

The *Popular Culture Studies Journal* Reviews: Introduction

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In the spirit of reflection, I wanted to look back at my own involvement with the *Popular Culture Studies Journal* that began in 2015 with volume 3, issue 1&2. That installment featured two reviews written by me: one for the book *Captain America, Masculinity and Violence: The Evolution of a National Icon* and the other for the film *The Interview* (Evan Goldberg and Seth Rogen, 2014). The latter piece has the distinction of being the first film review featured in the *Popular Culture Studies Journal*. The following year, my first published article, “Shakespeare, Didgeridoos, and Samurai Cowboys: Remixing National and Cultural Identities in *Sukiyaki Western Django*,” appeared in volume 4, issue 1&2, along with a review I wrote of the then-popular streaming series *Daredevil*. The article went on to win the Fred E. H. Schroeder Award at the Midwest Popular Culture Association’s annual meeting in 2016. Since then, I have greatly increased my participation with the PCSJ, publishing three articles (two by me and one co-authored with the journal’s current editor, CarrieLynn D. Reinhard) and three more reviews (including two looking at board games). I also co-edited two special issues (one devoted to professional wrestling and the other to live streaming) and assumed the role of Reviews Editor, taking over for my predecessor and occasional collaborator Malynnnda Johnson.

The primary reason for my continued involvement with the PCSJ is largely due to the supportive atmosphere fostered by the Editorial Board, an ethos established by the journal’s founders and perpetuated by the current team of editors. While the journal rejects the occasional submission, the editors would much rather encourage contributors to revise and resubmit. Moreover, the folks behind the PCSJ (myself included) sometimes work with contributors to improve submissions and bring them in line with the journal’s mission. As someone who does not consider himself an academic or a scholar and who finds most academic publishing (not to mention academia as a whole) to be unnecessarily intimidating, I find this philosophy of acceptance most refreshing. Though I often feel out of place within the walls of the academy, even as I am in the process of completing my doctoral studies, I nevertheless enjoy analyzing, discussing, and writing about popular culture. Like Ray Browne and numerous other cultural studies scholars, I believe that studying

popular culture can help us better understand ourselves and our societies, mainly because the things we enjoy reflect us and our communities. Yet there are those who still dismiss popular culture studies as a frivolous pursuit. The PCSJ, therefore, serves an important function in that it not only encourages the study of popular texts such as films, TV shows, games (both digital and analog), comic books, etc., but also provides a welcoming environment for scholars who may find that their interests face derision in other areas of academia.

Like Malynnda before me (and Jennifer Dunn before her), I want this section of the journal to reflect this broader ideology of uplift by encouraging reviewers to cast a wide net when looking for books or other texts to review. I want contributors to submit reviews of books that move beyond the usual mass culture artifacts associated with popular culture, such as those listed in the previous paragraph, and provide readers with glimpses into other, perhaps less-explored avenues of mass taste. For instance, in this issue Dennis Owen Frohlich reviews Melanie Swalwell's new monograph *Homebrew Gaming and the Beginnings of Vernacular Digitality*, which explores the culture of modding (or modifying) 8-bit microcomputers. Meanwhile, Ying Ma considers the general interest book *Rise: A Pop History of Asian America from the Nineties to Now*, which gives readers an overview of Asian popular culture from the last three decades. Of course, it is important that we also travel those well-trodden paths of popular culture from time to time, which is why this issue includes reviews of books dedicated to more traditional forms of popular culture such as films and video games. As such, Samuel Grant reviews Andrew Osmond's monograph analyzing the classic anime film *Spirited Away* (Hayao Miyazaki, 2001), while Jana Fedtke discusses *Play Like a Feminist*, in which Shira Chess seeks to shake up the video game industry. Rounding out the book reviews is Christine Tomlinson's look at *Normalizing Mental Illness and Neurodiversity in Entertainment Media: Quieting the Madness*, a collection of essays looking at media portrayals of mental illness edited by myself and Malynnda Johnson. Finally, this issue features reviews of two recent films, as Elizabeth Shiller examines the harrowing thriller *Like Dogs* (Randy Van Dyke, 2021) and Carlos Tkacz offers his opinion on the sci-fi spectacular *Nope* (Jordan Peele, 2022).

I write this introduction on my laptop adorned with stickers devoted to such varied popular culture texts as *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Jim Sharman, 1975), *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* (Quentin Tarantino, 2019), long-running TV show *Mystery Science Theater 3000*, New Japan Professional Wrestling stable The Bullet Club, and home video label Vinegar Syndrome. As I write, I sit in my

living room, its walls decorated with framed posters for *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (Sergio Leone, 1966), *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973), *Once* (John Carney, 2007), *Paddington* (Paul King, 2014), *Drive* (Nicolas Winding Refn, 2011), *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977), and *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*. Strewn about the room are various toys, Blu-rays, video games, books, comics, puzzles, and other popular culture ephemera. I mention all this because I think it illustrates just how important popular culture is to me and my partner, CarrieLynn. We are fans of numerous popular texts that have shaped us as people, and we love sharing our passion and our thoughts about these things with other people. This enthusiasm is why the PCSJ is so important to both of us, as the journal has provided us and others who feel like us with an outlet to do just that. I believe I speak for CarrieLynn when I say that we hope it does the same for everyone reading currently reading these words.

As always, I want to thank my assistant editor Linda Howell for her invaluable assistance in putting this section together. I also want to thank the reviewers for their important insights on the books and films featured in this issue. If you would like to contribute a review to be considered for inclusion in a future issue, please reach out to me. You can either pick one of the titles listed in the Book List for Reviews found on the PCSJ website, or you can suggest a title. In addition, I am always on the lookout for reviews of films, TV shows, games, comic books, or other popular culture texts, so if you have thoughts about any of these things, I would love it if you would send them my way. For more on how to do that, you can check out the PCSJ website or contact me at olson429@uwm.edu. Now, on to the reviews.