

Reviews

THE POPULAR CULTURE STUDIES JOURNAL REVIEWS

Introduction

Entering my third year as the reviews editor I am reminded yet again of how grateful I am for the job I have. Almost every month a pile of books arrives in my mailbox making this bibliophile giddy. With each package I am given the gift of getting the first glimpse of new ideas and scholarship covering every topic imaginable. Comics, movies, topics in the news, the list simply goes on and on. I must say, if you have been paying attention to the world around us, you will not be surprised to see some very timely and newsworthy books reviewed in the following pages. Topics such as feminisms, politics, even Puerto Rico; nestled between reviews on some of your favorite shows (X-Files), favorite bands (the Beatles and David Bowie), as multiple discussions of comic icons. Admittedly, I am always riveted by the books that come across my desk but those reviewed here include some of my personal favorites since taking this post. This in mind, I want to say thank you to the authors of these books for all the effort you have put forth.

I also want to say thank you to the many reviewers I have had the pleasure of working with. This year, thus far, we have had over 70 books sent out for review. Many are included, and many more will be coming in the upcoming April issue. We cannot have a reviews section without reviewers and I am incredibly grateful for each and every one of you.

In addition to getting to, at the very least, skim over the newest books in our field, and work with great reviewers I have also had the immense pleasure of working with our editor Norma Jones who is entering her last few issues with the journal. She has worked tirelessly to continue to put together a great journal and it has been a delight to work with you.

Lastly, but certainly not least, I have to say a very special thank you to Jessica Benham my assistant editor. You have been my critical eye, support, and friend. I was deeply sad to hear you would not be able to continue in this role, however, the work you are perusing is vitally needed and I am 100% in support. I look

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forward to following your new path as I know you will be doing great things. One day I will be voting for you I just know it! Thank you so very much for all that you have done for the journal.

Malynda A. Johnson
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Babic, Annessa Ann. *America's Changing Icons: Constructing Patriotic Women from World War I to the Present*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2018.

America's Changing Icons: Constructing Patriotic Women from World War I to the Present covers the dynamic and ever-evolving use of images to portray patriotic women from World War I to the present. Author Annessa Ann Babic describes this evolution in highly approachable, vibrant, and poignant prose. Babic's analysis and rich contextualization take the reader through icons such as "Rosie the Riveter," the currently very popular in mainstream media Wonder Woman graphic novel, and *The American Girl*.

Static images from advertisements, popular media, magazines, and other various sources are the subject of careful analysis. Oral histories, which further demonstrate Babic's care of the subject, from periods covered are included alongside the more traditional artifacts. The use of "unpublished accounts of wartime service" from individuals living amongst the sources in the analyses add a layer of credibility (8). The visual sources are successfully paired with accounts from Merch Kazmierczak and Rebecca Littlepage to enliven history further. Babic's skill with narrative and intriguing analytical explanations bring the seemingly distant past into a nuanced and directly relevant perspective for the present.

America's Changing Icons focuses upon the static visual representations of women in the United States during times of war. Five chapters of deep contextualization and analyses that connect with contemporary relevance—such as politics, the strife of women in the United States, and current complexities involving representations of women. Babic reminds the reader of the importance of the past through keen examples of multi-layered implications from each period

examined. Each chapter focuses in on one particular war, conflict, or period of time marked significantly by war. The first chapter takes on the First World War. Chapter 2 focuses on the World War II era and argues this was the “last great era for her,” the clearly defined patriotic female (2). The patriotic female is explored in her decentralized form in Chapter 3 through the context of the brief Korean War and Cold War era. Chapter 4 focuses on the Vietnam War and protests of the 1960s and 1970s. Chapter 5, *The Gulf Wars and the Changing Light*, explores the fading images of patriotic women. Babic weaves Wonder Woman throughout the delightful tapestry of history, public memory, and exciting artifacts from the past.

Babic submits in her introduction: “this discussion will place standard and accepted female patriotic images next to issues of social contention to show how and why female patriotic imagery declined in US culture in reaction to the evolving role of women” (19). *America’s Changing Icons* delivers a definitive contribution to the scholarly pursuit of understanding the gendered dynamics of war, nationalism, and collective identity.

Chapter 1, *Columbia and the American Girl During World War I*, sets the stage well for the rest of the book. Each chapter begins with a fitting narrative or persuasive hook. Chapters unfurl to expose the core of US societal perceptions of both females and war during the wartime era covered. *American Girl*, *Ladies Home Journal*, “The Gibson Girl,” and other artifacts particular to the World War I era give detail and a nexus point from which the patriotic female image in the US grows from is explored in immense detail and layers of context (35). Gender, politics, society, technology, and other facets are given clear attention that connects back to the promise of the introduction.

Chapter 2 *Wonder Woman Fetishes and Fantasies* digs into icons that have clearly stood the test of time, such as Rosie the Riveter and Wonder Woman. Babic argues in a compelling fashion those icons have transformed significantly since their first iteration. There is a careful balance of new information in each chapter and making meaningful connections to the preceding analyses. The patriotic female image from World War I is referenced and pivots clearly into the transformations Babic develops the particular demands placed upon women to leave their roles in the home to cover work that had not previously been available. At first blush the symbolic and direct messages from advertisers, for example hygiene products we still see today like Listerine and Kotex, place women as consumers and bastions of US tendencies similarly to advertisements in World War I. Babic supplies valuable nuances and neatly articulates the development of

the female patriotic image the unique demands of the period bring about. This trend develops throughout the book, provides a clear delineation between the needs of each era, and forwards the dynamic advances of static images of the patriotic female over time.

The chapters that follow the World War II era include Wonder Woman as a familiar touchstone to evaluate the period explored. The Korean War and Cold War era are combined, Vietnam War and prolific protests during the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the Gulf Wars era, each have their own versions of Wonder Woman and her mediated lore. This is a useful heuristic for the reader, especially given the resurgence of popularity in recent years due to Warner Bros. 2017 film release and serves the purpose of the book well. The postscript offers Babic's personal take on Wonder Woman as well as how her study relates to the current societal, cultural, and wartime demands placed upon women today.

The development and dynamism Babic argues the female patriotic image undergoes over time is justified, well-explained, and brought to life through careful research and rich descriptions. The book is a valuable source and starting place for scholars interested in history, public memory, politics, war protest, the collective identity of the United States, or the power of rhetoric generally. Though a specific mode of analysis is not specified, the book clearly contributes to scholarly conversation and would be an enticing read for a non-academic as well.

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Womack, Kenneth, and Cox, Kathryn B. *The Beatles, Sgt. Pepper, and the Summer of Love*. Lexington Books, 2017.

In celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the spectacular international success of Beatles' Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, Kenneth Womack and Kathryn B. Cox lead a group of 'Beatlemaniacs' in offering eminently readable analyses on the group's sociocultural influence at this pivotal point in Western popular culture. This anthology attempts a close analysis of the Fab Four's role in fomenting the Summer of Love in 1967, when more than 100,000 'wild' youth converged on San Francisco and when wearing flowers in your hair became a

mark of identity. While the book is divided into three sections dedicated to avant-gardism in Sgt. Pepper, commercial strategies and the fiasco of 'Magical Mystery Tour', this review seeks to glean the eleven essays into three overarching themes.

In 1967, indeed many other times in their career, the Beatles took many an enterprising decision both in terms of art and business. These moves were then seen as mis-steps, but subsequent historians now consider them as pioneering. For instance, calling it a "golden blunder", Joe Rapolla chronicles the saga of Apple Corps, the band's pioneering publishing arm for monetizing their intellectual property. At one point Apple looked set for burial, but has since become a textbook for several musicians (think the Carters) trying to have control over their art. In a similar vein, Robert Rodriguez traces the troubled production history, and subsequent presentation to a wrong audience, of the experimental movie *Magical Mystery Tour*. Over the past fifty years, the musical film's assessment has changed from that as a fiasco to as the seed of a 'midnight movie'.

Other essayists in this volume are interested in the third space that the band sought to evoke between the binaries of creativity and commerce. Jacqueline Edmondson argues that the dialectical relationship of discord and harmony in Sgt. Pepper (both in terms of band's creative collaboration and aesthetic value of their experimental music) provides opportunities to understand how the Beatles were "both a product of their experience and simultaneously produced themselves" (89). Borrowing the postcolonial studies concept of an ambivalent third space, she argues that the Beatles as "product-producer" brought new meaning of and to themselves and their world. They translated their experience, imitated it, and in the process found a third space of freedom, she writes. Also consider that despite being an inseparable part of the 60s counterculture, the band never explicitly got involved in the global politics of the 1960s - from Civil Rights to Vietnam, from women's lib to Cold War escalation and the threat of nuclear annihilation. While charting out the history of *Revolution*, Kenneth L. Campbell notes that John Lennon included both the phrases "you can count me out" and "you can count me in" in different versions and in different verses of the same version of the song. Writing in the 'girl studies' tradition, Katie Kapurch argues that Sgt. Pepper appealed to female youth, especially those navigating the new possibilities of work and sexual freedom in the 1960s and beyond. She draws on the memoirs of Ann-Nancy Wilson (*Heart*) and Chrissie Hynde (*The Pretenders*) to establish the indelible role of Sgt Pepper in their early music. She summarizes: "Sgt. Pepper may have appealed to girls and young women of the time because it continued to

articulate freedom in androgyny while reflecting contemporary contradictions of 1967: the celebration of mind expansion without explicitly sexual orientation; the celebration of autonomous women who are still objectified.” (157)

Another keystone of the book is the idea that the Beatles’ experimentation during this era helped them reach transnational audiences and lent their music a very ‘global’ character. Kit O’Toole offers a close analysis of polysemy in the simple lyrics and production history of *All you Need is Love*. She situates its encapsulation of the “utopian desires” of the Summer of Love in Marshall McLuhan’s notion of technology – in this case, music – creating a new “global village” comprised of worldwide participants. Kathryn B. Cox explores the role of Indian classical music and philosophies in the evolution of the band, reading it as a product of globalization in the 20th century. “The Beatles road to Rishikesh was a convergence of many paths forged globally by artists, scholars and spiritual leaders functioning within the communicative networks that opened up in the twentieth century”, she writes (84). Jerry Zolten provides a fascinating account of how the Beatles incorporated avant-garde influences in their music and thus helped redefine rock and roll music as an intellectual enterprise. Like sampling became a leitmotif of the global avant-garde, the tape recorder became central to the Beatles creative success as they progressed from *Rubber Soul* to *Revolver* to *Sgt. Pepper* and *Magical Mystery Tour*, he writes.

Scholarship on the Beatles is voluminous and can combine elements of social history, journalism, biography, lyrical study, musical criticism, commercial practices and so on. This collection uses the lens of 1967 in the Beatles’ oeuvre to study the band’s wider impact on popular culture ever since. The extensive trivia and details can at times be jarring, but it is only a tribute to the overall industry involved in the writing. The volume will serve as an excellent reference point for social and music historians studying the relationship of Beatles to the tumultuous sixties. The book presents 1967 as the band’s ‘coming of age’ given that they left behind their childish adventures and moved on to a braver path. We could say that a whole generation came of age along with them, as the Summer of Love in 1967 paved the way for a violent period of political, social and cultural upheaval in 1968.

Gaurav Pai
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Olson, Liesl. *Chicago Renaissance: Literature and Art in the Midwest Metropolis*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013.

Cultural historians and literary scholars often locate early twentieth-century modernism in the elite art and literary circles of Paris, London, Vienna, and Berlin. For Americanists, modernism is said to have begun in the United States with the 1913 Armory Show in New York, an event which brought the European avant-garde styles of cubism, fauvism, and futurism to a nation whose art centered primarily on realist modes. In *Chicago Renaissance: Literature and Art in the Midwest Metropolis*, Liesl Olson challenges these assumptions, arguing that scholars must examine modernism in other locations and across a greater span of time to fully understand its complexities. Referring to modernism as “brash and unstable” (11), Olson, the current Director of Chicago Studies at the Newberry Library, seeks to understand the multiple modernisms at play in early twentieth-century Chicago’s various cultural communities. Employing rich archival material, including many collections from the Newberry Library, Olson weaves a fascinating narrative of literary lives, texts, relationships, and communities. Olson’s book is a refreshing look at a cultural movement that has been analyzed for decades but has since received no full-length study.

Instead of locating Chicago at the periphery of American modernism, as previous scholarship has done, Olson argues for its centrality. Not simply a reading of texts by Chicago-based authors, *Chicago Renaissance* seeks to contextualize and localize the phenomenon of modernism. One of the major contributions of Olson’s work is its ability to contextualize her subjects and their writing, addressing both the macro and micro elements that contributed to the shape and history of Chicago’s art and literary renaissance. Specifically, Olson is interested in putting the modern literary histories of white and black Chicago into conversation with one another. In so doing, she interrogates the multiple meanings of the term “renaissance,” concluding that the label meant very different things to the city’s black and white art and literary communities. For African American artists and writers, renaissance promised cultural liberation and communal bonding. In contrast, for the city’s white *avant-garde*, renaissance meant financial stability and opportunities for alternative lifestyles.

In *Chicago Renaissance*, Olson surveys familiar Chicago-based authors, such as Ernest Hemingway, Richard Wright, and Carl Sandburg, as well as lesser-known but no less important voices, including Margaret Walker, Harriet Monroe,

and Margaret Anderson. Significantly, Olson argues that authorship was just one side of Chicago's literary renaissance, choosing to grant an equal amount of space in her study to editors, patrons, bookstore owners, and general readers. Rather than characterizing the Chicago renaissance as a "highbrow" cultural movement, Olson employs the term "middlebrow" to describe the collection of authors, artists, and poets she examines. The book contains a somewhat unusual organizational structure. It is broken up into five chapters with interludes between them. The interludes are short vignettes about specific figures like Sherwood Anderson and Fanny Butcher or important events such as the Chicago World's Fair of 1893 or Gertrude Stein's arrival to the city in 1934. The five chapters are chronologically ordered and concern the impact of historical developments on the city's art and literary communities. During the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Chicago underwent dramatic transformations fueled by increasing industrialization, urbanization, and commercial enterprise. These transformations, Olson argues, led to the rise of a new literary mode, one which expressed the anxieties, frustrations, and inequalities wrought by industrial capitalism in a clear, less sophisticated style. As Olson explains, "rebellion is less evident in the literary styles of Chicago because it is more palpable through the ways that writers often uphold a mirror as a means of social protests. The revolution was to speak straight" (19).

There are some issues with the book. First, Olson struggles to link together the various figures, texts, and events into a guiding argument. A more clearly stated thesis in the introduction would have been useful in framing the volume's disparate parts. Second, in this reviewer's opinion, Olson occasionally focuses too much on biographical details. This is not necessarily a negative, but I wondered at times how these details contributed, if at all, to the larger story of Chicago's cultural renaissance. Finally, the interludes between each chapter, while offering interesting anecdotes, often feel like unnecessary asides and often operate awkwardly beneath the book's central themes. One wonders why Olson chose not to integrate these profiles and stories into the chapters themselves.

These are minor issues, however, and do not take away from Olson's remarkable contribution to the cultural history of American modernism. Like her 2009 study *Modernism and the Ordinary*, Olson's *Chicago Renaissance* strives to recover lost literary modes and place authors in their historical contexts. By placing Chicago front and center, she challenges conventional thinking about the phenomenon of modernism in the United States. One of the book's greatest

strengths is Olson's recovery of the crucial role played by women and African Americans in the development of literary community in early twentieth-century Chicago. Most remarkable perhaps is Olson's ability to engage with several different fields and genres, including literary studies, cultural history, and biography, to create a unique and compelling narrative. *Chicago Renaissance* is an engaging, thought-provoking, and original study that will prove accessible to both scholars and general readers.

Adam Q. Stauffer
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Garcia, Vanessa, and Arkerson, Samantha. *Crime, Media, and Reality: Examining Mixed Messages About Crime in Popular Media*. Rowman and Littlefield, 2018. Print.

When the average person thinks of crime and justice, and subsequently, criminal justice, these topics are likely associated with black and white formulaic calculations or a specified range of consequences for actions committed outside of the law. In recent years, Americans have binge-watched enough crime series to conclude that no case is too cold to solve, forensic evidence almost always exists, and that law enforcement agencies have the resources and training to collect and readily analyze it at the drop of a hat. With the onset of sensationalized true-crime docuseries such as *Making a Murderer*, *The Jinx*, and *Evil Genius* as well as podcasts such as *Serial*, the passive viewer or listener has evolved to fill the role of an active appellate, bringing new life to closed cases depicted in the media. Though audiences become captivated by popular media portrayals of crime, rarely do we become interested in or literate in the deeper meanings of how conceptions of crime and justice develop through media portrayals. In *Crime, Media, and Reality: Examining Mixed Messages About Crime in Popular Media*, authors Garcia and Arkerson explore the social constructions of crime and justice, how these social constructions differ from reality, and how they are depicted through various forms of media.

Social constructionism asserts that "nothing is known as fact until it is created through culture" (6). In the first chapter, the authors lay the foundation that crime and justice are socially constructed by discussing the rise of infotainment, which

“blurs the line between information and entertainment,” resulting in widespread distortion between news and amusement (9). Though the United States houses one-fourth of the world’s prison population, what most Americans know of crime and justice are not based on direct or even indirect experience, but rather, through brief news bits that are continuously replayed due to convergence and corporate consolidation of the media. The second chapter discusses social media, the 24/7 news cycle, and fake news, reinforcing societal role expectations and stereotypes of race and gender in crime news. Why does the public perceive that violent crimes committed by black males are rampant and costly? Despite the numbers demonstrating that property crime is most common and that societal debt is mostly accrued by white-collar criminals, this is not what we see. The manipulative model determines what is newsworthy based on subjective motives of the media source, motives that center on profit and attempt to sway public opinion. In other words, perception becomes what Garcia and Arkerson refer to as ‘symbolic reality.’ Why do media portrayals such as this matter? Perception of this symbolic reality contributes to policy.

In the United States, a ‘tough on crime’ attitude has been adopted and supported by the public, with the prison industry growing and continuing to disproportionately affect people of color. Chapter 3 discusses Sasson’s framing typology, where the authors give voice to the racist system frame and blocked opportunities/faulty systems frames largely ignored in mainstream media. In contrast to these frames, which emphasize structural oppression, the media emphasizes the social breakdown frame, attributing minority convictions to a lack of familial or community support, perpetuating stereotypes of welfare queens and absent fathers while ignoring policies such as stop-and-frisk that target black Americans. These frames are also present in the fourth chapter, in which the authors argue violence is the main frame of crime movies where heroes can defend against violence or be revered for perpetuating violence in a faulty system or for overcoming their personal pasts, reflective of the social breakdown frame. In Chapter 5, second-order cultivation resulting from crime television viewership presents an unrealistic, flawless criminal justice system where police are solely responsible and capable of responding to and solving all crime, providing further evidence of the harmful effects of infotainment discussed in previous chapters.

While concern over police brutality remains present in the media, Chapter 6 provides ample evidence that media positively regards law enforcement as the ‘good guys’, with rare exceptions to the rule. While police are often the central

focus of the criminal justice system in the media, Chapter 7 highlights the superiority of the courts to uphold law and order, where prosecution works to defend greater society against inherently troubled criminals. Throughout the text, the authors refute the first-order cultivation perpetuated by the media that convictions occur by trail. In contrast, in a 'tough on crime' society, defense attorneys commonly negotiate guilty pleas and ramifications as opposed to proving innocence. The average media consumer is likely to correlate a conviction with institutionalization, though parole and probation are more likely to occur. While prisons are thriving in the United States, the final chapter conveys that they are seldom the focus of media, and if they are, television shows and movies rely on stock plots and characters that reinforce the idea that all criminals are violent threats to society. Regardless of the media type or subset of the population, much of what we see of crime and justice is inaccurate.

Throughout the text, the authors present a wealth of theoretical concepts and data in an accessible manner. Though there is no shortage of empirical evidence to support the main argument, *Crime, Media, and Reality* remains readable beyond the world of experts and academics. In addition, the authors provide a comprehensive approach to analyzing all players involved in such encompassing social institutions, including citizens, judges, lawyers, and police as well as accounting for the evolution of print, audio, and digital media sources. As a critical sociologist and educator, I found that the authors successfully address the intersectionality of race, social class, and gender and how media sets and reinforces expectations of individuals who occupy complex identities. While the authors briefly account for corporate influence on crime and media, explicitly stating that this is not the main purpose of the book, this phenomenon may be a timely and significant focus for future research as the prison industry continues to develop. Media continues to impact our perception and understanding of crime and justice, and while the authors effectively demonstrate changing depictions over time, perhaps a future opportunity is an expanded discussion of how social media exposes America to counternarratives of historically marginalized groups. *Crime, Media, and Reality* is a timely addition to research on media and public perception, providing a factual counternarrative and disabling the fake news about crime and justice that continues to thrive in this era.

Monica Klonowski
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Natoli, Joseph. *Dark Affinities, Dark Imaginaries: A Mind's Odyssey*. Albany, State University of New York Press, 2017.

As a cumulative retrospective of his writing, Joseph Natoli's *Dark Affinities, Dark Imaginaries* is a captivating journey across mind and culture; a tracing of the American cultural imaginary that embraces the backwards gaze of self-reflexivity in search of post-truths within the personal and mass psyches. What results is an equally mesmerizing and unnerving cautionary tale that warns against the burgeoning reality of alienation and exploitation of the American people in an unbridled plutocratic regime. Navigating freely between poles of psychology, politics, philosophy, and the synergies and breakages in-between, Natoli's work is equally as literary as it is critical, with his theoretical underpinnings as scaffolding for a grander narrative that weaves the personal into the political just as it does the political into the personal.

In line with Raymond William's sense of culture as a whole way of life, Natoli is refreshingly candid and boldly vulnerable in sharing his personal history, embracing an intellectual and political practice that is partially, if not wholly, informed by the saturation of surrounding cultural forces. Undoubtedly, this position informs what Natoli cites as a lifelong meditation on William Blake and Martin Heidegger, wherein imagination is the only recuperative for our culture's sunken one-fold vision. This dark and blindingly tragic condition is the short answer to Natoli's inquiry as to why we are rarely roused to action: "[W]hat we hear others say is only what ourselves would say—that what challenges our own perceptions never reaches us" (14). To change this phenomenal reality is not to change condition but rather perception; that is, to reconnect the experiences of everyday life with what we take from them. We live deeply immersed in rival factions—fabrications that misconstrue the "nature of things" and our relationship to them, so we can only evoke democracy when we correct our societal norms to break with illusions of wealth, power, and status. As Natoli warns, "You cannot stage a revolt against plutocracy when you identify with the plutarch and share a fear of the revolutionary" (17).

Citing the ways in which texts, images, and objects act as intelligible symbols of a re/produced cultural imaginary, Natoli effectively articulates a postmodern narrative despite its ubiquitous buzzword status. He explains that market rule has eroded postmodernity into a destructive force that reifies subjective supremacy as an ontological status of merely *existing* rather than *being* within a larger world: a

resultant YOUiverse (67) that makes it increasingly difficult to break from the capitalist confines that position you, the consumer, as designer of your own reality. Thus, the opening chapters of *Dark Affinities*, *Dark Imaginaries* read as a strategic playbook, a critical reading of the world as text and a mapping of disorder onto these literary realms. If, as Natoli claims, we see the world through story frames and hear through other voices, then we can, in fact, embrace popular culture as a pathway upon which we interact with the world, breaking free of the binding notion that we all share, to some degree, the same, one reality.

Natoli's reading of *Citizen Kane* and *Inglorious Basterds*, for example, exist as somewhat representative texts to understanding the dark, deep morals of a culture's discourse mapped onto its imaginative qualities. Such disruptions to the "Master Voice" (96) reveal the world in full imaginative form—a carnivalesque interpenetration of voices that uphold the interweaving of intertextuality. In fact, Natoli's attention to literary and film criticism is perhaps the brightest spot within his otherwise dark tale. His insights from the O.J. Simpson trial to *The Big Lebowski* point to reality frames and cultural climates that reveal the radical potential (both good and bad) of cultural imaginaries at work. Here, the brilliance of *Dark Affinities*, *Dark Imaginaries* resides in Natoli's ability to connect these buffering screens to a larger moral and economic narrative at work. In absorbing these cultural texts, we sit precariously waiting for an epiphany—a transformative moment—that might provide new insight into the ever-changing relationship between us and reality; meanwhile, democratic egalitarianism is overturned by a plutarchic disorder that transforms our cultural imaginary into a new-yet-unrecognizable form of demonization and destruction. In short, culture and order are inherently tied. For Natoli, it is our role as critic to find the connection.

It is this imperative that anchors the concluding chapters of Natoli's work as one grounded in the cultural dimensions of our political dynamics. By discovering alternative narrative framings of the world, you observe the processing of an individual's life-world that precedes views and opinions, reflections and arguments (243). If we are able to free ourselves of the American neoliberal social unconscious, from our cross-party shared fixations and antipathies, then we may see clearly that our economic system is controlled by a legislatively overpowered and dividend-fed elite. Yet, reform is already corrupt when people are leveraged like a product or service to be branded. The deflation of our present plutarchic order thus resides in the realization of a fluid and flexible class structure, rather than a revolution for lower and middle classes that aims to stay afloat in an

already disadvantaged economic system. In our now millennial age, this means we must orient our cultural imaginary to solidarity working for the public good, rather than individual self-actualization.

Both within and beyond this latter proposal, Natoli's work is clearly detailed in theorization and riveting in connection to surrounding cultural domains (such as his final critique of the Occupy Wallstreet movement). As a whole, *Dark Affinities, Dark Imaginaries* provides a uniquely informed approach to the realm of cultural studies and critical theory. The interweaving of personal narrative with political philosophy makes present the visions and representations of a dangerously active American imagination while still recognizing its potential for revolutionary transformation—a substantial contribution to critical educators, concerned citizens, and beyond.

Rachel Presley
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Theodore G. Ammon, editor, *David Bowie and Philosophy: Rebel Rebel*. Open Court, 2016.

Who is David Bowie? What does he stand for? And how can something true pierce through his many ambivalent personalities? These questions among others are addressed in *David Bowie and Philosophy: Rebel Rebel*, but perhaps the question above all is: how can we even know ourselves? There is no better centerpiece for a conversation on identity and authenticity than David Bowie, the creation of David Robert Jones, and the alien who invented Ziggy Stardust, Aladdin Sane, and the Thin White Duke. In this edited volume by Ammon, academics, writers, and travelers take into consideration the entirety of David Bowie's catalogue – from his debut album, *David Bowie*, to his final album, *Blackstar*, released just days before his death – and give perspective on what can be learned about self and sincerity, reality and madness, and performance through a philosophical investigation of his work.

The book opens with a foreword, *A Farewell to David Bowie*, proclaiming his death as another day in which the proverbial music died. *Blackstar* was released a few days prior to his death as his final living performance and message for the

world, bringing an end to a career of constant transformation: Bowie the artist seemed to not have an underlying self. Ammon writes in Chapter 3, “I make a case that our Bowie is many Bowies and that his essential nature is flux” (27). Nonetheless, throughout all of his creations he was always undeniably Bowie. In Chapter 1, Reisch writes that somehow Bowie was able to “subvert the idea of *artistic authenticity*” (6). He was a faker, yes, a poser and a mime, “he had managed to control his body, to stylize it, to aestheticize it” writes Botz-Bornstein in Chapter 2 (11), but according to Cooper in Chapter 12, “the clash between the overt fakery in play and the believability of his vocals” broke the connection between authenticity and truth (142). In other words, if the social world is a construction then choices have to be made, and Bowie helps audiences see the production, the costumes, the (necessary) lies, and he does so from the perfect stage, the perspective of the music industry, an industry that trades in plastic authenticity. In Chapter 13, Lampert suggests that Bowie’s “knowing, ironic, winking performance” is him being honest about being a faker (154). The message is that everyone is a faker; Bowie is urging the world to be honest about it.

Interestingly, nonetheless, Bowie, while constructing characters, was attempting to disavow notions of a true self. The Buddhism present in his attempts to free himself from the “delusions of ego” is noted in Chapter 6 by Muchall (69). However, his attempts at achieving nirvana came with a cost: the speed at which he became and unbecame characters – in the words of Cooper, “from queer extraterrestrial to synth-laced aesthete to blond and boppy hitmaker, all in just one decade of a half-century career (139) – left him, as the song goes, oftentimes sinking in “Quicksand.” Moreover, points out Michaud in Chapter 8, Bowie and his characters have always been aliens, hybrids of fantastic creatures and real-world men, and sometimes even, according to Piven in Chapter 11, “suffused with uncanny and salacious images of demonic couplings, possession, and alienation” (127). Bowie, in his journey of eliminating the ego, was forced to confront the evil parts of his identity, which he embraced, whereas most people pretend they are not there. The result was sometimes something akin to chaos and madness. Lampert brings up an interview in which Bowie remarks that sometimes he has his “heads” in the clouds before laughing and saying, “now there’s a sign of a schizophrenic” (151). A joke perhaps, but Bowie’s struggles with instability and drug addiction are well known.

Ultimately, Bowie's final message to the world is that everyone is a "Blackstar," the opening track on *Blackstar*. According to Potter and Cobb in Chapter 10, *Blackstar* is a metaphor for the inadequacy of our language and symbols. True expression is impossible, yet somehow it can transcend through performance. "All that exists are performances in a social context," writes Hill in Chapter 7, and performance is Bowie's art, even if, according to Littmann in Chapter 5, it sometimes fails to make sense, or maybe better yet, *because* sometimes it fails to make sense.

Overall, this book is both entertaining and enlightening, offering short essays that are neither dense nor cumbersome, but would be recommended mainly for Bowie fanatics and music fans in general looking for a quick and light read. Despite the title, and aside from a few chapters, the book is rather thin on philosophy, although it does touch upon the philosophies of aesthetics, self, art, ambivalence, and death. Academic uses of the book could include any class or research that focuses on identity, authenticity, communication, performance, and/or the history and critique of music and art.

Noah Franken
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Steven Shaviro. *Digital Music Videos (Quick Takes: Movies and Popular Culture)*. Rutgers University Press, 2017.

Music videos commonly escape definition and genre categorization, as their structure not only deviates greatly from the narrative structure often central to film and television, they are also difficult to compare and/or define even within the scope of music videos themselves. Music videos follow a unique production and distribution process, as they are created to be a marketing tool subservient to a song that has already finished its production cycle. In turn, music videos make for a fascinating topic for both study and discussion, even through its seeming defiance of definition. Additionally, contemporary music videos, which are most often created utilizing the latest digital technologies, gives its audience a richer audiovisual experience, while also offering scholars an object well suited for academic analysis.

Despite the allusiveness to defining and discussing music videos as stand-alone art pieces, Steven Shaviro successfully provides the reader with a rich description of twelve digital music videos, which are subsequently (loosely) divided into four unique categories. The videos selected reflect around nine years of contemporary music video releases, with the oldest piece having been released in 2007, and the newest in 2016. He offers the reader a detailed, informational description of each music video, followed by his personal analysis of the video's meaning and its technological significance. Shaviro's description and analysis of each music video is also fused together with thoughtful connections made to various other authors, directors, film, or music videos. For example, the comparison he makes between the camera placement of Janelle Monáe's "Cold War" video to that of Sinead O'Connor's "Nothing Compares to You" (68), or describing Animal Collective's psychedelic "Applesauce" video as replacing the "critical vigor of modernism with a postmodern aesthetics of opportunistic hedonism" (84).

In the introductory chapter, Shaviro provides the reader with a historical contextualization of music videos along with the development of motion pictures, starting his discussion with the 1927 talkie, *The Jazz Singer*, then moving the discussion to Queen's 1975 music video for "Bohemian Rhapsody" and The Buggles' "Video Killed the Radio Star" (the music video that ushered in the age of MTV), all the while tying his argument together by addressing the theories of heavy weights like Marshall McLuhan, Michel Chion, and André Bazin. Shaviro directly addresses the question behind the need to analyze and discuss music videos in the first place, as aside from his personal like and fascination for them, music videos "almost never have a status of independent, self-subsisting works" (7). Music videos are often "subject to the whims of marketers and publicists" for the purpose of advertising the song, as they are "generally based on preexisting material, which was not created with them in mind" (7). Additionally, and perhaps most importantly to academic/artistic inquiry, music videos "frequently remediate older media contents: alluding to, sampling and recombining, or even straight-forwardly plagiarizing materials from movies, television shows, fashion photography, and experimental art" (7).

The book's four subsequent chapters each discuss three music videos divided into the following categories: *Superimpositions* (Ch. 1), *Glitch Aesthetics* (Ch. 2), *Remediations* (Ch. 3), and *Limits* (Ch. 4). These four categories work as general descriptors for the visual qualities and technological effects shared by the respective videos, where Shaviro notes the artist (who is often the main character in the music video itself), as well as the video's director. Consequently, *superimpositions* loosely refers to videos that utilize multiple images imposed onto/around one another to create a more complex visual composition, such as the 2007 video for Rhianna's "Disturbia." *Glitch aesthetics* can feature image loops, non-synchronized audiovisuals, and violent camera movements, the latter of which is seen in the video for Allie X's "Catch" (2015). *Remediations* functions as a visual transformation/reinterpretation of high art (like Kylie Minogue's "All the Lovers," 2010), and lastly, *limits* "is concerned with three videos that explore extreme physical and emotional conditions" (18), a brilliant example can be seen in the video for Kari Faux's "Fantasy."

As Shaviro explains, "We do not *hear* the music of "Disturbia" in the same way when we watch the video as we would without it" (35, emphasis in the original), and this statement can easily extend to encompass the viewing experience of pretty much all music videos, as it differs greatly from listening solely to the musical album. Thus, in preparation of reading *Digital Music Videos*, I began by watching all twelve music videos discussed in the book, which are freely available online. Then, after reading each chapter, I re-watched the videos. I decided to view each of the music videos before and after reading the book, in order to obtain a more robust perspective regarding the works discussed. Although Shaviro offers detailed, well written descriptions of the music videos he highlights, I highly recommend readers to also view the videos (before and/or after reading the book). Otherwise, the reader misses out in the rich nuances of the visuals (and the music) that is discussed and described throughout the book.

Digital Music Videos is a valuable resource for anyone with a personal and/or academic interest in learning more about contemporary music videos. At 140 pages, the book offers readers a quick, easy read while still providing an in-depth and meaningful analysis into the making and meaning behind music videos in the 21st century. The book contains numerous references to various artists and theorists, and also provides further reading suggestions (in addition to the works cited). While the book has a limited scope, in that it only addresses twelve music videos spanning less than a decade, (a fact that Shaviro does acknowledge), the

book nonetheless provides a solid and intelligent overview of the contemporary music video world, while keeping the door wide open for further discourse and exploration on the topic.

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Wills, John. *Disney Culture*. Rutgers University Press, 2017.

Disney Culture explores the respected Disney Company, examining the influence and success of Walt Disney's legacy. John Wills' text is a vital contribution to Rutgers University Press' *Quick Takes: Movies & Popular Culture* series, each sentence sophisticated, intelligent and well written. The author's study has depth, venturing beyond the child-like innocence often synonymous with the brand. This remarkable book separates reality from idealism, revealing the Disney Company as a well-oiled machine, appealing to traditionalism, family values and wholesome Americana.

John Wills is a senior lecturer in American history and the director of American studies at the University of Kent in the United Kingdom. His credentials make his voice as author credible, especially following his 2005 publication *Invention of the Park: From the Garden of Eden to Disney's Magic Kingdom*. Wills brings mundane facts to life, sparking reader interest by addressing the cultural atmosphere integral to forming the popular Disney brand. For instance, harsh political climates welcomed the distraction of Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck; these loveable characters reinforced traditional American values and ideals. The author relies on description, narrative and comparisons to structure the text, making for an easy and thought provoking read. Quotes from Disney's employees, scholars and critics are spread throughout the work, anchoring the arguments and creating depth to the text as a whole.

Disney Culture is organized sensibly, resulting in a thoughtful and in-depth analysis that is a pleasure to read. The text is organized into four distinct categories, *Making Disney Magic*, *The World According to Disney*, *Disney Dollars* and *Disney Values*. These segments encompass Disney's growth and vast history, from a smalltime animation workshop to an international media

enterprise. The Disney ethos is the central focus, a welcomed theme woven throughout the four chapters. The text traces Disney's progress over a century, documenting its successes and its failures alike. Wills captures the dedicated Disney community pivotal to the brand's success, manifested through consistent and wholesome attitudes and the enchanting animated characters its global fan base has grown to adore. This book is all about impact, how affect is elicited through entertainment, merchandise and the infamous theme park experience.

The first chapter, *Making Disney Magic*, focuses on the history of the company, beginning with Walt Disney's first creative venture when employed by the Pesmen-Rubin Art Studio, and later the Kansas City Film Ad Company. The author uses this chapter to discuss the creation of Mickey Mouse, the celebrated cartoon character that has become the iconic mascot of the brand. Wills quotes Disney, "it all started with a mouse", using these words as the foundation for the chapter. The author seems to agree that Mickey Mouse set the precedent for the family oriented, playful and child-like brand, strongly influencing Disney's business decisions, vision and culture. This chapter is perhaps the most significant for the reader who aims to relive the nostalgia of a Disney childhood. Although the text does not focus on animation techniques or technical innovation, Wills provides an exquisite insight into one of America's most lucrative brands. The entertaining anecdotes and significant histories offered throughout the chapter prepare the reader for the extensive cultural analysis to come.

The World According to Disney, the second chapter of the text, analyzes Disney's influence on a global scale, exploring perceptions of the Disney brand throughout the United States and Europe. Wills unpacks the disneyization of European folklore, challenging theorists to consider that European story was being transformed and Americanized rather than being duplicated. The author attributes this Americanized storytelling to a rise in American culture globally, touching on the commoditization of western goodness and traditional family values. This commoditization, particularly in the case of Disney's theme parks, has unintentionally elicited a fear of American capitalism. This analysis proves vital to the text as it addresses the successes and conflicts surrounding the Disney brand. Rather than approaching the Disney Company as an unconditionally loved universal brand, Wills' strength as author is his objective approach, recounting the problems associated with the sale of nostalgic and idealized American entertainment. This chapter, along with the section following, provides excellent

insight into the Disney theme park enterprise, reinforcing Disney's culture and the business decisions that have resulted in both success and controversy.

The third chapter, *Disney Dollars*, explores the merchandising practices that Disney is famous for. Disney currency is also examined, reinforcing the brand as truly unique. The more recent procurements of the Marvel and *Star Wars* franchises are also discussed as strategic purchases, honing Disney's appeal to an older and perhaps new, dedicated audience. Again, Wills is faithful in his pursuit for truth, examining praise and criticisms of the Disney brand in a corporate and capitalist arena. *Star Wars* and Marvel seem to exist independently from the Mickey Mouse empire, with the author perceptively assessing the company's dedication to future growth.

Disney Values, the last chapter of the text, offers a unique examination of Disney's relationship with fandom, fanaticism, environmentalism, race and sexuality. The author looks to the future, situating the company as a global media presence. Wills raises the fascinating argument that there is an absence of new Mickey Mouse content from Disney. This iconic figure seems to lack a contemporary media presence, veering from the brand's powerful nostalgic influence that appeals to its older audience. This refreshing argument elicits thought of the niche nostalgic market Disney can accommodate, and whether such needs will be met in the years to come.

Disney Culture is an exceptional scholarly text, its evocative arguments and significant research are second to none. Each of its chapters explores Disney's successes and weaknesses, and at times daring to expose the controversies surrounding the utopic brand. John Wills has produced a brilliant cultural examination of the Disney Company, exploring its past, present and future. *Disney Culture* is a bold and honest text, effectively proving that the Disney Company is the ultimate media powerhouse, successfully commoditizing the American dream.

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Matthews David, Alison. *Fashion Victims: Dangers of Dress Past and Present*. Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2017.

The history of fashion has some low points, where aesthetics were placed above health and safety. *Fashion Victims: Dangers of Dress Past and Present* by Alison Matthews David explores some dangerous processes and materials used in the creation of fashionable goods, focusing on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The author details various ways fashion has been detrimental to one's health over seven chapters and a conclusion. An abundance of illustrations clearly provide visual examples, so there is no misunderstanding her research, with engaging text that both draws in and horrifies the reader. Some interesting elements are addressed below.

The first chapter discusses how sickness was transferred from clothing to the wearer. For example, in the late nineteenth century, Sir Robert Peel's daughter was given a riding habit that a seamstress worked on at home and used the large, wool material to provide warmth to a sick family member (77). Peel's daughter ultimately died from typhus, illustrating that germs do not discriminate against wealth through fabric transfer. Matthews David even notes how the fashionable silhouette was affected in response to germs and the panic they caused as hemlines rose in the 1920s, as this shift is widely attributed the women's suffrage movement and participation in sports.

In the next chapter, mercurial hats are explored. Originally, men's top hats were made from beaver fur which naturally felted nicely, yet it became easier and cheaper to acquire other animal furs, although they required mercury to achieve the proper conditions for shaping. The workers' mercury exposure led to paranoia, suicidal thoughts, worrying and trembling (139). Additionally, the idea of a rabbit being pulled out of a hat is discussed; the rabbit's pelt is used as inexpensive fur for hats and pulling a live rabbit out of a hat metaphorically brings the rabbit back to life. Repeated exposure to the toxic chemical was life-altering for hatters as their physical and mental health was affected, thoroughly explaining the use of the phrase "mad as hatter" that was popularized by Lewis Carroll.

The next two chapters focus on dyes and the harm they caused. Hat makers placing faux flowers on women's hats were exposed to high concentrations of a copper and arsenic trioxide mixture that was used to produce a brilliant green

color. The arsenic trioxide, also known as white arsenic, was the harmful culprit, and when used in powder form the workers would get it under their fingernails, in their eyes, and accidentally ingest it. As news spread about the awful symptoms and deaths faced by those exposed, women who wore green were called out for harming others. Although upper class women would condemn their peers for donning the harmful color, it was actually lower class workers who were in contact with the chemicals daily that truly suffered. Other dye colors were equally harmful, and Matthews David continues in the next chapter with examples. There are accounts of socks causing problems, which might be unexpected as they are a rather unassuming garment. Some were knit in bright colors to excite the eye, yet dyes used to create these festive foot coverings were not healthy for all. As dye rubbed against the sweaty feet of the wearer, eczema and rashes appeared, often in the same striped pattern as the knit sock. Chromophobia then became a real condition and some promoted undyed garments as being healthiest (229).

Strangulation and flammable fabrics came next. Unfortunately, working conditions were not originally regulated, and machinery often caused accidents within factories, resulting in clothing that was later designed for workers to diminish the chances of bodily harm. As seen in other examples, the working class was able to create goods quickly and cheaply, but were then prone to occupational hazards that were detrimental to their health. Matthews David notes, "In fact, for much of history, to be fashionable meant consciously sacrificing comfort and mobility for visual display" (301). As if entanglement was not worrisome enough, the following chapter focused on flammable fabrics, which was particularly gruesome as children were often burn victims while wearing a cotton imitation of wool flannel known as flannelette. As one may guess, it was cheaper and easier to make than wool flannel, yet unlike wool, it ignited almost instantly.

The final chapter discusses other flammable accessories and fabrics. Celluloid, a nineteenth century plastic, was used for items such as decorative combs, as its creation saved the lives of animals who had previously been killed for materials such as ivory. Yet, once again, more risks were bestowed upon workers as early plastics were very volatile and had the ability to combust as quickly as gunpowder. Artificial silk was also studied, and this innovation never quite reached the beauty of silk. Matthews David comments on the imitation fabric: "It was worn by the Duchess of Windsor, a woman who led a king to

abdicate but who, like Rayon, could not be queen herself” (429). Modernization and technological advances are not always best.

The recurring theme throughout the book is that workers making fashionable items can experience health issues as a direct result. Matthews David notes, “As the case studies in this book have proven, the democratization of luxury goods was seen as a triumph of science and industry, but it came at a steep cost to the health of humans, animals, and the environment” (440) and this thesis is directly understood.

As seen, the information covered is fascinating and thorough, and the reader is engaged and open to learning more about past hazards. The methodology of research includes reviewing primary sources such as magazines, newspaper articles, fashion plates and journal articles. Additionally, quantitative analysis was done to show existing levels of toxins in surviving clothing. For example, green shoes from the Bata Shoe Museum were tested for arsenic levels, proving the research for the text was careful and complete. Although leather tanning and the effects of chromium exposure were briefly mentioned, more research could have been dedicated to this area as the process of tanning leather is detrimental to both the environment and workers and this inclusion would have fit well within the scope of the book.

Since all examples were from the past, one can only hope that things have gotten better but this is not necessarily the case. The book ends on a bit of a downer as old risks have been removed but new ones are present. It is then that Matthews David rallies the reader for change, stating, “We need to start questioning how the inequalities of the global economy can, like the dead Victorian seamstress in the mirror, come back to haunt us in new incarnations” (451). She continues, “In filling our wardrobes with deliberately disposable clothing, we have perhaps unwittingly caused pain, suffering, and even sometimes death in developing countries” (454). Hopefully, education on this social justice issue will engage readers to rethink their own purchases to make smarter decisions and we can only hope the industry does better in the future, and information is a first step for this revolution.

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Engstrom, Erika. *Feminism, Gender, and Politics in NBC's Parks and Recreation*. New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2017. Print.

Feminism, Gender, and Politics in NBC's Parks and Recreation is a slim volume with valuable applications for instructors of gender and women's studies, and media criticism courses. Each of the six chapters in Erika Engstrom's feminist textual analysis examines a different aspect of the unapologetically feminist hit sitcom that aired for seven seasons on NBC (2009-2015). The book's central argument is that *Parks* broke new sitcom ground by normalizing feminism while satirizing patriarchy, and also by showing feminism unbound by gender and able to affect change in fictional Pawnee, Indiana, and beyond. Engstrom illustrates her thesis with an impressive and comprehensive reading of more than 120 episodes across the series' seven-season archive.

Engstrom's book effectively grounds her analysis in feminist theory, but equally commendable in her analysis is her knowledge sitcom history and an appreciation for the humor and conventions of the genre. Engstrom places feminist icon Leslie Knope appropriately in the lineage from television comedies *I Love Lucy* to *Gilmore Girls*. The book fully appreciates and accounts for the "mockumentary" conceit of the show while focusing on the more subtle ways the show broke new ground on portrayals of both female and male characters and the institutions they inhabit. The result of this understanding of genre conventions, sitcom history, and feminist theory, is a compelling argument for the persuasive power of televised feminism by Engstrom, who has authored two other books on television's treatment of women getting married (*The Bride Factory: Mass Media Portrayals of Women and Weddings*, Peter Lang, 2011) and in the workplace (*Mad Men and Working Women: Feminist Perspectives on Historical Power, Resistance, and Otherness*, Peter Lang, 2014).

The book deconstructs the themes of *Parks*' treatment of gender and feminism, beginning with an analysis of the historical and codified patriarchy of Pawnee, Indiana. Engstrom wisely highlights the sometimes subtle ways the sitcom's visual set pieces and props reinforce the feminist agenda of the scripted dialogue and storylines. The second chapter analyzes the fictional city's government-funded murals as a site of comedic critique of historic racism and sexism, and episodes centered around archaic laws still in the city's codes provide a narrative of resistance and change through political action. Engstrom's analysis

benefits from the persuasive power of incorporating the visual, scripted, and performative aspects of the show.

Chapter three of the book examines the “new men” characters that inhabit Pawnee’s city government, and the various ways they expose the false binary afforded by hegemonic masculinity. Engstrom deconstructs the gender performance of Ron Swanson, the manly man; Tom Haverford, the metrosexual; Chris Traeger, the pretty-boy athlete; his best friend and Leslie’s love interest, Ben Wyatt, the nerdy intellectual; Jerry Gergich, the hapless family man; Andy Dwyer, the goofball manchild. She finds in all the characters androgynous and counter-hegemonic masculine traits – especially in each character’s emotional expressivity.

The male allies of the feminist Leslie Knope are not one dimensional; they all exhibit some form of androgyny that combines their masculine and feminine side. (64)

As Engstrom argues, the friendships and open communication among the male characters on *Parks* distinguish it from other sitcoms by showing “what men *can* be like – and that they can be liked by other men” (64).

Chapters four and five center Leslie Knope’s feminist philosophy in action, as she interacts with other women in the show and launches a political campaign for Pawnee City Council. Engstrom notes the subversive but also ambivalent attitude Leslie demonstrates in her encounters in controversial spaces for women, including as a beauty pageant judge and at a strip club. Engstrom argues that Leslie’s predominantly second wave feminist philosophy, while willing to acknowledge sex work and porn culture’s unavoidable place in society, appears to take a radical feminist view of sex work as a patriarchal sphere that degrades women. The feminism of Leslie Knope finds a more effective avenue for equality in her interaction with girls as leader of the Pawnee Goddesses – a Girl Scouts-type youth group that celebrates girl power and ultimately welcomes boys to the party.

Engstrom delves more deeply into the feminist portrayal of romance and power demonstrated by Leslie Knope in both her personal romance with Ben Wyatt, and in both characters’ approach to her run for political office. Her analysis of the characters’ wedding, notes that every aspect from the dress to the planning to the vows illustrates mutuality and equality among the male and

female characters. In examining the political career of Leslie Knope, in which her husband serves as her campaign manager, Engstrom pays special attention to the visual aspects of the show's feminist message, contrasting the "wall of inspirational women" behind Leslie's office desk to the wall of City Council men that hangs in the hallway outside her office, and contextualizing Leslie's campaign poster featuring her face superimposed on the Rosie the Riveter icon, using the slogan, "Knope We Can!" Again, Engstrom's argument benefits from its attention to multiple sites of analysis, as she notes that the show also features guest appearances by groundbreaking women in politics. Even after being recalled as a city counselor, Leslie bounces back with the help of her community of support.

In contrast to the personal feminism in other contemporary television offerings that featured a woman main character who identified as and uttered the word 'feminist' itself, the feminism extolled by Leslie Knope in small town Pawnee promotes the power of collective action... (93).

Engstrom's book offers scholarly recognition and appreciation for what she calls the show's depiction of "cooperative feminism," as unapologetically as Leslie Knope would.

The palatable feminism and almost heroic portrayal of Leslie Knope combines with the camaraderie evidenced by her female and male friends to create a vision of a gender-equitable feminism, one that promotes cooperation between men and women (132).

Even scholars who are not *Parks* fans will find this book a useful tool in illustrating for students feminist concepts and textual analysis in contemporary media.

Lori Henson
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Darowski, Joseph J, and Kate Darowski. *Frasier: A Cultural History*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2017.

From two siblings comes a brief history of one of the best television shows about two siblings. As the authors explain in the introduction, Joseph J. Darowski introduced his younger sister, Kate Darowski, to *Frasier* in 2006, two years after *Frasier* went off the air. The viewing public has not forgotten the show since then, as one of television's most successful spin-offs lives on through various streaming services, a few clicks away from its forebear, *Cheers*. The authors are unabashed fans of *Frasier*, and their writing style is warm and informal. The book resembles a well-researched, well-polished series of blog posts, and this, in fact, is precisely what makes it so useful. It is evident that the authors had fun thinking and writing about the series, and fans will enjoy this lively, intelligent, and readable overview. *Frasier: A Cultural History* can serve both as a companion for long-time viewers re-watching the show and as a quick introduction to the series for students and scholars.

To clarify the subtitle, this is not a book about the entire history of the culture surrounding and influencing the show during its run through the nineties into the early 2000s. Instead, the book is about some of the culture within the show, how *Frasier* came together, and how the show's production informs its stories and themes of family and class. The authors synthesize several decades of published writing from critics and journalists. They also consulted the published remembrances of industry insiders, including NBC's former president Warren Littlefield and longtime television writer Ken Levine, who worked on both *Cheers* and *Frasier*.

The main body of the book comes in at just under 150 pages and is divided into two parts. Part I describes the building blocks of the show: its creators, stars, and characters. Chapter one explains the gradual and somewhat unexpected emergence of Frasier Crane as a leading character on *Cheers*. Chapter two recounts the top-down development of the spin-off; *Frasier* was conceived by a network fearing the end of its signature sitcom and the idea was initially resisted by star Kelsey Grammer as well as creators David Angel, Peter Casey, and David Lee. The book observes how hard the show's creators worked to differentiate *Frasier* from *Cheers*—setting it on the opposite coast, for example—though that is a story that has been discussed many times before. Still, the chapter recounts many interesting nuggets, from the decision to fire future *Friends* star Lisa

Kudrow from the role of Dr. Crane's radio producer four days after she was hired, to the meaning of the show's inscrutable theme song, "Tossed Salad and Scrambled Eggs." Chapter three offers brief character analysis of Frasier, his brother (Niles, played by David Hyde Pierce), and his father (Martin, played by John Mahoney). Chapter four similarly examines the two female leads, Martin's live-in therapist (Daphne, played by Jane Leeves) and Frasier's producer (Roz, played by Peri Gilpin). The dissection of Niles, a character constructed to be almost identical to the show's lead, is particularly noteworthy. Pierce himself balked at the design of a supporting character so like the titular character, but as the authors' persuasively point out, both the show's writing and Pierce's acting made the Crane brothers one of television's funniest pairs.

Part II of the book analyzes some of the show's main themes. Chapter five traces the evolutions of the characters through the course of the show's eleven seasons. Chapters six and seven discuss, respectively, *Frasier's* standout set design and decoration. These are the richest chapters in the book, as Kate Darowski's expertise in the history of art and design comes to the forefront. The authors carefully ponder the space of *Frasier's* apartment set and explore how it contributes both meaning and comedy to the show. They also offer rich analysis of the objects and furniture selected for the apartment, from the Chihuly sculpture that appeared in season five as an homage to Seattle to Martin's incongruous but beloved Barcalounger. The final chapter offers a comparatively cursory analysis of gender in the show, but of course others have already discussed such issues in greater depth; the authors do introduce their readers to several penetrating studies of *Frasier* in the text as well as the bibliography.

The appendix includes "An Opinionated Compendium" of every episode of the show, listed in chronological order, each with a very brief description and the authors' rating out of four stars. Fans might be interested in the authors' argument that seasons six and seven were among the best of the series, contrary to typical critical appraisals that observe a decline in quality following season five. The point is a subjective one, but here, as throughout the book, the authors are not shy in sharing their opinions. Again, this highlights the book's approach, as well as, depending on the reader's needs, one of its potential strengths. *Frasier: A Cultural History* does not attempt to offer the definitive scholarly analysis of *Frasier*. This is a handy guidebook that illuminates the show's backstory, invites further consideration of the show's production, and encourages a closer look at a classic show. Undergraduate courses teaching *Frasier* may find this book to be a

useful reference. Overall, the authors have crafted this book for a general audience rather than an academic one, and it will appeal to both casual and die-hard fans of the show alike.

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Condis, Megan. *Gaming Masculinity: Trolls, Fake Geeks, and the Gendered Battle for Online Culture*. University of Iowa Press, 2018.

Many who has ventured into the online world of video gaming have their horror stories: from someone screaming epithets on Xbox Live chat to receiving horrible comments on reddit or twitter for their gaming opinions. Many times, these insults or epithets are gendered. In their new book, *Gaming Masculinity: Trolls, Fake Geeks & the Gendered Battle for Online Culture*, Megan Condis explores the gendered nature of gaming culture and how that culture interacts with politics and societal movements writ large. Specifically, Condis' main thesis surrounds an examination of "how gender politics are being filtered through and produced by the logic of video games" (3). Condis shows "that despite the supposedly disembodied nature of life online, performances of masculinity are still afforded privileged status in gaming culture" (9).

The book begins and ends with the #Gamergate controversy, where a disgruntled ex-boyfriend decided to use online platforms like 4Chan and reddit to target Zoë Quinn. Quinn—a video game developer—was attacked relentlessly in gendered and sexualized ways, exposing the misogyny that pervades gaming culture. While not everyone who participates in gaming culture took part in the #Gamergate attacks or ones like it, it provides an "exaggeration of the normative rhetorical practices of hardcore online gamers" (3). That rhetoric, which is centered around the privileging and continued domination of masculinity, also operates as an extension of current backlash-oriented right-wing politics that includes antifeminist, anti-social justice discourse.

In chapter one, Condis analyzes the role that trolling plays in gaming culture. Trolling serves as a way for members of the gaming community to police masculinity. As the logic of trolling goes, there are two ways that one responds to

a troll: those who respond directly to the troll—and thus ‘lose’ the gendered metagame at play with trolling—are viewed as more feminine based on their perceived overly-emotional response. On the other hand, those who do not respond to the troll are seen as more masculine: they maintain control of their emotions, are rational, and are competent users of the internet. The typical characteristics of those who do not respond to the troll are connected to ideas that are traditionally masculine. Thus, trolling becomes not only a way to fetter out those who are not acting appropriately masculine for this community, but to troll is to assert one’s masculinity because clearly the troll is not exhibiting overly-feminine traits by engaging in trolling.

In chapter two, Condis explores another main facet of online culture in which gender policing occurs: memes. Many of the memes that were circulated further the gendered discourse within this online community. Condis found three meme themes that operated to solidify the gaming community as a masculine space where performances of masculinity are valued: the “sexy sidekick,” the “casual girl gamer,” and the “fake nerd girl” (46). Each of these themes played on tropes of femininity to communicate the idea that if women are present in the gaming community, they are either not as capable or are using their appearance to unfairly corrupt the gaming space.

Chapter three examines the ways in which the title of ‘gamer’ or ‘fan’ are highly politicized and contested within the gaming community. Specifically, Condis uses a rather famous episode from the online message boards associated with the game *Star War: The Old Republic*. In the now-famous message thread, fans of the online game discuss the decision by the game’s developer to ban the use of the words ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ from the message boards themselves. The logic behind this decision, Condis argues, lies in the idea that the only reason that members of the message boards would only be using those words in a derogatory way rather than acknowledging the fact that gay or lesbian gamers may exist and want to talk about their identities on the message boards. Moreover, Condis found that a good number of comments in this particular thread followed a theme of wanting to ‘just play the game’ and leave one’s politics at the door. This chapter highlights how the politics of privilege—with games being apolitical at default—operates in the discourses and feelings of those who consider themselves ‘gamers.’

In the final and fourth chapter, Condis more explicitly connects the politics of online gamer culture to the current iteration of culture war politics that

culminated in the election of Donald Trump. Trolling and meme usage are not only tools of online gaming culture to police masculinity, but tools of the Trump presidency itself. Condis argues that Donald Trump is the first troll president (106). Not that we should not take his presidency seriously, but rather Donald Trump uses “unserious, insincere rhetoric toward serious... aims, an art that is the hallmark of Internet discourse” (106). Condis makes arguably one of the more interesting points of the book in this discussion: while many claim to use memes, shock-jock-esque humor, and engage in trolling behavior ironically or to get laughs, if the irony or humor cannot be deciphered from the actual ideologies of bigotry and hatred, then the distinction ceases to matter (105). In other words, if one evokes a racial or xenophobic discourse ‘for laughs,’ but that discourse is side-by-side with actual hateful discourse, then ultimately one’s intentions do not matter. Taking this perspective would help fight against the toxic online environment as well as our current political landscape.

Throughout the book, Condis employs what she dubs “game breaks:” chapter breaks that serve as short commentaries on specific games or facets of games that have heavily gendered aspects. This writing style is not only interesting for the reader but also allows the author to explore a specific idea or concept that fits with the overall theme of the book. *Gaming Masculinity’s* flaw is one that plagues many books in the popular culture field: some of the popular culture references are now presently a bit outdated. Overall, Condis’ book is a useful and timely read that asks all of us to take gaming and gaming culture a bit more seriously.

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Gunkel, David J. *Gaming the System: Deconstructing Video Games, Games Studies, and Virtual Worlds*. Indiana University Press, 2018.

Ten years after Ian Bogost argued that video game studies should focus not on the narrative operation, but the arguments contained in the operation, hyper-prolific scholar David J. Gunkel presents another shift in the field of video games studies, arguing that one focus on “*the game in the argument*” [emphasis original] (ix) in

his latest publication, *Gaming the System*. The text's title refers to moving beyond simply playing by the rules, and "to learn[ing] to manipulate the rules in such a way as to gain an advantage or to modify the program to make the system function differently and otherwise" (1). Gunkel elaborates across four chapters, focusing on virtual worlds, avatars and the governing documents thereof.

"Terra Nova 2.0" examines how scholars from Castronova onward regard virtual worlds as a frontier that is "in terms of its social structure [. . .] a very real [. . .] alternative to our physical realm" (29). Gunkel notes how "frontier" and "new world" remain loaded terms, with the same sins of colonization and genocide being replicated in historically-based games (35). Additionally, while it might seem no *real* victims exist, depictions of African-Americans and Latinos in the likes of *Grand Theft Auto* and the overgeneralization of "Arabs" in first person shooters continue to reinforce racist stereotypes. The graphics may have "improved" since *Custer's Revenge*, but the stomach still turns. Adding further insult to injury, a large number of victims of colonialism continue to fall on the "have-nots" side of the digital divide (52-53). Gunkel ends on an ironic note, noting that the "virgin territory" of video games studies stands in danger of being colonized by other disciplines such as literature and film studies (56).

Chapter Two, "The Real Problem," progresses logically to avatars in this new world, with users "trying on" race and gender as a positive aspect, but in a different light, potentially crying havoc and letting slip the (online, no one knows you're a) dogs of war (62). He provides historical context, citing "Sanford Lewin"'s online masquerade as the disabled woman Julie (65) as well as the Goodson/Todman panel show *To Tell the Truth* (65), explaining that reality may be realized either *a priori* via one's Facebook profile, or *a posteriori*, using the infamous example of Notre Dame linebacker Manti Te'o's nonexistent girlfriend succumbing to leukemia, as well as *Wired*'s online interview with "Marshall McLuhan" over a decade after his death (74-75). In his exploration of "the real," Gunkel examines the concept over increasing levels involving Plato, Kant, and Žižek with the "real" becoming ever more amorphous and unattainable. Gunkel concludes that the problem rests not with our understanding of virtual environments. Rather, "[t]he real problem has to do with the real" (88).

At first blush, the premise of the third chapter, "Social Contract 2.0" might seem absurd. Gunkel believes that the most important political documents of the twenty-first century resulted not out of the reorganization of nations after the fall of the Soviet Union, but the manifold Terms of Service (ToS) and End User

License Agreement (EULA) documents one must “sign” in order to participate online (92). Gunkel situates the argument in the dueling definitions of social contract theory of Locke and Hobbes, citing LambdaMOO’s wizards’ initial abdication intending to favor a “state of nature” resulting in the infamous “rape” by “Mr. Bungle” and subsequent restoration of submission to the wizards’ rule (95; 97). No matter which name the social contract might go by, said documents address matters such as data sharing and intellectual property in relation to user content (99). Of no surprise, these agreements favor the organizations over the users with the latter party having no choice but to submit to take part (100-01). So ready are the majority to submit, few bother to read the ToS/EULA, as illustrated by GameStation’s 2010 April Fool’s joke claiming right to the user’s immortal soul for eternity (101). With their seeming emphasis on users’ rights in contrast, Facebook’s EULA/ToS provides the best example of Gunkel’s initial thesis, though Facebook’s ability to pass along personal data to law enforcement agencies taints Zuckerberg’s utopia. Gunkel sees this as an opportunity to engage in activism in the virtual world. “Occupy: Cyberspace” as it were (120).

For “In the Face of Others,” Gunkel returns to online identities, building upon the possibility that a user might be neither male, female, nor dog, but a bot (125). Citing the historical examples of Turing’s Imitation Game (126) and ELIZA (129), Gunkel leads up to one of his favorite subjects: machine ethics. What happens when computers, such as the example of AlphaGo, exceed the learning implemented by the creators and are arguably no longer instruments of their creators? What if machines are implemented with emotions eventually? Who should be held responsible when, inevitably, the machines revolt? To draw on cinematic examples, ignoring the all-too-easy allusions one could make to *Blade Runner*, would Charles A. Forbin and Stephen Falken face international tribunals for committing war crimes, or their creations, Colossus and JOSHUA? Does Bomb Number Twenty’s detonation which kills the crew of *The Dark Star* (excepting already dead Commander Powell) constitute mass murder-suicide or a potential wrongful death suit to be filed against NASA?

As Gunkel explained initially in his employment of deconstruction in its purest form in carrying out this discussion, he arrives at no definite answers. Any reader taking issue with this failed to pay attention. Gunkel remains impeccable in his research, situating his argument among varying philosophical viewpoints and giving an impressively thorough historical background leading up to the current discussions in each chapter. The *only* shortcoming rests with the print

nature of the text in relation to its faster-moving subject matter. However, given the fact that Gunkel and fellow series editor Robert Alan Brookey got their respective scholarly surfboards on top of the wave early on, wipeout does not appear imminent.

Scott R. Stalcup
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Rabinowitz, Aaron and Robert Axp editors. *Hamilton and Philosophy: Revolutionary Thinking*. Open Court Publishing Company, 2017.

A scholarly series of more than 125 books with each book dedicated to analyzing a single popular culture topic with varied philosophical approaches is no small mandate but the Popular Culture and Philosophy series rises to this challenge. Each book independently targets diverse popular culture phenomena that include television programs (e.g., *The Americans*, *The Sopranos*), films (e.g., *The Princess Bride*, *The Matrix*), and other popular culture topics (e.g., David Bowie, iPod). It is the exception for the series to tackle a Broadway play and this is what is accomplished with *Hamilton and Philosophy: Revolutionary Thinking*.

With this 110th volume in the Popular Culture and Philosophy series, *Hamilton and Philosophy: Revolutionary Thinking* Editors Aaron Rabinowitz and Robert Axp investigate how multiple philosophical approaches can inform readers and/or the *Hamilton* musical viewing audiences about Alexander Hamilton the man and *Hamilton* the award-winning musical. The two editors' achieves the goal. This book review will advance three strengths and a caveat before concluding with the overall assessment that the contribution the book makes is noteworthy.

To say Alexander Hamilton led a colorful life only begins to describe the unique adventures he faced. The orphan grew up to assist General George Washington in leading the Continental Army before becoming the first United States Secretary of the Treasury and later dying in a duel with Vice President Aaron Burr. Add other milestones like creating the *New York Post* and the United States Coast Guard as well as publishing an apology for being an adulterer and

extremely colorful seems to be a more appropriate description. Such an interesting life makes for a fascinating protagonist in Lin-Manuel Miranda's hip-hop musical *Hamilton*.

Lin-Manuel Miranda created the Broadway musical *Hamilton*'s book, music and lyrics that spotlight the complex and colorful life of United States Founding Father Alexander Hamilton. Having this production embrace rap changed the paradigm on Broadway but Miranda took it a step further by changing the paradigm by not matching the race of the actors to the race of the historical figure they portrayed. These paradigm shifts from traditional musicals demonstrate how Miranda is a visionary whose innovative work resulted in the show winning 11 Tonys in 2016.

No question then but that *Hamilton* is a deserving popular culture topic for the Popular Culture and Philosophy series. *Hamilton and Philosophy: Revolutionary Thinking* analyzes the lyrics, acting, rapping, storyline and overall performances from many different lenses. The book meets this challenge successfully overall but limitations emerge as well.

One of the strengths of the edited book by Rabinowitz and Axp is that *Hamilton* is viewed with refreshing perspectives that are not typically found in a popular culture and philosophy book. The text provides creative and thoughtful ways for assessing both Alexander Hamilton the man and for the musical. Specifically this unique book delivers multiple facets of the *Hamilton* production being reviewed with an array of philosophical approaches with rigor and imagination. For example, *Hamilton*'s key characters are compared to Cyborgs, MacBeth and Buddhists to name just a subset. The chapter authors provide engaging images, humor and irony with effective juxtapositions. Philosophical frameworks applied in original ways to offer insights into *Hamilton* and into Alexander Hamilton's life is the first strength of the book.

A second strength is that the majority of the chapter authors were considerate of the spectrum of readers in terms of having seen the play when reading the book. Without a doubt having seen the theatrical production makes for an interesting experience when reading *Hamilton: Revolutionary Thinking* but the majority of the 24 chapters' scholars write so that it is not necessary to have seen the production to understand the authors' philosophical approach for analyzing the theatrical messages. This is a significant accomplishment when philosophical tenets, frameworks and concepts are directly linked to the musical but what is helpful is that the elements are so clearly explained that attendance is not

required. The book as a reading experience can stand alone. Put simply, *Hamilton: Revolutionary Thinking* can be read before or after viewing the production and it can be equally enjoyed without seeing the biography.

A third strength is how the musical production is linked to a host of philosophies. The linkages offer rich conceptualizations and operationalizations of key concepts and tenets that are highlighted in each chapter. The aha moments are numerous. “To Throw Away Your Shot or Not” by Tim Jung and Minerva Ahumada, “Eliza Hamilton, Buddhist Master” by Benjamin Ross and “Casting in Living Color” by Adam Barkman and Rachel Wall are three of the strongest chapters with this technique of providing detailed descriptions of the show being viewed from a specific philosophical lens. The symbolism of redemption, seeking one’s legacy and family loyalty, pops with the philosophical approaches selected.

Despite its strengths, a caveat that emerges quickly is the significant variance in the quality of the chapter authors’ writing across the chapters. The variance appeared quickly with the two first chapters. Unfortunately the first chapter by Christopher Ketcham entitled “I, Hamilton, Confessions of a Ten-Dollar Bill” promises excitement only to disappoint. The text is repetitive, vague and reads as if the author wrote general observations at the top of his head without correlating the content in a meaningful way to the musical nor even to Hamilton’s life. A conversation with the ten-dollar bill could have been creative but instead the link with the bill of today advancing numerous rhetorical questions. This slow start rebounds with Joe Chapa’s second chapter “Who’s the Hero?” but one can not but think that the book would have benefited from another revision to increase the consistency of the quality of writing across the chapters.

In conclusion, *Hamilton and Philosophy: Revolutionary Thinking* provides an innovative read. Overall the authors’ creativity and expertise makes this well worth the read in terms of time and money.

Melissa M. Spirek
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Flanagan, Martin, Andrew Livingstone, and Mike McKenny. *The Marvel Studios Phenomenon: Inside a Transmedia Universe*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2016.

The release of Marvel Studios 2018 film, *Ant-Man and the Wasp*, marks the 20th cinematic installment of a transmedia universe that is unrivaled in the contemporary entertainment landscape. Marvel's approach to content creation spans multiple films; it is emulated by other studios and has yet to be duplicated and perhaps might never be. With the advent of Marvel Studios (MS) and their first feature film, *Iron Man*, audiences were given just the change they apparently wanted, as demonstrated by the continued worldwide support of multiple films each year. Marvel truly has built a unique transmedia universe that generates massive amounts of money, delights audiences, and sets standards rather than following them. Flanagan, McKenny, and Livingstone offer a clear picture of Marvel's history that uniquely positioned them as a company to capitalize on an entertainment climate that was ready for a change, and thus warrants reading.

Chapters one and two focus on the history of Marvel coupled with the entertainment industry in the late 1990s and early 2000's that provided the fertile grounds necessary for the seeds of a successful new film company, Marvel Studios, to flourish. Beginning with the 2005 production of the critically acclaimed and financially successful film, *Iron Man* (released in 2008), Marvel Studios caught the eye of Disney for an unprecedented \$4 billion purchase of a company with only one successful film under their belt and several products in the pipeline. With a broad spectrum of source material from a 50-year history of panel-packed Marvel Comics pages, the studio made bold steps to generate contemporary iterations of classic characters such as Iron Man, Captain America, Thor, Hulk, and many more. The authors draw readers attention to the unique position that Marvel found themselves in: continuing to produce new comics in tandem with the rigorous release-schedule of Marvel Studios; here executives experimented with the strategies to maintain cohesion across multiple films as well as comics to produce a unique transmedia narrative. Marvel maintained a "movies-first" approach that placed the characters of their films (Iron Man, Thor, Captain America, Hulk, etc.) as the point of convergence for their multiple forms of revenue such as toys, television series, comic books, etc. Chapter two poses a question that is at the heart of the entire book: *Does Marvel succeed at business in*

order to tell great stories? Or does it tell great stories in order to prosper in business (60)?

The authors leave little doubt that Marvel tells great stories, and Marvel Studios works to construct provocative narratives that expand and reframe the genre of big-budget action-adventure superhero movies. Chapter three calls forth the question: what is a superhero movie? The authors explore the many ways Marvel Studios subverts the genre of superhero films (and television) by allowing their properties to cater to different audiences. Audiences likely perceive the stark contrast between the structure of *Iron Man* about the son of an arms dealer with a change of heart set in contemporary society compared to *Captain America: The First Avenger* as a period piece set primarily during the events of the Second World War. Equally so, *Ant-Man* and *Thor* extend the genre to include family-friendly heist films and Shakespearean drama. The Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), and its corresponding television properties, is populated by superheroes and non-powered individuals alike, but it is allowed to flourish by the varying degrees of connectivity between properties. Chapter five explores this convergence of storytelling through discussing the ways in which MS uses teams of multiple superheroes in ways that echo the efforts of Stan Lee's efforts in the 1960s to use existing properties to herald new faces into canon. Using Easter Eggs and Post-credit scenes as connective tissue from the very first MS film and the original appearance of Samuel L Jackson's Nick Fury, the audience is told simultaneously with Tony Stark that he has become part of a bigger universe and he just doesn't know it yet. From that moment on, the Avengers lead the charge as Marvel Studios' flagship property and pinnacle of transmedia franchises and carrying with it the culmination of the heroes finally united as well as the studios efforts to create a multi-billion-dollar juggernaut. Chapter six continues the discussion of broadening genre boundaries with a focus on a different team, the alternative to the Avengers and tenth installment of the MCU, *The Guardians of the Galaxy*. The film expands the superhero genre again by extending the continued narrative to the cosmos: the space-opera brings an Avengers B-list to the screen and takes a lot of risks cinematically as well as from a marketability standpoint along the way. The cosmic anti-heroes were among the most obscure properties in the breadth of protagonists to which Marvel Studios had access, and here readers are reminded that Marvel is becoming synonymous with big-budget cinema in new ways by widening what constitutes a superhero film and limiting the potential of competition (148).

For media scholars, movie aficionados, and people that just like taking a glance behind the curtain, this book offers a clear and cohesive exploration of the complex history that created some of the most popular films of the early 21st century. The book is an interesting read, that asks provocative questions about how Marvel both creates and reflects culture, often simultaneously. The book's organization is at times somewhat repetitive; much like some comics from which the stories draw, readers revisit history and themes about the content from different vantage points. Nonetheless, this book advances our understanding of how Marvel serves as an exemplar for aspiring transmedia entertainment empires in a time when more movie studios try to build expanded and interconnected shared universes for their properties. Most importantly, this book points out the complexities of creating a consistent and convergent universe for the characters to inhabit together and calls into question why Marvel and audiences continue to refer to this empire as the Marvel Cinematic Universe rather than the more appropriate Marvel *Transmedia* Universe (181).

Curtis Sullivan
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Auxier, Randall E. *Metaphysical Graffiti: Deep Cuts in the Philosophy of Rock*. Open Court, 2017.

There's 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's 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 is occasionally what it strives to be—and more like a philosophical ode to a cultural enterprise that's 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 over and over again if you still listen to FM stations in your car during rush hour. 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).

In this way, *Metaphysical Graffiti* is an attempt at original philosophical literature. And at times, it works. The eighth chapter of the book, “It’s All Dark: The Eclipse of the Damaged Brain,” is one such example where Auxier’s philosophy meets the road. Here he’s positing a phenomenology of musical appreciation, with Pink Floyd as the subject. Even if you’re 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 what was the psychical and mildly hallucinatory experience of his first encounter with the *Dark Side of the Moon*. He’s 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 has 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). And 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’s 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 doesn’t know much about Paul Simon, either, which is why he approaches his music so broadly and haphazardly. Or perhaps it’s because Simon’s work as an artist is indeed so immense and vast that it takes more than essay to summarize its supposed significance. Either way, Auxier’s haphazard method works as a way to do philosophy-as-literature. There are no answers here, only process. It’s something curious philosophers may have patience for, just as musicians have the interest be able to stand through warm-ups, sound checks and opening acts. But for a general audience, Auxier’s motley approach may be just a little 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* has more in common with 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 for 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’s not using pop culture artifacts to teach about philosophers’ interesting ideas. Instead, he’s using the music to work out ideas of his own. With a different editor and more creative publisher, *Metaphysical Graffiti* could actually stand a chance at broader appeal. It has the necessary humor, self-awareness, and plain speak that’s necessary for bringing philosophy down to ground level. But then, this book could never have been pitched as philosophy. And it’s too heady to stand alone as music criticism, thus becoming a deep cut of its own.

Benjamin van Loon
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Kee, Chera. *Not Your Average Zombie: Rehumanizing the Dead from Voodoo to Zombie Walks*. University of Texas Press, 2017.

Popular culture conventionally presents zombies as a collective horror comprised of humans that have been stripped of their identity. Whether the kind of zombie a piece of media portrays harkens back to the monster’s Haitian roots in Vodou or the George Romero inspired flesh-hungry ghoul, the abject aesthetic of “ordinary” conventional zombies treats these monsters as “little more than empty shells, waiting for someone to project fears onto them” (Kee 2). While the zombie’s openness to a variety of critical interpretations might appear to account for the monster’s popularity in American pop culture, Chera Kee suggests instead that “The somewhat seductive pull of the zombie may have something to do with the fact that US pop culture is full of... *extra-ordinary zombies*... zombies [that] go beyond expectations of ordinary zombies” (3).

To extrapolate the earliest incarnations of the extra-ordinary zombie, Kee begins Chapter 1 by focusing on the zombie’s Haitian roots. Kee constructs a history that culminates out from Columbus’s colonization of Hispaniola in 1492 into the Haitian Revolution and the US occupation of Haiti. Although brief, Kee

uses this history to articulate the interconnected legacy that zombies share with Vodou and institutionalized slavery before the zombie migrated through to the United States through such films as *White Zombie*, *Ouanga*, and *King of the Zombies*. Kee observes that “Early slave-style zombie narratives [such as the ones that appear across the aforementioned films] are predicated on the idea that zombification doesn’t have to be permanent- especially if one is a young white American” (26). With this observation, Kee comes to an early conclusion that from the beginning of American zombie media, extra-ordinary zombies have existed, although the context that these zombies emerge from is haunted by a lingering sense of racism and a nostalgia for colonialism.

Although Chapter 1 explores how zombies have been racialized since their initial appearances in American pop culture, Kee uses Chapter 2 to interrogate how apocalyptic zombies occupy a liminal space that is both raceless and racialized. Per Kee, Zombies are raceless in a sense that they evoke a coming new world order that itself is post-race, yet zombies are racialized by human survivors and consumers of zombie media. Surveying such works as the original *Night of the Living Dead*, *Land of the Dead*, and *Ugly Americans*, Kee is especially interested in re-reading conventional cannibal zombie narratives to articulate how this liminal space lends itself to the creation of extra-ordinary zombies. Kee notes that although zombies are almost always black in the slave-style zombie narratives, in cannibal-style texts, zombies “are almost always white” (52). In cannibal-style zombie narratives then, what makes a zombie extra-ordinary is not a zombie’s white skin, but that a zombie has been humanized. Kee identifies two ways that this humanization commonly occurs in these texts: one) “the zombie is a person that living people knew, such as a friend or family member” and two) “the zombie exhibits human qualities... it tries to answer the phone or play the trombone, anything that marks it other than mindless” (65).

Kee utilizes Chapter 3 to interrogate the role of white women in zombie films. Kee returns to *White Zombie* and turns to other texts like *Chopper Chicks in Zombietown* and *Revenge of the Zombies* to articulate a feminist critique of zombification in film. Regarding slave-style narratives, Kee notes zombification makes white men “behave according to dictates similar to those placed on idealized white womanhood: they will become docile, passive, and willing to follow the orders of a (white) man” (79). Should a white woman control a white male zombie in this kind of narrative, she gains the ability to assert her own agency and resist hegemonic norms. As for cannibal-style narratives, Kee notes

that these texts “largely leave it to a white female to decide what her ‘civilization’ will now look like” (90). Yet while the zombie apocalypse might allow white women to perform extra-ordinary acts of heroism, zombification of white women, as Kee observes, also can allow white women to seek their revenge against the patriarchal system that oppressed them while they were still alive, transforming them into extra-ordinary zombies (95).

Kee shifts to women of color and Hollywood contrived voodoo in Chapter 4. Although this chapter does not further reinforce Kee’s claim that extra-ordinary zombies are ubiquitous in American pop culture, her interrogation of *The House on Skull Mountain* and *Ouanga* explores how voodoo/zombification empowers women of color across slave-style zombie narratives.

Kee returns to extra-ordinary zombies in Chapter 5, which surveys videogames such as *Stubbs the Zombie*, *World of Warcraft*, and *Planescape: Torment*. Kee notes “games that rhetorically justify the killing of ordinary zombie hordes reinforce the notion that there are beings who lost their rights to life” (128-129). The video game version of the extra-ordinary zombie, however, “emphasizes the idea that some [zombies] have full claims to human status” (129). This is because the player often controls the zombies in these games. Kee also identifies another type of extra-ordinary zombie as zombies in games, e.g. *Left 4 Dead*, that have unique characteristics that set them apart from the ordinary undead, but these zombies do not challenge the notion that zombies have lost their rights to life (135).

Kee’s final chapter turns to the phenomena of zombie walks and how they represent a gathering of inherently extra-ordinary zombies (157). Kee argues that this is because participants in zombie walks create/perform their own unique zombie personas.

Although I found myself initially skeptical of Kee’s initial thesis about extra-ordinary zombies’ ubiquity in American pop culture, Kee provides a compelling synthesis of theory and criticism in the first four chapters that I think is useful for horror scholars interested in how portrayals of zombies intersect with race and gender. The final chapters are relevant to a more niche scholarly community concerned with zombies’ ties to ludology and performance respectively.

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Christian, Aymar Jean. *Open TV: Innovation Beyond Hollywood and the Rise of Web Television*. NYU Press, 2018.

Emergent technology has not only impacted how Americans consume television, it has also changed the content seen on the landscape of the medium. In *Open TV: Innovation Beyond Hollywood and the Rise of Web Television*, Amar Jean Christian historicizes the shift from what is labeled closed TV (an oligopoly of television controlled by the Big 3 Networks - NBC, ABC, & CBS - in which diversity is limited) to what is labeled open TV. The term “open TV” describes a marketplace in which producers of television are able to distribute their work independently from the traditional, or legacy, media; this is typically associated with distribution through the Internet. Each chapter explores a different aspect of the tension between open TV and closed TV.

Chapter 1 reviews the role the Internet played in distributing television between the ten-year-span of 1995 to 2005. Legacy media outlets were the first to capitalize on the advent of the web by creating new shows explicitly for this new medium. Since niche audiences had been established through numerous cable television stations during the 1970s and 1980s, legacy media continued to target these audiences online.

Chapter 2 discusses the infrastructure and labor practices of television. Legacy TV has the resources to hire labor for one specific job: a grip, a writer, an actor, etc. Open TV offers creative freedom, yet this freedom comes at the cost of problematic labor conditions. Open TV demands someone, such as a writer, adopt multiple roles without compensation; this person may also be an editor, a caterer, a talent scout, and a camera operator.

Chapter 3 examines the identities portrayed on television. Because open TV allows creative freedom, it can feature character identities that are too niche for legacy TV and, hence, not profitable. Hundreds of web series have existed that feature Latino, black, gay, transgender, Asian, and lesbian characters that defy stereotypes. However, such programs disappear quickly because they target niche audiences and do not have the resources to produce, distribute and promote.

Chapter 4 explores the struggles producers of open TV have when distributing their work. Legacy TV has been, and remains, the most powerful distributor of television whether on traditional devices (an actual television) or emerging forms (a tablet or phone). Even if an independent web program is able to distribute on a major site, such as *YouTube*, there are often restrictions that hinder distribution

through other venues. Those programs that are able to secure funding and distribution must often relinquish creative control to their sponsor or platform.

The final chapter investigates how distributors of web television can only compete with legacy TV through an increased scale of audience. Larger open TV resources, such as *Buzzfeed*, attract sizeable amounts of traffic by offering both cheap space for advertisers (funding) and an easy way to navigate content for consumers. Despite this model, it remains difficult for independent creators of programming to gain audience attention on sites like *YouTube* when competing with programs on this platform supported by the resources of legacy TV.

In most of the chapters, Christian opens with an autoethnographic account of his experience producing a web television series entitled *She's Out of Order*. For instance, in Chapter 2 Christian details the lack of resources independent TV producers have, when he used a friend's apartment as a filming location rather than building a set explicitly for the production. The use of personal experience ensures the reader, even if they have no prior knowledge of television production, has a detailed blueprint of the realities that exist in the industry. The qualitative method of research also helps to guide the reader through the emerging narrative of producing content for an online format.

The story of open TV is, indeed, emergent in that one of the central technologies people use to consume TV, a cell phone with the capacities of a computer, has only really existed over the past 10 years. The history of online programming is just starting to be told, unlike the traditional television set that has existed for nearly 100 years and has a defined and structured history. Christian reflects on this ongoing materialization of open TV in his writing by maintaining elusiveness to the term. The very word "open TV" can be used to refer to character development, production methods, or distribution techniques, among other things. However, it is precisely the elusive nature of the term open TV that allows for a variety of perspectives and a variety of entry points into the discussion on the subject, much like the entity of open TV itself.

Christian has produced a text that serves as a talking point about the history of television developed for the web and its current state. The work conducted also gestures towards the not-so-distant future of television. As more legacy corporations unite to form major conglomerates, it will be interesting to see how management of independent programming materializes. In addition, the work offers an outline how to potentially merge the practical application of autoethnography and a critical theoretical framework to eventually alter the

landscape of television and position independent programming and legacy programming on equal footing. Further reading: *A Future For Public Service Television*, Des Freedman and Vana Goblot (Eds.), MIT Press, 2018.

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Heyrman, John. *Politics, Hollywood Style: American Politics in Film from Mr. Smith to Selma*. Lexington Books, 2018.

In May 1973, at the age of six, I watched the first Watergate Hearing on television. This event marked the beginning of a long fascination with politics and what I knew of “political theatre.” From then until now, I have viewed countless hours of political drama in the form of news coverage, personal and professional interaction and literature. And yet, my actual consumption of political film is oddly and embarrassingly sparse. But after reading John Heyrman’s *Politics, Hollywood Style: American Politics in Film from Mr. Smith to Selma*, I’ve gained a deeper understanding, affinity and respect for the genre of political film and its influence and reflection on American culture writ large.

Before tackling the analysis of a variety of films in their corresponding political eras, Heyrman lays out an important and convincing defense for the examination of political films. The author asserts media consumers do not neatly divide news sources and entertainment into what is “true” and what is “fiction.” Indeed, in this current age of the overt extoling of “fake news,” many consumers find it difficult to even understand news at all.

Heyrman concedes his overall approach to analysis is more political scientist than film critic, but he nonetheless deftly categorizes each film’s approach through the lens of four broad categorizations. These are: idealistic/cynical, completely cynical, paranoid, and heroic. In short, an idealistic/cynical film is one in which an ethical/moral individual finds themselves up against a corrupt, even evil system and yet prevails. Heyrman defines a completely cynical film as one in which both individuals and political enterprises are so corrupt that no hero can fix it. Paranoid films feature extreme distrust of government and/or politicians and fear plays a starring role. And heroic films feature the struggle of the

protagonist against problems or obstacles not necessarily caused by politics or government corruption. Once the author lays the ground rules, he then divides films into a “political era.”

In the first chapter we become acquainted with The Depression Era. It is here that Heyrman unpacks classic political films such as *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* along with lesser known works such as *Gabriel Over the White House*. The author considers each film and weighs them against culture norms of the time period. We learn that women are unsurprisingly shown only in “behind the scenes” roles, and minorities are nearly absent with few minor exceptions. Heyrman categorizes the political ideology of the time “mildly liberal” and explains his rationale as it relates to the actual unfolding of political events of the time. He follows this same prototypical approach throughout the text.

In the Postwar and Cold War era, Heyrman introduces us to such diverse films as *All the King's Men* and *State of the Union*. In this era, women fare better than the previous. In one instance, a female is even elected to Congress. However, the position of minorities does not improve which is indicative of the times in which the films appear.

The Height of the Cold War era covers the late 1950s and early 1960s. And, Hollywood itself is changing rapidly along with the political landscape. Heyrman reviews eight films including *The Manchurian Candidate* and *The Best Man*. Given the tumultuous time frame in which these films appear, it isn't surprising they take quite a skeptical view of McCarthyism and inject concern over the prospect of nuclear war.

The assassination of John F. Kennedy, the Vietnam War and Watergate feature prominently in the Challenging Political Powers chapter. In this era, *All the President's Men* is juxtaposed against *The Candidate*. While small in number, the films analyzed in this section are categorized by Heyrman to be completely cynical or paranoid – as reflected in the culture. Additionally, passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 provide actual progress for minorities and this progress begins to show up in the films.

Chapter five takes us into the Me Generation of the late 1970s and 1980s. Heyrman introduces a documentary for the first time – Michael Moore's *Roger and Me*. Films in this time period are considered by the author to be largely cynical, and yet, he characterizes them overall as “tame” even “dull.” Women make more progress here, but minority representation lags the reality of greater progress and gains in positions of power and elected office.

The next political era analyzed is dubbed the Return of the Political Film. And indeed, Heyrman walks us through 21 films produced from 1990 to 2001. In this analysis every category includes one or more films. From *Thirteen Days* to *Dave* to *Wag the Dog* and *Enemy of the State*, the author takes on a wide range of cinematic offerings. We finally witness significant progress for women and minorities on the screen - both are found in leading roles and prominent supporting roles. Heyrman notes the increase in the number of films and progress for women and minorities, and points out that the political ideology remains staunchly liberal.

The final chapter considers the post 9/11 era and is titled The War on Terror and Beyond. Twenty-four diverse films are analyzed including: *Lincoln*, *White House Down*, *Selma*, *Thank You For Smoking* and *Legally Blonde II*. In this era, we notice a new theme rise in the form of a debate between security and freedom. Heyrman attributes the continued interest in politics as an outgrowth of the dominance of Baby Boomer directors and writers. He also discusses the corresponding political ideology of the films overall remains liberal.

Heyrman's review and analysis of 80 years of political films is an ambitious and worthy work. In any book about film, there is tension between appropriately capturing and analyzing a film's nuance while remaining a compelling read. This text is no exception. As a film novice, this book could be quite tedious to read on its own, but as a companion to a film course or a political movie binge, it would be an asset.

As world events continue to unfold at a furious pace, filmmakers will have an abundance of fodder for more works. And, as the media and entertainment space continue to merge and converge, making sense of the state of American politics and its effects on the American culture will remain an important enterprise. John Heyrman's *Politics, Hollywood Style: American Politics in Film from Mr. Smith to Selma* lays important groundwork for the analysis of political films now and into the future.

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Santino, Jack. *Public Performances: Studies in the Carnavalesque and the Ritualesque*, Utah State University Press, 2017

Public Performances: Studies in the Carnavalesque and the Ritualesque, is a collection of articles and the latest in series of volumes on *Ritual, Festival and Celebration*. Jack Santino acts as editor of these works as well as providing the theoretical groundwork for why and how to study these acts of public displays. To further delve into the carnival, ritual and material cultures of public performances, the anthology is loosely divided into three sections dedicated to each, though the purpose of this book is often to show how interwoven all three types of performances are.

Included in the definition of public performances for this work are things as small and intimate as a roadside memorial, to traditional carnivals, protests, Pride parades, even to material culture such as the impromptu leaving of tokens at memorials after tragedy or attacks, displays of country flags and so on. Nearly anything done in public with an intent for display, whether by a single person or a group, a large or small display, is included in the working definition (Santino x-xi).

Santino divides the performances between ritual and carnival based on the intent of the act. Ritualesque is a public performance done in an effort to make lasting changes to the “real world” outside of the performance, while the actions done during the carnivalesque are outside the rules and regulations of the real world. Just as it is in any Pre Lentian festival, rules of society are temporarily suspended in the carnivalesque. But these are only idealized constructions and often a single event will hold aspects of both ritual and carnival within it (Santino 5). The goal of the collection is to explore these gray areas as well as the political dimensions of public displays. Santino theorizes when a public performance is organized from the ground up that the very act of performance is a political act and this assertion of power from below and thus, will cause a certain amount of resistance from “above”. And of course, when it is organized from the top down, there can be insidious intentions, though the nature of these intentions are never fleshed out in any of the works. Given the trying times in the US currently with protests, social media efforts and other public displays being revamped and reprioritized, from the ground and the top, this theory is of particular interest and current importance.

The theme of ground up creates power and top down diminishes it is carried out in every section regardless of location or time period. In the exploration of traditional carnival we first delve into comparisons of a modern Caribbean (20th century Port of Spain) and more ancient European (1450s and 1540s Nuremberg) carnival traditions and find that the crux for each was top down interference. For Port of Spain it was the from governmental control to create a safe and profitable carnival for tourists while for Nuremberg the loss of self governance in favor to larger governments restricted the liberating sides of the carnival (Kisner 16-17; 41). Furthering the importance of community involvement, we explore the mixture of African and European practices in the New World and how this has shaped and continues to influence local praxis (Abrahams 49).

Moving towards more ritual performances, we are taken to Indonesia to explore the varied use of processions for everything to personal mourning to religious or government sanctioned festivals. As to be expected, government sanctioned events can be met with tension as displays of power are felt and sometimes unappreciated. Though even in these top down processions part of the goals, according to Harnish, is to subvert social order as in the traditional carnival, not just to push some sort of agenda (Harnish 148).

The use of ritualesque behavior by governments is further explored in Gilman as agreed upon concepts of Mzimba heritage are now being intentionally promoted and remembered in a new festival, the Umthetho Festival, which was created to combat fears of “losing” the culture to dilution from European interactions and intermarriages. The insidious sides of this cultural promotion is explored as Gilman reveals the political effects this festival, and the act of combining so called cultural preservation with politics of macro powers has (Gilman 185). Though not explicitly stated, one can see how the specific concepts of culture being promoted in the Umthetho Festival means certain other aspects of history as well as marginalized groups are being silenced as an official narrative is being formed. Though the ultimate motive of the government’s intentions is left unexplored, perhaps because it has not been realized in real time yet, the feeling of unease is expressed by the author and the subjects.

Moving towards protests and activism, we have several case studies that show the power of public performance as a form of protest throughout locations and history with references to Cork Brass Bands (Borgonovo 93) and roadside memorials (Graham 239) in Ireland , displaying of Puerto Rican flags for a variety of personal and political needs in New York (Martinez 113), the use of

Shakespeare to protests Big Oil in England (Magelsson 222) and the use of material culture to remember and protest in United States (Wojcik 254).

This collection gives a great introduction to the varied forms of public performance across space and time and drives home its thesis very well. The only thing I wish I saw more of was a fleshing out as to why top down public performance is, by its nature, so damaging to the people. Of course we all can come up with our own theories based on our own research as to why, be it for political or monetary gain, but the lack of exploration made some pieces feel like there was more that could be gained through additional research. But if the effect of an anthology is to inspire more research, then it is likely a very good project indeed.

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Lopez, Marco, Hazel Newlevant, Desiree Rodriguez, Derek Ruiz, and Neil Schwartz, editors. *Puerto Rico Strong: A Comics Anthology Supporting Puerto Rico Disaster*. Lion Forge. 2018.

In the fall of 2017, the passage of Hurricane Maria pulled Puerto Rico into an unprecedented humanitarian crisis that left an estimated death toll of more than 1,000 people (Fink), many more homeless, and almost 1 million households without electricity (Goodkin). To further complicate matters, Puerto Rico's legal status as an unincorporated United States territory forced its people to face numerous bureaucratic, partisan and ideological roadblocks to initiate recovery efforts. Thus, the specter of Hurricane Maria elicited public contestations about the island territory's national identity and centuries-old struggle for sovereignty. *Puerto Rico Strong*, which was published to raise funds for post-Hurricane Maria disaster relief, meticulously captures many of these discourses and immerses readers in the contemporary Puerto Rican state of mind.

The book is a collection of 41 comics stories that unpack Hurricane Maria's psychological impact on Puerto Ricans' collective consciousness and their perception of national identity. The editors have assembled a cadre of incandescently talented writers and artists, many of them Puerto Ricans living in the island, who deconstruct the concept of "Puerto Ricanness" using a mélange of

idiosyncratic aesthetic styles and deeply intimate personal stories. In turn, the comics elucidate discussions about Puerto Rico's most pressing problems, such as post-colonial cultural shock and the sense of public despair in the face of a natural disaster, incorporating testimonials from people who experienced some of the particular situations first hand.

What feels most refreshing about *Puerto Rico Strong* is that it is not merely an overview of Puerto Rico's history and current plights. Rather, it harnesses and even harmonizes the emotional chaos that emerged from the uncertainty, confusion, and anguish caused by Hurricane Maria. The book's mission is to provide a voice to Puerto Ricans on the margins, to humanize their struggles, and to document and reinforce their sense of resilience. This is accomplished with ease because the writers and artists often invoke their own memories and experiences to craft their stories, articulating a vivid sense of reality, as a result.

The book arranges its comics collection without the bias of a chapter-driven structure, leaving navigation entirely in the readers' hands. Although this decision may prove slightly inconvenient for those seeking to browse the tome using clearly defined categories, the stories still connect to one another with common themes, events, and even historical characters. As a Puerto Rican versed in the island's history and culture, I linked some of the stories—consciously and subconsciously—using the following categories: “native heritage (Taínos)”, “folklore”, “nostalgic diasporas”, “second class citizenship”, and “post-hurricane trauma”. It is likely that other readers may find different interconnecting themes based on their knowledge of Hurricane Maria, and Puerto Rican history and culture.

The “native heritage” category features the “Taínos”, an indigenous tribe inhabiting the pre-Colombian Caribbean region, including Puerto Rico. Some of the book's stories tend to highlight their heroic yet futile efforts to resist imperial conquest, assimilation, and eventual extermination. For example, “A Taíno's Tale”, “Taínos Online” and “Areytos” unfold like brisk yet robust school lessons about the tribe's traditions, history, and enduring contributions to Puerto Rican and world culture, like the word *huracán* (“hurricane”).

Stories in the “folklore” category explore modern Puerto Rican mythology, romanticizing infamous characters like the Chupacabra in “Of Myth and Monsters” and a local vampire-like creature in “El Vampiro de Moca” (The Vampire from the Town of Moca). These chronicles unfold as aesthetically

macabre yet innocuous adventures, with entertainment and educational value for readers of all ages.

Puerto Rico has experienced various economic collapses, which produced two major diasporas to the United States, with the first one occurring between 1940 and 1960, and the current one, which began about a decade ago. As a result, a transnational sense of identity connecting those in the U.S. mainland with their compatriots who remain in Puerto Rico has manifested. Stories in the “nostalgic diasporas” category capture intimate aspects of family dynamics typically associated with demographic displacement. “Stories from My Father”, where characters recall Puerto Rico’s seemingly simplistic and community-oriented lifestyle, perfectly illustrates this vicarious connection, in which Puerto Ricans living in the United States contend with two paradoxical identities: Puerto Rican national and American citizen.

Several years after acquiring Puerto Rico, the U.S. government granted citizenship to its inhabitants with a few caveats (Trías Monje, 77). Among them, Puerto Ricans would receive limited federal benefits, no meaningful representation in Congress, but would be able to travel freely to the U.S. mainland. The unveiling of this “second class citizenship” occurred in the dawn of World War I, forcing thousands of Puerto Ricans to enlist in the armed forces. “Macondo, Puerto Rico” and “La Casita of American Heroes” astutely direct the readers’ attention to this “coincidence” (Lopez 157). These comics stories, inundated with nostalgic images of Puerto Rican veterans of various wars, quietly advocate for a more dignified relationship with the U.S., the nation many Puerto Rican soldiers gave their lives to defend.

Lastly, stories exploring issues directly connected with Hurricane Maria’s aftermath in *Puerto Rico Strong* seem to operate as coping mechanisms, articulating a spectrum of contradicting emotions. In “Resilience by Lamplight”, various Puerto Rican families gather in overwhelming darkness after a massive blackout, seeking to guide their paths forward with candles and a rekindled sense of community. “Fajardo” shows us a family on their way to their *abuelito*’s place, days after the hurricane. After driving through the debris and rubble, they find the house in ruins. While inside, they reminisce about their grandfather’s service in the U.S. military, echoing the themes of second-class citizenship exposed in stories like “Macondo, Puerto Rico”. Lastly, “Thanks for Nothing” satirizes President Trump’s disastrous visit to the island territory days after the hurricane’s passage with ferocious cynicism and farcical energy. The story mocks the

President's dismissal of the natural disaster, linking it to some of his previous xenophobic propositions, like the "Muslim travel ban". The stories in this category depict a community drowning in despair yet focused on enduring, never missing an opportunity to rationalize and criticize their situation with humor.

In short, *Puerto Rico Strong* delivers on its mission to immerse readers into a journey of discovery through a mixture of distinctive aesthetic and narrative comics styles and authentic personal stories. Its portrayals of Puerto Ricanness, and the plethora of identities it encompasses, from historical, ethnic, political, and economic perspectives, feel both intimate and universal. In particular, using Puerto Rico's post-Hurricane Maria reality to teach unsuspecting readers about Puerto Rico's identity crisis, as it manifests in the shadow of colonialism and a post-hurricane reality, sets the stage for important contestations to take shape. The book bestows a voice to a group of people who exist perennially at the margins of mainstream American discourses. This is fulfilled thanks to the restless efforts of a creative team who understands the "power" of comics (Lopez 3) and wield it as both a pedagogical resource and an instrument of empowerment.

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Pugh, Tison, *The Queer Fantasies of the American Family Sitcom*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2018.

Reading Tison Pugh's *The Queer Fantasies of the American Sitcom* is like watching familiar television programs with a perceptive pop culture junkie whose witty commentary reshapes the familiar in a new, queer, form. Each chapter of Pugh's survey of US family sitcoms is devoted to a specific series popular in subsequent decades of US television history beginning with *Leave It to Beaver* and ending with *Modern Family*. By cleverly conjuring the specter of queerness in the seemingly straightest of television genres and communicating his findings in a humorous and accessible manner, the author produces a text likely to appeal to gender and sexuality scholars as well as students of popular culture in undergraduate and graduate classrooms.

Pugh works from the assumption that television is a rich historical archive as well as a powerful socializing force. He produced a complex archive to contextualize each program he explores demonstrating that sociological and psychological theory, political policy, audiences, and television creators are part of a complex tapestry of meaning making. However, the focus of his study is identifying the queer potential of the family sitcom. Pugh theorizes three sites of queerness intrinsic to the genre: 1) the queer fantasy of the family sitcom as a stable genre with clear boundaries, 2) the queer fantasy of family friendly programming with clear points of identification for all, which he suggests fails to account for "multiple and contradictory viewing positions" (8), and 3) the queer fantasy of innocent children. Each chapter engages these specters of queerness while also generating claims specific to the individual programs analyzed.

In chapter one, "The Queer Times of *Leave It to Beaver*," Pugh focuses on the queer temporality of characters' pasts and futures. He suggests that Ward Cleaver's abusive past resurfaces in the text's present and that Barbara Billingsley's later work retroactively camps her portrayal of June Cleaver. Additionally, Pugh identifies and explores Beaver Cleaver's queer textual present

though his homosocial relationships and preference for feminized pastimes throughout much of the series' run.

The second chapter, "Queer Innocence and Kitsch Nostalgia in *The Brady Bunch*," explores the program's "impossible and ultimately queer innocence" (51). Pugh suggests that throughout the sitcom's original run the presence of six children regulated the sexuality of the adult characters. Pugh also notes that queerness makes its way into the series' subtext through flamboyant characters, the erotic possibility of step-incest, and the inadvertent sexualization of child stars. According to this reading, queerness is present and available to the Brady's and the program's audience even as it hovers below the show's surface.

Pugh's third chapter, "No Sex Please, We're African American," is a study of *The Cosby Show* that highlights shifts in the gender dynamics of parenting. He suggests Cliff Huxtable performs "parenthood as an androgynous role" but observes patriarchy reentering the sitcom through Cliff's policing of his daughters' sexuality (80). According to Pugh, queerness emerges in the impossibility of representing black sexuality normatively, which suggests the failure of normativity and the lie of universality intrinsic to the genre's conventions.

The fourth chapter, "Feminism, Homosexuality, and Blue-Collar Perversity in *Roseanne*," explores the original series, not its 2018 reboot, and certainly not its 2018 cancellation due to Barr's racist outbursts, both of which occurred after the book was published. Instead, chapter four explores the shift from androgynous parenting to a family clearly headed by a matriarch. Pugh's generous reading of *Roseanne* characterizes the program as: "Defiantly queer in its treatment of economics, sexuality, and their numerous points of intersection" (108). Interestingly, this chapter celebrates *Roseanne*, the program, character, and actresses', commitment to feminism, economic justice, and queer representation but omits a discussion of race. It likely would not be the same chapter if written now but the limits of the program's progressive storyline could have been identified prior to recent controversies. Importantly, for Pugh, *Roseanne* brought representations of queerness to the surface of the sitcom genre by exploring queer themes and characters.

Pugh's fifth chapter, "Allegory, Queer Authenticity, and Marketing Tween Sexuality in *Hannah Montana*," departs from other chapters by focusing on a subgenre of the family sitcom, the tween sitcom, which focalizes a teen character and envisions its primary audience as preteens. In this chapter, Pugh synthesizes

two themes: consumption and authenticity. He demonstrates that the idea of authenticity is intrinsic to the financial success of tween programs. The queer potential of the program emerges through audience identification with Miley Cyrus the actress/singer as well as the character Hannah Montana, whose fictionalized life mirrored Cyrus's. Cyrus's personal and professional life took a queer turn, which, paired with the moral of authenticity embedded in the program, can have a queer influence on its tween/no longer tween audience.

The sixth chapter, "Conservative Narratology, Queer Politics, and the Humor of Gay Stereotypes in *Modern Family*," explores the queer possibilities of the sitcom genre's narrative structure and conventions. Pugh argues that both structures and conventions can be bent to queer ends. He does not look exclusively to the program's gay couple, Cam and Mitch, to make an argument for the show's queerness, but instead focuses on the availability of perversity to heterosexuals through anal eroticism and incest. Even more, he explores the queer potential of stereotypes through smart and original interpretive readings of the sitcom.

In his conclusion Pugh succinctly sums up the project: "Family sitcoms, whether they dramatize erotic normativity or its subversions, open inherently queer spaces for spectators to query the presumed limits of the American family and thus to create a praxis of spectatorship unmoored from the erotic discipline implied throughout America's history of heteronormativity" (193). Pugh's impressively researched and compellingly argued take on family sitcoms provides a fresh look at content too frequently dismissed as simplistic and moralistic. He makes a compelling case for the genre's complexity and demonstrates the queer potential of its moralism.

The Queer Fantasies of the American Family Sitcom is a smart and humorous text that does a wonderful job turning a queer eye to American family sitcoms. However, I am disappointed in Tugh's lack of commitment to intersectional analysis throughout his discussions. Although his reading of *The Cosby Show* engages interconnections between race, gender, sexuality, and class, he fails to read the ubiquitous presence of whiteness and subsequent absence of racial difference in the other programs he analyzes. As mentioned in my chapter descriptions, Pugh's lack of engagement with race in *Roseanne* is a glaring omission considering his otherwise thoughtful discussion of identity categories and hierarchies reinforced or challenged on the program. The absence of racial difference, present on most American family sitcoms, is integral to the genre, and

I would suggest, likely intersects in meaningful, and underexplored ways, with their latent queerness.

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Brown, Simon. *Screening Stephen King: Adaptation and the Horror Genre in Film and Television*. University of Texas Press, 2018.

Assembling over 34 years of constant reading, watching, and analyzing, Simon Brown has provided fans and scholars of Stephen King with a seminal text in his recent publication, *Screening Stephen King: Adaptation and the Horror Genre in Film and Television*. Thoroughly researched and engaging, this book follows King's works from literature to cinema, home video to television, and finally concluding with streaming platforms. Brown's access to numerous boxes of King's original manuscripts (housed at The Raymond H. Folger Library of the University of Maine, Orono), including unpublished screenplays, add an exciting element to the book itself. Access to these archival works, which Brown both consulted and cited for his project, allowed him to examine the relationship that "King adaptations have had to the horror genre" while also assessing "the impact of these works on the genre in film and on TV since the mid 1970s" (2), providing readers in both academic and popular circles with a clear understanding of the striking influence King has had within what is sometimes considered a "niche" genre "that exists largely on the periphery of popular culture due to its 'social unacceptability'" (25). Brown introduces his text with an overview of the plethora of scholarship previously devoted to King, but sets his own work apart from these by considering the concept of "Brand Stephen King" (author's capitalization) throughout his analysis of the many adaptations of King's works, beginning with Brian DePalma's *Carrie* (1976) and concluding with Hulu's *11.22.63* (2016). This book is, therefore, more than a work about the texts and films; it is about King's name itself and how this "Brand" can be traced throughout the genre of filmic and televisual horror.

Brand Stephen King, as Brown points out in his first chapter, begins with King's literary accomplishments in his early novels, which set the tone for the

establishment and eventual emergence of this “Branding.” Brown notes that King is best known for hybridity in his writing, which is usually demonstrated through a “conflict between good people and a bad force” (163). In other words, King’s literary brand – first and foremost – is about realistic and relatable “American” characters with whom the audience can identify. According to Brown, one of the keys to King’s literary success – and to his eventual “Branding” – is his ability to be the “chronicler of America” (90), further observing, “His characters don’t drink a soda, they have a Coke or Pepsi. They smoke Luckies or Camels or Tareytos, and they relax with a Pabst or a Narragansett” (39). King’s emphasis on character development is essential to his Brand, as these characters are then placed into unforeseeable supernatural circumstances. King often downplays gore and body horror, and tends to be serious in his tone, allowing his audience become more involved with the psychology of the humans involved in narratives dealing with rather un-human circumstances. What Brown has noticed throughout the years is when adaptations are “divorced from those consistent stylistic and thematic traits...relying mainly on King’s name as a specifically cinematic or televisual brand” they often “[struggle] to find a place within horror on film or TV” (192). Therefore, King’s original sources, which established his literary Brand, are essential to consider before discussing the screen adaptations.

Once the literary Brand Stephen King was established through his early novels, Brown chronologically traces the screen adaptations in four subsequent chapters, each focusing on early, mainstream, low-budget/home video, and television adaptations (in that order). Every screen adaptation produced until the publication of this book in 2018 is represented within the chapters, including obscure sequels and films associated with King through title or name alone. Though it would be simple to only compare and contrast the adaptations and their original source material, Brown does not merely rely on this technique. He provides concise and useful summaries of each text/film he discusses, and then seamlessly blends these summaries with adept critical and cultural analysis, including considerations of the film theories and techniques which make a horror film successful (or not, as the case may sometimes be).

What makes this book remarkable is that, although King is the primary focus in the text, this is not just a book about King’s work. More broadly, Brown’s book can be deemed an overview of the history of horror films and television and the genre’s relationship to its audience, positioning King within this history to better understand why and when his adaptations might succeed or fail. In fact, the

term “adaptation” in the book’s subtitle largely carries a double meaning. *Screening Stephen King* is not just about text-to-screen adaptations, but also how Brand Stephen King has adapted and maneuvered itself within the horror film genre and its “mainstream audience” through viewer demand, viewing habits, industry practice, and even format. Brown often focuses on how socio-historical context can change both the adaptation of King’s works and their reception. He also notes that King has had a tenuous relationship with the horror genre over time, as directors/producers will often either “use” Brand Stephen King to legitimize their projects, or they will “avoid” King’s affiliation with their film(s) to save their reputations. This largely depends on the works, the times in which they were/are adapted, and the target audience. *Screening Stephen King* shows how Brand Stephen King was essential in establishing what is considered “mainstream horror” while he simultaneously divides what is mainstream is based not on King’s writing (the original source material), but on his name alone (his “Brand”).

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Cavalcante, Andre. *Struggling for Ordinary: Media and Transgender Belonging in Everyday Life*. New York University Press, 2018.

Struggling for Ordinary paints a detailed picture of the ways in which transgender individuals utilize media to navigate the complex, often violent reality that they are thrown into because of their non-normative gender identities. Importantly, Cavalcante sets out to detail not only the sensationalized aspects of these people’s lives that theorists tend to focus on. Instead, Cavalcante details the everyday, ordinary parts of the lives led by transgender people. Through his analysis of ethnographic interview data, Cavalcante argues that media sources such as the Internet and television shows mediate the ways in which transgender people navigate their everyday lives. Readers interested in transgender and queer theory will find *Struggling for Ordinary* fascinating because of this different approach to the topic at hand.

Additionally, readers will find this book a valuable source in learning about the “queerly ordinary,” Cavalcante’s take on queerness in the everyday, ordinary space occupied by people with non-normative genders and sexualities. The author argues that because queer and transgender theory has historically isolated the ways that queerness acts contra normativity, there is a dearth of research discussing how queer and transgender individuals act within normal society. Queer and transgender theorists have primarily sought to theorize queerness as oppositional to normativity instead of theorizing the everyday lives these people live. Cavalcante seeks to answer a different question: how do transgender people navigate their gender identities within their everyday lives? This focus on the mundane is important, as the author argues, for taking the (oftentimes) overly ivory tower fields of queer and transgender theory and better applying them to the everyday lives of real transgender and queer people. Detailing how the everyday lives of queer and transgender people exists somewhere between the individual and the larger society that determines these people are abject, Cavalcante provides a rich defense of this focus on the ordinary nature of the people involved in his research study.

Cavalcante lays out the details of his ethnographic study in the introduction and his first chapter. Here, he develops the theoretical background for his study, focusing mainly on the ways that media sources such as the Internet, movies, and television shows influence people’s identities and everyday lives. He describes the theoretical necessity of his study here, drawing from Butler (2004)’s theory of possibility to argue that transgender lives need methods to navigate the anti-transgender ideology prevalent in modern-day society to survive; transgender people need to be *understood as possible* to even exist. Cavalcante isolates media as one of the primary methods by which transgender people strive to survive.

The author’s second chapter details the violence transgender people navigate in order to survive and the ways in which the media portrays sensationalized, problematic images of transgender people are portrayed by the media. Arguing that transgender people are commonly seen as the brunt of the joke, as insane serial killers, or as homicide victims, Cavalcante aptly lays out the sensationalized images of transgender people in the media.

In the third chapter, Cavalcante lays out the ways in which the media helps shape positive images of the “possible selves” lived by transgender people. Several of his interviewees drew from comic book characters and websites about transgender people to achieve their “wow moment” when they started recognizing

their own transgender identities (102). In doing so, Cavalcante shows the ways that the media can act as a care structure (Scannell, 1996) to help transgender people come to grips with their gender identities.

In chapter four, Cavalcante discusses the adaptation and survival mechanisms the participants in his study adopted to deal with negative images of transgenderism in the media. He does this through a discussion of the embodied, affective experiences of his interviewees. Affect is frequently discussed throughout this chapter, becoming an important aspect of the strategies of resilience adopted by the author's research participants. Importantly, Cavalcante argues here that discussions of affect and resilience, prominent in numerous academic fields, is largely missing in media studies. As such, he uses this chapter as a way of supporting the budding conversation regarding affect and resilience in media studies.

In the fifth chapter, Cavalcante isolates the ways in which his interviewees use media as a tactic to achieve ordinary lives. This action is not easy, as Cavalcante reminds the reader, because transgender people are constantly reminded that they are not normal. As such, the research participants oftentimes had to figure out creative ways to find their everydayness. For example, a lengthy discussion of the websites safe2pee.org and refugerestrooms.org is included here. These websites were integral for several of Cavalcante's interviewees to find safe spaces to use the bathroom in public, an action that cisgender people frequently take for granted.

Readers interested in the homonormative will find Cavalcante's conclusion particularly valuable, as he lays out his theory of the queerly ordinary in detail here. Explaining that the queerly ordinary is "a hybrid form of self- and life-making that combines components of queerness and ordinariness," Cavalcante highlights how queer theory tends to create an ideal form of queerness that always acts in opposition to normativity (171). Arguing that this completely oppositional stance belies the lived experience of transgender and queer people, Cavalcante challenges this "either/or" stance in favor of a "both/and" stance whereby queer and transgender people are understood as *both* ordinarily normal *and* queerly oppositional.

Overall, readers of *Struggling for Ordinary* will find this book to be an excellent investigation into the everyday lives of transgender individuals. Media scholars interested in the ways that things such as the Internet, television shows, and movies mediate people's identities will find this book an important read.

Researchers interested in the operationalization of transgender and queer theory outside of the academy will also find this book a fascinating read. By pushing the boundaries of queer theory and analyzing the oftentimes contradictory ways in which the media influences transgender people's lived realities, this book is sure to uncover new ways of thinking about media studies and queer theory.

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Boudreaux, Armond, and Corey Latta, *Titans: How Superheroes Can Help Us Make Sense of a Polarized World*. Cascade Books. 2017.

Armond Boudreaux and Corey Latta argue in *Titans* that, much in the same way that ancient mythologies provided people guidance for understanding their lives, so too do superheroes act as a modern mythology through which we can “understand our lives and our world” (xiv). Superhero myths “turn the things we care about the most into *story*” in a form that grants a lot of freedom for fantastical storytelling steeping with philosophical ideas (xiii, xxiv). Boudreaux and Latta have written this book with a contemporary problem in mind: the political polarization in the United States. In a deliberative democracy, the authors are concerned with their readers grasping “the possibility that people [with whom they disagree] might be convinced that they have good reasons to believe what they believe” and that those reasons consist of more than “irrational fear, sinister prejudice, an unforgivable bigotry, [or] a willful stupidity” (xx). Given that this book was being written during the 2016 election season, Boudreaux and Latta have in mind the political partisans arguing that either Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton would destroy the U.S. if either of them were elected. Boudreaux and

Latta want their readers to consider that good people are capable of taking different sides on the same issue for good reasons, and they provide a number of examples from the comic book medium to illustrate their point.

The main body of the book is divided into two sections: 1) heroes on the page, and 2) heroes on the screen. Section one, written by Boudreaux, is divided into six chapters. Chapter one begins with an analysis of how Captain America's historical portrayal in comic books has been a site of contest, reflecting the "disagreements over the basic values that define America" (4). Boudreaux ends this first chapter with a reference to the since-resolved Hydra Cap storyline in order to indicate that Captain America's transformation into the leader of this Nazi sect indicates a fundamental change in the fabric of American public discourse itself.

Chapters two through six unpack a number of famous DC and Marvel comic book storylines for their relevant political content. Chapter two discusses the storyline of *Kingdom Come*, the famous apocalyptic tale by Mark Waid and Alex Ross about a dystopian future in which metahumans run wild across the earth. In this story, Superman returns from a ten-year exile to set the world right through increasingly fascistic means. Boudreaux weaves an argument through Isaiah Berlin, Thomas Hobbes, and René Girard to discuss disagreements about the nature of freedom and the cycle of violence that results from disagreements between good people concerning what exactly it means to be free. Chapter three looks at Mark Millar's *Civil War* story arc and the disagreement between Iron Man and Captain America over the Superhero Registration Act, inquiring about the limitations and necessity of government regulation. Chapter four addresses the less-popular *Civil War II* that finds Iron Man again in conflict with a fellow hero, but this time, it is Carol Danvers, aka, Captain Marvel. The dispute concerns Danvers' use of an inhuman, who can apparently predict the future, to prevent crimes before they happen. Boudreaux uses this arc to explore the ethics of data-mining and predictive policing. Chapter five explores Frank Miller's classic *The Dark Knight Returns* and inquires about the legitimacy of the state's monopoly on violence and the individual's right to assert themselves and act in the face of the state's inaction and the need for a proper ethical framework in taking such action. Finally, chapter six addresses the 2012 story *Avengers vs. X-Men* and the fear of and use of power in shaping a better society.

Chapters seven and eight are included in section two, written by Latta, and look at two on-screen portrayals of heroes coming to blows: Daredevil vs. the

Punisher in the *Daredevil* Netflix series, and the movie *Batman v. Superman: Dawn of Justice*. In chapter seven, Latta takes advantage of the religious imagery in *Daredevil* to frame the conflict between *Daredevil* and the Punisher as a conflict between the younger brother and elder brother in the Jesus' famous parable of the Prodigal Son while chapter eight looks at the role the understanding of the divine and the problem of evil play in forming political reality in *Batman v. Superman*.

Boudreaux and Latta have put together a fine book that fans, students, and professors teaching introduction or popular culture classes will appreciate. As a fan, I found their story choices were perfect for engaging with the ideas they discussed and found myself wishing that they had included more stories. While some of the arguments they engaged will be familiar to those who are acquainted with this kind of popular culture and philosophy literature (i.e., comparisons of Kantian, utilitarian, and virtue ethics), I am excited that René Girard's mimetic theory and discussions about the sociopolitical implications of the familiar Prodigal Son story will reach a larger audience.

There are a few structural problems with the book. Many of the chapters have a lot of set up with too little pay off, and it can seem like some of the chapters are cut short. Another structural issue revolves around the fact that only two movies are addressed while 5 comic events were addressed. I would've preferred these two sections to be a parallel. At the risk of redundancy, *Captain America: Civil War* might have been good, along with *Captain America: Winter Soldier*. Perhaps there was a fear that some of the movies too closely resembled their comic book counterparts, as least as far as *Captain America: Civil War* is concerned. Maybe *Winter Soldier* would've worked, although that may have mirrored *Civil War II* too closely in terms of theme.

While I do find myself in agreement with Boudreaux and Latta on the importance of rational persuasion over labeling those we disagree with as bigots, I nevertheless believe that some important qualifiers need to be made about this argument. It is true that in our culture of outrage some of the rhetoric can be quite polemical and abrasive, but while all may be equal under the law, not everyone one is equal based on cultural power dynamics. There are still real disparities, which means that not all disagreements are between two good-natured sides that need to talk things out. Sometimes one side has the moral high ground, and the cost of ignoring that fact has real material consequences for people. This makes

me a little nervous about Boudreaux's dismissal of the X-Men-as-minority metaphor in favor of a lesson about the universal temptation of power to corrupt.

Overall, Boudreaux and Latta have produced a fine work that could make a good introductory text for comic studies or philosophy, highlighting the significance of superheroes in our culture and what they show us about ourselves.

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Mafe, Diana Adesola. *Where No Black Woman Has Gone Before: Subversive Portrayals in Speculative Film and TV*. University of Texas Press, 2018.

Diana Adesola Mafe, associate professor of English at Denison University, sets up her book with the *Star Trek* (1966-1969) character, Uhura and her modern counterpoint. Although not part of Mafe's deeper analysis, this is an important bookend because it points to the larger purpose of the book, which is to fill a gap in the discussion about black women in film and television in general, and speculative film and television in particular. This book brings together several postmodern feminist theories while paying attention to other potential readings of speculative fiction. Mafe's approach to five case studies brings depth to the gap she aims to close in this under-deliberated area by focusing on close reading and textual analysis. The choices of films and television shows make for an interesting mix of well-discussed pieces and those that have largely been ignored by scholarship in the past. To her credit, Mafe builds on existing scholarship even in areas largely ignored by others.

Mafe's first two case studies, *28 Days Later* and *AVP: Alien vs. Predator* exemplify the book's purpose of filling a gap in scholarship on black women in speculative fiction. These two films cover a range of under-discussed topics with one film produced in the United States and the other film produced in the United Kingdom. In *28 Days Later*, the character of Selena, while not the lead character, plays an important role in expanding representation of black women in the horror genre. Mafe points out that the film does not create an entirely new horror heroine, as many of the classic horror movie tropes are still present. What

28 Days Later does for representation according to Mafe is avoid the trap of confirming stereotypical gender roles, as is typically the default in horror films. *28 Days Later* does not conclude reestablishing order, as is the cliché of many horror films. Order is typically around male dominance making this choice subversive in nature.

AVP: Alien vs. Predator is an interesting choice of case study in the book. A film with little acclaim or popularity, *AVP* has not received attention from academics. Mafe's examination of the character of Lex makes for a provocative new look at a black female character that has been overlooked or ignored. Mafe begins by establishing the common themes of both the *Alien* and *Predator* franchises. The focus on the Law of the Father in both franchises helps establish the importance of the divergence present in *AVP*. Prior films in the franchises have had a strong focus on fear of the feminine. This backdrop makes the character of Lex, played by Sanaa Lathan, fascinating to evaluate as a black female heroine in franchises that have never had those roles. Lex is the epitome of a subversive portrayal in this type of film. Mafe demonstrates Lex's rejection of patriarchal authority and the film's denunciation of the male gaze in total. Lex as the lone survivor is also a powerful example of the subversive nature of this black female character in a horror action thriller.

The following two case studies, *Children of Men* and *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, focus on films that have received more critical praise and attention. Mafe is able to explain previous research while adding to the understanding of these films' importance. In *Children of Men*, Kee played by Clare-Hope Ashitey has been viewed as a problematic representation of a black female body as controlled by white male society. Mafe is able to find more in Kee than is readily apparent on the surface. Kee's subversion of the status quo is subtle but still an important consideration in the evaluation of speculative film. *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, introduces a more obviously empowered black female character in the main protagonist Hushpuppy played by then six-year-old child actor Quvenzhané Wallis. Mafe's in depth analysis is an interesting addition to scholarship on the role black women play in speculative film and how that likewise impacts black girls.

Mafe's final case study and conclusion again solidifies the book's focus on filling an obvious gap. The addition of speculative television to this analysis is an important opportunity for scholarship looking at television from a non-social science point of view. By analyzing two speculative television shows, *Firefly* and

Doctor Who, Mafe connects her opening discussion of *Star Trek* while laying out some of the growth television has allowed in representation. Overall the book lays out an interesting case for both the growth and remaining shortfalls in the roles played by black women in speculative media. An examination of the rebooted Uhura from *Star Trek* (2009) served as a good bookend to understand that while much has been improved in the representation of black women it is not a linear path. Mafe's coda strikes a good balance between reflection and optimism while pointing to possible future directions black women in television and film may go. Mafe's goal of bringing light to subversive portrayals in speculative film and television is laudable and well executed.

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Leonard, Suzanne. *Wife, Inc.: The Business of Marriage in the Twenty-First Century*. New York University Press, 2018. Print

I am an avid consumer of wedding reality television. If you can judge it, I will watch it. So when I got the opportunity to read this book I leapt at the chance. While there has been much written about whether marriage as an institution is still relevant or valuable, the role of the wife is potentially more central than it has ever been in popular culture. Suzanne Leonard's book discusses neoliberal feminism and how ideas of pragmatism and self-interest are normalized and promoted for women in choosing partners. Notions of practicality and labor are intertwined with contemporary wifedom. Her book is particularly concerned with looking at the work of wifedom in public spaces and how that relates to the logics of the workplace. Leonard's five chapters progress chronologically, following women as they date, prepare to be married, and work as wives.

Her first chapter concerns dating, particularly online dating. Leonard opens with a reflection on the infamous Princeton mom letter of 2013. Her letter aligns with neoliberal requirements of agility, self-reliance, and entrepreneurship. Marriage is understood as being deserving of effort and calculation. Women are expected to brand themselves and be self-starters in their quest for a marriageable man. Online dating is gendered, and women are encouraged to brand themselves

in appealing ways. Conceptualizations of the self as brand parallel that of the notion of dating as a quest for a soulmate. In fact, Leonard argues that online dating may have revitalized the rhetoric of soulmates.

Dating is presented as serious work that is assumed to lead to marriage. In chapter two, the focus is on wedding-themed reality programming. Leonard uses the programs *The Bachelor*, *Millionaire Matchmaker*, and *Bridezillas* as case studies. In the logic of reality television, the wedding serves as the reward of the emotional, physical and psychological labor the bride-to-be has undergone. Women should, and must, make choices, but can only do so from a prescribed set. Only when a bride has proven herself responsible as a citizen by being able to regulate her emotions, manage her body, and discipline her desires does she become eligible to be a wife.

Where the previous chapter looked at brides-to-be, the third chapter focuses on the housewife. The term has always been as much of a media construction as a representation of the actual lives of women. *Desperate Housewives* and *The Real Housewives* franchise are used to consider how the term housewife has been reconceptualized. No longer does the term refer to a married woman who does not work outside the home. Now, the term serves as a signifier for all things feminine. While the housewife has historically been placed as the feminist's other, the term has today become the aspirational every woman. *Wife, Inc.* chronicles the rise of "wife" as an occupation. The professionalization of the wife hinges on this notion of the housewife.

In chapter four Leonard returns to reality television to focus on wifely programming. More industrial than the previous chapters, the focus here is on networks and branding. Bravo, VH1, and TLC are examined in regards to their lineups and how each network understands and promotes visions of wifedom and marriage. Leonard argues that to be a professional wife entails a willingness to sell and commodify one's own intimate life and a plethora of products. This chapter also brings to the fore how these programs work to maintain current relations of power. While wives make money and may gain cultural rewards for their participation, at the end of the day they are all working for and providing profit to the networks, which are all run by men.

The fifth and final chapter focuses on public infidelity and the politics of being a spouse. For public figures there are many benefits to having a good marriage and dangers to not having one. Political wives have opened up a space in which to talk about marriage as a platform for female achievements and

professionalism. The political wife as a figure has evolved in such a way that now provides insight into how marriage can operate as a business. Leonard mixes real-life examples in with popular culture. Talking about figures such as Huma Abedin, Jenny Sanford, and of course Hillary Clinton, alongside characters like *The Good Wife*'s Alicia Florrick and *Scandal*'s Mellie Grant, she considers how rage and anger are new additions to the conceptualization of the scorned wife. There is also a clear power and culture hierarchy between the wives and mistresses. While there are fewer spaces afforded to wives to tell their stories, avenues like the memoir are more respectable than those offered to mistresses. First-person accounts from wives can be marketable and profitable opportunities. Blurring the lines between work and marriage, scorned wife media reveals the slippages between the intimate labor and public efforts. The wife plays an integral role in presenting the family as a whole but also holds incredible power to rehabilitate or tank the family brand.

Wife, Inc. : The Business of Marriage in the Twenty-First Century offers a critical examination of how terms like wife and housewife gain meaning and maintain relevancy. Factual and fictional representations come together to support the claims made in this book. Throughout, Leonard argues that wifedom continues to serve as a structuring conceptualization of American women's lives despite the fact that marriage as an institution is roundly considered to be in decline.

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Parkin, Katherine J., *Women at the Wheel: A Century of Buying, Driving, and Fixing Cars*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017. Print.

Replete with examples and data supporting the notion of women as safe, responsible drivers who are also capable of maintaining a car while advertisers, corporations, and salespeople pander or reinforce stereotypes, *Women at the Wheel* is a book full of laugh or cry moments for people interested in gendered pop culture depictions, consumer behavior, the intersection of cars and identity,

and the history of auto driving and buying in the United States. Parkin's writing engages the reader by using vivid stories, quotes, and examples of advertising from the dawn of automobiles in the 1890s through the 2010s. *Women at the Wheel* is an enjoyable journey through history and identity with Parkin sitting literally at the figurative wheel.

Women at the Wheel includes five chapters. First, Parkin writes a historical account of the challenges women faced in becoming licensed drivers. Chapters two, three, and four detail the experiences of women as they buy, drive, and care for a car. The final chapter, "The Car and Identity" explores naming, sexualizing, and objectification of women as cars. The Preface and Epilogue are brief yet apt descriptions of the information in the book and the social implications of that information.

The women featured in Parkin's opening chapter, "Learning to Drive," encountered legal and social challenges as they defeated naysayers while navigating roads and inconsistent driver licensing processes. Two recurring themes throughout *Women at the Wheel*, gendered reasons for driving and marketers' presentation of women as fundamentally different from men, emerge in this first chapter of the book. However, even those messages are often contradictory. Young men are taught that their role is to protect women by driving carefully (7), while marketers of driving schools tell women that their husbands are incapable of teaching them to drive (9). Teaching women to drive was viewed as a moral victory and a safety accomplishment (8), but the licensing process limited women to being named as extensions of their husbands, even if they did not use his surname (21-22). Instead of cars achieving their touted possibility as purveyors of freedom, they were steeped in patriarchal social systems and gendered expectations that followed women from their schools and homes to driving schools and the legal system.

Chapter two, "Buying a Car," analyzes advertisers' incorrect assumptions about women's reasons for buying a car, knowledge about cars, and a desire for safety over all other car features. Partly in response to these assumptions, car manufacturers identified women as a "special group" (31). As such, they were targeted using a miniscule advertising budget (47) and messages focused on the car's physical appearance and added safety features. Advertisers displayed a complete lack of understanding about women's car purchase motivations and enhanced that with an unwillingness to understand. In tandem, manufacturers installed air-conditioned glove compartments to preserve lipstick in high

temperatures (59). These gendered and assumption-filled experiences didn't end with the car purchase.

Driving offered yet another highly gendered and assumption-filled experience for women. In chapter three, "Driving a Car," the themes of women as incompetent drivers and gendered reasons for driving are revisited. Writers of newspaper opinion pieces questioned women's mental fitness for driving (65), and magazine writers claimed that women could be deemed fit for time behind the wheel of a car based on their physical appearance (67). Men were not categorized in the same manner. Women as bad drivers were featured in comedy routines and this persists today. In 2016, Ricky Gervias used the stereotype of bad women drivers as a way to make fun of Caitlin Jenner (73). The obsession with women needing and wanting protection distinct from that desired by men presents itself in Parkin's exhaustive examples from popular media and public campaigns about imagined terrors that could be alleviated by new cars or proper behavior while driving. *Women at the Wheel* counters this ostensible emphasis on safety with details about real crimes that are dismissed in the same media and public organizations via victim blaming or failed investigation and reporting. Contradictions and gendered expectations continue as themes even as women become responsible for arranging for or providing car maintenance.

The belief that women could not and should not perform maintenance on cars is well-explored in chapter four, "Caring for a Car." Women were expected to be ignorant about car maintenance, but to arrange for those services. If women worked on cars, their adherence to other gender norms became a primary concern. During wartime, these social pressures functioned to both maintain traditional gender roles through the expectation of temporary service and to provide a necessary driving and mechanically literate workforce (118-122). *Women at the Wheel* concludes chapter four by observing that although there were glimmers of gender neutrality as women learned to work as mechanics in specific time periods, fixing and maintaining vehicles exists firmly in the male identity with little or no crossover.

In the final chapter of *Women at the Wheel*, Parkin tackles "The Car and Identity," in a historical, psychological, and anthropological look at the relationships between men, women, and cars. Advertising sold cars as sexualized objects and objectified women to do so. In naming cars with generally female-sounding names, consumers personified inanimate objects and objectified women. This final chapter wrapped up the overall messages in the book. Cars are an

important part of our identities in the United States and the process of driving, buying, and owning cars is deeply gendered and steeped in patriarchal structures.

Katherine J. Parkin's *Women at the Wheel* alternately encourages the reader's heart and mind to sing and seethe with stories, examples, and data about the intensely gendered world of driving and cars. The content is appropriate for and interesting to anyone interested in cars, gender, and advertising. The writing is well-researched and includes photos of advertisements to enhance the reading experience. Parkin has a firm grasp on the metaphorical wheel and the reader will be happy to let her drive.

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Arp, Robert, editor. *The X-Files and Philosophy: The Truth is in Here*. Open Court, 2016.

Since 1993, Chris Carter's television series *The X-Files* has captivated audiences by exploring broad cultural curiosities: Government secrets, paranormal activity, conspiracy theories, and the fear of alien colonization of planet Earth. Such interests and fears are passionately uncovered by the series' main characters, Fox Mulder and Dana Scully. Robert Arp's edited volume, *The X-Files and Philosophy: The Truth is in Here*, creates a case construct that creating a triangulation of popular culture, philosophy, and science helps answer questions related to the series and human positionality in the wider world. In the edited collection, Arp posits that "*The X-Files* is great story-telling. And there are some great philosophical topics found in and through those stories" (xv). Arp's edited volume operates on two levels: On one hand, the collection suggests that there are pockets of rational thought where "philosophy can help clarify ideas in science" (xii). In the second level, the text attempts to break down the ideological 'dichotomy' that made Fox Mulder and Dana Scully so well known on television; such deconstruction suggests that the philosophical and scientific complexities of the main characters are deeper beyond an initial glance.

Although the relationship between science, philosophy, and popular culture appears daunting, the structure of the edited volume consistently bridges such

conversations back to the television series as a base of understanding. The collection contains 35 unique chapters across 10 sections, with almost all section and chapter titles inspired by common themes and catch phrases used throughout the series. Nearly every chapter poses broad questions that utilize a theme from the series as a launchpad to answer a larger philosophical question. Examples include Chapter 1: “Why is Scully usually wrong? What’s the point the writers of *The X-Files* are making in continually debunking her scientific explanations in favor of Mulder’s paranormal theories?” (4), Chapter 9: “But what exactly is a conspiracy theory? What is the difference between a theory about a real conspiracy and one that turns out to be fantasy? (74), Chapter 24: “If the truth is out, shouldn’t we believe it? Isn’t it virtuous to believe only the truth?” (225). As such, the balance of scholarly rigor and passionate homage to the television series serves as a major strength in the edited collection. Because philosophy, science, and *The X-Files* offer several interpretative paths, Arp’s volume reflects such diversity. For example, section nine (“The Ghost Within”) utilizes Descartes’ notion of Key highlights from Descartes’ notion of mind-body dualism in section nine (“The Ghost Within”) when discussing the relationship between man and machine. In Chapter 35, Frank Scalabrino employs Heidegger’s *Time and Death* as a philosophical lens for episode “Sein and Zeit” (season seven, episode ten), a cumulative story arch concerning Mulder’s mother and sister (321). , and Heidegger’s *Time and Death*, which draws connections to the season seven, episode ten “Sein and Zeit”, a cumulative episode concerning Mulder’s mother and sister (321).

The notion of truth through the lenses of pragmatism is considered when analyzing Mulder and Scully’s (broad) ‘schools of thought’ and reasoning processes. If such topics don’t appeal to readers, the edited volume offers other avenues of thought, including the connection between the series’ ‘Monsters of the Week’ episodes and the ‘The Post-Modern Prometheus’. The volume also offers analyses on the relationship between ‘truth’ and The Syndicate, a secretive government organization with strong connections to Mulder, Scully, and their search for ‘the truth’. Each contributor to the text is clearly passionate about the television series, creating an underlying enthusiasm to create the bridges between philosophy and the cult classic.

A particular standout chapter within the volume is Dennis Loughrey’s “Dilemmas for Prisoners” (Chapter 19). Loughrey takes the cultural stereotypes of The Syndicate (i.e., mysterious men in high power positions wearing dark

clothing and sitting in quiet rooms), and pushes readers to consider their (and in turn, Mulder and Scully's) decision – making strategies. Loughrey takes the series knowledge and applies it to the Prisoner's Dilemma game, which reveals the “tough minded lesson...that, from the perspective of each person, ratting is better, no matter what the other does” (105). Prisoner Dilemmas are oft based on repetition; when considering the frequent meetings between Mulder, Scully, and The Smoking Man Loughrey posits that ratting in one episode heightens a risk of receiving payback in a future instance. Loughrey's parallel of the Prisoner Dilemma and the relationship between the main characters and The Syndicate suggest that truth and information are commodities, and every character in the series must pay a price. However, the edited volume does run the risk of offering too many chapters that cover extremely similar material and suggest similar conclusions; as a consequence, the text can be read as repetitive.

Overall, Arp's edited volume on *The X-Files* takes the high-brow nature of philosophy to a lens and framework that allows readers to create connections between the analysis of human nature and popular culture. The strength of Arp's volume – and *The X-Files* – is that the underlying conversations occurring are timeless. *The X-Files and Philosophy: The Truth is in Here* holds readers responsible for drawing their own conclusions and actively seek their own interpretations of the truth. One doesn't need to be an FBI agent or a member of The Syndicate to utilize the reasoning strategies of Mulder, Scully, or any other character in the series. However, in keeping true to the series, the volume warns about the consequences and possible philosophical changes one might experience in their quest for the truth. As Fox Mulder puts it, “The answers are there. You just have to know where to look” (3).

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