Introduction

CHRISTOPHER J. OLSON

One of the challenges facing popular culture scholars is the question of what exactly constitutes "popular culture." This question has loomed over the cultural studies field since before Ray B. Browne authored his pioneering essay "Popular Culture: Notes Toward a Definition" in 1970. Yet the query takes on a renewed urgency during the early years of the 21st century, a time when the so-called "nichification" of culture has accelerated thanks to the rise of new communication technologies such as social media and streaming video platforms. Such innovations have granted consumers and fans greater access to the things they love and communities of like-minded people, while simultaneously contributing to the fragmentation of audiences and culture.

While concepts like monoculture or mass audiences are debatable (and likely never existed in the first place), the current nichification of culture has undoubtedly altered definitions of the term popular. There was a time when seemingly everyone knew about TV shows like *M*A*S*H* or *Cheers* or *Friends*, even if they did not watch or like these series. Now, however, thanks to the flood of proprietary content, many media texts only exist in the hearts and minds of the people who consume them. While there exist exceptions to this rule such as *The Mandalorian* or *The Last of Us*, other shows can run for years without generating any sort of buzz outside of their loyal fanbase and without making a dent in the popular consciousness. Therefore, contemporary popular culture scholars must cast a wide net when looking for objects of research and may find themselves needing to make a case for why their chosen text should be considered "popular."

The reviews collected in this issue explore scholarly texts and popular works that demonstrate the ideas discussed above, as they cover topics such as horror, comedy, social media and more. The reviewers look at monographs, anthologies, films, and comic books produced around the world and devoted to exploring popular culture from a variety of historical periods. Heidi Ippolito reviews *Dislike-Minded: Media, Audiences, and the Dynamics of Taste*, in which author Jonathan Gray sets out to provide a nuanced discussion of how people express distaste for films, TV shows, music, sports, and video games. Dennis Owen Frohlich offers his thoughts on author Brian Boxer Wachler's *Influenced: The Impact of Social Media*

on Our Perception, which explores the rise of influencers and considers their impact on audiences. Francis Shor's monograph *Soupy Sales and the Detroit Experience: Manufacturing a Television Personality*, which offers insights into the popular culture of the 1950s, is the subject of Graham Cassano's review. Sarah Stanley discusses editor Simon Bacon's anthology *The Transmedia Vampire: Essays on Technological Convergence and the Undead*, which collects essays interrogating the impact vampires have had across various media. Moving beyond scholarly books, Carlos Tkacz provides some discussion about the first two volumes of *Frank Herbert's Dune: The Graphic Novel*, Elizabeth Shiller reviews the darkly comedic film *The Enormity of Life*, and Arthi Vasudevan discusses the South Korean dramedy film *Lucky Chan-sil*.

As always, I am grateful to my reviewers for their contributions, as the journal would not have a reviews section without them. I also want to extend my heartfelt thanks to my assistant editor Linda Howell, who found time to proofread the reviews and offer her thoughts on them even as she navigates the despotic restrictions currently imposed on educators in her home state of Florida. Solidarity, sister.

Finally, I want to say that if you wish to contribute to the reviews section of the *Popular Culture Studies Journal*, please email me at olson429@uwm.edu, as I am always on the lookout for contributors looking to offer their positive, constructive thoughts about anything relevant to the field of popular culture studies.