

Editorial Introduction: Co-Constructing Academia

CARRIELYNN D. REINHARD

The *Popular Culture Studies Journal* has had special issues repeatedly, but none quite like this one. This special issue truly lives up to that name as the contents of it consider two key anniversaries: the journal's 10th anniversary and the 20th anniversary of the Midwest Popular Culture Association / American Culture Association since it was relaunched by Gary Burns in 2002. To celebrate these milestones, this special issue contains various reflections on the histories, visions, and futures for the journal and its parent association. Gary Burns provides a specific essay considering the association's history and his work with it. Brendan Riley provides his thoughts on how the MPCA/ACA's popular pub quiz started. Various MPCA/ACA executives and members from past and present share their memories, opinions, and hopes of the organization. Bob Batchelor, Norma Jones, and others who helped create the PCSJ reflect on how it all started and what is left to do.

In collecting these oral histories, my goal has been to in some way demystify how academia operates. My hope is that these reflections will demonstrate just how much all academic institutions are created by people. Our academic journals, associations, and universities – with their array of practices, policies, traditions and rituals – are produced and reproduced through the collective actions of professors, researchers, scholars, and academics.

I think that understanding might help younger or newer academics, especially those who do not come from academic families. If first generation undergraduate and graduate students only understand academia from popular culture, or what established and entrenched academics tell them, they may not feel empowered as agents of change to address problems in academia. For academia to face the challenges of the 21st century, getting more voices and new blood in academia will be necessary. We need our younger scholars realize that these academic institutions they attend, that give them rules are just people saying, “Okay, we're coming together, and we're producing this thing.” That these institutions are not just pre-existing structures that they just have to move into and through; that they can interact with and co-construct academia. That as long as they are interested and passionate enough, they can be part of the process that builds academic practices and norms, institutions and policies.

My hope with this special issue is to talk about how all of this was made, how it came to be; to give that story to everyone inside and outside of academia. I want students' parents to understand the co-constructed nature of academia. I want to make certain high school teachers, community and technical college instructors, and independent scholars all know that they are as welcome in academia as any tenured, full professor from the elite universities of the world. We need to remember that people with a scholarly mindset and doing scholarly work do not just exist in universities.

This welcoming attitude is meant to reflect a central ethos of MPCA/ACA, as noted repeatedly in this special issue. It is definitely indicative of the journal's ethos, as established by Bob Batchelor. I remember Bob, at one point, saying that he wanted people to essentially tell a story in their articles. He did not want the traditional academic writing that segregates information into specific locations, following a stodgy formula of academic writing. To make academic writing more welcoming to a larger, general audience, it needs to tell a story, letting the academic follow their passion and write from their heart as much as their head. I think that sentiment is a really good way of describing what the journal is trying to do.

Since I became the journal's Editor, I have sought to expand upon what Bob and Norma accomplished before me. Although I have also jettisoned some lasting elements of traditional academic journals. For example, many academic journals focus on acceptance rate; specifically, they want to keep the acceptance rate low with the assumption being do so elevates their status as distinguished because not everyone can publish with them. In a publishing world dominated by print journals, such discernment makes more sense, although a continuation of it borders on elitism.

For this journal, we do not have to worry about publication space being completely online. Without that technological constraint, we can publish more works, as well as experiment with form and function. Without that limitation, I would rather help people produce their best work than to just say, "well, this is never going to work" and just dismiss it out of hand. We do not have to be beholden to an acceptance or rejection rate. We can work with anyone and take the time to help them develop their ideas if there is anything unique about its contribution.

This peer-editing approach is intentionally meant to align with MPCA/ACA and replicate that incubator feel the association has as it tries to help undergraduate and graduate students. As with the conference, the journal wants to help people figure out the best way to present their work. Helping emerging academics learn

the publishing process seeks to empower them and their ideas, to prevent any self-censoring and silencing themselves because they do not know the “right” way to be an academic and communicate their scholarship. The conference seeks to mentor younger scholars through various professional development initiatives and the creation of a safe space for exploring ideas.

The journal also seeks to exist in that niche. To that end, we are starting a professional development section in the journal where we have short essays from established scholars that cover topics on how to be an academic. Guest contributors will be asked to reflect on what they wish they knew starting in academia; to provide suggestions for how to develop academic research and communication skills; or even just how to survive and thrive in the various academic institutions they will encounter. This special section Scholarship Bites begins with Malynnda Johnson encouraging students to find their voices by developing their arguments, followed by my own reflections as a graduate student on how to become interdisciplinary in my own scholarship.

As always, we also have regular and student articles as well as book and film reviews. Julia Brown’s work on *Alien*³ earned our annual Michael T. Marsden award. In this issue’s Student Showcase, Casey James O’Ceallaigh presents a fascinating analysis of the depiction of deafness in *Hawkeye*, while Jessica Sage Rauchberg interrogates the limitations of #MeToo. These articles represent the type of scholarship we hope to offer more of in the next decade of the journal’s existence.