of inventing a machine that turns water into food. The failure of the town's capitalist economy leaves the city on the brink of financial ruin, until technology saves the day and provides "hope." For children watching, the film heralds technology and science as saviors and safe places in which children can place their hope. Flint's food machine gets accidentally launched into the sky, which Sam describes as "manna from heaven," made possible not by God this time but by scientific progress. Only after Flint's machine changes Swallow Falls' weather patterns (raining quintessential American fare including hamburgers, hotdogs, steaks, and even scoops of ice cream) does the town get renamed Chewandswallow as a part of a marketing campaign set in motion by the ambitious mayor who desires to court tourism revenue to advance his political career.

Even the name of the town must be made logical and explained in ways amendable to adult audiences who purchase film tickets/rentals/discs. In the book version, the imagined world is named Chewandswallow from the beginning.

Readers, like the children in the narrative, are invited to imagine this imaginary world that could never actually exist, whereas in the film, that suspension of disbelief is foreclosed by the film's rampant explanations that supplant the imaginative play of the original story. The tension speaks to an important difference in ontology or the nature of reality between the book and film narratives, one I characterize, following Jean-Luc Nancy, as between "being-with," on the one hand, and a "being of" on the other hand (*Being* 33-35). The being-with of being emerges in a moment of close contact instead of a permanent social organization predicated upon the fundamental split of self/other. *Being-with* involves relation built upon the paradoxical foundation of existence as always being simultaneously singular and plural. *Being of* relegates Being to a relationship of self and other within a network of various people, animals, objects, and technologies that relate to one another like nodes on a network. *Being of* imposes, at bottom, a distance and a mediated relation (instead of the contact preserved in being-with). The important difference between these two phrases has everything to do with distance and contact.

Throughout *Being Singular Plural*, Nancy makes a convincing case for an ontology that locates the origin of being beneath or before the split of self/other. *Being-with* should be understood to occur in an instant, always contingent, emergent, and situation specific. Any attempt to systematize, solidify, or permanently organize beings creates a problem. While a sense of community among a group of people, for example, is preferable to hostility and violence, this social organization ultimately creates distance among people and groups. By attempting to organize and unify, the instant of contact between singularly plural beings is forfeited for an organizational relation predicated on an essential distance. Justice, I would argue, emerges through the instant of contact between singularly plural beings, when distance is minimized. An ontology that fosters distance and not contact runs the risk of turning relationships into non-relationships.

The *Cloudy* book offers a representation of being-with in various moments throughout the narrative. The instant of shared laughter over the flapjack incident illustrates a collapsing of distance among singularly plural beings. The bedtime story of Chewandswallow begins with a visual illustration of the touch, the contact, between family members: the grandfather's arm wrapped around Henry's shoulder while the granddaughter who narrates the book, Kate, sits next to her brother, her knees held to her chest leaving her feet and ankles in contact with her

grandpa's knee. At the end of her grandpa's tall tale, Kate writes, "I remember his [Grandpa's] goodnight kiss" (27). *Being-with* is not limited to humans, and that instant of being also occurs in the shared contact in the penultimate scene between Henry and his dog sledding together. Importantly, the book maintains the essential "togetherness" of singulars, as Nancy puts it, in these instants of contact (*Being* 60-62).

These moments enable the imaginative experience of Chewandswallow, of bringing new worlds into existence. The hyphen in *being-with* signals both union and division, the paradoxical essence and experience of being singularly plural (37). These moments of contact recall and represent this ontological relation. Nancy also describes *being-with* in the context of art, particularly in how "it is the birth of a *world* (and not the construction of a system)" (*Being* 14-15, italics in original). The creation of a world in the book originates not from the grandpa's invention of the imaginary world of Chewandswallow. Instead, the birth of a world occurs in the contact shared between the grandfather and his grandchildren; this being-with enables the very possibility of imagination in ways not limited by modernity, techno-science, "progress," or other aspects of the modern world to which adults have become accustomed.

The "of" in *being of* designates the measured distance between a part and the whole, as in one person (i.e. Flint) among a whole (i.e. a town, society, "global community," et cetera). Rather than allow for the emergent instants of contact found in *being-with*, *being-of* systematizes and hardens social distances into a network of equivalent relations or relationships among various "actors." If singularly plural beings are reduced to flattened or equivocal actors on a network among various other actors, then two things happen. First, the contact zone between beings, from which justice and ethical relationships emerge, is foreclosed into a measured distance of one node's relation to other nodes on the network. This is the distance that Nancy designates with "of" in *being of*. Secondly, the flattening of social relations and voices runs the risk of further marginalizing already marginalized voices within the network, as they now must fend for themselves as mere actors on a network that is always already attuned to hegemonic discourses. That is, if all actors are equal, then the marginalized voices cannot be heard over the powerful ones.

In the *Cloudy* film, we see the distance between self/other preserved at every turn in how Flint relates to his community, and this social distance and *being of* is presented in the film as natural. The *Cloudy* book resists this distancing, and

instead offers the imaginative contact zone of a bedtime story and its narrative emphasis on specific moments shared between grandfather and grandchildren. The film erases *being-with* in favor of *being of*; this erasure is marked by Flint's isolation as a scientist and by situating the whole story around how Flint's inventions place him in relation to others in the town. These relations, then, work to propel the neoliberal ideologies that counter unproductive imagination.

The most pronounced ideological achievement in the *Cloudy* film is how the networked catastrophe establishes a sense of solidarity among the people of the town with a newfound faith in Flint, technological advancement, and science. The film presents such faith primarily through two patriarchal figures: Tim Lockwood (Flint's father) and Earl Devereaux (the town police officer). The film presents both as initially suspicious and critical of Flint, so that their acceptance of Flint and his inventions, based on their usefulness to the town, parallels neoliberalism and the commodification of imagination. Subjectivity itself becomes impossible in the sense that subjects become objects of the market, flattened actors on a larger network. These relations are typical of a *being of*, that is, of a social relation predicated on preserving (and measuring) distance. Relations with distance preserved can be measured and, therefore, fashioned into markets for exploitation and control.

The book and film versions of *Cloudy* both maintain the absence of parents—the father is inexplicably absent from the scene in the book, and the mother is absent from most of the movie, sans her inspirational words to young Flint. The absent father and somewhat stoic but kind-hearted grandfather in Barretts' book, combined with the "simple fisherman" who isn't "good with his feelings" in the movie, both trade on the same tradition of performing the expected codes of masculinity: austerity, absence, and silence in family settings, learned behaviors, to be sure (Ouellette par. 7). By the end of the film, Flint's father needs the monkey's thought translator to express his love for his son. The film positions the social problem of absent fathers and toxic masculinity that prevents intimacy among men as being remedied by technological mediation, which suggests a technological deterministic solution. Thus, Flint's technological innovations are proffered to the audience as a means not only to improve society, but to improve the family unit as well.

In the film, Flint's primary antagonists are the patriarchal figures of family (i.e. his father) and the Law (i.e. the police officer). Perhaps the film positions family and Law against science, or at the very least as offering some resistance to

science. Flint is only ever reconciled with both after achieving “success.” His technological success earns him a place among the men in the film, a representation of masculinity that reinforces the role that the “libidinization of gadgets” figures in codes of masculinity (Adorno, *Stars* 100). What Adorno describes concerning the psychosocial effects of gadgets should also be articulated as being an activity wrapped up with patriarchy and masculinity. The circulation of gadgets within markets and industries are dominated by men, and this circulation becomes ways of relating among men—beginning with male children—that instill a penchant for aggressive control of the other. This aggressive control becomes the central type of social relationship in the film.

The relations of people to people, people to environment, and people to (nonhuman) animals all change in striking ways from the print to film versions of *Cloudy*. Without a technological savior-figure like Flint, the book depicts the town working together once the food storms overpower them, and they build ships out of peanut butter sandwiches with sails of Swiss cheese and pizza to reach a new land. In the film, the people manage to escape the food disaster, although the calm solidarity of townsfolk in the book is replaced by mass panic. The real reason for their salvation, however, is Flint’s selfless and risky act of destroying the machine, which allows the inhabitants to return to their town. Within the networked catastrophe, technoscience becomes the only hope for salvation from the disaster that the very same technology created. The relations among people in the film are removed from a *being-with* in communal solidarity and replaced by a *being of* in which distance, rather than contact, mediates social relations.

Neoliberal Capitalism and Unproductive Imagination

The book and film versions of *Cloudy* take two different mimetic approaches to representing reality, approaches that map onto Erich Auerbach’s paradigm of mimetic technique. The film version offers explanations for everything. The viewer is left with a narrative that fully explains 1) the science and technology that causes food to fall from the sky, 2) the human and bureaucratic control over nature that reverses the book’s relation to nature, and 3) ultimately the human failures (or at least some of them) that cause the uncontrolled situation. Because its narrative is oriented toward realism, the details of Flint’s lab, his experiments, his calculations, and relations to others in the town are detailed and foregrounded

for the audience to leave few narrative gaps. Why Flint must be a scientist, why he and his father are distant, and why he has trouble fitting in with his peers are all clearly explained. The viewers know how he feels; they know his insecurities; they know his triumphs and failures. The audience has little need for imagination when everything is explained.

Instead of an attempt at accurate realism, the book involves an openness rather than an overt invitation: read and imagine what another world could be like (Borradori 128-9; Derrida 361). The book offers its readers a chance to defamiliarize the world they have grown used to and instead imagine a world outside the technological and economic mediation of public and private lives (Shklovsky 12-13). In other words, the book offers children a glimpse into a life of art, which invokes the process of perception. For unproductive imagination, the process matters, not just the end result, and the process of art is a process of *jouissance*, of painful-pleasure; perhaps better written in light of the singular plural origin of being, as Nancy does, as “*co-jouissance*” (*Being* 75). The narrative gaps that Iser describes in his phenomenological approach enable Barthes’ *jouissance* of the text to emerge: the pleasure of reading *Cloudy* comes precisely from its activation (and even disruption) of the reader’s imaginative capacity rather than the imposition of meaning or explanation upon the reader (Barthes, *Pleasure* 14).

By means of its framed narrative, Barretts’ *Cloudy* leaves readers with more questions than answers. Where is the father? How did food come to fall from the sky? Does the Grandpa live with them, or does he just visit on the weekends? And so on. In a similar way to what Auerbach identifies as an Old Testament style of mimetic representation, *Cloudy* leaves much unsaid, obscure, unexpressed, and unexplained. Unlike the defined and revealed details characteristic of secular texts oriented to realism, which Auerbach illustrates with a close reading of Homer’s *Odyssey*, Biblical texts orient the reader to make interpretations through the narrative’s gaps, absence of details, and ambiguity (13-14, 20). Similarly, the *Cloudy* book offers the reader narrative gaps, a lack of detail, and thus a space to consider the universality of “unproductive imagination” that operates according to a principle of *being-with* and promotes the co-creation of virtual realities and new worlds. The importance of imagination is the historical “truth” of *Cloudy* that the film adaptation forecloses. While the film version is oriented toward realism with a plot that “makes sense” to the audience and explains the gaps in the original story, the book stands apart as a striking example of how the sublime and the

everyday become inseparable, as Auerbach notes about Biblical narratives (22-23). Despite the explanations, logic, and illuminations of the *Cloudy* film, the book remains more influential in its orientation to the “truth” of the humanimal capacity to invent worlds, stories, fictions, and signs out of nothing.

In the modern world, imagination is increasingly subjugated in American popular media, business culture, and cultural scripts to a use-value and exchange-value, which nullifies the beauty and pleasure of a slow, imaginative process (Vico 378). This is not to say that imagination should not serve useful projects—on the contrary, it always has—but that an ontology of *being-with* necessitates the “indeterministic processes of imaginative generativity” that belong to humans to “provide a ground for claims of freedom” (Pitman 369). Phrased another way, “unproductive imagination” is important because it provides a generative space for thought and artistic investigation outside the confines of deterministic reality. Imagination allows one to think outside of political paradigms and mimetic realism, outside a system that says food cannot just fall from the sky, and to suppose the potential “what if.” If a human, who is always acted upon by deterministic forces like technology and capitalism, loses the ability to imagine from nothing, how could that person possibly live in any way towards others except under conditions of unfreedom? Unfreedom is experienced when one cannot imagine oneself outside the roles and subject positions in which one is initiated. Imagination is not limited though to thinking oneself only outside of deterministic positions; it also offers a means to think oneself into the lives of others, or, to empathize.

Empathy, however, does not always trade on the practical, productive, or profitable. If “we have become all too practical” as Adorno writes, this occurs because “anything that is not reified, cannot be counted and measured, ceases to exist” (*Minima Moralia* 44, 47).⁵ Techno-scientific advancement creates and cures the problems, yet it only takes credit for the cure, perpetuating itself as the limitless source of power to cure all biological, social, and economic ills. Driven

⁵ Within the post-Fordist, information economy-driven society, “there is nothing in reality that can be encountered in its pure state; everything has already been formed, transformed, reflected by man” (Levinas 209). The need for measurement, data, and counting—besides its age-old function as a social mechanism of control (Porter 49)—also takes on a new immediacy through the movement of technology, which works as a gradual process, antithetical to the movement of science, which is “associated with periods of explosion” (Lotman 88). I have discussed the history and relation of measurement, counting, and narrative gaps in “Dialogical Numbers: Counting Humanimal Pain in J.M. Coetzee’s *Elizabeth Costello*.”

by networked technological advancement and supported by scientific breakthroughs, late capitalism claims for itself the tools and processes to fix the problems that it unintentionally creates, a claim reinforced by the *Cloudy* movie at every turn. The devastating decisions made by those in power—Flint’s experiments and the mayor’s political decisions—are largely remedied by the requisite faith in technoscientific advancement: Flint’s scientific work is the only hope for the city. The manna from heaven once provided by God is replaced with the gadgets produced by humans. The empathetic potential that lies in the context of being-with is lost.

The cultural logic and narrative emphasis on placing one’s trust in a cultural institution, however, seems to differ very little between the religious and technoscientific demands for trust and faith. To say so is neither to conflate science and religion, nor by any means to argue for a return to the religious. I suggest that a similar, structural parallel can be drawn between the two in how they figure in the public imagination.⁶ This is the promise at the end of the film: though the thirst for fame and profit resulted in some problems, mainly at the hands of a corrupt politician, technological innovation will always save the day, allowing in this case the citizens to return to the town and not have to migrate to another city. Innovation and invention of material commodities requires the maintenance of disbelief in everything except neoliberal capitalism, not ever allowing for its slightest suspension, or the contact of *being-with* that could suggest other directions for social organization.

In the film, the catastrophic food-weather events result directly from the “misuse” of Flint’s technology, which ultimately releases the grand narratives of technological progress and science themselves from any responsibility in the Anthropocene. While Flint, the townspeople, and the mayor are all complicit in this disaster, the film’s narrative casts blame for the disaster singularly upon the mayor. Personal ambition—that dangerous cousin to the individuality proffered at the beginning of the story as admirable—becomes the danger to progress. The film redeems capitalism through technological advancement, individualism, and heroic self-sacrifice saving the day. When the machine creates natural disasters of

⁶ My argument here parallels a common phenomenon in ideological warfare: a group often becomes similar to the very thing it struggles and fights against, often unknowingly so. Slavoj Žižek details this well in *The Year of Living Dangerously* (2012) in a section that addresses how religious and secular activists often both end up sacrificing their own values for which they fight (religious experience for the former, freedom and democracy for the latter).

food, Flint must destroy it, which he does at risk to his own life and with help from his earlier spray-on shoes invention that clog the machine. While the audience is momentarily led to believe that Flint dies in the food machine's explosion, he ends up being saved by another earlier creation—his genetically engineered rat-birds, which up to that point were seen as a nuisance, another failed invention. The ending thus effects a full redemption of Flint as an individual and of the scientist's production process as the authentic location of hope.

The mayor—whose corruption and greed are located visually in his morbidly obese body, which grows excessively larger in each scene—figures as “the corrupt politician,” a Girardian scapegoat figure and common rhetorical trope of populist rhetoric. This trope becomes important because corruption is atomized at the level of the individual and essentialized as a problem of bodily desires not kept in check. The mayor alone is punished, sailing off into the ocean on his bread boat (which all the townsfolk in Barrett's book use to flee the town) and self-destructively eating it. The film's conclusion illustrates how neoliberal capitalism appropriates critiques against itself, and against the political systems that support its economic policies; in this case, representative democracy.⁷ The rejection and distrust of politicians and political institutions in the U.S. are reduced to one idea: this all could have been avoided if it had not been for one, greedy, corrupt politician. The mayor's corruption serves as the twofold signifier for the cultural crisis of exploitation and greed that is seen within the spectacle as disrupting the otherwise peaceful community and the collective violence of corrupt politicians against the middle class (Girard).

The *being-with* of Being—the shared consciousness at the origin of Being—runs the risk of being replaced by a pseudo-solidarity (even under the guise of “community”) of ends and means (Nancy, *After* 32). Imagination, for instance, becomes a mere shadow of its former demiurgic glory, reduced simply to the equivalency achieved between X's imaginative capacity to create material or immaterial commodities and Y's capacity to do the same, all monitored,

⁷ David Harvey provides a succinct history of the rise of neoliberalism, citing its emphasis on self-regulating markets and personal freedom (19-21). Imbricated with neoliberal thought is the concept of “late capitalism,” a term originating from the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory and expanded by Fredric Jameson in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. It designates the phase of capitalism from the 1950s onward that is characterized by globalized business, mediatized culture and relations, automation, military domination, and systems of economic and political organization that are “late” because they are inherently unsustainable.

measured, and calculated (Žižek, “Seeds” 272). This is the problem Swallow Falls encounters when their sardine market crashes and the mayor seeks to regain that lost prestige. It is easy to see how caring for human needs gets lost in the process. The end of the world—a common apocalyptic trope in popular culture today—is easier to envision and accept than alternatives to capitalism or the narratives of progress. Slavoj Žižek argues that “[w]hat today’s radical left needs are such ‘seeds of imagination’ that would enable it not only to provide a new vision of a Communist society, but also to break out of the terrifying impoverishment of our power of imagination in our late capitalist society” (“Seeds” 268). More difficult to discern, of course, are what “seeds of imagination” could prompt revolutionary new ways of political and economic organization that take into account the *being-with* of Being. Such was not found in this film, which speaks to the children who shall inherit this world.

Climaxes: Beginnings Yet to Come In-Between-Us

In the film, what is lost is the time to think, consider, reflect, ruminate, and imagine. The book preserves the gaps needed for imaginative interaction with the text. These gaps have the effect of slowing down the reader, an aesthetic certainly possible in children’s cinema as well.⁸ The loss of unproductive imagination runs the serious risk of subjugating the abstract to the practical, the latter of which easily becomes complicit in the neoliberal processes of production, consumption, waste, and destruction. Marshall McLuhan identifies this risk in his concept of *being-in-the-technologically-mediated-world*, which, to Marcelo Vieta and Laureano Ralon’s critical attention, must involve an accounting of sensory impact—or how particular sensory perceptions are foreclosed or dimmed—by the medium (41-42). Another way to conceive of the “unproductive imagination” needed is as a full use of sensory perception, which a slow aesthetic helps cultivate, as in the “changescapes” that Ross Gibson describes: those artworks that function as systems when the complexity, mutability, and beauty are “marshaled by deliberate human care for mainly contemplative or aesthetic ends

⁸ The difference here between slow and quick aesthetics can also be observed in the differences between Hélène Giraud and Thomas Szabo’s *Miniscule: Valley of the Lost Ants* (2013) and Eric Darnell and Tim Johnson’s *Antz* (1998). The cinematic technique differs in speed, but the narrative gaps present in *Miniscule* create the space for the life-affirming practice of “slow reading” to occur (Nietzsche 5).

rather than pragmatic purposes” (11). Sensory perceptions (McLuhan), bodily-rooted imaginations (Vico), and changescapes (Gibson) are all various ways of thinking about how the *being-with* of Being requires an attention to the instant, the moment, and our place within it.

The imaginative work needed now requires time to reflect; time unshackled for the constraints, pressures, and anxieties of labor. Here it is worth considering what Lyotard writes: “In a world where success means gaining time, thinking has a single, but irredeemable, fault: it is a waste of time” (36). Thinking—and imaginative, poetic thinking, particularly—is “actually and above all the force of resistance, alienated from resistance only with great effort” (Adorno, “Resignation” 202). Thinking rests on the ability to decide, at crucial moments, to suspend disbelief and think new worlds into existence—even eccentric ones in which manna falls mysteriously from the sky, or snow-covered hills that come to resemble mashed potatoes shared at a family meal.

Like the sardines, we face systemic depletion from climate change and other threats resulting from our modern technoscientific and neoliberal conditions. To address the Anthropocene by creating new worlds requires the resistance inherent to unproductive imagination. Despite the opening narrative of Flint’s romanticized “difference,” the audience ultimately receives a full serving of very common ideological food. Beyond the limited and limiting image of the scientist as white, male, and isolated, the film version of *Cloudy* invites us to consume media in altogether familiar ways that operate against the life-affirming imaginative processes involved in *being-with*, which is the *co-jouissance* of artistic practice, the *co-jouissance* of creating meaning in narrative gaps, and the *co-jouissance* of contact in a given moment. The very real networked catastrophe we face cannot be met without such *co-jouissance*.

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Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story?: Gendered Legacies in *Hamilton*

JESSICA SEYMOUR

Hamilton: An American Musical, written, composed by, and starring Lin-Manuel Miranda, made its Broadway debut in August 2015. Since then, *Hamilton* has won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama and a record-breaking sixteen Tony Award nominations. Miranda also received a \$625,000 MacArthur Fellowship, more commonly referred to as a “Genius Grant”. *Hamilton* has been heralded as a game-changer for Broadway musicals, starring a racially-diverse cast and supported by contemporary music styles including rap, hip hop, and jazz. It is one of the most popularly successful musicals in recent memory, inspired by the life and times of American founding-father Alexander Hamilton.

One of the key themes in the *Hamilton* musical is the concept of legacy. In historical terms, a legacy is handed down from one generation to another. Glenn Llopis writes in an article for *Forbes* that leaving a legacy should be a key concern for leaders who want to perform to the best of their ability in business: “The best leadership legacies are a consequence of success coming to those who are surrounded by people that want their success to continue.” Other authors and analysts (see Kerr, Wallace, Hunt, Galford and Maruca) write that workers can and should tailor their careers to suit the personal legacy they wish to leave behind. In a *Time* magazine interview written by JJ Abrams, Lin-Manuel Miranda stated that he has been preoccupied with legacy “since [he] was a kid”:

We have this amount of time. It’s the tiniest grain of sand of time we’re allowed on this earth. And what do we leave behind? I think that

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question has gnawed at me as long as I've been conscious. That's something that Hamilton outright states in our show and I think that's something I share with him. (Abrams)

It is important to examine the themes and issues explored and critiqued in this musical for two reasons. The first is that theatre has long been considered an important medium for social commentary (according to scholars such as Langas, Denning, and Papa), and musical theatre as a rhetorical text has attracted significant academic study (according to scholars such as Wolf, Jones, Swain, and Barnes). A strong tradition of studies exists that focus on specific musicals as case studies for theoretical criticism. Scholars have examined *Oklahoma!* for its portrayals of ethnicity and gender (Aiken 277; Cook 35), *Rent* for its portrayals of LGBTQ+ identities and cultures (Sebesta 419; Schrader 23), and of course the Broadway hit *Wicked* has attracted academic criticism from performance scholars (Wolf 1), cultural theorists (Schrader 7), and comparative literature scholars (Burger 1).

The second reason to examine this musical is the fact that its sheer popularity across demographics indicates its success in engaging with important themes and issues relevant to the audience. Popular culture is a reflective media; it engages with and explores cultural themes and trends. While *Hamilton* is a period piece, the themes of, for example, gun violence and political division are particularly significant to contemporary times, and I argue that *Hamilton* is popular because the audience has found something with which to engage. This paper examines the representations of gender and how different genders engage with legacy and power in the musical, this paper intends to examine how these concepts are considered in this particular lens. This is not to say that *Hamilton* has had the last word on this matter, but the progression of how these ideas are conceptualized helps researchers understand popular culture and society.

The *Hamilton* soundtrack/cast album allows listeners to hear each song performed by the original *Hamilton* cast. *Hamilton* is a sung-through show, so the complete narrative can be found on this album. Characterization and motivation, the plot of the narrative, and significant themes are all present in the song lyrics. The contemporary music styles of rap, hip hop, and jazz are lyrics-focused and deeply entrenched in the storytelling-through-music tradition and this contributes to the depth of the album (Barco 63; Flores 85). John Bush Jones writes that "greater numbers of Americans have always listened to popular music than regularly attend musical theatre," so incorporating popular music styles bridges the gap between the *Hamilton*

musical's historicity and the contemporary audience (318). Musical styles can also reveal character in the musical. Thomas Jefferson, for example, sings in a laid-back jazz style typical of the American south, while the Marquis de Lafayette's rap vocals are used to portray his developing mastery of the English language.

Musical themes also connect elements of the story, drawing the listener to reflect on what has come before at various stages of the narrative. Miranda employs *contrafacta* (certain melodies which are performed repeatedly with different lyrics) to draw the dramatic connections between characters and situations. Although Joseph P Swain argues that Andrew Lloyd Webber's uses of *contrafacta* in *Jesus Christ Superstar* "drastically alters the lyric to a certain melody" which creates a "less dramatic association between the melody and the action [and] a fatal weakening of the melody's dramatic function" (321). In *Hamilton*, the technique is crucially important for this musical to stimulate intra-narrative unity and support the through-lines of the legacy theme. While Stacy Wolf argues that analyses of musical theatre should examine the "total experience to understand how the pieces of a richly multivalent performance make meaning", the *Hamilton* cast album, available on iTunes, represents the most complete version of the story that is available to the largest number of consumers, and will therefore be the primary focus of this essay's analysis (5).

This essay is not concerned with author-oriented textual analysis nor is it intended to be an examination of Miranda's relationship with the concept of legacy and how this relationship may have influenced his writing. This essay is intended to reflect on how ambition and legacy are portrayed in the *Hamilton* musical, and, in particular, how the gender of the characters affects how they interact with the concept of legacy. Using a critical discourse analysis of the lyrics in the musical, this essay concludes that ambition and legacy are gendered within *Hamilton*. In *Hamilton*, with female legacies are portrayed as more philanthropic and less ultimately destructive despite being informed by the historical limitations on women at the time.

Give Us a Verse; Drop Some Knowledge!

I do not consider gender a stable, ahistorical, or placeless concept, but for the purposes of this article I will use the concept of "gender" in its Western contemporary iteration because that is the context of *Hamilton's* target audience. Gender is considered in Western culture to be a relational concept, where "masculinity" relies on a binary relationship with "femininity" (Romøren and Stephens 216; Reynolds 96; Connell 62). Of course, many

different gender identities and expressions exist in contemporary society, and this essay is not intended to enforce the gender binary. It is intended to comment on how male- and female-identifying individuals are portrayed in a specific piece of musical theatre.

When it comes to portrayals of gender in text, the context of the narrative—both in terms of when it was written and when it was set—is important. Occasionally, a text may be written after the time period in which it was set, and so characters' portrayals may be colored by nostalgia. Nostalgia has been in vogue in American musicals since the 1970s with the production of *Grease* (Jones 305). While this has allowed historical musicals like *Hamilton* to gain prominence, it has relegated female characters to predominantly supporting roles and can have a somewhat limiting effect on the types of characters and stories available to female performers in the industry (Barnes 14). The gender imbalance at the structural level could also be a factor in the gendered divide which is often seen in Broadway musicals: if producers, directors, writers, and composers are men, then it stands to reason that the musicals will privilege the masculine experience (Barnes 14).

Gender tends to be portrayed on a spectrum between very masculine and very feminine. Romøren and Stephens developed a list of “masculine” traits which are typically associated with hyper-masculinity, and although their essay was published over ten years ago, the list remains relevant:

...to be self-regarding, a physical or verbal bully, overbearing in relation to women and children, (over)fond of alcohol, violent, short-tempered, neglectful of personal appearance, hostile to difference/otherness, actually or implicitly misogynistic, sexually exploitative, insistent upon differentiated gender roles and prone to impose these on others, classist, racist, generally xenophobic, sport-focused, insensitive, inattentive when others are speaking, aimless, possessive. (220)

Romøren and Stephens write that repeated experiences condition consumers of media to associate these traits with masculinity, arguing that the presence of three or more of the traits is generally an indication that a character is performing hyper-masculinity. Female characters can also perform hyper-masculinity, though that is arguably not the case in *Hamilton*.

In *Hamilton*, the majority of male characters appear to be driven by a desire to cultivate or defend their legacies as the stories that future generations will tell about their exploits. Traditionally feminine concerns such as family

and the home are portrayed as an unnecessary distraction; as seen, for example, when Hamilton refuses to go on holiday with his family to focus on his congressional work. Although contemporary articles and books which advocate for legacy as a key component of leadership are not specifically written for men, it is perhaps telling that the majority are written by men (see, for example, the works of Jocko Willink and Leif Babin, Simon Sinek, Tim Irwin and Tim Tassopoulos, and Seth Godin). Female-written leadership manuals are often preoccupied with avoiding conflict and approaching business with an awareness that the reader may need to exercise caution in a male-dominated environment (see Chu).

In the context of the *Hamilton* musical, I argue that Hamilton is a “cultivator”; he is motivated by a desire to cultivate his legacy so that future generations will remember him. Since he comes from a family with no real legacy to speak of, he needs to build his own from the ground up. Aaron Burr, along with Hamilton’s son Philip, are “defenders” and this can be seen in their continued reference to the legacies their parents cultivated before them in the lyrics they sing. In “Wait for It,” Burr sings: “When they died they left no instructions/ Just a legacy to protect.” In “Blow Us All Away,” Philip sings: “He disparaged my father’s legacy in front of a crowd/ I can’t have that, I’m making my father proud.” This framing of legacy as something that should be protected and cultivated establishes “legacy” as a matter of personal ambition. They are not driven by philanthropic concerns. Instead, these characters are primarily concerned with perception and image. This is self-regarding behavior, which is listed as the first indicator of hyper-masculinity in Romøren and Stephens’ list.

The Masculine Ambition: I Am Not Throwing Away My Shot!

In *Hamilton*, the masculine ambition for personal legacy is portrayed as being cultivated through either wealth or military prowess. During “Right Hand Man,” Hamilton performs his desire to die on the battlefield so that his legacy will be assured:

HAMILTON: If they tell my story/ I am either gonna die on the battlefield in glory or

HAMILTON /BURR/ MULLIGAN/ LAURENS/ LAFAYETTE: Rise up!

The “rise up” in this set of lyrics refers to Hamilton’s and the rest of the male characters’ desire to move between social groups and advance themselves.

Among the male characters’ lyrics, there is a preoccupation with ensuring that their children be the ones to defend their legacies moving forward. In “The Story of Tonight,” Hamilton sings: “I may not live to see our glory/ But I will gladly join the fight/ And when our children tell our story/ They’ll tell the story of tonight”. The expectation that the children will be the ones to defend the legacies of their fathers, is in line with the patriarchal expectation of continuing male family lines.

Alexander Hamilton’s character arc is particularly preoccupied with his own legacy, as is shown through the repetition of lyrical themes in the musical’s songs, such as “I wanna build something that’s gonna outlive me.” Initially Hamilton is introduced to the audience by the rest of the cast in the opening number, when they sing not only of his origins as an orphaned, illegitimate child, but also of the legacy he will eventually leave behind: “Will they know you rewrote the game?/ The world will never be the same”. “My Shot,” Hamilton’s first big number, focuses on Hamilton’s desire to rise above the circumstances he was born in and give the world something to remember him by” “Don’t be shocked when your history book mentions me.” This recurring theme of historical memory becomes more important as the narrative progresses, and the characters are shown to be aware that the events of *Hamilton* will shape future historical discourse.

Other characters recognize Hamilton’s desire, though some notable instances exist where characters try to warn him against focusing on future generations’ perceptions of the past. Eliza Hamilton repeatedly asks him to focus instead on the present with his family. During “History Has Its Eyes on You,” George Washington explains to Hamilton that what they are doing will have lasting consequences on the legacy that Hamilton leaves behind.

WASHINGTON: Let me tell you what I wish I’d known/ When I was young and dreamed of glory/ You have no control

WASHINGTON/ CHORUS: Who lives, who dies, who tells your story.

This song foreshadows Hamilton’s early death, as well as the fact that it is Eliza, and not Hamilton, who will have the most power over his legacy when he is gone. Washington is presented in *Hamilton* as an older, wiser version of Hamilton, someone who was once concerned with legacy and has since shifted

his priorities to philanthropy—this will be explored later in this essay. It is arguable that Washington's words have the opposite effect: Hamilton's portrayed behavior over the course of the rest of the musical indicates his awareness that history will remember him and the steps he takes to try to ensure that history remembers him favorably.

In *Hamilton*, war and wealth are thematically connected with the male characters; it is the men who fight in the Revolutionary War while the women remain in the primary care positions of their households. During "One Last Time," Washington transitions from war hero and national leader to the home environment: "I wanna sit under my own vine and fig tree... At home in this nation we've made." In this transition, Hamilton argues strongly against Washington's stepping down from the Presidency, claiming that the citizenry will see Washington as "weak" for choosing to end his leadership role. Here, the listener sees quite clearly where Hamilton stands on the subject of men moving away from leadership roles. While he eventually does support Washington in his transition, and Washington's song ends on a triumphant note, there is a reluctance to Hamilton's verses. The audience uses Hamilton as a frame of reference, and so these moments where he is trying to convince Washington to remain in power are telling, and then reluctantly following his lead is telling. The song also includes a songified version of Washington's Farewell Address, which draws the listener's attention back to Washington's legacy as President, reminding them again that history has its eyes on him despite his desire to retire: "I shall also carry with me/ The hope/ That my country will/ View [my errors] with indulgence."

Hamilton's cultivation of his legacy has two significant consequences in the musical: the Reynolds Pamphlet and his son's murder. The publication of the Reynolds Pamphlet is prompted when his political rivals discover the payments he'd made to the husband of his mistress, Maria Reynolds. Rather than risk accusations of corruption, Hamilton comes clean about the affair, assuming that it will not hurt his political career if he is honest with the people: "Overwhelm them with honesty/ In the eye of the hurricane/ This is the only way to protect my legacy". Unfortunately, the Reynolds Pamphlet has the opposite effect: it destroys his chances of winning the presidency as well as his marriage. A significant consequence of Hamilton's desire to cultivate legacy which will be explored in more detail later in this essay.

There is a lyrical and thematic separation between male characters' careers and their family lives at the beginning of the musical. This separation, and the emphasis placed on the career as the site where legacy will be cultivated (with family expected to carry it into future generations), genders the concept. This

was seen in George Washington's case, when his desire to switch from the Presidency to "under [his] own vine and fig tree" drew Hamilton's incredulity. In *Hamilton*, the female characters live at home and raise the children while the men work (or fight); by emphasizing the careers of the men as the important "legacy" that they will leave, the male characters are shown to value the masculine domain over the feminine.

After the Reynolds Pamphlet's publication, and Eliza's song "Burn," the narrative skips several years to Philip Hamilton's duel and murder. In the lyrics to "Blow Us All Away," Hamilton's preoccupation with legacy has been passed on to his eldest male child. This could be read partly as a consequence to Hamilton's construction of his career and his legacy earlier in the play as more important than family, as well as a thematic call to the tradition of male children keeping their family name after marriage and by extension carrying on their family's legacy. Philip Hamilton sings the opening lines of "Blow Us All Away" as a *contrafactum* of Hamilton's first lines in "My Shot," and so Philip echoes of Hamilton's ambitions:

"My Shot":

HAMILTON: I'm 'a get a scholarship to King's College!/ I prob'ly shouldn't brag, but dag, I amaze and astonish!

"Blow Us All Away":

PHILIP: Meet the latest graduate of King's College!/ I prob'ly shouldn't brag, but dag, I amaze and astonish!

The lyrics to "Blow Us All Away" reiterate Philip's motivations stemming from a desire to protect his father's legacy, which he considers an extension of his own. During the song, Philip discovers that a classmate of his made a defamatory speech about Hamilton, and Philip challenges the man to a duel. When Philip explains his reasoning to his father, he sings: "I doubt you would have let it slide and I was not about to." This continued comparison between Philip and his father is demonstrative of the legacy that Hamilton has cultivated through his son.

During "It's Quiet Uptown," which follows Philip's death, Hamilton is shown to retreat from public life and begin to prioritize his family:

HAMILTON: I spend hours in the garden/ I walk alone to the store/
And it's quiet uptown/ I never liked the quiet before/ I take the
children to church on Sunday

This verse, where he notes that he “never liked the quiet before” demonstrates his shift in priorities from the fast-paced, action-packed world of political intrigue, to quiet days with his family. Of course, this shift in priorities does not last, and when Aaron Burr challenges Hamilton to a duel in “Your Obedient Servant,” a duet, Hamilton’s musical style falls back into the old, “swaggering” style of beat that he’d used when debating Samuel Seabury in “Farmer Refuted,” and he begins to argue that he is in the right:

HAMILTON: Hey, I have not been shy/ I am just a guy in the public eye/ Trying to do my best for our republic [...] I won’t apologize for doing what’s right.

Here, Hamilton’s lyrics are preoccupied with defending his honor. He notes that he is “in the public eye” and therefore is obligated to be truthful. Despite the portrayed shift in priorities following his son’s death in “It’s Quiet Uptown,” Hamilton’s decision to continue antagonizing Burr indicates that, on some level, the character remains convinced that his cultivated legacy requires rigorous defense.

Hamilton’s death in “The World Was Wide Enough” leaves the listener with a mixed message as to the character’s motivation before and during the duel. Hamilton and Burr perform a *contrafactum* of the songs from the two previous duels: Laurens vs. Lee, and Philip vs. Eaker. This establishes the tone of the scene as one of adversarial expectation. The music stops, however, after the shots fire, leaving Hamilton to perform an accapella verse. He begins to question how history will see him and whether killing Burr is worth the risk to his cultivated legacy:

HAMILTON: Legacy. What is a legacy?/ It’s planting seeds in a garden you never get to see [...] [America is] a place where even orphan immigrants can leave their fingerprints and rise up/ I’m running out of time. I’m running, and my time’s up/ Wise up. Eyes up [...] Teach me how to say goodbye

The final line in Hamilton’s verse, “Raise a glass to freedom,” reminds the listener of “The Story of Tonight” from the first act, which establishes a narrative link between the two songs. In “The Story of Tonight,” Hamilton and his friends sing about the glory of their futures, and during “The World Was

Wide Enough,” Hamilton is confident that his orphan fingerprints will remain on the world when he is dead.

In *Hamilton*, “legacy” as a concept is something to be cultivated and defended, but in the case of the male characters this desire to create a good legacy continuously leads to tragedy. When male characters choose to exit the public sphere and relinquish what control they had over how history will view them, as in the case with George Washington, an unease exists in the way that other male characters view them. Hamilton fiercely cultivates and defends his legacy, and encourages his son to do the same, but the priority he gives to his legacy leads to his murder at the conclusion of the play. The violent lengths that male characters go to cultivate and defend their legacies, and their willingness to make sacrifices that cause harm to others, indicates that the male-coded approach to legacy is ultimately destructive.

The Feminine Legacy: That Would Be Enough

If there is an awareness among the male characters that their stories will eventually make it into history books, the same can also be said of the female characters. The female characters, however, are shown to approach the cultivation and defense of legacy differently. There are four named women in the musical: the Schuyler sisters (Angelica, Peggy, and Eliza), and Maria Reynolds. It is Eliza’s effect on Hamilton’s legacy and her approach to defending legacy through philanthropy that is particularly noteworthy.

In the first act, Eliza’s songs are predominantly concerned with her place in Hamilton’s life. She repeats her desire to be a part of Hamilton’s narrative, and to “be enough” for him. When Eliza sings about wanting to be enough for Hamilton, it is framed as her asking him to be satisfied with family life. She is shown to value his relationship with his family: “You deserve the chance to meet your son.”, This frame is opposed to his potential future as a rich soldier if he survives the war. This is also the first time that Eliza acknowledges that history has its eyes not only on Hamilton, but on her as his wife: “Oh, let me be a part of the narrative/ In the story they will write someday.” This establishes the power over that narrative and their combined legacy with Hamilton.

After the Reynolds Pamphlet is published, Eliza sings her solo song “Burn.” During this song, Eliza burns the letters that Hamilton used to woo her. The song frames this act as a very self-aware act of historical narrative erasure. Eliza understands that future historians will read her correspondence with Hamilton, hoping to get a sense of his relationship with his wife and

perhaps of who he was as a person beyond his politics. In burning the letters, she intends to thwart their efforts: “Let future historians wonder how Eliza reacted when you broke her heart [...] I’m burning the memories/ Burning the letters that might have redeemed you”. This is an act to ensure her own privacy, as well as the first acknowledgment the listener has that Eliza has some control over the narrative—if only in that she can silence herself: “I’m erasing myself from the narrative”.

Her original position in “That Would Be Enough” is one of passive self-effacement, but in “Burn” a shift occurs towards what could be called active passivity or self-erasure. It is an act of agency, but one which relies on Eliza removing herself from historical discourse. There is no guarantee that her voice would have been acknowledged in historical record if her correspondence with Hamilton had been discovered and read, considering that women’s voices have traditionally been sidelined in history. In the context of the musical, burning the letters allows Eliza to take control of the narrative. It is portrayed as a revolutionary act. In the context of *Hamilton*, Eliza Hamilton’s letter burning is performed during the only solo; all other songs in the musical are shared among characters or with the chorus. In “Burn,” Eliza is on her own. The lyrics are Eliza’s, the actions are Eliza’s, and her decision to erase herself from the narrative that she had begged to be a part of in the first act establishes her as a character who has chosen to separate herself from the self-regarding and destructive legacy that Hamilton is cultivating.

As an aside, but one that I consider extremely important from a feminist perspective, Eliza’s “Burn” places the culpability for the affair between Hamilton and Maria squarely on Hamilton. In “Say No to This,” when Hamilton begins his affair with Maria, and during “We Know,” when his political rivals confront him, Hamilton tries to place the blame for the affair on Maria by casting her as the seductress: “I am helpless”; “She courted me/ Escorted me to bed.” John Reynolds calls Maria his “whore wife,” despite the fact that the lyrics imply that they planned the extortion together. The male characters frame the affair as something that the female character had the most agency over, while they were unwilling participants.

Eliza’s “Burn” mentions Maria only once: “You published the letters she wrote you/ You told the whole world how you brought this girl into our bed.” The “Burn” lyrics avoid gendered slurs or accusations towards the female; the action of bringing her to bed is Hamilton’s, and thus the culpability for the affair is his. This reframing of the narrative that the male characters have built up offers a contrasting perspective on the traditional femme fatale position which Maria Reynolds seems to occupy in the male characters’ perspectives.

The character is re-framed by Hamilton's wife, the injured party in the affair, as someone who, while complicit, is not responsible for Eliza's pain.

The closing number for the musical, "Who lives, Who dies, Who tells your story," opens with Washington singing a reprise of "History has its eyes on you." The song begins with a callback to the play's continuing theme of legacy, and in particular the lack of power that people have over their own. Washington's opening for the closing song reminds listeners that Hamilton, who is now deceased, could not control who lived or who died in the play, and now that he is gone he cannot control how his legacy will continue without his controlling influence or violent defenders. The music builds towards the second half of the song, until the chorus begins to repeat the phrase: "Who tells your story?" After the fourth repetition, the male voices fall silent and the female voices take over:

CHORUS (FEMALE VOICES): Eliza

ELIZA: I put myself back in the narrative

CHORUS (FEMALE VOICES): Eliza

ELIZA: I stop wasting time on tears/ I live another fifty years/ It's not enough

Eliza's line "I put myself back in the narrative" is a very active phrase. There is a sense of ownership here, not only of the narrative but of her place in it. Eliza's active decision to insert herself in the narrative is a stronger expression of agency than her self-erasure because it commands attention rather than diverts it. Instead of the passive desire for a man to allow her into the story with "Oh, let me be a part of the narrative," Eliza takes control of Hamilton's story, answering the question "Who tells your story?" with her own female voice.

The rest of the song details how Eliza takes control defending Hamilton's legacy, as well as the legacies of the other men in the play:

ELIZA: I interview every soldier who fought by your side

MULLIGAN/LAFAYETTE/LAURENS: She tells our story
[...]

ELIZA: I raise funds in D.C. for the Washington Monument

WASHINGTON: She tells my story

The rest of Eliza's "story"—that is, the description of the years following Hamilton's death which makes up the conclusion of the musical—is motivated by a desire to defend the legacies of male characters ("Have I done enough? Will they tell your story?"). She enlists Angelica, another strong female voice in the musical, to help her: "I rely on Angelica." This could be read in one of two ways: either Eliza has sidelined herself once again and submitted to the patriarchal expectation of masculine legacy taking precedence over female legacy, or the character is motivated by a desire to create positive consequences to the ambitions and legacies left behind by the male characters because she has the power to do so. The author of this essay chooses to argue for the somewhat more optimistic latter option.

Given the toxic and destructive consequences suffered by the male characters who had tried to cultivate and defend their personal legacies, the fact that Eliza attempts to build male legacies through philanthropy, such as "I speak out against slavery," indicates that in the context of the *Hamilton* musical, the power over legacy lies in being able to tell others' stories, and can yield positive consequences when the female characters take control. The traditionally masculine self-regarding behaviors performed by the male characters leave legacies that require violent defense, as seen in Philip Hamilton's narrative arc. It is the female survivors—the ones who are left behind to tell the stories of those who died fighting—who have the power to shape legacy positively.

Legacy. What Is a Legacy?

The progression of the conceptualization of these legacy and gender helps researchers understand popular culture and society through the extremely popular lens of the *Hamilton* musical. In the *Hamilton*, a clear gendered difference exists between the male characters' and the female characters' approach to ambition and personal legacy. The female approach is structured as less toxic and destructive than the masculine approach. Despite the fact that the masculine motivation of protecting personal legacy led to the two murders in the play, Hamilton's character values the cultivation of his legacy until the moment he is shot. He is constantly at odds with other characters; first with

the English during the revolution, then with his fellow cabinet members, then with Eliza.

At the conclusion of the musical, Eliza explains how she worked tirelessly to defend Hamilton's legacy, and while this could be considered on par with Hamilton's struggle, the music is styled smoothly, and the character's vocals are played as calm and confident. Eliza is not struggling here. While male legacy is portrayed as a toxic fight, it is Eliza who can erase herself, rewrite herself, and defend the legacies of others at will. Because of this, the musical portrays female legacies as ultimately less destructive and more philanthropic than their male counterparts, and so the gendered portrayal of legacy privileges women in this historical musical.

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Sin City and Color: Comic Adaptation and Shifting Meanings

ERIN B. WAGGONER

It is a black and white night; a woman in a red dress overlooks the city below her. “She shivers in the wind, like the last leaf on a dying tree” (Miller 29). She knows the man joining her on that balcony is there to kill her. He lights her cigarette, and her eyes shine a deep green contrast against her bright red dress. The man tells her he loves her and shoots her; her blood blends against her red dress. He will cash her check in the morning.

Robert Rodriguez’s *Sin City* film adaptation adds color to the original graphic novel to enhance characterization, serving as semiotic cues to help the viewer read specific story segments in a particular way. Essentially, color in film allows for artistic visualization of who a character is, affording filmmakers a purely visual style to allow viewers a peek into the characters they bring to life on screen. Since comic books and graphic novels are already a highly visual medium, the adaptation of these originals to film becomes more intriguing for their use of color because filmmakers make the creative decisions on what to include or exclude from the original image. Therefore, this article focuses on Robert Rodriguez’s 2005 adaptation of Frank Miller’s *Sin City* and how color through adaptation, both its absence and addition, serves to create a new visual literacy when watching films. Specifically, this article contributes to the field through examining how color shifts semiotic meanings, especially as they relate to understanding the characters’ motives and internalizations.

The adaptation adds the woman’s red dress and green eyes to the original monochrome text, utilizing them to tell a different story from the original graphic novel sequence. Specific colors are used to represent a character’s identity, so the film uses the green eyes to show potential corruption and allow the audience to read

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other characters as similarly corrupt throughout the film's other sequences. These shifts of character and color cues become part of the meaning-making that filmmakers engage in to create their visions for the characters. Since filmic adaptations of literature are not usually privy to textual cues about a character's psyche, the use of color is one such heuristic approach to enable an audience to engage with this translation from text to screen.

This happens using color as a semiotic process. Semiotics in film is part of the cinematographic language that helps give a film depth beyond mere moving images. Christian Metz highlights that pioneers of this cinematographic language (i.e., Méliès, Griffith) were not concerned with any formal symbolism or message for their films, being more concerned with telling their stories; however, they essentially created cinema's narrative background, taking on the qualities of a language. From a semiotics perspective, the adaptation of color operates as the denotation itself that is being constructed, organized, and to a certain extent "codified" (codified, not necessarily encoded).¹ Lacking absolute laws, filmic intelligibility nevertheless depends on a certain number of dominant habits: "A film put together haphazardly would not be understood" (Metz 68). Without cinematographic elements and this cinematographic language, films risk confusion.

David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001) is an example of cinema breaking these rules, and while the film is praised for its originality, audiences are left confused and critics are left pondering the meanings presented in the shifting diegesis. However, careful examination of the colors the filmmakers use helps viewers navigate the film's mixed reality. Regarding *Mulholland Drive*, Katherine Hayles and Nicholas Gessler claim, "A clue is given in the opening shots, which show someone sleeping under red sheets covered by an orange blanket. These colors reappear in Betty Elms's spangled sweater, visually connecting the sleeping Diane with the personae she creates in her dream" (491). Therefore, color is part of the filmic language that helps viewers understand the characters presented in the narrative, even in particularly complex narratives that break other elements of the cinematographic language.

However, just because a filmmaker codifies a specific message or image does not always mean that viewers will decode that message in the same way. This

¹ Codify is used here, since the use of color is something arranged in a systematic manner, as opposed to encoding, which involves converting information from one form to another.

difference is especially true when considering the use of color as a signifier in the cinematographic language. Metz notes:

The speakers of ordinary language constitute a group of users; filmmakers are a group of creators. On the other hand, movie spectators in turn constitute a group of users. That is why semiotics of the cinema must frequently consider things from the point of view of spectator rather than of filmmaker. (69)

While films like *Pleasantville* (1998) spend much of their time utilizing color as a key identifier of the narrative plot, comic book films such as Zach Snyder's adaptation of Frank Miller's *300* (2006) create hues to match the tone or signify the placement of the original graphic novel. However, viewers unfamiliar with the original would not be able to decode these signifiers in the same way the filmmaker intended. Before delving into the semiotics of color in *Sin City*, it is important to understand the history of adaptation, adaptation as translation, graphic novel film adaptation, and the history of color in film.

A Brief History of Film Adaptation

Film adaptation has been a film-based storytelling inspiration since early cinema. In 1903, Cecil Hepworth and Percy Stow adapted Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* into a short film. William Shakespeare's works were popular adaptations for short silent films as well, including William Kennedy-Laurie Dickson and Walter Pfeffer Dando's *King John* (1899), Clément Maurice's *Romeo and Juliet* (1900), D.W. Griffith's *The Taming of the Shrew* (1908) and multiple renditions of *Hamlet* (Clément Maurice, 1900; Georges Méliès, 1907; Henri Desfontaines, 1908). These early short films only adapted smaller scenes from the larger literary works, and several of them have been lost to time.

As film technology expanded to include longer works, filmmakers could adapt more of the original works into their screenplays and production. However, the nature of the different mediums (i.e., film and literature) presented a new problem: what to include and exclude. Erich von Stroheim's *Greed* (1924), based on Frank Norris's novel *McTeague* (1899), is a turning point for film adaptation. Originally around nine hours long, the film was considered a literal adaptation of the original novel, though Stroheim's script included new and extended scenes not in the novel

(Finler). However, Metro Goldwyn Mayer's final cut was released at only two hours, resulting in a loss of over seven hours from the storyline. These massive cuts change the story significantly from even the original four-hour cut Stroheim had originally presented to the studio (later released by Turner Entertainment in 1999). Early films would adapt certain scenes to tell only part of a story, but *Greed* was an example of when film adaptations become too long and tell too much story. This instance began the trend of elision, or purposely omitting things, in film adaptations, which remains an ongoing trend in cinema, even with epic adaptations such as Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003) trilogy.

Film Adaptation as Translation Theory

According to Linda Hutcheon, when viewing film adaptations, audiences often fall into the trap of fidelity, assuming and critiquing the film based on the original work. While the Netflix series *The Umbrella Academy* (2019) had almost ten hours to adapt the original graphic novel into episodic television, elisions still occurred that the critics and fans of the original work noted in their reviews (Hernandez). Such considerations of fidelity become even more pronounced in films that only last from one to three hours. More elision needs to occur, as well as interpolation—additions of characters and plots—to help the coherence of the film. Instead of seeing the film for its own merits, fidelity distracts audiences from the true art of film adaptations. Much like engaging with the original work elicits individual interpretations, film adaptations become the director and screenwriter's interpretations of that work. Films do not need to stay true to the original work to become their own products of individual interpretations.

According to Hutcheon, film adaptations are more closely related to translation theory (16). Films can be seen as more translations of a work, as filmmakers understand the various facets (e.g., mise-en-scene, editing, sound) that are required to convey the meaning from text to film. This perspective is similar to how cultural and language barriers prevent literature translations to uphold the true nature of the original work in its native language. The film and the original work are similar to texts translated into other languages and become “an act of both inter-cultural and inter-temporal communication” (Bassnet 9). Hutcheon notes that film adaptations are actually translations, or “re-mediations...in the form of intersemiotic transpositions from one sign system (for example, words) to another (for example, images)” (16). These “re-mediations” pull adaptation theory away from thinking

through a purely fidelity-based lens. Instead, seeing adaptation as translation refocuses audience interpretation and criticism on the media differences while simultaneously celebrating and acknowledging the elisions from the original work to the film adaptation.

However, according to Karen Kline, translation is one paradigm of film adaptation that privileges the original work, “while the film exists to ‘serve’ its literary precursor” (71). Kline notes that translation is based around fidelity and how closely the film matches the original work. Hutcheon expands the concept of translation to consider the recoding elements required between mediums, which breaks Kline’s translation paradigm away from pure fidelity-based critiques. Works on translation theory focus on print-to-film adaptations more, while *Sin City* translates from one visual medium to another. Therefore, this article expands translation theory by looking more closely at graphic novel adaptation. While Rodriguez does use the graphic novel frames as his storyboards in *Sin City*, he still uses the digital application of color to shift the original narratives. Considering these additions of color, this article focuses on the film as translation-style adaptation through a Hutcheon-based theoretical lens.

Film Adaptation and Graphic Novels

Comic book and graphic novel adaptations face some issues with translation from the print medium to the film medium. Fans of the original works often criticize the infidelity within the adaptations, but directors of the adaptations are faced with the additional shift from the semiotics of a print medium to the cinematographic language of film. Nico Dicecco states, “Audiences come to understand the intertextual meaning of an adaptation only by actively recognizing the relationship between the source and adapted texts” (69). The problem is, then, that comic book films already have a fan-based audience, especially for larger franchises following characters like Batman, Superman, and Spider-Man. Despite this potential problem (if it really is a problem) the early 21st century saw an influx of comic book adaptations. Marvel Comics and DC Comics even intertextually weave their narratives together across several films, creating shared cinematic universes. For example, Marvel Studios released the Marvel Cinematic Universe, an amalgamation of various comic book characters and storylines within the Marvel Universe from the comic books that have been translated onto films, starting with *Iron Man* (2008) and continuing to release at least two films a year since. Upon the

success of this formula, Marvel Comics rival DC Comics began its own cinematic universe with its characters, starting with *Man of Steel* (2013) and presenting the first female blockbuster superhero film of this new generation of comic book adaptations, *Wonder Woman* (2017). However, major comic book characters and storyworlds are not the only comic book and graphic novel adaptations.

Interestingly, the difference between major blockbuster adaptations of high-profile characters and more art house-style graphic novels differs in how critics respond to the film adaptations. Matthew McAllister, Ian Gordon, and Mark Janovich note:

Modern comic book-based films have helped establish the industrial formula of the Hollywood popcorn blockbuster: fantastic action movie as cultural event. Comic book materials attract a youthful moviegoing demographic, appeal to nostalgic older audiences, and offer thrills and well-defined archetype characters, especially heroes who also have well-established track records for popularity, licensing, and sequel potential. (110)

This adaptation formula has seemed to work in recent years, following the Marvel formula of intertextuality among its comic adaptation films. Even obscure comics within the Marvel universe, such as *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014) and *Ant-Man* (2015), which present lesser known characters than those of Captain America or Iron Man, have still proven successful film adaptations at the box office. The more Hollywood-ized adaptations seem to be pulled from already mainstream comic labels, most notably Marvel Comics and DC Comics, who dominate the majority of the comic audience. However, any close association with infidelity to the original texts presents a falsity for the viewers, who may not understand or recognize the differences in the media's differing languages. This is where translation theory's shift away from pure fidelity to instead focus on medium comparisons becomes important. As Pascal Lefevre notes, "The dilemma is, then, that a film that too 'faithfully' follows a comic will seldom be a good film. Since it is another medium with other characteristics and rules, the director has to modify the original work" (5). The problem is that comic book creators risk their narratives changing too much for the filmic adaptation.

This challenge is especially true for more art-house style or one-shot stories or characters, since they are placed within one diegetic storyworld, as opposed to

Marvel or DC Comics characters who have undergone many redirections or reimaginings over the decades. For example, the Batman franchise has undergone three filmic redirections since 1989, starting with Tim Burton's *Batman* (1989), Christopher Nolan's *Batman Begins* (2005), and Zach Snyder's *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016)—and a fourth is in the works at the time of this article's publication. This character is popular and has already undergone narrative reloads in its comics, so the infidelity issue is not as prevalent in the more art house works. Zach Snyder's less mainstream adaptation of Alan Moore's *Watchmen* (2009), on the other hand, closely follows the original text, but familiarity with the original would allow viewers to notice the absence of the comic's framing through the newspaper stand, which promotes the theme of "who watches the watchmen" throughout the film adaptation. These elisions become key components to the film. The inclusion of these newspaper stand characters would not only expand the narrative's already long length, but also feel unnecessary considering that film can highlight this comics-based concept in a short reel of newspaper clippings with Bob Dylan's "The Times They Are A'Changin'" playing in the background. The film does not need the narrative exposition that the graphic novel needs, so these changes make sense when considering the different needs from medium to medium. Thus, critics may be more accepting of the elisions in the mainstream comic adaptations, which already have more fluidity in the original text, than art-house style adaptations, which come from a singular or limited-run graphic novel.

Similarly, Robert Rodriguez claims he wanted to closely follow Frank Miller's original story when he adapted *Sin City* to film, even forgoing the traditional storyboards and using the original graphic novels' frames as his storyboard ("How It Went Down").² However, this translation from comic medium to film medium still shifts meanings because the use of filmic technology changes the language being used to tell the story. This shift is most noticeable in the film's use of color; therefore, it is important to consider some uses of color in film history to better understand how color is part of the cinematographic language and how Rodriguez uses this language to adapt Miller's graphic novels.

Cinematic History of Color

² Rodriguez convinced Miller to make the film through a proof of concept clip (the "Customer is Always Right" sequence) to demonstrate the direct panel-to-screen format he was going to use throughout the entire film.

When the moving image was invented, critics immediately noted the lack of color, and filmmakers from the 1890s to 1920s used colorization techniques including hand painting, spray painting, and dyeing the film. However, color fades with time, so most of the original color on these early films has since disappeared. Some early films, such as Méliès's *Gulliver's Travels* (1902), show some of the preserved color, but these cases are rare and faded across the frames from their originals. In the 1930s, Technicolor revealed a more natural colorization process by reproducing color frequencies of light and transferring them onto film. *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) features perhaps the most notable use of early Technicolor, signifying a cinematic trend of using color in opposition to black and white to tell a narrative between two opposing forces: waking/dreaming, sanity/insanity, life/art, heaven/earth, and past/present (Misek). For example, in Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946), Technicolor was used to differentiate between Earth and Heaven. The film even included a moment where the character Conductor 71 transitions from these two planes and directly addresses the shift to Technicolor through diegetic monologue. These early technologies highlight how color from its earliest inception into the cinematographic language has been used to signify specific narrative qualities and focus on the opposing forces and shifts in meaning to tell a story.

As Hollywood began to utilize color more, art film directors had two competing opinions on the use of color. Some were opposed to it, as it presented a cacophony to the message being sent by distracting the viewer. Others felt the color could be used to help them send their message (Misek). Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1957) is shot in black-and-white, giving the message of the simplicity of war-torn feudal Japan, along with the consuming grayness of the mist that surrounds the settings. However, Kurosawa's later film, *High and Low* (1963), is a black and white film that brings in the use of red smoke to signal for the police to locate a kidnapper; as Richard Misek claims, "Had the red smoke appeared in a color film, it would have had to compete for our attention with other colors" (61). This addition of specific colors allows viewers to focus and see the importance of moments, making these additions a specific linguistic element in the narrative. The focus on colors such as these challenge visual literacy by forcing focus on elements within the frame, so that cognitive interpretation of a scene is further molded during film production. This ties to David Bordwell's work on cognitive film studies, which posits that viewers are actively interpreting films as "mental representations

functioning in a context of social action” (17). Color works in these films to guide the viewer’s cognitive processing as they actively discern these codified cues.

Another example of color used as characterization is the absence of color. Adding color to monochrome film moments has the ability for directors to showcase something specific. The telling moments are just as much in the color moments as those moments where they are absent, which serve to signify more focus on the colored moments. Misek notes:

Natural color can usefully order perception as well as confuse it—the redness of red apples in green trees help us see them, and so pick them, eat them, and spread their seeds. However, for the film-maker, whose intentions typically diverge from nature’s, the natural superabundance of color is always a potential threat. (61)

This absence indicates that filmmakers are quite aware of their use of color and what they want it to signify. For example, *Schindler’s List* (1993) is shot in black-and-white but Spielberg added contrast by making one young girl’s red coat indicate both pathos for the viewer and for Oscar Schindler’s character. The audience can recognize the red coat among the victims, providing a moment for Schindler to realize the depth of the atrocities being committed. Interestingly, this moment was adapted from the original text, Thomas Keneally’s *Schindler’s Ark*, which highlights a moment where Schindler and his mistress are discussing a young girl wearing a red coat. This manipulation is exactly what Rodriguez does in *Sin City* by adding and subtracting color moments throughout the film. The audience is forced to focus on these colors because the rest of the diegetic space mimics the original black-and-white world of the graphic novels. The absence of color is just as telling in contrast to the moments when color is added.

Adding or subtracting color via digital editing is a relatively new technology introduced into the filmmaker’s visionary toolbox, allowing for more autonomy and technical capabilities of telling a story in several ways. Digital intermediacy (DI), introduced in 1989 and popularized in the 1990s, allows filmmakers to manipulate their color post-production, enabling them to add, enhance, diminish, or even remove color from their original digital productions (Wood). Filmmakers can even present two different versions of their own films, as was the case with Frank Darabont’s adaptation of Stephen King’s *The Mist* (2007), where the original theatrical release was in color but Darabont released the director’s cut in black-and-

white, shifting the overall tone of the film to one more reminiscent of 1950s and 1960s horror films. Meanwhile, Snyder's *300* adaptation used a DI in post-production to help match the original graphic novel's tones and colors. The majority of the film was shot in front of a blue screen, and Misek notes how Snyder and cinematographer Larry Fong created this "comic book aesthetic by clipping highlights, crushing shadows, and desaturating colors" (152). This usage of DI displays how the manipulation of not just the color but the depth and brightness of the color shifts meaning.

It was also in post-production that they settled on yellow as the film's chromatic major and blue as its minor. Every shot reeks of late nights spent in visual effects and color grading suites. Though the intensity of the film's digital color is unusual within mainstream cinema, the extent to which color (and, indeed, film as a whole) has now become dependent on extensive post-production. (Misek 152-153)

The use of a DI in post-production allows filmmakers more ability to manipulate their use of color as signifiers. Much like *300*, this technology was a prevalent part of Rodriguez's production and post-production when he adapted Frank Miller's *Sin City*. Therefore, this article now explores how Rodriguez's *Sin City* adaptation utilized the digital intermediacy technology and how color was used as a semiotic process in characterization.

Sin City, Digital Intermediacy, and Communicating Character through Color

The original *Sin City* graphic novels each tell a standalone story within the gritty, neo-noir of Basin City's seemingly immoral storyworld. In this world, Miller created a narrative that presents a reality showcasing humanity's darker tendencies and desires. No traditional heroes exist in the texts, and the protagonists relate more as anti-heroes who are motivated by their human flaws. For example, Marv in *The Hard Goodbye* is quite aware of his brute presence and mentality, stating that his parole officer's girlfriend, who is a psychiatrist, "tried to analyze me once but got too scared" (Miller 37). Still, he returns to his parole officer for the medicine her girlfriend prescribes him for some sense of normality, at least normal for Basin City. Marv is an anti-hero character, who eventually uses his flaws and brute

presence to avenge his lover's death, for which he was being framed. When Rodriguez translated these anti-heroes onto screen, he does so through DI post-production.

When *Sin City* was in production, Rodriguez collaborated quite closely with Miller while shooting the film to help him "translate" more than adapt the novel. This translation included keeping with the original's monochrome schematic, comic framing style, and extradiegetic narration. Aylish Wood notes:

Rodriguez separated out different layers of the image and re-grouped them according to the aesthetic of the comic books. Such a logic allows for a different kind of expressive practice in which many conventions of cinematic *mise en scene* are deformed in order to accommodate a comic book aesthetic. (87)

Using a green screen and digital technology, Rodriguez could capture the feel of the original graphic novels, but his use of color post-production is most notable.

Despite filming in color, the post-production DI process allowed Rodriguez to completely strip the colors from the film and later add specific shades, lighting, and colors to his various shots. Lisa Purse notes that despite the film relying "on heavily stylized visuals and computer-generated backdrops, the various planes of the image are carefully arranged to create the requisite depth of field, constructing a much stronger sense of a three-dimensional diegetic space" (21). Additionally, Misek states:

By lighting actors with low-key light, desaturating the results and increasing the contrast, Rodriguez transformed color into black and white. Adulterating the film's pure blacks and whites are occasional spot colors: a red pool of blood, a blue car, blonde hair, a red dress. Color, removed, is again selectively added, though the colors added are not the same colors as those that were removed. (166-167)

While Rodriguez does claim to "translate" the film, by adding this color through semiotic coding, he shifts the meaning of the narrative to one driven more by the characters' individual motivations. Whereas Miller's original graphic novels were mostly in black and white (save for the yellow bastard and a few female characters throughout the other novels not adapted in this film), Rodriguez's vision for the

film included adding these color moments to serve as semiotic clues into the characters' psyches. The diegetic narration serves its purpose through narrative cinematographic language to be faithful to the graphic novel format and the original graphic novel narrations, but these narrations are still restricted and only focus on the narrator. Therefore, color surrounding these anti-heroes and their femme fatales and villains place more insight into the psyche that the restricted narration cannot fully accomplish.

Although he did not choose to adapt the other stories that did incorporate color, Rodriguez stayed true to the use of color as characterization that Miller utilized in the original series, albeit with subtle and not-so-subtle shifts. Therefore, this article analyzes the four adapted sequences from graphic novel to film to examine the use of color either translated, added, or transformed. For clarity purposes, when discussing the graphic novel, titles will be in italics, and when discussing the matching film sequence, the titles will be in quotation marks. One exception is made when discussing the short stories included in the seventh graphic novel in the series, *Booze, Broads, and Bullets*.

“The Customer is Always Right”

As mentioned in the introduction, Rodriguez's “The Customer is Always Right” adds a red dress, red lipstick, and green eyes to the original short story from Miller's *Booze, Broads, and Bullets*. Interestingly, this sequence opens the framing for the entire theatrical release, when a hired assassin comes to kill a woman overlooking Basin City. The end of the film is the only other time he appears, when he is hired to kill another character Becky (discussed in more detail in the Rodriguez “Big Fat Kill” sequence). Through this beginning sequence, viewers are given a semiotic clue when the woman's eyes glow green. The other times when eye color is shown throughout the film feature corrupt figures who are waiting to be killed, as with Rourke in “The Hard Goodbye” and Becky in “The Big Fat Kill.” John Belton notes, “When the man lights her cigarette and tells her that what particularly attracts him to her are her eyes, her eyes slowly change color from black-and-white to pale green” (62). By addressing the eye color directly in dialogue and having the eye color added, the film adds the importance of eye color as a potential signifying clue to something within the rest of the narrative.

While Rodriguez added the red dress and lipstick to this sequence, he did not forego Miller's original graphic novel universe. In Miller's “The Babe Wore Red”

in the same book, another character identified as Mary is seen in a red dress and lipstick. Her fate is different from Rodriguez's murdered woman, though, as she returns to a nunnery after being saved by the unidentified anti-hero. By taking the color from another sequence and placing it into this film sequence, Rodriguez uses color as a semiotic marker that shifts the original graphic novel's narrative meanings. In the original story where color appears, the woman is mysterious and claims to be a prostitute, but the anti-hero immediately recognizes she is lying. Red in this story is supposed to indicate passion and sin, but it is a false characterization (as the woman is a nun), which is why the anti-hero finds the woman's lipstick and her dress without her in it when she returns to her black-and-white habit in the end. In contrast, the woman in Rodriguez's "The Customer is Always Right" represents true passion and sin, as she represents exactly what the woman in Miller's "The Babe Wore Red" was trying to mimic. By borrowing the color schematic from the other story, Rodriguez opens the idea of passion and sin for the character in the opening sequence of the film, discounting the original meaning and use of those colors.

That Yellow Bastard

While "The Customer is Always Right" borrows its coloring from "The Babe Wore Red," only one sequence in the film follows the same color pattern from the original. In the graphic novel series, *That Yellow Bastard* is the only novel that was adapted for this film that includes the use of established coloring. Specifically, the titular character is yellow. Interestingly, the "That Yellow Bastard" sequence in the film stays true to this colorization, where color added to the DI grayscale is for the titular character again. When Hartigan gets Junior's (that yellow bastard) blood on him, even the blood is shown in yellow, indicating the putrid level of corruption that Junior exhibits throughout the sequence. In the story, Hartigan hunts Junior so that he can save a young girl named Nancy Callahan from being molested by Junior. Despite his heart condition and his closeness to retirement, Hartigan pursues Junior and manages to save Nancy, though he is shot by his partner and recovers only to be placed in jail, having been framed for molesting Nancy and Junior's other victims. Only Nancy believes him and sends him letters during his imprisonment. Unfortunately, Junior survived Hartigan's beating and is now a putrid yellow man, intent on finishing what he started by finding Nancy several years later. The rest of

the sequence follows Hartigan as he attempts to save Nancy, only to finally kill Junior and in turn kill himself once he knows Nancy is safe again.

However, it is important to note that the yellow blood and the yellow skin of Junior are the only moments of color throughout this sequence. Hartigan is the closest to being a traditional hero character in this story, as he is the foil to the other corrupt cops in Basin City, including his partner. The absence of added color in this sequence is significant and contrasts the other sequences adapted in the film because Hartigan's motivation is to save and protect Nancy. He does not seek revenge, though Junior does. In contrast to anti-hero Marv in "The Hard Goodbye," whose blood is red and who also seeks revenge, Junior's blood being a putrid yellow signifies him as more sickeningly corrupt through his motivation. Marv's red blood signifies his passion for revenge, and the lack of such coloring for Hartigan suggests his more noble motivations. Here, Hartigan's character is considered, while Marv will be discussed in the following section.

Another moment to discuss here is the prominent use of Kadie's bar in this sequence, where the grayscale lightens and adds some light colorization to the girls working there. The colors are never predominant, but every time the interior of Kadie's appears on screen, this shift in the DI also appears. Since Kadie's is a central location in the film and novel, the color indicates the bar's purpose as a safe haven. The girls inside this space have this light colorization to indicate a softness in comparison to the harsh world outside the walls, where everything is in black and white. However, it is important to note the color is never as intense as in the other moments throughout the film. Instead, it is soft and subtle, almost like Kadie's represents a safe space where color exists but does not blind anyone with its intensity.

This contrast inside of Kadie's becomes particularly important for the character of Nancy. When Nancy dances at Kadie's, she is seen with this light colorization, but outside of this space she lives in the same monochrome world as the others. For the three anti-heroes in the three long sequences, Nancy's dancing on stage creates this ethereal creature throughout the original graphic novels and throughout the film. In Miller's *The Hard Goodbye*, Marv notes, "Plenty of nights I've drooled over Nancy, shoulder to shoulder with all the other losers like me" (54). However, in Rodriguez's "The Hard Goodbye" sequence, the film contains a moment not in the original novels where Dwight is introduced and addresses Marv and Nancy inside Kadie's, stating, "They'd've tossed them girls like Nancy back then" when discussing what Marv would have been like as a Roman warrior. In Miller's *A*

Dame to Kill For, and in the film sequel that adapts this particular graphic novel, Dwight states, “She may be showing off everything she’s got in a joint filled with horny drunks, but Nancy’s the safest gal in the world. Everybody keeps their hands to themselves. They know what happens to you if you don’t” (Miller 85). She represents safety for the anti-heroes, so they in turn make sure she is safe.

In the sequel, *Sin City: A Dame to Kill For* (2014), co-directed by Rodriguez and Miller, Nancy’s story continues after Hartigan’s death. Like the male anti-heroes in the first film, Nancy becomes the anti-hero in the second film and is now shown without color inside Kadie’s, a place where she once was safe. Not only does she physically change her appearance, but her color is stripped from her as well. This sequence parallels Marv’s story for revenge in the first film, as Nancy teams up with Marv to take down the people responsible for Hartigan’s death.

The Hard Goodbye

In Miller’s *The Hard Goodbye*, Marv is motivated by revenge of a woman, Goldie, who showed him one night of passion in exchange for protection (he discovers her motivation after her death but is still moved by her act). His own negative self-confidence and awareness about his looks and personality showcase why he would feel strongly about Goldie, often referring to her as “my golden goddess.” She can see past his exterior to appreciate what he really had to offer her: protection. So, when he wakes up to discover her dead body and that he was being framed for her murder, Marv seeks out revenge in a post-mortem “protection” of Goldie. When Rodriguez shot “The Hard Goodbye” sequence, he kept to the original’s monochrome schematics, but he added Goldie’s blonde hair color and the red satin sheets and lipstick to codify this passion and “golden” compass that seem to drive Marv.

This addition is equally contrasted in Marv’s blood showing red, while the other anti-heroes throughout the film’s sequences do not appear to bleed red. Discussing the aesthetics of color in *Sin City*, Philipp Schmerheim notes:

Blood is an unremarkable element presented to the audience in a non-haptic way, which makes the isolated red-colored representations of blood all the more haptic. One instance is the *The Hard Goodbye* sequence, in which Marv’s blood is sometimes represented in red. In these scenes, he is in the middle of seemingly dangerous situations and

suffers injuries that for normal human beings would be life-threatening. Marv, however, is represented as an almost invincible character—and the red color of his wounds becomes a marker of his invincibility. (122)

However, this “invincibility” is not entirely accurate when viewing the use of red blood compared to the others, who could also appear as invincible in the diegetic storyworld Miller created. Hartigan is shot and left literally hanging by his neck in *That Yellow Bastard* but remains alive, and his blood is not shown as red. Instead, Marv’s red blood in this sequence displays his character’s motivation for revenge. He sees red, so he bleeds red, as do those he hurts and kills throughout the film sequence.

Another moment that clues the audience into this semiotic use of color to characterize Marv is during the opening sex scene in the sequence. While Goldie (alive) presents this colorful and lit presence, the still monochrome Marv completely contrasts her color. Marv stands as this dark, black and white character against Goldie’s full color and light against the red sheets. Wood notes:

While Goldie is a cliché, a prostitute wrapped in red satin sheet, the use of colour is not necessarily saying anything about her status as a sex worker. Rather the colour sets in play an alternative set of resonances that sit in relation to the emotive environment already established by the greyscale aesthetic. (291)

Adding the color here presents Goldie as a passionate figure, and Marv’s descriptions of her as a “golden goddess” against his colorless presence allows viewers to see what Marv sees and feels in those moments. In the original, no colors exist to present this, so adding these colors signifies the passion and awe (i.e., “golden goddess”) which he places upon this moment and upon Goldie.

This representation is further contrasted with the red blood that consistently falls on Marv’s body throughout the rest of the sequence, but only when he is driven for revenge. Purse notes that the film’s

violent, episodic narrative repeatedly returns to physical confrontation and its visceral bodily consequences, and the stylized visuals often work to emphasize these results of physical collision and penetration: blood,

cuts, bandages, and scares glow red or a stark, fluorescent white against the monochrome articulation of the storyworld. (22)

However, his blood no longer shines red at the end of the sequence. His reason for revenge is complete, so his passion and motivation are gone. He returns completely to the monochrome existence he had before meeting Goldie.

Big Fat Kill

Perhaps the most interesting and challenging use of color for characterization in the adaptation is in Rodriguez's "Big Fat Kill" sequence. In this story, Dwight is interrupted by his liaison with Kadie's bartender Shellie (no longer in color now that she is outside of Kadie's) when her ex-boyfriend and his friends show up at her apartment. The rest of the story follows Dwight to Old Town, where he calls on Gail and attempts to help her after Jackie Boy, who is discovered to be a cop, is killed by one of the girls. A truce existed between Old Town and the police force, but killing a cop breaks this truce and Gail will no longer have control over the prostitutes in her jurisdiction. Lindop notes that "the women only become lethal when their autonomy is challenged," which is in direct contrast to the women inside Kadie's bar who represent safety for its male patrons (8). In a final massacre scene, Dwight and the girls stage a coup to ensure they do not fall prey to Basin City's corrupt leaders.

Not for revenge. Not because they deserve it. Not because it'll make the world a better place. There's nothing righteous or noble about it. We gotta kill them because we need them dead. We need a heap of bloody bodies so when mob boss Wallenquist looks over his charts of profits and losses he'll see what it cost him to mess with the girls of Old Town. (Miller 166)

However, despite this massacre sequence, the blood does not flow red and instead remains in the monochrome world. Yet, when the frame pans around the girls of Old Town, especially of Gail and Dwight, the sky above is red as blood, indicating their primal need to maintain their autonomy. What makes this sequence so complicated regarding color and semantics is that this sequence utilizes the most

mixture of colors throughout, but those colors are not always consistent. There are two colors in this sequence worth noting: red and blue.

The first use of color in this sequence does not appear until Dwight finally gets dressed. Dwight is hiding, and several minutes into the sequence, he is finally seen fully dressed and walking across rooms in a shot emphasizing his red Converse sneakers. After he threatens Jackie Boy, he jumps from Shellie's balcony, and again the film emphasizes his red Converse sneakers. Throughout the original graphic novel, Dwight's Converse sneakers are often focused within specific frames, so by adding red to his sneakers in the film, Rodriguez stays true to this focus but shifts the meaning slightly. Additionally, Dwight's car is a bright red, but he is not seen in this car once he reaches Old Town. Much like Marv, Dwight is slightly motivated in the beginning to revenge Shellie, whose ex-boyfriend Jackie Boy belittles and essentially "steps all over her" character. By adding the red to Dwight's sneakers and his car, his motivation to revenge Shellie is noted, but it is not as intense as Marv's thirst for blood. This distinction makes the actual moments of color in this sequence stick out more because Dwight is not completely driven by revenge like Marv but more by a sense of protectiveness like Hartigan. Thus, while his sneakers remain red, he abandons his car in Old Town when he has a new mission to protect the girls of Old Town, and the red coloring no longer overlaps with his revenge.

Dwight is like a quiet anti-hero on the move, which is further showcased by his long scenes in cars. After Miho kills Jackie Boy, Dwight goes on a mission to dump the body and the car in the tar pits. Quentin Tarantino directed this car sequence, and his vision matches that of the rest of the film, using color to show internalization that the restricted narration does not directly allow. Jackie Boy's car is a bright blue, which contrasts with Becky's blue eyes within the sequence, but once he is dead and Dwight begins to drive it, the car loses exterior color completely. Throughout this long dialogue with a dead Jackie Boy, the car's interior pulses with blues, reds, greens, and yellows, indicating the discord within Dwight's mind, despite his outwardly calm and focused exterior. This colorization matches the hallucinatory dialogue Dwight has with the dead Jackie Boy. Once they reach the tar pits, the colors fade back into the black-and-white.

While blue traditionally signifies depression or even stability, the film suggests new meaning here. Instead, blue is used as a challenge to that stability. Jackie Boy is a cop, who is supposed to be a hero figure, but the film presents him as both corrupt and violent. Additionally, the film depicts Becky as a timid young woman (played by a young Alexis Bledel, whose image adds to this character even more),

who should represent hope and naiveté. However, the use of blue here signifies that not everything is what it appears. A cop and a naïve young girl can be bad, just like much of Basin City. This world has shifted the traditional meaning of blue into something more somber and corrupt.

In the original graphic novels, one place occurs where blue plays a predominant role: with the character of Delia in “Blue Eyes,” “Wrong Turn,” and “Wrong Track” in the *Booze, Broads, and Bullets* short story collection. However, this character and these short stories (much like “The Babe in Red” color parallels in “The Customer is Always Right” sequence) are not included in the film adaptation, but the bright blue eyes are transferred to another character, who is revealed as corrupt. Becky’s bright blue eyes throughout the film mirror the consistency of Delia in the graphic novel short stories. Delia is later revealed to be corrupt, just like Becky is at the end of the *Big Fat Kill*. Becky is a victim of circumstance, though, whereas Delia is a trained assassin. Therefore, Rodriguez’s translation manages to shift the meaning here with Becky’s blue eyes, which serve as a foreshadowing of her corruption. However, the shift in the adaptation is through the connection with the other moments where eye color is shown, most notably the connection to the *Booze, Broads, and Bullets* sequence in the film, “The Customer is Always Right.” Not in the original graphic novels, the ending sequence frames the entire film with the hired assassin from this short story. Becky tells her mother she loves her on the phone and hangs up, knowing that death has come for her. This action is similar to the woman in the red dress at the beginning, who dialogues with the assassin, who may be aware of his intentions but seemingly ignores her fate. Just as the woman in red’s eyes shine green in the beginning sequence, Becky’s blue eyes at the end of the film (and throughout) help viewers understand why the assassin has returned to frame and close out the film.

Conclusion

While Robert Rodriguez added color to the original graphic novels he adapted for the *Sin City* film, he managed to place himself in the conversation about the use of color and meaning, specifically as it relates to adapting graphic novels. Color as a signifier for characterization tells a more complex story and adds character depth that can be difficult to achieve in films with a large ensemble cast. However, color and their intended meanings can fail if the codified meaning does not match with the other elements in the cinematographic language. Price states:

A red car appears red precisely because it is the only color of the spectrum that the object itself cannot absorb. All of this should raise serious doubts about the possibility of an intersubjectively verifiable interpretation of works of art in color, as it points to the inescapable fact that despite our best intentions we will all experience it in slightly different ways. In this sense, language becomes a way of regulation perception. (79)

While people may experience color differently, adding specific colors to black and white films focuses the meanings through the cinematographic language the directors utilize. Without other colors to distract, the viewer can interpret these colors with more precision than other films. This is precisely what Robert Rodriguez does with his adaptation of *Sin City*.

While there are moments of color within the film that are not addressed here, such as Manute's golden eye, this article's main purpose was to dissect how color added complexity to the anti-heroes, femme fatales, and main villains throughout four sequences in the film. Specifically, the use of color throughout as semiotic markers for these characters' psyches during particular shots was explored. Adaptation's infidelity to the comic book is often the biggest criticism in comic film adaptations, but Rodriguez's *Sin City* actually does something remarkable through its moments of creative departures and additions to the texts. By adding this color, viewers are given stronger insights into Basin City and can connect on a deeper level cognitively with these characters. His translation demonstrates his own interpretation of these characters. Even though these characters do not fit into a perfect model of good versus evil, Rodriguez's use of color shows the audience that there is more to Basin City than just black and white.

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Reviews

THE *POPULAR CULTURE STUDIES JOURNAL* REVIEWS

Introduction

When I was first asked to take on the role of reviews editor ideas quickly emerged of including the reviews of other types of popular culture texts. Thrilled and encouraged about the idea I modified the call and put out the request. In the last issue I was pleased to include a few reviews of games and movies. This issue however... let me just say... the reviewers have really come through. As such the follow is now broken into different sections. It begins with the book reviews you have grown accustomed to reading. Books covering movies, society, politics, and cultural influences continue the tradition of critical review you have seen in the past.

Following the book reviews, you will find critiques of games, films and television, and even live theater. I am immensely proud to introduce the expanded reviews section. Each of these reviews offer insight into the texts as well as critical questions that I hope will inspire future scholarship. If you yourself become inspired by these reviews, and you wish to contribute, I encourage you to submit a preproposal. To do so, all you need to do is email me directly with an overview and short rationale for the text you wish to review.

In addition to the continued great work of the reviewers, I am also very pleased to welcome my new assistant editor Christopher J. Olson. He has been highly involved on multiple layers of popular culture criticism, including authoring and editing books reviewed in this very journal. He is currently finishing his PhD at the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee in the area of Media, Cinema, and Digital Studies. I am incredibly grateful for his willingness to apply his critical and thoughtful eyes in service to the journal.

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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 an 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.

Scott Anderson
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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.

Matthew Brittingham
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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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Film and Television Reviews

Green Book. Dir. Peter Farrelly. Screenplay by Nick Vallelonga, Brian Hayes Currie, and Peter Farrelly. Perf. Viggo Mortensen, Mahershala Ali, and Linda Cardellini. Universal Pictures, 2018.

I saw the Academy Award-winning film *Green Book* in a nearly full movie theater during a holiday season matinee. Each time Tony Lip, played by Viggo Mortensen, acted brutishly or violently, the audience laughed. Apparently, *Green Book*, a film that depicts racial segregation and the difficulties of interracial friendships, is a comedy.

Green Book takes its title from the travel guide of the same name that listed accommodations for blacks so they could maneuver through the segregated landscape, as explained in Richard A. Kennedy's thesis *Auto Mobility, Hospitality, and African American Tourism*. In the film, the two characters traverse a segregated Midwest and South in 1962. The guidebook was essential because blacks were frequently targets of violence. Few people experienced more problems than touring performers. For example, in 1956 white supremacists attacked Nat King Cole in Birmingham. In 1964, Duke Ellington was refused service in a Virginia bus station when he tried to buy a sandwich. There are mentions of Cole's attack and we hear his version of "The Christmas Song" play over the last scene in the film. Nevertheless, most of the film's key plot points involve sandwiches, hotel rooms, bars, and swimming pools. Films easily depict *Green Book*'s type of racism because hotel accommodations are perfect for the visual narrative of cinema. However, inherent in this depiction is an assumption that racism is about skin and geography. In actuality, racism is about power.

Though a primary character in the film is concert pianist Dr. Don Shirley, played by Mahershala Ali, this is not a film about music or about black musicians. *Green Book* is a film about the education of a white man, Tony Lip. Shirley hires Lip as a chauffeur/bodyguard. The film makes clear that Lip has the power to change himself and he has the power to assault those who stand in his way. Slowly, the film removes Lip from any accountability for racism by showing him in violent altercations with racists, which is a cinematic investment in the binary fallacy of the "good" white and the "bad" white (MacIntosh 129). The film's depiction of

police echoes this binary: the northern police are helpful and the southern police are bigoted cowards.

Throughout, the film depicts Lip's racist language and violent tendencies as humorous. Each time the audience laughs, they erase the brutality of the character and resist the reframing of violence as a white privilege. In the place of serious engagement with the racial system, the film focuses on Lip's transformation from someone who refuses to drink from the same glass as a black man to a person who welcomes a black man to his table for Christmas dinner. As Dawn Marie D. McIntosh recently argued in the "Monstrosity" issue of this journal, "Inferential racism is a response to these growing cultural realities and propelled by whites denying personal responsibility in racism" (122). Indeed, Lip tries to deny his role by claiming that he is blacker than Shirley because he knows more about Aretha Franklin and poverty. In doing so, Lip metaphorically pulls on the mask of minstrelsy and commodified black culture as a shield against accusations of his own racism.

Like Lip, the film evades the "correlation between whiteness, white bodies, and white racism in the everyday" (McIntosh 123). The pivotal moment for the evasion happens at a swimming pool. Never mind the fact that towns with segregated accommodations would never have integrated pools, Lip rescues Shirley from the police who caught Shirley and a white man together in the locker room. Lip bribes the police and extricates Shirley. No thought is given to the white lover they abandoned. Here is the scene most indicative of the body politics without the body or the politics. Again, it is about Lips' powerful whiteness. Moreover, there was the opportunity for the film to connect race, masculinity, and sexuality, but to do this would require a challenge to what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie calls the "single story," which was a challenge the filmmakers did not take.

Green Book shares much in common with films such as *Driving Miss Daisy*, as *The New York Times* recently noted. I would also suggest shared commonality with *Paris Blues* (1961), *48 Hours* (1982), *Lethal Weapon* (1987), *Forrest Gump* (1994), *Oh Brother Where Art Thou* (2000), and *Mr. Church* (2016). In this genre, the filmmakers present the black character as the teacher and the white character as the pupil. When the white character chooses to learn, then this character becomes the hero and the black character becomes the ward.

In these films, it is rare to see the black character interact with other black characters. It is so rare in fact, that when these interactions happen it feels shocking, as though the veil is being briefly pulled back. *Green Book* contains two scenes like

this. The most obvious occurs after Shirley stands up to a racist and walks out on the job. Lip and Shirley go to a barrelhouse where Shirley plays Chopin for a black audience. Then, Lip saves Shirley's life one last time. However, the pinnacle scene happens about halfway through the film when Lip must pull over to fix the car. Shirley stands in the sun and gazes across the road at a black family working in a field. The family pauses and stares back. No one speaks because this is one of those muted moments that are the glory of cinema. The road that divides them is not so big that Shirley could not imagine himself in their poverty. Racism was never about geography. It was about power. Lip fixes the car. Even though as they drive away Shirley sat in the back seat and Lip in the front, Lip retained the power. In this way, the white character remains at the center of this genre that attempts to challenge white privilege.

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The Kindergarten Teacher. Dir. Sara Colangelo. Screenplay by Sara Colangelo. Perf. Maggie Gyllenhaal, Gael García Bernal, Michael Chernus, and Parker Sevak. Pie Films, 2018.

The Kindergarten Teacher, Sara Colangelo's 2018 remake of the 2014 Israeli film *Haganenet*, focuses on New York kindergarten teacher Lisa Spinelli (Maggie Gyllenhaal). Lisa, uninspired by her Staten Island home life with husband Grant (Michael Chernus) and their teen children, attends a poetry class run by the charismatic Simon (Gael García Bernal). Presenting some of the poetry spontaneously produced by her East-Asian American kindergarten student, Jimmy Roy (Parker Sevak), Lisa impresses her class and becomes inspired to do more for her student. Through a series of twists and turns the film continues to chronicle the choices Lisa makes for her student. Audience's near and far love Jimmy but soon Simon accuses Lisa of being a dilettante who recognizes talent while having none and asks her not to return to class.

The Kindergarten Teacher recalls other films that I in 2012 termed popular education films (PEF's) or popular films about the school experience. The PEF genre is critiqued for its problematic depictions of race and difference. PEF's are often narrated from a white male teacher's point of view, individuals that Adam Farhi in 1999 called superteachers, whose goal it becomes to save socially marginalized students. Films in this genre include *Dangerous Minds* (John N. Smith, 1995), *Freedom Writers* (Richard LaGravenese, 2007), and *Skirt Day* (Jean-Paul Lilienfeld, 2009).

Rather than falling lockstep into line with the archetypal superteacher narrative, *The Kindergarten Teacher* seemingly critiques this genre. When Lisa oversteps her boundaries and interferes first in Jimmy's education and then in his home life, believing she is an inspirational mentor, she is portrayed as out of touch with those whose help she tries to solicit. Jimmy's uncle Sanjay is visibly uncomfortable as Lisa hugs him after an unexpected visit to his workplace to enlist him in fostering Jimmy's talent. Babysitter Becca comments on Lisa's intensive focus on Jimmy by asking if Lisa has children and upon learning that she does, Becca comments that they are very lucky as, "You're ... very attentive." Both interactions intimate that Lisa's connection to Jimmy is out of proportion.

When PEF's feature female teachers, the genre has been critiqued for stereotypical portrayals. Patrick Ryan and Sevan Terzian in their 2009 study of

teacher Miss Brooks from the radio/TV series *Our Miss Brooks* (1948-1957) argues that the character's representation focused mostly on her lack of a personal life and maternal nature while her intelligence and teaching skill were downplayed. *The Kindergarten Teacher* appears to speak to these critiques as it is Lisa's failed aspirations and home life that compel her to form an obsessive fixation on Jimmy. The film frames Lisa locked in a pseudo-maternal role by portraying her cleaning the classroom, preparing and serving snacks, and putting children down to naps rather than as a respected professional. In this regard the film perhaps comments on society's failure to recognize and nurture women's intellectual abilities. In an interview with media critic Mary Sollosi in 2018, Gyllenhaal argues, "[Lisa] is a consequence of the broken culture that she lives in. I don't think she's naturally mentally ill. I don't think she's crazy. I just think, here's what happens when a bright, interesting woman gets stifled for too long." Speaking with Patrick Ryan in 2018 Gyllenhaal reiterates her commitment to projects featuring women as this film is written, directed, financed, produced, and headlined by women.

Lisa fixates on Jimmy's creativity because she craves intellectual stimulation but also love and human connection. Lisa hopes that Jimmy's talent will win her the love of Simon and her peers, but when that plan fails, Lisa focuses on the love that she hopes Jimmy will bestow on her as her mentee and his sole guardian. At the poetry reading Jimmy tells the crowd his poem is devoted to Anna, Lisa's teacher's aide, and Lisa is clearly upset by this revelation; Lisa clearly wants to be Jimmy's muse. Through Lisa's portrayal we see that the superteacher's efforts are not for the student who becomes secondary to the teacher's own search for fulfillment.

Often PEF's depict students of color as having absent parents or families that pose barriers to their future success. Again, *The Kindergarten Teacher* flips the script as Jimmy, despite the fact that his parents are divorced, has a hardworking father in Nikhil who is invested in his son's success. Nikhil, a nightclub owner, does not want Jimmy to attend the poetry recital because he rightly knows this is inappropriate for a kindergartener as we later see Jimmy listening to a poet who delves into sexually explicit metaphors and adult language. Nikhil tells Lisa that he wants Jimmy to play ball with his friends after school instead of going to the club. Nikhil argues to Lisa, "Don't overthink it. They need things simple at this age." In this moment, the onus shifts from the white teacher, whom PEF's often frame as the responsible adult, to the parent, here a person of color with his child's best interests at heart. Jimmy also has his uncle Sanjay who reads with him. The film

presents two strong male role models of color in contrast to a white teacher who pursues her own interests through her student.

Other PEF's have also critiqued the archetypal white superteacher narrative. In the film *Half Nelson* (Ryan Fleck, 2006) white teacher Dan Dunne (Ryan Goslin) is initially presented as wanting to keep African-American student Drey (Shareeka Epps) engaged in school so she will not become a drug messenger. Instead of Dan saving Drey, she saves herself and serves as an agent of change seeking to affect Dan's recovery (Alley-Young, 2011). The examples of Drey and Jimmy attest that students, not superteachers, are active agents in their own advancement.

That said, the racially problematic aspects of this flipped superteacher script include framing students of color and their experiences as secondary to white teacher protagonists' lives. So, while *The Kindergarten Teacher*, like *Half Nelson*, disavows Lisa of her position by having Jimmy seek help, the question remains whether Jimmy acts to save himself or works to serve and protect Lisa, his teacher. Either way, *The Kindergarten Teacher* urges viewers to consider the consequences when women and people of color are relegated to playing secondary roles in their own lives, serving others, and/or suppressing their own aspirations. Viewers are left to wonder what will happen to students like Jimmy as he sits alone in a police car saying, "I have a poem, I have a poem," with no one present to take notice.

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Shoplifters. Dir. Hirokazu Kore-eda. Screenplay by Hirokazu Kore-eda. Perf. Lily Franky, Sakura Andô, and Kirin Kiki. Aoi Pro, Inc., 2018.

Family has been a recurring theme in many of Hirokazu Kore-eda's films. In *Nobody Knows* (2004), Kore-eda showed us abandoned children in Tokyo whose lives are slowly brought to deterioration. He depicted the children's downfall through a series of episodic images, so that what happens to them begins to look as if it was a part of the metropolis' reality. His more recent *Like Father Like Son* (2013) posed a poignant question: What connects family? The time they spend together? The memories they share with each other? Or simple, biological factors like blood? Kore-eda highlighted this question, specifically by not prioritizing one over the other. Kore-eda has portrayed many families in his works so far, and the ways in which these families take shape are varied. Now, his latest film *Shoplifters*

(2018) presents one form that family may take in a contemporary urban environment, which is becoming rapidly and increasingly stratified.

Shoplifters begins with a somewhat comical scene in which a middle-aged man and a young boy cooperate to shoplift at a supermarket. We are thus introduced to two main characters, Osamu and Shōta, of the Shibata Family. The Shibatas—Osamu, the father (Lily Franky), Nobuyo, the mother (Sakura Andō), Shōta, their son (Kairi Jō), Aki, Nobuyo's younger sister (Mayu Matsuoka), and Hatsue, Osamu's mother (Kirin Kiki)—appear to be a family, simply struggling to make ends meet. Yet the story soon unfolds in an unexpected direction, when Osamu and Shōta encounter Juri/Yuri/Lin (Miyu Sasaki), a little girl who has been abused by her parents, and Nobuyo decides to “keep” her. What is initially presented as an ordinary family thereafter reveals its extraordinariness little by little.

One of the striking visual tropes that *Shoplifters* uses is the shared space that the family members occupy: namely, their home, their residence. They live in a small, old house in suburban Tokyo, caught in shadow, in obscurity, between high-rise buildings. Inside the house are found a jumble of objects: a rice cooker next to piles of plastic bags, clothes side by side with cardboard boxes, musty bedding adjoining instant foods, and the like. There is no rational order between these objects. Quickly exposed in the beginning of the film to an untidy heap of things in the house, each of which is not so easily identifiable, the viewer has no choice but to leave them as they are. We are not ready to reason, nor make sense of the connections between the things displayed in front of our eyes.

Throughout the film, Osamu and Shōta frequent a grocery store to steal their daily necessities. The brightly-lit, neatly organized aisles of the store make a stark contrast to the dark, messy interior of their home. Shop clerks tidying up commodities behind the two shoplifters becomes a crucial part of the film's mise-en-scène. There is nothing unusual about clerks arranging goods if it takes place in a regular context. Yet in this film their constant, punctual action of structuring counter-illuminates the disorderliness that chronically permeates every alcove of the Shibata household.

A series of images of the random objects inside the house present the family members as if they were the extension of these objects: one thing after another, and another, and another. A hodgepodge of things and people prevail the same space, as if the former assimilated the latter. They exist in such a chaotic manner that they would topple down if thrown off balance. The family's falling apart becomes foreseeable most strongly when Shōta spoils the order of goods to draw a clerk's

attention in the store. This moment is elucidative on multiple levels; Shōta's action introduces confusion into lines of organized items on the one hand, while forcing each family member to be subsumed back into traditional, socially accepted order. No matter how mainstream this order operates in a given society, however, it only functions to disturb the peculiar space that the Shibatas, perhaps out of necessity but still inadvertently, have developed.

The Shibata Family stands on the edge of equilibrium. Nevertheless, specifically because of such fragility, they do not allow us to keep our eyes off them. These objects and people, nonsensically arranged next to each other, invite us to think of a possibility of a family that is connected through spatial contiguity, rather than through symbolic lineage, such as blood. They simply exist in the same space, and that is what ties this family together. Such a relationship may not make sense, considering the conventional meaning of family. Yet, precisely because of the absence of meaning, the relationship that the Shibatas fostered with each other becomes more compelling.

In *Shoplifters*, Kore-eda literally shows a family that lives in an abyss, between objects, between buildings, between social problems. With *Shoplifters*, Kore-eda created an abyss that allows us to glimpse such a family. When confronted by that abyss, we should surrender ourselves to it.

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Udaari. Dir. Mohammed Ehteshamuddin. Teleplay by Farhat Ishtiaq. Perf. Samiya Mumtaz, Bushra Ansari, and Ahsan Khan. Momina Duraid Productions, 2016.

Although violence against women and girls is a global issue, the problem is exacerbated in Pakistan because of tribalism, patriarchal values, and a corrupt criminal justice system (Khan, 2005). Several volunteer organizations provide support and legal aid to the victims, but only 30% of the reported cases are prosecuted in court (War Against Rape). The survivors and their families are often pressured into silence because rape is seen as a woman or a girl's irreparable "loss of virtue," and brings shame to the entire family (Rasheed, 2004).

The Pakistani TV serial, *Udaari*, which aired on the television network Hum TV from April 10 to September 4, 2016, is a commendable attempt to raise awareness of sexual abuse of children in Pakistan. The TV serial depicts a rapist/child molester wreaking havoc in the lives of his victims who struggle to rebuild after their traumatic experiences. Although the serial does the community immense service by raising the taboo subject of sexual abuse and providing role models of courageous mothers, it also promulgates harmful stereotypes of stepfathers as child molesters and normalizes the high level of proof that must be met before a child molester can be convicted in Pakistan.

Intertwining the story of three families led by strong women—Sheeda (Bushra Ansari), Sajjo (Samiya Mumtaz), and Muneera (Laila Zuberi)—*Udari* provides a vision of motherhood in which women put the needs of their children above their fear of societal judgments. The fear of “*log kya kahengey*” (what will people say?) typically keeps women in Pakistan quiet even under extreme circumstances such as rape and abuse. However, *Udaari* depicts women making courageous decisions for the sake of their children and spreads a much-needed message of hope and agency.

Sheeda performs the role of a mother who protects her daughter from sexual predators before her daughter becomes a victim. For the young girls and mothers watching this show, Sheeda’s courage seems extra ordinary as Pakistani culture expects women to suffer in silence. When Sheeda’s neighbor tries to rape her daughter, Sheeda chooses to believe her daughter. Cultural norms dictate that such incidents be immediately suppressed in case the neighbors find out. The fear of “*log kya kahenge*” (what will people say?) is very real as *log* (people) almost always blame the victim for inviting an assault. However, Sheeda defies cultural norms and marches into her neighbor’s house to confront the perpetrator. With such bold moves, Sheeda acts as a role model for Pakistani women throughout the serial.

Sheeda’s urban counterpart, Muneera, is a wealthy, progressive mother who empowers her daughter by allowing her to make her own choices and empowers others by taking a leadership position in a volunteer organization. Muneera is an example to the wealthy women of Pakistan who have the resources to help others but instead choose not to see the suffering around them. Like Sheeda, Muneera operates not on the debilitating logic of “*log kya kahengey*,” (what will people say?) but her own sensibilities.

On the other hand, Sajjo performs the role of a mother that Pakistani women are quite familiar with. She seems blind to the fact that she has married a sexual predator who is more interested in her young daughter, Zebu, than her. Even when

she eventually realizes that her husband has molested Zebu, Sajjo is unable to confront him. She pretends like nothing has happened and instructs Zebu to never talk speak of this incident to anyone. Sajjo's desperate silence strikes a chord in the audience. Women in Pakistan often feel helpless in such situations as the law does not protect them. They cannot even turn to their families or neighbors because *log* (people) are more likely to ostracize them than offer support. However, when her husband molests Zebu again, Sajjo stabs him in a fit of rage and flees the village with Zebu. The contrast between Sajjo and Sheeda is quite stark. Sheeda makes bold moves to protect her daughter while Sajjo takes the path of silence and inaction. The TV serial poignantly depicts that failing to act will only empower the perpetrator.

Udaari does a marvelous job of showing three mothers who dare to put the well-being of their children above the common fear of judgment of relatives and neighbors. However, the serial promotes a harmful stereotype of stepfathers as child molesters. Many Pakistani mothers of young children are afraid to remarry for fear that their new husbands will molest their daughters, which means that single mothers and their children cannot reap the economic benefits of having a two-parent household. Since the TV serial challenges cultural taboos and fears, it could have gone a step further and depicted a step father who was a positive influence in a child's life.

Udaari normalizes the availability of an eye witness and a confession in child abuse cases instead of depicting the reality of Pakistan's laws, which makes it almost impossible to get a rape conviction. In the serial, the court believes Zebu's testimony only when an eye witness comes forward, which makes the perpetrator so angry that he confesses to molesting Zebu twice. *Udaari* tells mothers that the law can protect them, and at the same time, demonstrates that the burden of proof is so high that most rape and molestation cases will get dismissed. It would have been far more realistic if the TV serial had cast the molester as a biological father and engineered the plot to show that Zebu's testimony was dismissed by the court and Sajjo was given the maximum sentence for attempted murder. The ending would not have been pleasant but would have done much to raise awareness of Pakistan's rape laws that place an impossible burden of proof on the victims.

Overall, in spite of these missteps, *Udaari* raises a critical issue which has been neglected by the Pakistani entertainment media. Not only does it bring the taboo subject of rape into the living rooms of Pakistanis but also provides role models who tackle the problem head-on rather than bury their heads in the sand.

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Game Reviews

The Mind. Pandasaurus Games, 2018.

The Mind, created by Wolfgang Warsch, is a cooperative card game in which two to four players must work together to defeat all the levels of the game without exchanging information (i.e., no talking). The deck contains cards numbered 1-100 and, depending on the number of players, teams try to complete 8-12 levels of play. In each level, players receive a hand of cards equal to the number of the level (i.e., one card per player in level 1, two cards per player in level 2, and so on). The team must then collectively play these cards in the center of the table (in a single pile) in ascending order without communicating with each other about what cards they hold. The team starts with lives equal to the number of players and if someone plays a card out of order, the team loses one life. As the team successfully completes levels, they earn rewards along the way. If they complete all levels before losing all their lives, they win.

In 2018, *The Mind* was nominated for three prestigious board game awards, including the *Spiel des Jahres* (Game of the Year, German market award), and won two: the *Guldbrikken* Best Parlor Game and *Guldbrikken* Special Jury Prize (The Golden Pawn, Danish game industry awards). With over 6,000 reviews on Board Game Geek (the largest online board-gaming resource and community), *The Mind* currently ranks 34th best out of 506 party games. Immediately following its release, the game sold out across many board game sellers in Germany and the United States and has since been reprinted. The game's popularity suggests a strong social and cultural resonance with its theme and mechanics.

As players, we observed the most profound feature to be the transformation of *waiting* into a significant medium of communication. As the game's rules indicate, "the secret of the game is developing that collective feeling for 'now is the moment.'" This feeling develops out of reciprocal waiting. Unlike many board games, in *The Mind*, waiting is not a form of wasted down time but rather a central component of participation that emerges from playing with and understanding other players. By turning waiting into an enticing and central part of play, this game offers a unique take on the cooperative experience, which we address in the remainder of this review.

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The board game industry is currently undergoing a cardboard revolution, which has created a golden era of analog games. From cards to boards and rooms to parlors, game players are increasingly attracted to a variety of new gameplay experiences. Traditional board games often rely on contexts of competition or *agôn* (contest), where gameplay typically forces players to strategize their choices for maximum impact, undermine other players when possible, and accumulate resources or points for their own benefit. Within this competitive structure, players often work together to undermine a runaway leader or to form efficient alliances but their extrinsic motivation for teamwork is limited. However, newer board games are transforming this team structure from a tertiary component into a central mechanic of cooperative game play.

Cooperative games are a growing genre of board games that rely not on player antagonism but on group strategy to beat the structure of the game. Players work together to surmount resource limitation, overcome challenges, and defeat specific enemies. In the end, they either win or lose together. Because players still have individual agency, a cooperative structure relies upon explicit, open communication and group strategy to balance player choices with group goals. *The Mind* introduces board gamers to a cooperative style of play that transforms this system of communication and the strategies of interaction that players engage in to achieve group success.

By restricting players from exchanging information—essentially asking them not to communicate—*The Mind* implicitly requires players to facilitate cooperative gameplay through two alternative channels of communication: silence and waiting. Unlike most games where players verbally communicate their insights and ambitions, in *The Mind* players work to understand how their silence can communicate. As one player lays down a card in the center of the table, the other players must gauge the meaning of the silence reverberating among the rest of the group. These moments of silence give players the opportunity to think about their available cards, consider the possible cards in the hands of other players, and evaluate the statistical odds in favor of or against their actions. Moreover, the silent nature of the game play encourages a contemplative approach to interaction that values the potential of other players and ignites both anxiety and hope around the table while everyone waits to see what the others will do.

Essentially, *The Mind* turns silence into waiting and waiting becomes a form of communication. The decision to do nothing, to wait, signals to other players that it is their turn to contemplate action. When a player's card choice is apparent, they

are quick to lay down a card. When there is more ambiguity in the situation, individuals are apt to stay silent and wait. The longer one waits, the more everyone must contemplate. Waiting, then, becomes a strategic decision that has expressive intensity. That intensity, felt simultaneously by all players, is the game's most compelling and unique feature. It is particularly resonant given the current social and cultural moment. In a time of heightened narcissism, increasing allegiance to a competitive marketplace, fast-paced communication technologies, and reactionary politics, *The Mind* encourages players to pay attention to one another, cooperate, embrace waiting, and operate more mindfully.

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Poké Ball Plus, Nintendo, 2018.

Nintendo's *Poké Ball Plus* brings a long-awaited tactile component to both *Pokémon Go* (2016) and *Pokémon Let's Go, Eevee/Pikachu* (2018). Approximately 48mm in diameter, and a mere 65g, this lightweight accessory mimics the appearance of a "Pokéball," a small spherical device used to catch and store fictional monsters called "Pokémon." Easily fitting in your pocket and possessing approximately three hours of battery life, the device can be realistically carried and used on an everyday basis. Its adjustable wrist strap, like those found on other types of Nintendo motion controllers, helps to comfortably secure the device, which retails at \$49.99, only \$10 less than the full-cost of the game *Let's Go*.

Released November 16, 2018, the *Poké Ball Plus* enables two divergent playstyles, respective to the two games with which it can be paired: Niantic's augmented reality mobile title *Pokémon Go* (2016), and Nintendo's Switch title *Pokémon Let's Go* (2018). Despite their shared franchise and generally similar player-goals, the vast gulf between differing platforms divides the two games, and, consequently, the ludic possibilities each entails. As an augmented reality (AR) mobile game, *Pokémon Go* uses geolocations to spawn items and wild Pokémon in real time, across a real-world map. Before the release of the *Poké Ball Plus*, it

represented one of the most immersive experiences in the franchise, and the only one to close the gap between its diegetic world and our own. *Let's Go*, on the other hand, retains the well-entrenched console game design upon which the Pokémon franchise has been built since its inception. While its graphics and some of its play mechanics are new, the game's basic design is comfortably familiar. Both the limitations and the desired effects of the two platforms predetermine the play possibilities of the *Poke Ball Plus* when used in combination with your smartphone or Switch.

Niantic's smash-hit AR mobile game, *Pokémon Go* premiered in July 2016 on iOS and Android devices. Utilizing the digital map infrastructure they previously built for their first AR game, *Ingress* (2012), Niantic combined their pioneering location-based game design with the cultural currency of the globally successful Pokémon franchise. *Pokémon Go* struck gold by capitalizing on the collectability inherent to the franchise, which frequently releases new sets of monsters. The franchise slogan, "Gotta catch 'em all!" aptly captures the manic desire for consumption upon which successful mobile game franchises are built.

Used in conjunction with *Pokémon Go*, the *Poké Ball Plus* serves as more of a tool of convenience than of gameplay enrichment. It allows the player to complete routine and repetitive tasks, such as collecting items and catching low-level Pokémon, with a single click of the *Poké Ball Plus*'s large top button. The ability to play *Pokémon Go* without being glued to your smartphone screen brings added convenience to the game, while further immersing the player. The central conceit of *Pokémon Go*—that these adorable creatures exist, and can be interacted with, in our own "real" world—is enhanced when the intermediary screen becomes unnecessary for play to occur. In short, the *Poké Ball Plus* more effectively augments reality than *Go* does on its own, by further blurring the lines between the world we live in and the one we play in. This little round accessory enhances the game's ludic elements by adding physicality to it; the game feels more "real" when you're *really* pressing a *real* button.

At their core, nearly all *Pokémon* stories center on a young trainer who travels the world trying to catch every unique type of Pokémon. *Go* found its success in combining this narrative premise with real-world geo-syncing and accelerometers. To go out and catch Pokémon within *Go*, you had to literally *go* out, explore, search for wild creature spawns, interact with waypoints of various kinds, and then walk a significant amount to "hatch" the Pokémon eggs acquired along the way. Nintendo's *Poké Ball Plus* immerses players even further within the fantasy of

becoming a Pokémon master – while going about their normal lives – by removing the need to awkwardly stare at a screen when walking and by adding a haptic prop that makes the player’s simulated action “feel” real at a sensory level.

Through Niantic’s AR mobile game, players seek the fantasy of adding Pokémon to their own physical space within reality. There is a clear distinction between this “real” space and the in-universe, diegetic game space contained within the Nintendo Switch’s *Pokémon Let’s Go*, the fantasy of which centers instead upon physically interacting with Pokémon. When playing *Let’s Go* on the Nintendo Switch, the *Poké Ball Plus* functions as a motion controller. In the same way that the steering-wheel motion controller, pioneered on the Wii, strengthens the immersive experience of playing *Mario Kart*, the *Poké Ball Plus* advances the fantasy of catching Pokémon. The sense of player agency—of real interaction with the creatures—is enhanced by the linkage of physical player motion with their corresponding onscreen successes and failures. The sensation of “throwing” a Pokéball, and the ensuing elation or dejection that follows its result, adds a sense of embodiment to player experience.

In addition to its effect on play, the *Poké Ball Plus* is also physically-appealing. Though similarly-functioning yet less expensive *Pokémon Go* accessories exist, they tend to look like gawdy watches or weird keychains. The *Poké Ball Plus* remains the only such device that looks accurate to the item it simulates, and this accuracy represents a huge draw in terms of both immersion and “nerd cred.”

The *Poké Ball Plus* only possesses one critical drawback: its limited effectiveness as a game controller. While it effectively simplifies the *Pokémon Go* processes of collecting digital goods from “Poké stops” and of catching wild Pokémon while navigating the real world, this accessory currently lacks motion control capabilities within the mobile game. Thus, the game’s reality-fantasy is diminished, as you can only use the *Plus*’s button to catch Pokémon. A similar controller limitation detracts from the otherwise positive motion controller experience within *Let’s Go*. Using the *Poké Ball Plus* to “throw” Pokéballs in the Switch game comes at the expense of using a controller with a better joystick to navigate the game world. In the current iteration, the *Plus* replaces, rather than augments, an existing Switch controller, meaning its tiny and unintuitive joystick nearly cancels out the added enjoyment the motion controls bring to *Let’s Go*. In terms of minor drawbacks, the *Plus* becomes dirty quicker than you might expect for a product allegedly intended for everyday use; its durability is also somewhat dubious. At nearly the full cost of a new console game, these drawbacks make the

Poké Ball Plus hard to recommend to any but the most diehard of Pokémon fans—myself included—for whom none of these setbacks can outweigh the thrill of “throwing” a visually-accurate Pokéball.

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The Thing: Infection at Outpost 31, Mondo Games and Project Raygun, 2017.

In *Game Play: Paratextuality in Contemporary Board Games* (2015), Paul Booth writes that “Paratextual board games create meaning from the tension between an authorial presence and audience play; this meaning is created between player, designer, and original text” (46). The cooperative hidden identity board game *The Thing: Infection at Outpost 31* (2017) exemplifies this idea. The game, an adaptation of director John Carpenter’s 1982 horror film *The Thing* (itself an adaptation of John W. Campbell’s short story “Who Goes There?” which was previously adapted by Howard Hawks and Christian Nyby in 1951 as *The Thing from Another World*), successfully transplants the paranoia that plays such an important role in the movie and transforms it into a necessary ludic element that informs each play session. Designed by Joe Van Wetering and featuring whimsical artwork by Justin Erickson of Phantom City Creative, *Infection at Outpost 31* faithfully “recreates the world of *The Thing*, making players feel the cold isolation of Outpost 31” (*The Thing Board Game*), and asks players to work together to complete various missions even as it generates an overwhelming sense of distrust among them. Ultimately, *Infection at Outpost 31* translates the narrative of Carpenter’s film from a cinematic context into a ludic setting in a way that manages to, as Booth writes, “strengthen and cohere” the cult world, thereby making it more real for fans (177).

In *Infection at Outpost 31*, published by Mondo Games and Project Raygun, four to eight players spend anywhere from 60 to 120 minutes re-enacting the scenario from Carpenter’s cult classic, in which a shapeshifting alien infiltrates a remote Antarctic research station staffed by an increasingly suspicious crew.

Players can choose to play as one of the 12 characters featured in the film, including Blair (Wilford Brimley), Palmer (David Clennon), Childs (Keith David), and MacReady (Kurt Russell). They must then work together to kill the titular monster and escape from the rapidly failing station. Yet one or more players have become infected by the Thing and now aim to surreptitiously sabotage the efforts of the other players as they embark on missions to track down crucial supplies (such as dynamite, rope, and a flamethrower) and to find the alien that has intruded upon their fragile sanctuary. Thus, *Infection at Outpost 31* incorporates a traitor mechanic like the one described by Jonas Linderoth in “Exploring Anonymity in Cooperative Board Games.” According to Linderoth, such a mechanic dictates that “one or more of the players are supposed to secretly work with the game board and ruin the other players’ chances of victory” (7). The traitor mechanic thereby generates mistrust among the players to the degree that “the motives of anyone suggesting a specific strategy can be questioned” (7). *Infection at Outpost 31* utilizes such a traitor mechanic to recreate the paranoid atmosphere that characterizes Carpenter’s film, as players become increasingly wary of their teammates each time a sabotage card appears during a critical mission.

The game uses its complex but easy-to-learn mechanics to further establish this tension-filled mood, as it forces one player to assume the role of leader and decide who will accompany them when exploring the different rooms throughout the station. The leader (referred to in the instructions as “the captain”) is determined through rolling the dice; whoever rolls the highest number becomes the captain, their authority signified by their possession of the “gun” token. Throughout the game, the captain determines which players venture out to search for the tools needed to escape the station and thereby allow the human players to win the game. It also becomes the captain’s responsibility to ultimately decide which players to leave behind or to kill prior to escaping should some or all the other members of the party accuse them of being infected. This setup becomes complicated by the fact that the leader is not immune to infection and might use their power to mislead the human players. This play-mechanic intensifies the ludic anxiety, effectively approximating—and embodying within players—the atmospheric terror Carpenter creates within his horror masterpiece. As such, *Infection at Outpost 31* demonstrates Booth’s assertion that paratextual board games must exhibit a “keen awareness of the particular mechanics as they apply to the media franchise” if they are to be considered a successful adaptation (7). In that regard, *Infection at Outpost*

31 succeeds because it facilitates ludic interaction between itself and the original media text, thereby serving as a superb adaptation of the source material.

Despite the positive ludic interaction described above, the game does suffer from a few drawbacks, not the least of which involves the number of players needed to launch a campaign. *Infection at Outpost 31* requires a minimum of four players, meaning that organizing a play session can sometimes prove difficult. In addition, playing with only four players can sometimes make identifying which player or players have become infected too easy, decreasing the paranoia that drives the game's ludic interaction and rendering the game less enjoyable. Despite this admitted shortcoming, a group of five or more players ensures that the Thing's identity remains a mystery throughout, thereby ramping up the suspicion that connects players to the storyworld of Carpenter's film. For example, at the 2018 MPCA conference in Indianapolis, Indiana, I played the game with seven other participants, one of whom became infected in the first round but nevertheless managed to conceal this fact right up until the very end, much to the shock of the other players. Overall, *The Thing: Infection at Outpost 31* does a fine job of translating Carpenter's film from the screen to the tabletop and should therefore appeal to both hardcore fans of the property and board game enthusiasts alike.

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Theatrical Reviews

Soft Power. Dir. Leigh Silverman. Play and lyrics by David Henry Hwang. Perf. Francis Jue, Conrad Ricamora, and Alyse Alan Louis. Center Theatre Group (Los Angeles), 2018.

Imagine a future in which the United States is no longer a global superpower but, instead, China is, and the rest of the world comes to understand American culture through highly-visualized, -verbalized, and -physicalized gestures generated by Chinese musicals. Commissioned by Los Angeles' Center Theatre Group for their 50th anniversary season in 2018, David Henry Hwang's *Soft Power* asked audiences to do just that, displacing those who are primarily used to, perhaps even unquestioningly comfortable with, the deep-seated stereotypes and assumptions that American popular culture continues to produce about Asia – if only for a few brief hours. In response to the frustrating orientalism and misappropriations found specifically in “Asian” musicals like *The King and I* and *Miss Saigon*, Hwang's work functions as a loving critique of the broad strokes and generalities about Asian countries and cultures that Western musical theater has generated. Through a metatheatrical framing device, color-conscious casting and acting choices, and the excess and exaggeration highlighted by its set design and musical numbers, *Soft Power* flips the Americentric worldview upside-down to present a complex, farcical representation of America, embracing musical theatre's form while simultaneously pushing back against the very sociocultural and political power system(s) that produce knowledges about other cultures.

In a series of metatheatrical moves, a dramatized version of Hwang named DHH (Francis Jue) serves as the show's protagonist who meets with a Chinese producer (Xue Xing, played by Conrad Ricamora) about his

script; DHH, although Asian American himself, is guided by American-produced ideologies and perspectives about Asia, unable to understand Chinese customs and values and butchering the pronunciation of the language. DHH soon meets Xing's girlfriend, Zoe (Alyse Alan Louis), a political artist who presents a brief diatribe about the orientalist nature of American musical theatre. Importantly, Zoe suggests that musicals are an incredibly effective "delivery system," a medium that shrouds a text's actual ideologies and messages—often distorted and dangerous—within emotional and poignant aesthetics, such as beautiful musical scores and eloquent dance numbers. Also, presented as the recent-past, characters continually assert and assume that Hillary Clinton will win the 2016 presidential election, marking the American characters we meet thereafter with a sociopolitical complacency. The main substance of the show is initiated when DHH is stabbed (a real incident that Hwang experienced in late 2015); passing out, DHH's subsequent dream is presented to audiences as the primary frame for the show: a world-renowned, beloved Chinese musical called "*Soft Power*" which depicts Xue Xing's visit to a crime-filled, outlandish, and farcical version of America (NOTE: The production of *Soft Power* will be indicated with italics, whereas the show's musical-within-a-play will be indicated as "*Soft Power*" with quotation marks). Taken as truth by the rest of the world, "*Soft Power*" thus exploits the delivery system—visually, verbally, and musically—to cloak an otherwise eccentric and absurdist portrayal of America.

Reiterating this metatheatricality, the opening scene of Act Two is staged as a Shanghai television station's interview with Xue Xing's granddaughter and the children of "*Soft Power*" creative team members. Now seen as the experts on US culture, the Chinese characters are joined by a professor of US folklore, who continually struggles to interject his American perspective throughout the interview, politely accusing "*Soft Power*" of musical appropriation and mis-representation of America. The discussion, though brief (roughly seven minutes long), is a palpable reversal

of global power and position, imagining what it would be like if the US were colonized and constructed via stereotypes, as well as commenting on musical theatre (and cultural texts in general) as a form of power that produces false knowledge about other countries and cultures.

With a keen understanding of the delivery system and framing device that is “Soft Power,” audiences experience a future representation of America through an Asian lens, which is reinforced repeatedly by the production’s color-conscious casting and the acting choices pertaining to accents. All but one cast member (Louis, who doubles as Zoe and Hillary Clinton) is Asian American, subverting the continued practice of casting non-Asian actors in “Asian” shows. In this future America, the Asian American actors perform Caucasian roles, wearing blonde wigs and applying exaggerated versions of “white” accents to their cartoonish characters. Significantly, the stereotypical American accents reverses the long-established practice of yellowface (traditionally achieved via makeup as well as offensive, made-up accents), such that the cast performs a verbalized “whiteface” during the musical portion of the show. These choices also stand in contrast to *Soft Power*’s opening scenes, in which Jue speaks in an unaccented voice while Ricamora speaks in a Chinese accent. Notably, Ricamora adopts a realistic Chinese accent rather than the more absurd, stereotypical accents that typically gesture towards Asian characters on stage, television, and film; most importantly, Ricamora drops the accent altogether once “Soft Power” begins, creating a marked difference between the “regular” accents (performed by Xing, now the Chinese protagonist) and the exaggerated “American” accents. In addition, Ricamora’s subtle choices intensify the fact that Xing in “Soft Power” serves as the Chinese hero, arriving in the US and teaching American politicians how to best run their own country—a complete inversion of white savior trope frequently found in American popular culture.

In addition to the nuanced approaches to casting and acting, David Zinn’s larger-than-life scenic design and Sam Pinkleton’s flashy

choreography help add to the charade and spectacle of “Soft Power.” Throughout the show, scenes are accented with brilliant blues and reds, alluding to the hyper-patriotic and nationalistic tendencies of America. Particularly noteworthy designs occur during elaborate musical numbers (crafted by Hwang and Jeanine Tesori) and scenes (directed by Leigh Silverman) that take place at McDonald’s, the proverbial ballot box, and the White House. In each case, Zinn’s designs and Pinkleton’s dances are visually loud and large: in China’s version of an American McDonald’s, giant gold arches appear in front of a deep red curtain, and chandelier-wearing, fries-holding manikins greet visitors—gaudy visuals surpassed only by roller-skating restaurant servers and Louis (as Hillary) performing an upside-down twerk on an enormous hamburger, with a choreographic nod to *The King and I*’s “Shall We Dance.” In a later number about the US voting process, rows of large metal stars outlined in lights meet a throng of smaller white stars painted across the blue walls of the stage, visually gesturing towards the American flag, while the cast performs “Election Night”—a song led by a Harold Hill-evoking Chief Justice (Jon Hoche, also evoked by the music) that celebrates the country’s blind loyalty to the electoral college system—all of which is further emphasized by the jazz hands and strong flashy movements made of the ensemble “voters.” And at “The White House” (spelled out in large letters outlined by bright white lights), tall statues of Budweiser cans surround the stage as a Veep character (Raymond J. Lee) sings atop a giant Budweiser six-pack—plus cheerleader-esque dancing females join gun-toting male politicians who proudly dance with and protect their large guns.

The final moments of *Soft Power* bring audiences back to the present, with DHH waking up in the hospital and breaking the fourth wall to present an autobiographical monologue wherein he elucidates the stabbing incident, which is believed to be racially motivated (as reflected on by Hwang in a *New York Times* piece in 2016). Subsequently, the finale song (“Democracy”) takes place on a semi-bare stage (only the blue walls and

now-unlit stars remain) with the entire cast, all dressed in regular street clothes that feature lighter blue, red, grey, and white tones, thus implying an embodiment of their off-stage, real selves rather than any characters or caricatures. “Democracy” is performed with full house lights, a final optimistic gesture and invitation to the audience to hold onto hope and create positive change for the future.

In all, the show persistently demonstrates a heightened awareness of the ways in which Asian Americans have been stereotyped, marginalized, and oppressed by popular culture, carefully upending the harmful traditions and history of musical theatre while also pointing out and calling attention to the flaws of America’s political system, questioning—but not throwing away—the efficacy of democracy. Although “Soft Power” presents as an Eastern depiction of America in the future, *Soft Power* is ultimately a critical commentary about present-day America made *by and for Americans*.

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POPULAR CULTURE STUDIES JOURNAL

ABOUT

The *Popular Culture Studies Journal* is an academic, peer-reviewed, refereed journal for scholars, academics, and students from the many disciplines that study popular culture. The journal serves the MPCA/ACA membership, as well as scholars globally who recognize and support its mission based on expanding the way we view popular culture as a fundamental component within the contemporary world.

AIMS AND SCOPE

Popular culture is at the heart of democratic citizenship. It serves as an engine driving technology, innovation, and information, as well as a methodological lens employed by the many fields that examine culture, often from an interdisciplinary perspective. Managed by The Midwest Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association (MPCA/ACA), The *Popular Culture Studies Journal (PCSJ)* is an academic, refereed journal for scholars, academics, and students from the many disciplines that study America and American culture. The journal serves its membership and scholars globally who recognize and support its mission based on expanding the way we view popular culture as a fundamental component within the contemporary world.

EDITOR

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- Television
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- Video Games

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Written reviews should be roughly 800-1,000 words and should be typed, double-spaced with 12 pt. Times New Roman font. Research and documentation must adhere to *The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* and *The MLA Style Manual*, 8th edition, which requires a Works Cited list, with parenthetical author/page references in the text. Punctuation, capitalization, hyphenation, and other matters of style must also follow *The MLA Handbook* and *The MLA Style Manual*. If you are interested in submitting any alternative form of review, please contact the reviews editor directly with your proposed format. Guidelines will be determined depending on the proposed format.

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OCTOBER 2019: UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE STUDENT SHOWCASE

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MidwestPCA/ACA

The Midwest Popular Culture Association / American Culture Association is a regional branch of the Popular Culture Association / American Culture Association. The organization held its first conference in Duluth, Minnesota, in 1973. After a five-year hiatus during the 1990s, the organization held a comeback conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 2002.

MPCA/ACA usually holds its annual conference in a large Midwestern city in the United States. In the last several years, conferences have been held in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Ohio. Upcoming conferences will be held in Missouri and Indiana. The conference typically is held in October.

Anyone is welcome to join and submit proposals for consideration at the MPCA/ACA conference. Membership in MPCA/ACA is by no means limited to those working or living in the Midwest or even the United States. In fact, presenters have come from as far away as Florida and California, and Norway and Australia.

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Introduction: Why Popular Culture Matters

CARRIELYNN D. REINHARD

Special Entry: Multimedia Presentation of “Why Popular Culture Matters”

CARRIELYNN D. REINHARD

Editorial: I’m So Bored with the Canon: Removing the Qualifier “Popular” from Our Cultures

SCOTT M. BRUNER

ARTICLES

Special Entry: 2017 Gary Burns Graduate Student Travel Grant Award Winner Watch, Go, Now: “TV Everywhere” and the Promotion of Liveness

CARTER MOULTON

“What’s the Difference Between Men and Women?”: Hegemonic Masculinity in *The Walking Dead*

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***Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* in Print and Film: Imaginations, Catastrophes, and the Being-with of Being**

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