

## Book Reviews

Bryan, Victoria. *Prestige Television and Prison in the Age of Mass Incarceration: A Wall Rise Up*. Routledge, 2020.

Research shows that individuals who are told lies often enough may, over time, believe the lies as truth. That is, “even patent lies may slowly become more credible, provided enough repetition” (Martinez-Conde). The “illusory truth effect” has many implications in “daily life, where consumers of news and products are often repeatedly exposed to both plausible and implausible falsehoods” (Martinez-Conde). Popular television series are no exception, and they often serve as a source of tremendous influence on American society, culture, and psychology (Hamer, Poole, & Messerli-Burgy; Mackay, 2018; Pearce & Field, 2016).

On average, nearly 80 percent of the U.S. population watches TV on a given day (Krantz-Kent). Despite increasing media fragmentation, the numbers are staggering (Uncovering Trends). From 2013-2017, “the U.S. civilian noninstitutional population ages 15 and older spent an average of 2 hours 46 minutes per day watching TV” (Krantz-Kent). Both the content of television programs and time spent viewing can be primary sources of negative impacts, rather than the medium of television per se (Psychological Effects). In general, individuals “don’t realize how much the stuff we read and watch shapes the way we see the world and the people in it” (Stone). As Victoria M. Bryan, author of *Prestige Television and Prison in the Age of Mass Incarceration: A Wall Rise Up* notes, “[f]or better or worse, popular culture is of paramount importance when it comes to honing the general public’s understanding of prison” (12). Moreover, as viewership of plots and narratives which are often overly reductive rises in the United States, so too does incarceration.

In *Prestige Television and Prison in the Age of Mass Incarceration*, Bryan takes on critical prison study through the genre of prestige television, the truth of mass incarceration, and the often reductionist ways that popular culture depicts prison systems and associated stigmas. Bryan examines four prestige television series that work in distinct and unique ways to authenticate the truths of our prison system. Bryan simultaneously provides context and reasoning for the importance of doing so.

Chapter 1 focuses on *Rectify*, a series that follows Daniel Holden and his

adjustment to life after solitary confinement and almost two decades of incarceration (19). Bryan describes the series as not only “aware of the connection between solitary confinement and social death, but actively engaged with bringing that reality to the attention of the viewer” (23). The series explores complexity as it presents in multiple and varied forms throughout all aspects of our carceral system (including with respect to forced coercions, illusions of truth, and lingering stigmatization). Chapter 2 focuses on *American Horror Story*, a series that explores the complex question of what society chooses to normalize, provoking more nuanced and complex reflections on the horrors of our system of carcerality. In the series, characters are not presented as simply good or bad. Rather, tensions and complexity are effectively woven throughout plots and storylines so that the series “shines as a critique of incarceration culture” (44). Chapter 3 explores *The Walking Dead*, a show about zombies that “utilizes varying degrees of direct and indirect representations of incarceration in the United States to expand what we understand as a carceral space” (64). The series “dramatizes the fact that we often focus our attention on the wrong enemy” when seeking to address society’s many ails and, in fact, often worsen and intensify those same social challenges through simplistic and misdirected messaging, including in popular culture and news media (66). Finally, Chapter 4 presents *Orange is the New Black*, a series that demonstrates how both the prison industrial complex (PIC) and its multifaceted oppressions has become “part and parcel of the United States” (87). Just as the “crux of the show is the ability for free world viewers to identify with stories from inside a prison,” the crux of the text is the ability for readers (educators, activists, change makers, citizens) to identify with the reality of our carceral system, including its horrors, oppression, and complexity (93).

Bryan intentionally curates a collection (*Rectify* and *Orange is the New Black* are set primarily inside of prisons; *American Horror Story: Asylum* focuses on prison as an abject space; and *The Walking Dead* explores the threat of something non-human or “Other”) that successfully tests Jason Mittell’s estimation that “the twenty-first century marks a shift from the traditional expectation that formulaic storylines and predictable characters are the makings of successful television programming” capable of sustained interest on the part of viewers, both individuals and society more broadly (5). Ellsworth R. Fuhrman and Carol A. Bailey write that “concern for the link between the individual and society is an ancient one” and suggest limitations associated with traditional approaches to an examination of individual-society relationships in that they “do not contain a rich enough sense of

the relationship between the individual, society, and nature” (2). Bryan, too, demonstrates acute awareness of the complexity that is a fundamental component of critical prison study as well as popular culture and its relationship with viewer psychology and perceptions regarding carcerality, citizenry, and related oppressions. The text is both a tool and a direct response to the challenges of reductionist depictions of prison, the individuals housed therein, and the PIC in mainstream media as well as a guide for how to consume and assess media going forward.

Relatedly, the text serves as an example of instructional strategies (such as problem-posing inquiry, reflective questioning, and culturally responsive curriculum) that might be employed to teach about complex and complicated topics. John Dewey has written on the importance of ongoing reflection to ascertain meaning and refine understanding. Each previewed series serves in unique and distinct ways to, as Bryan says of the *Walking Dead*, “productively trouble the PIC” and productively prompt reflection on the part of readers. In doing so, Bryan, in the spirit of Dewey (1933) and not unlike the work of philosopher Hannah Arendt, encourages the type of thinking and reflection that is necessary to develop deeper understandings of a system and counter natural, more mechanical tendencies both with respect to what we consume as well as to how we act (Ferlazzo).

The text prompts powerful reflections on the hidden curriculum that is a fundamental component of television consumption as well as on the long-term implications of consumption choices. Moreover, the work offers viewing, teaching, and learning options that both highlight the horrors of mass incarceration and the stigmatization of imprisonment in ways that promote awareness, reflection, and action beyond reductive considerations of our carceral system and call into the question the illusion of truth that so often accompanies popular culture and media depictions of our incarceration and prison system.

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- Cusack, Carole M., John W. Morehead, and Venetia Laura Delano Robertson, eds. *The Sacred in Fantastic Fandom: Essays on the*

*Intersection of Religion and Pop Culture*. McFarland & Company, Inc., 2019.

The edited volume *The Sacred in Fantastic Fandoms: Essays on the Intersection of Religion and Pop Culture* is timely for a postmodern moment in which people are seeking to re-enchant a primarily rationalistic world. Across ten essays, as well as a hefty introduction and conclusion, the editors and contributors of this volume explore how the practices of fandom in popular culture reveal a quest for, parallel with, or reference to facets of the sacred.

Carole M. Cusack and Venetia Laura Delano Robertson write in their introduction that while others in the field have asserted that religion and fandom are “essentially discrete phenomena” (2), they intend the essays to demonstrate “the ongoing fascination with, and existence of, the coalescing of religious and fannish interests and how this continues to make us question, deconstruct, and reconfigure the hegemonic cultural assumptions that reduce and devalue meaningful, world-building, and enchanted experiences with media sources” (7). A major strength of the volume is that the individual essays revolve around this thesis, thus avoiding a sense that the collected voices talk past each other, as often occurs in edited volumes. It is made even stronger by the fact that the essays not only coalesce, but are written from a myriad of religious, disciplinary, and pop cultural perspectives. Topics covered in this volume range from Christianity to Islam to Chaos Magic; include methodologies from film studies, cultural studies, and religious studies; and cover a wide swath of popular culture, from *Harry Potter* and cosplay, to *World of Warcraft* and *Sherlock* and fanfiction.

The volume is helpfully divided into three sections, each of which focuses on a specific facet of the intersection between fandom and the sacred: “Sacred Reading: Analyzing the Text,” “Sacred Viewing: Watching the Text,” and “Sacred Play: Performing the Text.” The first section opens with an essay that analyzes *Harry Potter and the Sacred Text*, a popular podcast in which the hosts read the texts of *Harry Potter* as though they were sacred texts. Cusack argues that the podcast represents a “radical democratization” of the sacred, through which fans of *Harry Potter* are personally empowered to make sacred meaning (18). Using *Star Wars* and *Sherlock* as examples, Rhiannon Grant explores how fans enter the world of the texts and make truth claims from therein, much like how doctrine functions in religious traditions. Linda Howell parallels the “symbiotextual” relationship between the fandom and creators of *Supernatural* with the Jewish midrash tradition,

arguing that, like midrash, *Supernatural* fan work supplements the authority of the original text. However, unlike midrash, fan work can also alter the text (54). Finally for this section, Greg Conley illustrates how practitioners of Chaos Magic seamlessly combine their occulture with their fandom, as their worldview does not depend on a distinction between “real” and “unreal.” Together, these essays demonstrate that fandom uses and relates to texts within popular culture in religious ways.

The second set of essays explores the experience of watching a piece of popular culture in the form of film or television. Marc Joly-Corcoran makes a particularly concrete contribution to the discourse on religion and fandom by coining the term “cinephany” to refer to the affective relationship that a viewer has to the piece of media. Joly-Corcoran breaks down the term into six types of affective reaction, which most readers should recognize themselves in and now are helpfully given language for. Jyrki Korpua et al. use sociological data to investigate the experience that viewers had upon watching *The Hobbit*, and find that many either treat the original J.R.R. Tolkien text as sacred and thus blasphemed by Peter Jackson’s adaptation, or reflect on viewing the films as a sacred experience, often using religious language to describe them. James Reynolds unpacks how the narrative of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* creatively uses the concept of the soul, which works to draw in the viewer because it parallels the viewer’s own experience of growth and division in their identity. This section of the volume thus adds an affective and experiential dimension of fans’ relationships to popular media to the conversation.

The final section turns to exploring how fans performatively engage with the objects of their fandom. Jovi L. Geraci uses psychological analysis of the relationship between videogame players and the game to argue that in *World of Warcraft*, players can enact themselves as messianic heroes in a kind of religious experience. Juli L. Gittinger looks at interview data with Muslim women cosplayers to explore how those who wear the *hijab* navigate cosplaying while maintaining modest religious dress codes, thereby subverting dual paradigms – what it looks like to be Muslim and what it looks like to be a cosplayer. Robertson then takes us back to the Wizarding World, this time analyzing the phenomenon of *Harry Potter*-themed weddings, and, using interviews, argues that the themes of *Harry Potter* fall neatly into the place where traditionally religious ones would have been. By way of conclusion, James Morehead argues that fan conventions parallel transformative festivals in their symbolism, ritual, and even as pilgrimage. Overall, these essays communicate that popular culture holds deep meaning for its fans, and

that we can better understand fandoms by reading their engagement with popular culture as engagement with the sacred.

The only thing that gives me pause is that this volume does not include how fandom might also parallel the less desirable aspects of religion, for example, gendered and racialized gatekeeping. Of course, no volume can be expected to cover every aspect of a topic. Yet the more negative facets of fandom are frequent enough experiences that it does read as something of a lacuna – hopefully one that a future book may remedy.

Because it is “academic yet accessible,” this book is suitable for a range of audiences from the general population to professors. It may be particularly useful in teaching undergraduate students to answer that pesky question, “What is religion, anyway?” It would also be helpful for scholars hoping to understand trends in U.S. culture that are replacing “traditional religion” with other means of seeking the sacred.

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Edwards, Erica B. and Jennifer Esposito. *Intersectional Analysis as a Method to Analyze Popular Culture: Clarity in the Matrix*. Routledge, 2020.

We engage with movies, shows, music, and posts, both in traditional media and social networking sites every single day. Most of the time, these popular cultural products pique our interest because we find them entertaining or the characters resonate with our identity. Yet they are much more than just mere entertainment and pastime, and Erica B. Edwards and Jennifer Esposito call for us to engage with popular culture texts using intersectional analysis method and theory. *Intersectional Analysis as a Method to Analyze Popular Culture* helps readers understand “popular culture artifacts...[through an] exploration into the multi-dimensional realities of cultural production and representation” (13). That is, to examine how categories and identity markers such as race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, among others, are represented in the texts and, at the same time, how these representations interact with the audience (and vice versa). By looking at popular culture artifacts this way, the complex voices we need to consider when watching

a sitcom, listening to a song, or scrolling through social media posts surface and become examinable.

The book offers theoretical, methodological, and practical value. In Chapter 1, the authors introduce the concept, theory, and potential of intersectional analysis by relating it to *The Matrix*. Just as Neo was made to choose between the red pill and the blue pill, the authors ask us to choose the red pill to see and understand popular culture in a different light – that is, to reveal, read, navigate, and contest patterns of oppression and representation in texts through the use of intersectionality. Nonetheless, the book proceeds with caution and proper elucidation as the authors discuss the history of intersectionality and the concerns it seeks to address. In Chapter 2 as Edwards and Esposito describe the relationship of intersectional theory, methodology, and methods. One good thing about this chapter is how the authors are quick to admit that they did not develop the theory and mention that there have been other approaches used in analyzing popular culture, including content analysis, Marxist analysis, psychoanalytic theory, semiotic analysis, and grounded theory. By doing this, the book distinguishes itself from other methodological and theoretical approaches while clarifying its premise and promise to “understand the social and ideological function of popular culture” (39), unmistakably needed in the age of multimedia. Chapter 3 reinforces the two previous chapters by highlighting ethical considerations that arise when doing intersectional research. This is important as it emphasizes that despite using popular culture texts and artifacts as nonhuman participants, research ethics must not be neglected in doing intersectional analysis. Thus, the book offers practical ethical approaches that could guide researchers in interactional analysis.

The next chapters are more engaging as the book presents actual examples and application of the intersectional analysis in sitcoms (Chapter 4), music (Chapter 5), film (Chapter 6), and social media (Chapter 7). Each of these includes specific case studies, data collection processes, analysis, and discussion. In Chapter 4, for instance, the authors use three sitcoms – *Cristela*, *Black-ish*, and *Fresh Off the Boat* – to illustrate how to analyze intersectionalities in such a medium. The value of the book also slowly unfolds while reading these chapters as they follow the usual research cycle – from defining the issue, presenting the cases (sitcoms, in this case), detailing the data collection and analysis (including the coding), and discussing the analysis and implications of the whole process and findings. In this chapter, the authors note that representation in these sitcoms is incomplete since they mostly portray white supremacy, instead of the superficially depicted image of Latinx,



Black, and Asian identities. This reading is very important as we increasingly see such representations in sitcoms and TV series on different platforms. Such analysis ensures that representations are properly accounted for, though it would have been great to see how other markers such as gender (*Cristela*), youth (*Fresh Off the Boat*), and parentage (*Black-ish*) intersect with the issue earlier raised.

Chapter 5 is an example of intersectional analysis in music, particularly in reading Big Freedia. An acclaimed hip-hop and bounce artist who “identifies as Black, gay, gender non-conforming male who prefers female pronouns” (99), Big Freedia is an apt text to be read for intersectional analysis. However, the analysis is not limited to Freedia and her music as the authors emphasize that the data and contextualization of intersectional analysis should be beyond the person and the music. Like the previous chapter, the book presents the data collection process and analysis done by the authors. The discussion and value of Freedia’s work outside and in conjunction with her identities lead us to think of how she “shows how to transgress the boundaries prescribed by white supremacist heteronormativity in the West and invites us to create and experience pleasure in our lives” (114). Hence, intersectional analysis allows us to not only read and listen to popular music beyond the artifact, but also to see into the industry that perpetuates (mis)representation and oppression.

Chapter 6 gives an intersectional reading of films, specifically the highly acclaimed movie *Black Panther*. In doing this, the authors offer another way of doing intersectional analysis, by combining survey. The chapter is notable as it reads a film that celebrates Black representation in a popular motion picture. However, the book further analyzes *Black Panther* through the intersection of various identities of race, class, gender, and ideologies beyond the aesthetics of the film. Seen through an intersectional lens, the movie “offers a limited portrayal of Black liberation and erases the larger matrix framing Black experiences...in film and real life,” which is an important point when reading film as a popular culture artifact concerning representations and power (142).

From films to music, the book moves to a relatively new medium that has become part of popular culture texts in the recent decade: social media. Chapter 7 analyzes the Instagram account and story of GBJ (@GetBodiedByJ) in relation to race, gender and class as represented in her body and social media posts through the ambivalence of “self-love.” This chapter also reflects some ethical considerations raised in Chapter 3, particularly in collecting data from social media. The emphasis on data collection ethics is important since “social media is not static”

and involves real people in a public domain (151). In doing intersectional analysis, the authors reveal the potential (and difficulty) of understanding motivations and actions as contextualized in historical, cultural, and economic milieus in the virtual space of social media. The authors admit that there is so much to explore in social media through intersectional analysis because it is a vast field encompassing diverse (re)presentations.

The book ends with an epilogue (Chapter 8) that summarizes the book and reminds us of some assumptions that would affect the use of intersectional analysis. To reinforce this, the authors also present ways to move forward in using intersectional analysis in studying popular culture broadly conceived. *Intersectional Analysis as a Method to Analyze Popular Culture* is a perspective-changing piece of work essential for researchers, teachers, and students. This is not only essential material for the field of popular culture studies but also in education, media studies, and cultural sociology. In each chapter, the authors offer us their reflexivity in dealing with the theory and method through the section “Theory in the Flesh,” which is valuable for qualitative researchers. Likewise, the section “Pedagogical Possibilities” is a helpful tool in the field and classroom when dealing with popular culture.

*Intersectional Analysis as a Method to Analyze Popular Culture* is an excellent resource when studying popular culture, and readers would benefit from seeing more types of media and issues, which of course is not always possible given that popular culture is a vast field, to begin with. As can be seen throughout the book and is mentioned by the authors in the last chapter, doing intersectional analysis is not easy, as it requires practice and more importantly a shift in mind frame. The book allows you to tread lightly and be at ease when critically reading popular culture texts. Of course, some might try to resist doing so, as viewers frequently prefer entertainment to critical analysis.

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Frankel, Valerie Estelle, ed. *Fourth Wave Feminism in Science Fiction and Fantasy: Essays on Film Representations, 2012-2019 Vol. 1.*, McFarland & Company, Inc, 2019.

Frankel, Valerie Estelle, ed. *Fourth Wave Feminism in Science Fiction and Fantasy: Essays on Television Representations, 2013-2019 Vol. 2.*, McFarland & Company, Inc, 2020.

The two volumes in Valerie Estelle Frankel's *Fourth Wave Feminism in Science Fiction and Fantasy* offer critical interpretations of female characters who are often overlooked in scholarly works. Two volumes dedicated to the recent representations of women in science fiction and fantasy in film and television is a welcome analysis of the rich, recent media landscape that echoes fourth wave feminism. While most of the essays in these volumes do not focus specifically on the fourth wave of feminism, they all draw from the period that is being referred to as "the fourth wave," generally starting around 2012 and moving into the present. While most journalists and scholars point to feminist actions in online spaces during this wave, it is important that we analyze the influence of the fourth wave in the media we consume. Additionally, as Frankel points out in the introduction to the first volume, we also need to be critically aware of the interconnectedness of the internet and culture on mediated narratives.

These edited collections offer rich analysis of several recent female characters in science fiction and fantasy mediated narratives. The first volume focuses on film representations from 2012-2019. Tackling a variety of subjects and films, these essays provide a wide array of analysis in cinema. The first section of this volume, "New Rules," discusses the evolution of trends for representations of women in films, discussing issues like the Mako Mori test, representations of sisterhoods working together to defeat angry men, and identity politics in a variety of films. The essay titled "Blockbusters for a New Age: Sisterhood Defeats Angry Young Men in *Black Panther*, *Captain Marvel*, *Last Jedi*, and *Ghostbusters*" provides the kind of in-depth, cross-film franchise analysis that is insightful for feminist media scholars to engage in, shedding light on patterns of representation and response to these representations in online communities.

The second section in this volume, "Deconstruction," centers on changes in representations of women in films including *The Final Girls*, *Happy Death Day*, *Annihilation*, and *Maleficent*. This section proves valuable for analysis of changing representations of women across sociohistorical time periods. The tropes of mothers in films and women in slasher films serve as valuable re-constructions of women's roles in a variety of films in the fourth wave. The third section focuses on

“Children’s Stories,” bringing insightful analysis of Katniss in *The Hunger Games*, females in millennial Disney movies, diversity in Disney’s females, and gender-bending in *Rise of the Guardians*. Scholars who delve into young adult media and children’s media will find this section helpful in discussing the roles of young women in film as well as the effects media trends have on young viewers.

The fourth section focuses on “Superheroes” with four essays on recent representations of women in superhero films. While two of these four essays focus solely on *Wonder Woman*, whose character has spanned generations and led to fruitful scholarly analysis, the section’s last essay that compares feminist representations of women in Marvel’s *Black Panther* and DC’s *Wonder Woman* offers an insightful comparison that may change the ways in which critical feminist media scholars analyze females in superhero films. Additionally, the first essay in this section on Wasp in the *Ant-Man* films is a brilliant analysis of an often-overlooked character in the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

The introduction to the second volume provides a succinct overview of women in television and how the feminist representations in science fiction and fantasy television shows have paved the way for more intersectional representations on the small screen. “Fighting Authority,” the first section of this volume, offers stunning analysis on women in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, *Sense8*, and *Orphan Black*. The analysis of queer cultural production in *Sense8* and *Orphan Black* offers a rich dive into the intersectionality and systems of power and oppression in these shows. “Warriors in a Respectful World,” the second section of the volume on television, dives into a few shows that have not garnered much scholarly attention yet, including *Wynonna Earp* and *Vikings*. The first essay in this section compares female power in *Wynonna Earp* and *Supergirl*, making stunning connections between the heroines in these two very different shows. The third section, “Intersectionality,” offers analysis of strong black female characters, intersectionality in *DC’s Legends of Tomorrow*, problematic white women in *Black Mirror*, and queer identity in *Doctor Who*. This section is rich for any scholar wanting to consider how science fiction and fantasy plays a role in intersectional representations of feminism. The last section in this volume, “Girl-Centric Kids,” focuses again on television shows geared toward young females. Additionally, though, the essay on transmedia adventures in online spaces geared toward attracting girl consumers of *DC*, *Marvel*, and *Star Wars* is a welcome and insightful analysis of transmedia marketing to young female fans.

Overall, these two volumes touch on a variety of mediated narratives in the fourth wave. Critical feminist scholars and fans of science fiction and fantasy will find a great deal of pleasure in the different essays and approaches provided in the two volumes. All I want from this volume is more of the strong analysis in the introduction to the second volume tying all these analyses together and offering us a bigger picture of representations of feminism and female characters. May we have some more, please?

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Friedenthal, Andrew J. *The World of DC Comics*. Routledge, 2019.

As part of Routledge's *Imaginary Worlds* books series, which seeks to examine the story worlds and "subcreations" of the "imaginary world tradition," Andrew Friedenthal's *The World of DC Comics* explores the uniqueness of the DC multiverse. Friedenthal establishes the centrality of the multiverse to DC's storytelling history and explores its unique storytelling capacity, as well as how various creators have used the multiverse to their advantage.

In the introduction, Friedenthal lays the groundwork for why it is even important to explore the DC Comics multiverse. Friedenthal briefly explores the scientific basis of the multiverse and the use of the multiverse by other creators, specifically Michael Moorcock. While DC Comics is certainly not the first creative agency to use the multiverse in their stories, the creators at DC were the first to "refine that concept into a unique storytelling engine" (4).

Chapters 1 and 2 provide a brief exploration of the history of the DC multiverse by exploring seminal stories in its history broken up into two phases: expansion and contraction/limitation. The chapter on expansion covers events like "Flash of Two Worlds" and the annual team-ups between the Justice League and Justice Society in the Silver and Bronze ages of comic, while Chapter 2 addresses the history of the multiverse from *Crisis on Infinite Earths* and its sequel crises in the 2000s and beyond.

In Chapter 3, Friedenthal highlights one of the most unique elements of the DC imaginary world – its creation exploration by multiple authors. Unlike the world of *The Lord of the Rings*, with its one creator, the DC universe has had multiple creators take its reins and add to its lore, creators who Friedenthal refers to as the

“cartographers” of the DC universe. Friedenthal explores the contributions of four key creators: Gardner Fox, one of the creative minds behind the famous “Flash of Two Worlds” story that inaugurated the DC multiverse; Marv Wolfman, writer of *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, which destroyed that same multiverse; Geoff Johns, who wrote *Infinite Crisis*, the 20-year anniversary sequel to the original crisis, which restored a limited number of alternate Earths; and Grant Morrison, who has explored the storytelling potential of the DC multiverse in multiple works. Friedenthal explains the unique stamp each creator has added to the multiverse, how they viewed the multiverse’s status as a viable storytelling engine, and how they used it to craft unique stories.

Chapter 4 looks at how stories about DC’s multiverse have fared in other media, as well as how the multiverse of DC’s main rival Marvel Comics differs from DC’s. Finally, Friedenthal asks readers to consider what world builders or subcreators can learn from the DC universe as they create worlds of their own.

One of the strengths of Friedenthal’s books is how much he covers in such little space. The DC multiverse involves a multi-volume encyclopedia’s worth of characters, storylines, and publication histories, but Friedenthal provides a coherent, non-exhaustive overview of some of DC’s most complicated stories in the service of advocating for DC’s multiverse as an important storytelling device. He does this in part by centering his analysis around certain themes and how those themes are explored by a creator’s use of the multiverse as a storytelling device.

If there is one complaint to level at this book, it is that I wish it was longer. This is not so much a critique of this book, which in very little space provides an overview of the DC multiverse, its history, major events, and major “cartographers,” as well as a thematic analysis of the purpose the multiverse serves in DC’s stories. However, for a more in-depth analysis of the DC multiverse, readers will have to look elsewhere.

Scholars and laypeople who are interested in world building will like this book, and even if they are not interested in DC Comics specifically, the analysis of DC Comics as an example of world building should be enough to keep them engaged. As a brief exploration of how DC has used the multiverse to generate some of its most memorable stories, it works. DC Comics fans will undoubtedly wish this was a more exhaustive volume about the nitty-gritty details of DC’s story world, but the chapter endnotes are full of references to scholarly works and comic volumes that explore the DC universe in more detail. Additionally, the casual non-fan who wants

to know how to make sense of the DC universe will be greatly helped by this volume.

Friedenthal manages to do a lot in a little bit of space. He discusses numerous complex comic book events and comic creators, who have a large body of work attached to their names, clearly and with brevity. As mentioned, this is not an exhaustive work, but it does tell readers what they need to know about the DC Comics multiverse to explore it as an interesting example of world building.

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Grant, Barry Keith and Scott Henderson. *Comics and Pop Culture: Adaptation from Panel to Frame*. U Texas P, 2019.

The relation between comics and film is an area of study that many scholars have investigated. Due to the rich contexts that both media provide, there is no lack of need for regular inquiry, debate, and investigation into the nature of comic adaptation and its role in popular culture. Barry Keith Grant and Scott Henderson's *Comics and Pop Culture: Adaptation from Panel to Frame* continues this necessary exploration with a set of eighteen conversations regarding filmic adaptations of comics and the cultural milieus they affect. Grant and Henderson divide the collection of essays into two parts: the first concerns issues and debates that surround comic books and their respective films, while the second focuses on the process of adaptation and the issues that arise therefrom.

Too often in academic work, the subject matter is presented with a detached lens to assert one's ethos in the edited volumes. However, *Comics and Pop Culture* is an unapologetic celebration of the historical, cultural, and processual affect of comics and film by academics who are fans of the subjects of which they write. These include Scott Bukatman, Blair Davis, Miriam Kent, and Aviva Briefel, among other notable comics and film scholars. Yet this love is not without critical discussion of the myriad of subjects that comics and film encapsulate. *Comics and Pop Culture* explores beyond the fields of film studies, theatre, and popular culture; it also includes historical narratives, queer studies, feminist studies, technoculture studies, and narratology. Furthermore, it delves deeply into the intersections of politics and ideologies, as well as how the representations and mediations of these concerns are pointedly chosen by their creators.

The first half of *Comics and Pop Culture* considers how films not only act as adaptation, but as an extension of the comic book content, material, and genre. Aaron Taylor's "Genre and Superhero Cinema" investigates the development of the superhero film as its own genre within cinema, which pairs well with an earlier chapter by Liam Burke, which taxonomizes comic-to-film adaptations. The book's first section additionally does not limit itself to films, but also speaks to serialized adaptations. As such, the collection lends itself to the larger conversations regarding the historical significance in American media of the serialized narrative, reaching as far back to serialized stories sold to newspapers all the way to expansive film universes that span decades. More importantly, perhaps, the book considers instances when the culture in which the first film of the series is produced no longer resembles or reflects the culture that houses the final installments of the narrative.

Several chapters question authenticity and fidelity in adaptation – both in terms of the "trueness" to the source material as well as to the timeliness of the cultural contexts of the time. The conversation of "authenticity" in the comic-to-film adaptation of *Scott Pilgrim Versus The World* in John Bodner's study on symbolic texts is quite different from James C. Taylor's chapter, "CGI As Adaptation Strategy," which investigates the cultural associations with 2D image and visual markers of the kinetic body. This conversation runs through the second part of the book, providing an enriching and diverse view of the many ways that scholars can question, emulate, and create authenticity in adaptation. Included in this conversation is the concept of fidelity, which also affects the authorial moves that these scholars track in the continued discussion between chapters in how comics have been adapted to film, why these choices matter, and what these conclusions mean for the future of the comic book film. Jeffery Brown's chapter, "*Black Panther*: Aspiration, Identification, and Appropriation," proves to be exceptionally poignant, especially in the wake of Chadwick Boseman's death, which leaves a painful void in the *Marvel Cinematic Universe* in terms of the representation and legitimation of Black fans and Black American comics.

*Comics and Pop Culture* is not a book wrapped in heavy theory, although it does draw from a wealth of other scholars in film and film-adjacent studies. If one were to look for deep analysis of visual semiotics or participatory theory, this book does not delve much beyond a comprehensive and accessible overview of conversations that can ultimately lead to questions that involve deeper discussion. That is not to say that this book is not valuable without theory, but that it provides a wonderful start to a conversation that other scholars may pick up to investigate in



other ways. In that aspect, it proves itself to be a valuable resource for the ongoing scholarship around the things we love to study: comics, film, and pop culture.

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Grossman, Julie and Will Scheibel. *Twin Peaks*. Wayne State UP, 2020.

Originally titled *Northwest Passage* and pre-sold as a televisual milestone before its pilot episode first aired, *Twin Peaks* (ABC, 1990-91) remains perhaps the most revered cult TV artifact of the last three decades. Following widespread acclaim for its belated third season, *Twin Peaks: The Return* (Showtime, 2017), and a slow-burning critical rehabilitation of big-screen prequel *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* (1992), David Lynch's tree-laden phantasmagoria has attracted an impressive body of scholarly work in recent years. This includes Franck Boulégue's *Twin Peaks: Unwrapping the Plastic*, Lindsay Hallam's monograph on *Fire Walk With Me* and the edited collections *Return to Twin Peaks*, *The Politics of Twin Peaks*, and *Critical Essays on Twin Peaks: The Return* – all of which owe varying degrees of intellectual debt to evergreen anthology *Full of Secrets: Critical Approaches to Twin Peaks*.

Julie Grossman and Will Scheibel's compact book is the latest addition to this ever-expanding world of *Peaksian* scholarship. With chapters addressing an uncontroversial range of topics--authorship, genre, gender, performance, intertextuality—Grossman and Scheibel initiate critical debate by placing the expansive paratextuality of *Twin Peaks* at the epicenter of their study. Three decades after it was first broadcast, they argue, the mixed-media universe of *Twin Peaks* “continues to exist at the threshold of multiple, mutable worlds (diegetic, generic, textual, temporal and technological)” (24). Understanding the relationship between Lynch and co-creator Mark Frost as a transmedia dialectic, Grossman and Scheibel position *Twin Peaks*'s pioneering fusion of televisual convention with avant-garde sensibility as a groundbreaking progenitor of 21st century “Quality TV.”

As director, writer, producer and actor, Lynch's multivalent creative roles in *Twin Peaks* have historically served to underscore narrow auteurist readings of the series. For Grossman and Scheibel, however, *Twin Peaks*'s popularity with early 1990s soap opera audiences suggests a more diffuse appeal. Far from a postmodern

satire of generic conventions, they suggest, *Twin Peaks* is better understood as simply another stage in the evolution of prime-time TV melodrama. Employing understated critical revisionism, Grossman and Scheibel emphasize *Twin Peaks*'s unsettling fusion of melodramatic affect with generic hybridity. Placing incestuous sexual violence at its thematic epicenter, the genre-shifting sprawl of *Twin Peaks* repeatedly invokes *film noir*, teen drama, soap opera, science fiction, police procedural, and gothic horror in its sustained exploration of psycho-sexual trauma. In the harrowing expressionist nightmare of *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, for example, Lynch mobilizes the most progressive aspects of the *femme fatale* archetype to empathically depict the fractured subjectivity of Laura Palmer (Sheryl Lee). Continuing this focus on the intersecting politics of gender and genre, Grossman and Scheibel argue that the proto-feminist characterizations of Audrey Horne (Sherilyn Fenn), Donna Hayward (Lara Flynn Boyle/Moira Kelly), and Diane Evans (Laura Dern) "constitute a resistance to [the] objectification and victimization" (57) of women in *Twin Peaks*.

This critical strand is continued in a lively discussion of *Twin Peaks*'s various ancillary paratexts. These include *The Secret History of Twin Peaks*, *Twin Peaks: The Final Dossier*, and bestseller *The Secret Diary of Laura Palmer* – a series of tie-in books that underscore the amorphousness of *Twin Peaks*'s transmedial diegesis by remediating the off-screen lives of characters such as Laura Palmer and Norma Jennings (Peggy Lipton). In what are perhaps the most intriguing sections of the volume, Grossman and Scheibel examine the stylized performances of actors Kyle MacLachlan, Ray Wise, and Sheryl Lee, linking their articulation of fractured modernist selfhood with the "intermedial storytelling" of *Twin Peaks* more broadly (80). Pointing to Lee's audiobook narration of *The Secret Diary of Laura Palmer* and its paratextual "conversation" with *Fire Walk With Me* (86), the authors argue that the interwoven transmedia stories that constitute the *Twin Peaks* universe "posit authorship, adaptation, and performance as mutually enhancing processes" (85).

Too often, however, this book feels like something of an oddity. At barely 100 condensed pages, this small volume seems quixotically ill-equipped to deal with an unruly cult brand that – as the authors are at pains to point out – willfully resists reification or narrative closure. Yet, when the authors hit their critical stride, the book can be fascinating. Grossman and Scheibel's thoughtful commentary on "Lynchian" performance style is original and engaging, for example – but even here their argument is frustratingly undermined by its brevity. Moreover, the book

communicates little of the tonal and aesthetic gulf separating the sprightly *Twin Peaks* of 1990-91 and the reflexively depressive *longeurs* of *The Return*, nor of the way Mark Frost's ancillary books encourage readers to understand *The Return* as a critique of the socio-economic conditions which fostered the rise of Donald Trump.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, much of *The Return* can—and should—be read as a revisionist critique of the political complacency Linnie Blake identifies as a hallmark of the original series. Such matters, sadly, fall outside the narrow remit of this book.

Grossman and Scheibel's failure to acknowledge Blake's acerbic critique is symptomatic of the book's relentlessly positive assessment of *Twin Peaks*. Presumably designed to appease the series' notoriously obsessive fandom, this strategy often proves disingenuous. The somewhat overdetermined valorization of female agency makes little sense without contextualization within broader scholarly debates about gender and misogyny in Lynch's work,<sup>2</sup> for example, while the authors' description of Audrey Horne's bank protest as "a strong activist gesture of rebellion against capitalist exploitations" comes perilously close to self-parody (48). Perhaps most unforgivable, however, is the critical flattening of *Twin Peaks*'s uncanny seductions into a breakneck exercise in current media studies orthodoxy – a project that is unlikely to sate fans, scholars, or curious neophytes. A little too *heimlich* for its own good, this overview of *Twin Peaks* offers a clean, reasonably priced room when it should have been where pies go when they die. Damn shame.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example: Fradley, Martin and John A. Riley. "I don't understand how this keeps happening ... over and over again': Trumpism, uncanny repetition and *Twin Peaks: The Return*." *Make America Hate Again: Trump-Era Horror and the Politics of Fear*, edited by Victoria McCollum, Routledge, 2019, pp.195-210.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example: George, Diana Hume. "Lynching Women: A Feminist Reading of *Twin Peaks*." *Full of Secrets*, op. cit., pp.109-19.

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- Han, Yaya. *Yaya Han's World of Cosplay: A Guide to Fandom Costume Culture*. Sterling, 2020.

As an emerging field, cosplay studies has yet to find its defining academic text. Earlier studies such as Thèresa M. Winge's *Costuming Cosplay* have noted that, to date, books on cosplay fall into one of three categories: "how to" guides covering sewing, crafting, electronics and other costume-related skills; photo books such as the *Cosplay in America* series; and academic texts – the number of which have increased since Susan J. Napier's *From Impressionism to Anime* and, arguably, Roland Kelt's *Japanamerica*. Yaya Han's new book *Yaya Han's World of Cosplay: A Guide to Fandom Costume Culture* introduces a personal narrative to the mix – giving an overview of her personal history of cosplay with that of fan costuming in Japan and America (with stops in China and Germany where Han grew up).

As a fan of Han's work, I am not sure how objective I can be in this review (let me tell you about the time she *looked* at my costume back stage five years ago; or how I almost crushed her with my massive hoop skirt and petticoats at the same event); nor is Han's book an academic text. It is one woman's personal tale of cosplay, family, and belonging written for fans of cosplay, of popular culture, and of Yaya Han (registered trademark).

One of my major quibbles with published academic works such as *Costuming Cosplay*, Paul Mountfort, Anne Peirson-Smith, and Adam Geczy's *Planet Cosplay*, and all the way back to *From Impressionism to Anime* is the low-quality images of

the cosplayers featured in each study. *Yaya Han's World of Cosplay* makes up for this with full-color glossy images not only of Han but also of a whole host of big-name cosplayers from around the globe – although not all of them are named in the pages. Indeed, if I have any complaints about Han's book, it is that there are no citations in the text. This lack of attribution is somewhat ironic given that Han advises aspiring cosplayers “give credit where credit is due” (18). This may of course be an editorial issue—I remember Han addressing something along these lines during one of her numerous Q&A sessions across multiple SNS platforms—or simply the reality of a trade book as opposed to a scholarly one. I was amused to see the same scan of the *My Anime* magazine from June 1983 in which Nobuyuki Takahashi first coined the term “cosplay” that everyone has used since it was first uploaded to Akibanana.com (now defunct) sometime before 2008—sadly there is a formatting issue with the resolution that will hopefully be fixed in later editions. Takahashi himself posted what appears to be the same set of scans on his website *Studio Hard* in 2013. All the photographers and cosplayers, including Takahashi, who provided photos are listed on the photographer credits on page 231, but since many photographers and cosplayers use “stage” names it is a poor guide for those seeking to know more.

*Yaya Han's World of Cosplay* mixes Han's cosplay narrative with crimson edged “how to” sections that cover everything from how to start making a costume (16), an introduction to sewing and armoring (53), how to negotiate photo shoots (120), advice on navigating online and in-person bullying (158), and how to build a cosplay empire (210). These “how to” pages come at the end of each section and compliment the content that preceded them, so “Starting a Costume” closes Part One, “Welcome to the World of Cosplay.” This first section introduces readers to a young Yaya who hid in the corner surrounded by adults and drew—a far cry from the woman who now commands attention at fan and cosplay events—while also introducing us to cosplay and fandom events.

Part Two, “The History of Cosplay,” offers an overview of the history of fan costuming and cosplay in Japan and the U.S. as well as Han's personal history with costuming and cosplay. Han gives 1939 as the start date of fannish dressing with the work of Myrtle R. Douglas aka Morajo (29-31). Like many other studies that establish 1939 as the start of fan costuming, this date elides a rich history of dressing up that includes masquerades and costume balls. What Han's work does do is document the divide between anime and manga sourced costumes and the much more respected costumes based on sci-fi and fantasy properties in the 1990s (32).

For many, cosplay was a dirty secret kept hidden from family and work colleagues, the pressures of which eventually drove practitioners from the hobby (51). On a personal note, I can relate to this as I was determined to keep my own cosplay a secret, until I was outed to Kotani Mari at a Japanese studies conference. Han ties this narrative to her childhood in China and Germany before she moved to the U.S. and discovered “her people.”

Part Three, “The Creative Expression of Cosplay,” and Part Five, “The Industry of Cosplay,” chart Han’s own journey to cosplay fame while also providing advice for those wanting to follow in her footsteps. Part Three focuses on conventions and competitions around the world while Part Five reframes these events in context of the Yaya Han cosplay empire.

Of particular interest, though, is Part Four, “The Duality of Cosplay,” which engages with the unpleasant side of cosplay—negativity, fat shaming, racism and black face. While these topics are regularly discussed by fans across social media platforms, they still need further study by academics who are themselves cosplayers and fans and thus members of these online spaces. While cosplay is often presented as a monolith where all the oddballs and misfits are friends with each other, the reality is often very different. Han points out that not only does cosplay differ from country to country (154), but that not everyone is welcomed with open arms—and that this is not okay. Perhaps the most powerful message of Han’s text is this:

Cosplay is a safe space for so many of us because we know what it is like to be judged. No matter where we live or the color of our skin, we each have faced hardships and tried to fit into a society with rigid ideas of right and wrong. [Cosplay] is our weird and wonderful escape. So, let’s make it a safe space for as many people as possible. (155)

Although not an academic text, *Yaya Han’s World of Cosplay: A Guide to Fandom Costume Culture* comes at a time when cosplay studies is still searching for its seminal text. While not an academic text, it bridges the gap between lay work and academic volume. Han’s insights are invaluable—both as someone who has been active in the American cosplay scene since 1999, and as a pioneer of the serious business of cosplay.

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Jaramillo, Deborah L. *The Television Code: Regulating the Screen to Safeguard the Industry.* U Texas P, 2018.

Policy studies might not be an area of research often associated with popular culture studies. Yet the space of media policy as both an academic subfield and a day-to-day practice might bridge such disassociations. Des Freedman had previously written that media policy is viewed as "the boring next-door neighbor who spends too long at your house, convinced that he has lots of interesting things to say while everyone else makes polite excuses and tries to usher him out" (11). At the outset of her book *The Television Code*, Deborah Jaramillo echoes this sentiment in stating that "The Television Code is a fascinating yet dull document, full of the anxieties and consensus politics of the 1950s" (1). However, there is something interesting in that sentiment: "Anxieties" and "consensus politics," terms that denote feelings and actions among groups of actors. These are central to Jaramillo's book, as she traces and underscores the roles that viewers, the federal government, and trade associations played in crafting the Television Code (more formally titled The Code of Practices for Broadcasters in policy speak) which was in effect between 1952 and 1983.

At the outset of her introduction, Jaramillo argues "that the heart of the Television Code is the trade association" (4)—whereby the standardization practices that are adopted through policy, pushed for by trade associations, redirects television programming to be understood as a market function rather than a creative one. "Divorced from the process of creation" the National Association of

Broadcasters (NAB) spearheaded the Television Code (11). Across six chapters and a conclusion Jaramillo effectively demonstrates how early television was constrained in its creative capacity due to the code's ability to entice broadcasting stations' subscription to its standards. Chapter 1 sets the tone with a historical context on the role of radio regulation as it carried over into television's early days—demonstrating the problematic nature of broadcast content for both governmental and industrial authority.

Chapters 2 and 3 focus extensively on the industry actors, with specific focus on the role of the trade association—encapsulated in NAB and the short-lived Television Broadcasters Association (TBA). Chapter 2 focuses on how these two trade associations defined themselves in contrast to radio and among their own memberships. As the trade associations sought to distinguish themselves, the interconnectivity between television stations and AM stations generated internal struggles and negotiations within the trade associations. The TBA's unsuccessful navigation of this interconnectivity resulted in its downfall, and a renamed NAB (National Association of Radio and Television Broadcasters) that would “monitor signs of government overreach” (53). Chapter 3 maps out the lead-up to the Television Code in which the NAB framed issues related to content as a “dire struggle between the democratic principles held by capitalists and the tyrannical intentions of a coercive government” (61).

The television audience becomes the focus in Chapter 4, as television viewers of the late 1940s and early 1950s wrote letters of complaint and calls for government intervention to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The letters effectively worked as a “neighborhood watch program” that monitored and called for action against television broadcasters and the content of television programming (85). Culturally, as Jaramillo notes, television's placement in the home connected it with the family unit. This placed broadcasters and television content in a rocky relationship with a vocal portion of the television audience. Once the Television Code was implemented, the FCC had “an extra paragraph in its reply letters and an additional escape route” to appease citizens (107).

The role of the government in the Television Code completes the book in Chapters 5 and 6. Elected officials, government employees, and federal agencies (such as the FCC and the Federal Trade Commission) play their part in the Television Code's construction and implementation. While Chapter 3 focused on the front room talk of the NAB, Chapter 5 shows how its back room talk within policy spaces take shape. Focusing on the FCC, Jaramillo builds off existing



literature noting the agency's "odd position" and its ambiguous role in the Television Code—in which the NAB leveraged the agency's authority to implement its own standards through the code. Senator William Benton is the focal point of Chapter 6, a demonstration of government interference and the NAB's response. Benton was a proponent of educational programming and a subscription-based service for television, resulting in a conflict of ideals between his leveraging of government oversight and the industry's commercial focus. The NAB was successful in utilizing the Television Code to off-set any challenges to the model under which television was operating.

Overall, this is a well-researched, articulate, and sound book that would contribute toward thinking of popular culture studies in ways that intersect with overlooked subfields such as media policy, and, perhaps, political sociology. This book effectively maps out the road to the Television Code, along with the detours and back roads that led to its ultimate implementation. Jaramillo calls attention to the arena that media policy provided for viewers and industry trade associations to express their anxieties and concerns over specific cultural and economic values. Readers would benefit from this focus and utilizing it in new ways to interrogate popular culture content beyond textual readings.

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It was during the 1985-86 school year when I first heard the word "AIDs." As I read Malynnda A. Johnson's *HIV on TV: Popular Culture's Epidemic*, my mind transports back to the made-for-TV movies, soap opera story lines, episodes of specific shows, and of course the headlines that permeated the terms AIDS and HIV into Generation X vocabulary.

Johnson begins by providing a foundation of studying the HIV/AIDS crisis through a media lens. She notes that HIV/AIDS is a popular topic of “research in many areas, such as stigma, social support, and barriers to testing” (xiii); yet analyses of the media’s social construction of HIV/AIDS remain scarce – until this book. More than just a book for media scholars, Johnson’s text would also be welcomed in pop culture, health communication, and rhetoric courses.

The examination of HIV/AIDS storylines begins with Johnson’s argument that television is more than just entertainment; it is also an educational tool. The exploration of theories, such as social cognitive, the elaboration likelihood model, theory of entertainment persuasion, and motivating change through entertainment education, provide the reader with a thorough understanding of television as educator. The text then moves on to explore the various structures the media narrative of HIV/AIDS portrays. The history of the evolution of the storylines, moving from a “gay disease” to one that famous people (e.g. Magic Johnson) and children (e.g. Eric White) can contract. Johnson does such a great job of providing various examples of the HIV/AIDS storylines that members of Generation X (or at least this member) will be drawn to memories of Robin Scorpio and Michael “Stone” Gates and afternoons spent discussing such topics as sex, Stone’s health, and Robin’s positive HIV test on *General Hospital*. Daytime dramas, or soap operas, is just one genre explored in the text.

Johnson admits that the book is a combination of rhetorical and qualitative methods. She watched over 100 hours of television shows and made-for-TV movies and conducted interviews with actors who portrayed HIV/AIDS-positive individuals. She classifies the shows by genre, focusing on how HIV/AIDS is used as a punchline in comedies, how the news coverage of HIV/AIDS evolved, and even the various ways television dramas handled the issue. Her exploration of these storylines takes readers back to the early 80s when Mark Harmon’s character, Dr. Robert “Bobby” Caldwell of *St. Elsewhere*, dies of AIDS in 1985, after contracting the virus through unprotected sex. For many dramas of this era, HIV/AIDS is portrayed as a death sentence; for other shows, like *Designing Women*, it is merely discussed as a stereotypical death sentence for certain groups of individuals.

The third part of the text focuses on the HIV/AIDS body. Johnson found that only two characters from the 100+ shows she analyzed were gaunt and sickly. The exploration of various characters and the actors who portrayed them during this section demonstrates the straightforwardness of how life-altering HIV/AIDS is. Readers are reminded of Gloria Reuben, who portrayed Jeanie Boulet on *ER*, and

how her character faced job limitations and threats of being fired. Offscreen, Ruben became an AIDS activist and spoke of the challenges that portraying an HIV-positive character had on her and her life.

Once Johnson started talking about the different genres and the different ways HIV/AIDS was embodied, I could not put the book down. I should have made a list of shows to go back and view for the first time (*St. Elsewhere*) or watch again because her descriptions of the characters and plots magically transport readers back to the area where you first watched or heard about the virus. Yet, as I read through the shows, I could not help but be disappointed that reality television was not explored. For instance, Johnson did not mention *The Real World: San Francisco*. Pedro Zamora (1972-1994), a housemate during that season of the venerable reality TV franchise, was revealed as HIV-positive, and he taught other housemates about the disease while advocating for more funding toward finding a cure. Perhaps that examination is a chapter for another book, another study.

When I first heard of the impending publication of *HIV on TV*, it was at a Central States Communication conference in 2016. It took another two years for the publication. The irony of reading the book while living in/through another pandemic is not lost on me. What I do know is that Johnson's study of HIV on television, the theories described, the methods used, and the results, can and should serve as a model for how current and future shows compose the COVID19/coronavirus storylines. Just like the 1980s narrative of HIV/AIDS, the 2020 narrative of COVID19 hits upon a lot of the key points Johnson makes: shame, stereotyping, people doubting that they have the disease, no cure in sight, etc. Also like in the 1980s, Johnson's concluding question still applies today: "After all, who would want to find out that they in fact are going to be punished for their actions?"

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Meehan, Paul. *The Haunted House on Film: An Historical Analysis*. McFarland, 2020.

As a structure both imaginative and architectural, the haunted house presents an intriguing contradiction: at once familiar and familial, it is an inherently prosaic domestic space, yet it is also the abode of a malignant Otherness. The haunted house is an unsettling site where the intimate encounters the alien. Attempting to articulate

the nature of the uncanny, those fears aroused by what is well known and deeply rooted in the psyche, Sigmund Freud (1919) famously deployed the image of the home as an emblem for repressed anxieties. For Freud, the homely (*heimlich* in German) encompasses not only that which is friendly, intimate and familial, but all that is “concealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know about it” (3). Freud’s architectural conception of repression hinges on the linguistic and conceptual proximity of the sinister and the habitual. Although more interested in the psychic space of the unconscious than the creaking doors and cobweb-strewn fixtures of ghostly manors, Freud’s marriage of the homely and the horrifying encapsulates all that is intriguing about the haunted house.

Paul Meehan’s new book, *The Haunted House on Film: An Historical Analysis*, evinces a similar understanding of the unique intersection of mundanity and terror that renders the haunted house such a potent imaginative construct. A comprehensive analysis of the filmic haunted house from the silent era to the present, Meehan’s study tracks the evolution of the haunted house from a storytelling device to a fully-fledged cinematic genre. *The Haunted House on Film* is an ambitious work, and it regularly probes the boundaries of how we as viewers understand haunting. The book asks whether haunting can comprise personal and psychological ghosts as well the ectoplasmic variety while also asking us to reconsider what constitutes a “haunted house”; can apartments, businesses, even items of furniture be haunted? Significantly, Meehan also pushes beyond the critical proclivity to confine haunted houses to the horror genre, showing how these eerie properties have played central roles in comedies, romances, musicals, and mysteries.

The introduction sketches a broad overview of the haunted house as a concept, identifying its emergence in antiquity, swiftly tracing its evolution through the Gothic Revival of late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, before addressing the more contemporary literary haunted houses found in the works of Shirley Jackson, Stephen King, and Anne Rivers Siddons. This section also includes an engaging discussion of the haunted house’s role in visual culture before the advent of cinema, with Meehan undertaking a particularly insightful exploration of the nineteenth-century “Phantasmagoria” and its role as a precursor to the special effects technologies used in later cinematic hauntings. Chapter 1 constitutes a detailed study of the “Mystery House Films” of the silent and early sound periods. Although noting the preponderance of specters in the early “trick films” of special effects pioneers like Georges Méliès, Meehan is quick to draw attention to a curious

phenomenon: the earliest anglophone productions often featured haunted houses with no hauntings. As Meehan explains, predominantly protestant nations like the United States had little room for limbo, purgatory or the ghosts that resided there. Instead, the first haunted house films produced in these countries tended to portray eerie buildings that are rumored to be haunted, but instead of encountering supernatural entities audiences are instead confronted with criminals, bank robbers and spies who craftily use the house's malign reputation as a cover for their nefarious activities. As such, the first haunted houses to flicker across the silver screen were generally seen in "mystery house" films like *The Bat* (1926, dir. Roland West), *The Cat and the Canary* (1927, dir. Paul Leni), and *The Old Dark House* (1932, dir. James Whale). Similarly, Chapter 2 discusses how the American aversion to specters resulted in a proliferation of haunted comedies, replete with faux spirits, that principally spanned the period from the 1910s to the 1950s. Chapter 3 moves the discussion into more explicitly supernatural terrain with its analysis of the gothic romance genre, which in the 1930s and '40s combined aspects of the "woman's picture" with the haunted house thriller. Examples of these eerie romances include William Wyler's 1939 adaptation of *Wuthering Heights*, Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940), the spectacular gothic melodrama *Dragonwyck* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1946), and a more contemporary revival of the genre, Guillermo del Toro's *Crimson Peak* (2015).

In Chapter 4, Meehan explores the classical period of anglophone haunted house cinema, an epoch which spans the 1940s through to the 1980s. As Meehan persuasively argues it was only in the 1940s, with the success of Paramount Pictures' *The Uninvited* (1944, dir. Lewis Allen) that the phantasmagoric began to penetrate mainstream anglophone cinema. Even then, though, *The Uninvited* was something of an outlier and it was not until the 1960s—an era marked by a growing interest in the occult and a shift away from traditional religiosity—that the supernatural haunted house film would bloom in the United States and Britain, with films like *The Innocents* (1961, dir. Jack Clayton), *The Haunting* (1963, dir. Robert Wise) and *Rosemary's Baby* (1968, dir. Roman Polanski) all being produced during that tumultuous decade. Chapter 4 also charts the development of the haunted house film through the 70s and into the 80s where it would reach new heights and solidify into a recognizable horror subgenre with iconic works like *The Shining* (1980, dir. Stanley Kubrick) and *Poltergeist* (1982, dir. Tobe Hooper). The following chapter expands this discussion of the mid-twentieth-century haunted house by broadening

its analytical scope to include the B-movies of iconic schlock director William Castle and the innovative gothic works produced in Italy during this period.

Chapter 6 is perhaps the most absorbing chapter in the book as Meehan dedicates the entire section to one of horror cinema's most fascinating and enduring tropes: the "based on a true story" film. Investigating a wide array of films purportedly based on real events, including *The Amityville Horror* (1979, dir. Stuart Rosenberg), *The Entity* (1982, dir. Sidney J. Furie) and *The Conjuring* series (various, 2013-present), Meehan explores the often porous boundary between fact and fantasy that defines such films. The book's final chapter features an analysis of the twenty-first-century haunted house film that questions how new technology and computer-generated effects might allow filmmakers to reimagine spectrality for a new age. The chapter also incorporates a brief examination of the West's turn-of-the-millennium fascination with Japanese horror cinema (J-horror) and explores how these films merge folkloric representations of spirits with contemporary technological anxieties. The book closes with a brief conclusion featuring a synopsis of key arguments and concerns.

Paul Meehan's *The Haunted House on Film* is a comprehensive and ambitious overview of uncanny homes in cinema. Meehan is a creative scholar who constantly challenges our understanding of what constitutes a haunted house while consistently pushing against accepted generic categorizations that would, traditionally, see these edifices consigned to the realm of horror. Meehan carefully and diligently illustrates the ubiquity of the haunted house as a cinematic trope in genres as ostensibly diverse as comedy, romance, and mystery. Furthermore, as a critic, Meehan has a firm grasp of cinematic techniques and their capacity to complement narrative and thematic concerns. His discussion of Jack Clayton's *The Innocents*, for example, stresses cinematographer Freddie Francis's exploitation of deep focus to create a surrealistic, often claustrophobic atmosphere. That said, there are some minor oversights and typos peppered throughout the book. For instance, the author regularly refers to "Charlotte Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*" and "Emily Bronte's *Jane Eyre*," confusing the sisters' most well-known works. Nonetheless, Meehan's book is generally well-researched, and the reader senses that such errors could have been avoided with more careful proofreading or a greater degree of editorial oversight. Similarly, the book is largely descriptive in tone, and while it might provide a good starting point for teachers, researchers, and fans, there is little in the way of rigorous academic analysis. This is unfortunate because Meehan clearly knows his subject very well and puts forward numerous fascinating insights

throughout his study: his discussion of the dearth of ghosts in early haunted house films and the cultural contexts informing this conspicuous absence is particularly astute.

Readers may find themselves somewhat disappointed that Meehan fails to develop these analytical perspectives more fully as they serve to expand our understanding of the films discussed and deepen our appreciation of the haunted house's evolving representational forms. Ultimately, *The Haunted House on Film* is a comprehensive study that demonstrates a nuanced understanding of how haunted homes marry the familiar and the strange, while providing the reader with a well-researched synopsis of the trope's evolution across a century of cinema.

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Nochimson, Martha P. *Television Rewired: The Rise of the Auteur Series*. U Texas P, 2019

In *Television Rewired: The Rise of the Auteur Series*, author Martha P. Nochimson documents the explosive shift away from formulaic plot lines, and toward a new (for television, anyway) auteur expression. She credits the creative vision of David Lynch's 1990 television series *Twin Peaks* as "our portal to auteur television and a new aesthetics of mass-media storytelling" (1). *Television Rewired* also examines television that successfully (or not) followed *Twin Peaks* through this portal and created their own vision of auteur worldbuilding. Having authored eight previous books on television and film, done a stint in television writing, and taught a course on the oeuvre of Lynch at the David Lynch Graduate School of Creative Arts, Nochimson establishes her expertise as the foundation for her solid, but accessible, insights into the process of auteur television expression.

At first, I felt put off by what I read as Nochimson's judgmental attitude toward the formulaic narratives of early television plotlines. Her opinion clashed with my own memories of these shows and, I will admit, some of my present choices. I absorbed the lessons in *The Andy Griffith Show*, and the fledgling feminism in *I Love Lucy*. At first, Nochimson seemed to diminish my love of passive television viewing. Yes, the "perfect hero" of the narrative unrealistically tied up every loose end. I understood this, but I enjoyed escaping into the "reality" of *L.A. Law* for an hour.

My first impression changed by the time I finished reading the introduction. Nochimson's criticism is not disdainful of the medium. She respects the potential of television to become an art form. Having worked within the confines of formulaic television, she "was troubled by a strong sense that [she] had the vocabulary for speaking of formula in television, but not enough vocabulary for speaking of television that breaks free of it" (17). *Television Rewired* relates Nochimson's journey as she learns the vocabulary by immersing herself in conversations with auteur television writers.

Nochimson states the evolution of auteur television began with the 1990 premiere of *Twin Peaks*. Previous shows tried to break the formulaic mold with plots that discussed rape, poverty, or the Women's Liberation movements, yet the strong main character who tied up all the loose ends by the end of the episode remained. Nochimson believes one reason *Twin Peaks* succeeded was due to David Lynch's creativity, but this would not be enough to usher in a new age of television viewing. The popularity of *Twin Peaks* proved the public was ready for something else, and Lynch was able to provide it. High ratings meant there was room for auteur storytelling in the line-up of popular television. In subsequent chapters Nochimson discusses the effect this had on the future of television series narratives from the 1990s until his return to television in 2017 with *Twin Peaks: The Return*.

Nochimson successfully articulates this effect by explaining "the why" of modern television narratives. Nochimson explains Lynch opened up formulaic formula into a modern vehicle that "portrays human life as a voyage into fear and wonder, sometimes branching out into the part of surrealism that overlaps psychology and physics, sometimes branching into the mysteries of philosophical and sociological relativism" (7). For me, this describes my experience with the writing of David Lynch, David Chase, and David Simon. Watching *Twin Peaks*, *The Sopranos*, or *The Wire* became a different entertainment experience from the one I was used to. I rooted for Lucy as she tried to convince Ricky she wanted to



work at his club, I listened to Andy's heart-to-heart talks with Opie. However, watching Tony and Carmela interact was something different, but I could not explain the impact I felt. Reading how Nochimson learned the language of auteur television helped me to better articulate what this "something different" is. The main characters of formulaic writing remain Dale Cooper, Tony Soprano, or Jimmy McNulty, but they are not in charge of the narrative. The auteur writers are creating a "grand narrative" rather than episodes. Nochimson spoke to David Simon, creator of *The Wire*, at length about moving away from a "unified narrative" about the Boston he wanted to write about: "He had to invent a narrative form reflecting the 'tangle' of people and systems that he saw with his own eyes...He had to invent a non-formulaic narrative that would make us reject false, simplistic answers that had no bearing on the immediacy of the city. He evolved *collage narrative*" (94, italics mine).

Collage narratives do not contain the perfect, problem-solving main character who solves all the problems. In fact, the plot depends on the flaws of the main character to tell the story. Even more important, the characters never rise above, become cured, or succeed despite their imperfect natures. The collage is more like real life, but Nochimson never uses the terms "real" or "reality." It is important to remember that while the form details the real complexities of life, it remains a created narrative. She explains it is the collaboration of writing, acting, lighting, music, and blocking that solidifies into an auteur artform of television storytelling.

The popularity of this form continued to influence other series writers after *Twin Peaks*, *The Sopranos*, and *The Wire*, but Nochimson discusses a trend toward "a matter of form divorced from function" that she calls "Formula 2.0" (210). Nochimson respects the series *Treme*, *Mad Men*, and *Girls* because they stay true to the form of the grand narrative. There are loose ends and questions at the end, but we have a better understanding of their world. She discusses that even though some newer series study complex relationships (*Masters of Sex*) with "A trace of cutting-edge storytelling" (the reboot of *The X-Files*), the formulaic structure remains. Many of the newer series "delight in playing with special effects, inventive framing, and trendy editing" (211), but continue to depend on the problem-solving skills of a main character to create closure within a plot of "smooth interlocking pieces of a puzzle" (212).

After reading *Television Rewired*, I learned a new vocabulary for television viewing. The book is not a judgment of what is good or bad. Nochimson expanded my appreciation for television by explaining exactly what it is I am watching.

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Perez, Maya, and Barbara Morgan, eds. *On Story: The Golden Ages of Television*. U Texas P, 2018.

Fans of PBS' *On Story* will no doubt enjoy this collection of interview transcripts compiled by Maya Perez and Barbara Morgan. Even if readers have not seen the series featuring on-stage interviews with Hollywood's leading writers and producers conducted at the Austin Film Festival, they will find a connection with this text. By focusing on some of the biggest hits of comedy and drama from the past few decades, readers will be familiar with most, if not all, of the shows. These programs are part of our lives, so we cannot help but connect with the content.

From *The Dick van Dyke Show* to *Orange is the New Black*, from *the X-Files* to *Breaking Bad*, the book shares stories from celebrated writers like the late, great Carl Reiner, Jenji Kohan, Chris Carter, and Vince Gilligan about how their shows developed, the challenges each faced, and lessons learned from years of struggle before finding success. The result is intimate insight that feels akin to a one-on-one conversation with legendary talents who share wisdom about Hollywood's grinding cycle of phone calls, meetings, and rejections.

First and foremost, this is a book about writing. Although its specific focus is writing series television scripts, anyone who has ever struggled to put word on paper will find inspiration. Many of these legendary creators articulate the passion required for successful writing. "Writing is it," says Carl Reiner. "You're alone with a pencil or typewriter and an empty piece of page. It's like getting lost in the woods and finding your way out" (51). During his 2004 interview, the late Garry Shandling – a man known for profound humor – explores the genesis, development, and process for successful writing in strikingly serious terms. *Lost* co-creator Damon Lindelof acknowledges the thrill of hitting one's stride after creating quality work, only to recognize art's fickle nature: "The first time you experience it, you have the hubris to think you're never going to miss a shot again, and then that goes away. So, the next time it happens, you realize that it's fleeting, and you cherish it all the more" (107).

Characters and collaboration are common themes across interviews. Many of the creators note that characters should drive television writing; be true to the

characters, they advise, and focused, quality stories will likely follow. Many of the writers also believe that a collaborative process is required for successful storytelling. They take us into the “writers’ room,” a creative space where pitches are made, stories are developed, and writing staffs feed off the energy of colleagues to produce scripts. “Most of the time,” *Better Call Saul*’s Peter Gould says of the writers’ room, “it’s a fun place to be, but there are moments when it feels like being stranded in a sequestered jury” (179). *Rectify*’s Ray McKinnon acknowledges, however, that solitude still has value: “I’ve discovered most writers aren’t people who should be in a room for long periods of time with anybody, much less other people who shouldn’t be in a room with people” (137).

One of the most enjoyable aspects of the collection are the inside stories giving readers behind-the-scenes anecdotes of what led to some of the most memorable episodes of these iconic series. Alec Berg provides some of the book’s best laugh-out-loud moments when he recounts experiences with the hit shows *Curb Your Enthusiasm* and *Seinfeld*. We learn how Michael J. Fox came to be cast in a *Curb Your Enthusiasm* episode in which Larry David’s character has a confusing encounter with a Parkinson’s patient, and details behind the *Seinfeld* episode in which Jerry dated a gymnast while Kramer battled a kidney stone. We also get a gem of an anecdote from *New Girl*’s Elizabeth Meriwether, who shares the winding path her show traveled to land Prince as an episode’s guest star.

Another recurring theme throughout the book is fandom. *X-Files* creator Chris Carter notes it would be unrealistic to focus too much on buzz from legions of fans dedicated to their favorite shows and characters, but he also describes how feedback from one specific fan shaped his series’ final episode. *Lost*’s Damon Lindelof offers another perspective, discussing how fans allow creators to determine whether storylines are working. The fans, he notes, are a gauge that can change a program’s course.

Male voices dominate the text, accounting for 71% of interviews; however, this is more an indictment of Hollywood than a criticism of Perez and Morgan. The editors do an admirable job of including diverse voices. An equal number of male and female writers are included in the comedy section, but men dominate dramas. This underscores the idea that the entertainment industry has work to do opening doors for female leaders in dramatic programming. There are a few interviews with Black and Asian writers and some who identify as LGBTQ+. Some readers may wish to see more diverse representation, but ultimately the book arguably does a better job of inclusion than Hollywood on most days.

This book features something for everyone. Pop culture fans will enjoy the inside stories about their favorite programs; details about casting, relationships, and story development are often as entertaining as the shows themselves. Writers will draw inspiration from the creative processes used and challenges faced by the biggest names in the business. Scholars will appreciate the contribution the interviews make to our study of television. These transcripts allow the reader to see moments of human failings and success that we can all relate to. We see the self-doubt that comes from the creative process and the thrill of success when it finally arrives. We can relate to the fear of acting alone and the growth that comes from teamwork. We see value in learning from past mistakes and recognizing growth. In the end, these revered writers' stories offer guidance for finding our own success.

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Rehak, Bob. *More Than Meets the Eye: Special Effects and the Transmedia Franchise*. NYU Press, 2018.

For fans of fantasy film and television, special effects (SPFX) are part and parcel to the enjoyment of the genre. Yet it is all too easy to apprehend these effects as technological feats spontaneously materializing through the genius of a few auteurs or SPFX teams for each film or franchise. Bob Rehak's book, *More Than Meets the Eye: Special Effects and The Transmedia Franchise*, complicates this problematic assumption by thoroughly illuminating the otherwise hidden life cycles and migrational flows of these special effects. While Rehak grounds his study in the close examination of a few of the most prominent transmedia franchises, cases that bridge the late analog to the early digital eras (*Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, *The Matrix*, etc.), the discussion is ultimately much wider ranging and more theoretically engaged than an analysis of these franchises' special effects might suggest on its surface.

Rehak's book departs from the question, "what might be missing from our critical understanding of contemporary special effects?" (2). In the introduction, Rehak suggests we need to see "past the state of the art" and introduces numerous conceptual tools to aid in this new view. Drawing on the seminal influence of Christian Metz, Rehak establishes special effects as discursive constructs and not merely technological or industrial acts. Thus, for Rehak, "the way we choose to

describe them profoundly shapes what we understand them to be” (7). One of the core analytical values orienting this study is its movement beyond questions of the successfulness, realism, or seamlessness of technique in the history of SPFX, instead focusing on the history of how images were produced, from pre-visualization (aka previz) through production, and then to continue to track their circulation and discursive afterlives. Rehak is not interested in passing judgment on the relative effectiveness of analog vs. digital SPFX either, but rather in seeing how they are fundamentally inseparable. A focus on the “chain of evidence” is also a central theoretical tool deployed here to better understand, and extend, what Rehak views as somewhat limited existing scholarly discussions of SPFX, complicating over-simplified origin stories of “groundbreaking” images and effects and instead view them as a much more complicated historical process of gradual evolution and migration of industrial practices and images.

In Chapter 1, the first of four case studies commences, with Rehak considering the emergence and evolution of the *Star Trek* storyworld from the 1960s into the 1970s. Rehak’s discussion of the role of what he labels “design networks” in objects and imagery across the *Trek* universe is more far reaching and complex than people might realize, involving an “open-source universe” which results in a “contested zone of manufacture in which labels like professional and amateur, authorized and unauthorized, legitimate and illegitimate roil in perpetual flux” (31). I appreciate how, in this chapter, Rehak’s discussion of *Trek* complicates the distinction between special effects and nonspecial effects, as an industrial logic related to cost savings, reproducibility, and production logics. Additionally, one of the more important scholarly interventions of this chapter is to privilege “object practices” over “textual practices,” something that has been under-emphasized in other studies of special effects (58). Lastly, Rehak establishes some key wider truths of transmedia franchises in general here—namely, that they operate at “scales and durations exceeding traditional categories of film and television studies” (70).

Chapter 2 is a logical counterpoint to Chapter 1, presenting a contrast between two major fantasy franchises, *Trek* and *Star Wars*—one fundamentally “co-creative,” the other strictly controlled from the helm by George Lucas. Perhaps the most important point to come across here is not just the central role of previz to the development of the *Star Wars* storyworld, but also the problematic role of previz in Lucas wielding unprecedented creative control over the franchise and its future. This discussion is important, on the one hand, because it demonstrates how much credit should go to Ralph McQuarrie’s previz paintings for determining the overall

look and feel of the franchise. On the other hand, this example demonstrates how previz functioned for Lucas as a means of locking down creative control and limiting the appearance of co-authorship. By theorizing previz, Rehak's goal is to extend the scholarly discussion beyond those more neat, classifiable pieces that academics tend to focus on: the director, the screenwriter, the finished film/text itself. Essential to this analytical angle is the critique of the idea of the auteur as a problematic category which serves essentially to preserve the "orderly cosmology of creation" (84). This chapter could potentially change how the average person views George Lucas's role in the franchise, for example, in its discussion of *Star Wars* animatics (moving storyboards) drawn from old WWII movies—an interesting point of argument going some way toward debunking the originality myth of the director's "vision" through which we might all-too-conveniently view the franchise.

Chapter 3 shifts away from focusing on any one franchise, instead looking at the history of augmented performances, as an important vehicle for discussing the intersection of analog and digital modes of production. As with other chapters, Rehak tries to steer away from the more ideological bent that prior discussion of the topic of "synthespians" has taken; the tension between the "real" and the "artificial," or technology vs. performer debate in screen performance. This chapter delves into the history of augmented performance, including a discussion of the stop motion animation used in the original *King Kong*, to the creation of monsters in the horror and sci-fi genres of the 1950s, before moving on to digital performance in the 1990s. A discussion of Gollum in Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* films serves as a key case for thinking about the problematic category of authenticity in screen performance. Rehak submits, "my assertion that augmented performance has always been 'real' can be inverted to argue that 'real' performance has always been artificial" (146).

In the final chapter, Rehak charts the migrational path and lifespan of a specific special effect, "bullet time" from *The Matrix* franchise, until its eventual decline from overuse. This is different than the other chapters because it tackles the idea that the "look" of an effect is in some ways now more important than questions of the technological method. Importantly, Rehak, as with so many other points of discussion in this book, is able to contextualize particular special effects within a longer historical timeline, highlighting important aesthetic and technological antecedents, so we avoid falling into the trap of an ahistorical fetishizing of technological triumphs or cult of personality aggrandizing of auteurs like the

Wachowskis. One key way Rehak accomplishes this is by carefully tracing the technical and creative antecedents to the “bullet time” effect, as a range of different “frozen time” SPFX emerged in the 1980s, well before *The Matrix* franchise.

While there is an obvious timeliness to this study, given the SPFX-dependent franchises now dominating Hollywood, Rehak’s text is in constant conversation with the wider fields of genre studies, media history, convergence culture, and transmedia archaeologies—both challenging and affirming them—making it an important contribution on theoretical grounds alone. *More Than Meets the Eye* is an important example of a much broader sort of critical inquiry of SPFX, one that considers the present state of digital SPFX in constant view of their direct analog antecedents, getting beyond facile discussions of the state of the art and technological breakthrough. While Rehak wants to highlight the technological history of special effects development, he avoids over-focusing on them to the exclusion of other vital pieces of historical evidence. As he puts it, he is wary of a “technological folklore friendly to the industry,” disputing the revolutionary nature of digital visual effects, or that the emergence of CGI somehow spells the end of an “authentic cinema” (149).

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Reinhard, CarrieLynn D. *Fractured Fandoms: Contentious Communication in Fan Communities*. Lexington, 2018.

Fandom is becoming more toxic. Or at least the media is becoming aware of the toxic nature of fan communities. From the hate levelled at *Star Wars* actor John Boyega to the racism enacted by *Drag Race* fans and the misogyny aimed at *The Last of Us Part II* actress Laura Bailey, the last 12 months have seen scores of fracturing and dissolving fan communities. Interest in the “dark” side of fandom within cultural studies has been on the rise, and this is certainly an area in need of deeper interrogation. CarrieLynn D. Reinhard’s *Fractured Fandoms* thus comes at an opportune time and its analysis of toxic fan behavior through the lens of communication studies offers an alternative way of approaching this object of study.

Reinhard opens with quotes from three fans and this sets the tone for the rest of the book. Fan voices are centralized in each of the chapters, and with over 100 fans

interviewed for the book Reinhard has access to a wide range of stories from fans in different fandoms, countries, and stages of life. This enables her to thoroughly document the experiences of fans from different communities. Although each fan's story is different, the book is structured to highlight the similarities between each one. Chapter 1 lays out what fandom and fans are as well as tracing the history of fan studies. It also defines fractured fandom as "manifesting from and being exacerbated by communication problems" (15). These communication problems are further defined in Chapter 2, where Reinhard examines the five issues that lie at the heart of these communication problems: misunderstanding, defensiveness, differences of opinion, power plays, and boundary policing. Both chapters are populated with stories from fans detailing their experiences, which take place on- and offline. Much work within fan studies focuses on the digital – partly because this allows scholars easy access to current issues – and thus the inclusion of stories such as Nina (who was attacked in a game store), Bea (who witnessed a fan trying repeatedly to get onstage at a Liza Minelli concert), and Ileana (who was bullied while cosplaying at a *Doctor Who* convention) sit alongside those of Twitter flame wars, cyberbullying, and online harassment. Although this focus on offline fractures is an important analysis, Reinhard's skill lies in demonstrating that the division between on- and offline behavior is not as marked as perhaps we may think. Nina discussed being physically attacked and was subsequently harassed, receiving hate mail and death threats. Bea's experience of another fan taking away from her concert experience is discussed alongside digital power plays in an online Italian *Star Wars* community.

Many of the experiences discussed in *Fractured Fandoms* are negative and had long-lasting impacts on the fans involved. Reinhard examines these impacts, which include emotional, mental, physical, behavioral, and social, as well as the overlaps between the different kinds of harms. This affords the reader the opportunity to understand just how long fans' negative experiences can stay with them and affect their life—both fannish and otherwise. Although there is a focus on negative experiences, as would be expected in a book on fractured fandom, Reinhard also illustrates the positives that can come from these harms. Once again utilizing fans' experiences, she highlights how the presence of a negative does not preclude something positive coming from it, a more balanced approach than the sometimes black and white thinking of "fandom is beautiful" and "fandom is toxic."

There are, however, some limits to the communication studies approach Reinhard takes. She suggests that "if communication problems lie at the heart of



these fractures, then hopefully improving communication can resolve the problems that occur or prevent them from occurring in the first place” (14). Yet in many cases it is not communication (or lack of) which causes the problem. It is underlying politics, philosophies, or morals, which are much harder to resolve. If one fan genuinely believes that same sex relationships are abhorrent it seems unlikely that changing communication practices within the fandom will fundamentally change that fan’s view. Reinhard acknowledges this to an extent, recognizing that “ideology can make people avoid communicating with others they may consider less than human” (106), but suggests that “overall, the fan collective’s self-policing represents the best tactic for handling harassment” (109). Given the many issues outlined in the book, relying on fan communities to self-police is perhaps too optimistic. Indeed, examining how fans attempted to resolve fractures found that many fans decided to shut down communication to bring an end to the issue.

Chapter 9 offers some suggestions for improving communication skills, suggesting that increased communication literacy could allow fans to “enter these situations and address the communication problems and power dynamics to potentially prevent the fractured fandom from occurring, or resolve the problem after it occurs” (182). Of course, this relies on the fans doing the work to then engage with fans who are not doing the work, and seems to bring us back to the problem we currently see in toxic fandom: those people who hold racist, homophobic, misogynistic, or other undesirable views are unlikely to change regardless of whom they talk to. As much as hearing from fans who have experienced negativity within fandom is valuable to the field, hearing from those who have enacted that negativity would prove a useful counterpoint, particularly when thinking about the communication processes that enable fractured fandoms and potentials for resolving them.

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Taylor, T. L. *Watch Me Play: Twitch and the Rise of Game Live Streaming*. U Princeton P, 2018.

True to its role as the first monograph about game live streaming, sociologist T.L. Taylor’s *Watch Me Play: Twitch and the Rise of Game Live Streaming* functions as both an introduction to and justification for live streaming research. While

ultimately drawn toward incredibly valuable questions of labor, user-generated content, usage and monetization rights, and the transformative work of game live streaming communities, *Watch Me Play* is an accessible text that both legitimizes academic inquiry into live streaming and provides a concrete base from which to build. Taylor uses comprehensible language to explain nuanced practices from gaming, legal, academic, and financial contexts, making this book useful for academics and students, as well as consumers, producers, streamers, and designers.

The emerging network of platforms, media forms, and communication methods orbiting game live streaming might seem hopelessly complex for those unfamiliar with streaming or gaming. As Taylor describes throughout the text, one of the greatest hurdles in studying and critically discussing live streaming as a media practice is that the global gaming community, for all its interconnectedness, is largely inaccessible. From exclusionary jargon and entrenched discriminatory practices to the material constraints of needing access to the internet and expensive hardware, engaging in game live streaming communities as a spectator or streamer has high barriers for participation. As a result, reading the cultural practice critically as an academic might feel daunting. That said, one of *Watch Me Play*'s greatest strengths is in its accessibility and inclusivity in the face of these barriers. Taylor weaves her personal experiences within the game live streaming community with her academic and alt-ac work in eSports, making the text useful for those unfamiliar with the basics of game live streaming and professional streamers alike. As a result, *Watch Me Play* feels like a necessary read for any interdisciplinary scholar interested in the confluence of media practices and the emergence of new media forms.

Taylor presents the findings and conclusions from her fieldwork and extensive background in internet studies across six chapters. The topics range from tracing the origins of game live streaming, to a deep dive into streamers and their communities. Chapter 1 introduces the idea of game live streaming by dispelling the common misconception that live streaming came out of nowhere. Rather, as Taylor explains, the act of publicly sharing what was once private play serves as a natural extension of our networked media environment. Moreover, the rapid growth and professionalization of game live streaming signals a broader cultural interest in participatory media that closes the gap between creators and spectators. Importantly, Taylor emphasizes that “game live streaming should not be seen as an unencumbered or utopic story of the triumph of grassroots engagement,” considering the space’s longstanding exclusion of marginalized peoples (258).

*Watch Me Play* could be divided into three major parts. The first two chapters provide theoretical and practical foundations in television, new media, internet, and network studies that can pave the way toward understanding the origins and future of live streaming. In the first chapter, “Broadcasting Ourselves,” Taylor details her experience noticing live streaming for the first time – a casual encounter with an early Twitch.tv broadcast of a *StarCraft* tournament in Paris – followed by a deep fascination with the phenomenon. As Taylor explains throughout Chapter 1, her fieldwork here consisted of observing Twitch broadcasts and the ongoing chat as a spectator and behind the scenes of a live broadcast, interviewing streamers and industry workers, learning how to broadcast her own gameplay, and engaging with archived media. Naturally, Taylor’s inquiry into the development of game live streaming necessitates a focus on this emergent media’s origins. In Chapter 2 (“Networked Broadcasting”), Taylor further situates game live streaming as a natural answer to established media institutions in the post-network era.

Chapters 3 and 4 dive into the complexities of game live streaming. Taylor primarily focuses on the streamers and associated media industries but acknowledges the powerful role of audiences for both streamers and producers. In “Home Studios” (Chapter 3), Taylor focuses on the experiences and production practices of individual streamers. This extensive study of live streamers and the intersections of play, labor, and broadcasting ultimately positions platforms like Twitch as hubs for “a new form of media labor” (133). Given her 2012 intervention in eSports studies, *Raising the Stakes*, Taylor’s subsequent discussion of eSports broadcasting feels like a natural progression. Chapter 4 (“Esports Broadcasting”) relies extensively on interviews with eSports players, producers, and broadcasters. In addition to an extended conversation about eSports business models and a brief discussion of the industry’s emergence, this chapter furthers the text’s earlier conversation about the relationship between live streaming and television.

In the final two chapters, Taylor addresses continuing concerns about invisible or precarious labor, inequity between streamers and regulatory entities, and other issues related to play and labor. These chapters introduce some of the most urgent needs for live streaming research: equitable regulatory practices that acknowledge the transformative work of users and players performing free labor. Taylor firmly contends that “game communities are avid, dynamic interlocutors with the systems that they engage” (237). Yet while Taylor and others read these communities as actively transforming media objects, therefore complicating complaints about copyright infringement, the massive corporate bodies at play in the gaming and

game live streaming industries often disagree. Nevertheless, the streamers Taylor interviewed continually reference the way that their labor—the process of streaming a game developed by someone else for a community of players they have drawn on a platform they use but do not own—transforms the original game object into something else: a stream, not a game. These closing chapters demonstrate different, sometimes conflicting views of ownership and copyright within the broad game live streaming community and the network of regulatory bodies that circumscribe it.

Largely due to the contemporary nature of the subject, *Watch Me Play* provides a frank, critical venture into studying an emerging media form wherein the fascination stems in part from watching the media form and its practitioners grow and evolve. However, beyond the immediate value of a primer on live streaming for those not familiar with the practice, one of this book's greatest strengths is its clear call to action for researchers across disciplines. Indeed, Taylor implores that researchers across disciplines must “take games seriously as a site of valuable empirical data and knowledge creation, and see games as now a decidedly central part of our media, networked, and sociotechnical landscape” (10-11). Taylor repeatedly seeks to include imagined colleagues across digital media disciplines in and out of the Humanities, encouraging interest in both live streaming as a phenomenon and as the most recent collision of exigent media forms to flourish into a media environment of its own.

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Webley, Stephen J. and Peter Zackariasson, eds. *The Playful Undead and Video Games: Critical Analyses of Zombies and Gameplay*. Routledge, 2019.

Zombie studies are a vibrant discipline at the intersection of horror, film, and game studies. They form a distinct cluster within more general monster studies, the subject matter of which spans from ancient compounds of legendary creatures to contemporary video games. In *The Playful Undead and Video Games: Critical Analyses of Zombies and Gameplay*, eighteen authors explore influences from all

kinds of media on the well-established zombie survival genre to find out what makes zombies preferred “chainsaw fodder” in video games.

The legacy of film director George A. Romero is the first source of inspiration and a basis for further comparison. Stephen B. Webley, the editor of the collection, shares his love for the “Romeroesque” twice: in the editorial and in the final chapter. In this way, he starts and then summarizes the discussion of social and political issues that figuratively brought zombies to life. In between, Brandon Kempner and Michael Epp perform two common but distinct interpretations of capitalism critique that originally lurks from Romero’s films and bleeds into next generations of zombie-themed media. Then, Eugen Pfister analyzes *The Last of Us* as a comment on American democracy, and notices: “The zombie myth in the twentieth century may have begun with a sociopolitical and cultural critique... Today, however, zombies function increasingly as a brand” (217). Even if killing zombies makes us feel like we are fighting capitalism, in fact we have already supported its primary cultural industry when we purchased the game.

As an alternative, Vanessa L. Haddad offers a psychoanalytic explanation of zombie fighting. According to her, it embodies the tension between Eros and Thanatos: love, aggression, and death. Altogether, there are many different interpretations in the book to choose: for example, the literary scholar Mitchell C. Lilly argues that zombies are responsible for uncertainty and unpredictability (151), while Bernard Perron, a horror game researcher, sees them as inherently predictable (199).

Perron and Kristine Jørgensen, both established game studies scholars, provide two comprehensive introductions to the history and culture of zombies in games. Perron looks into common tropes such as the straight arms of “videoludic undead.” Jørgensen stresses once again that not all zombie games are horror games, and not all undead people in horror games are zombies. Mythologies of the world are populated with the folkloric undead, such as the mythical Icelandic “draugr,” to whom Penny de Byl refers in her chapter on *Skyrim*, or the Japanese “shibito” —a very particular kind of the legendary uncanny explored by Madelon Hoedt. These former humans can think for themselves, while a self-aware and reasonable zombie is a transgression. The unique position of a zombie as the ultimate Other paves the way to queering it by making it a player character, as Tanja Sihvonon argues.

Interdisciplinary studies become even more productive as more disciplines merge. Matthew Barton turns to comics studies when he disentangles the visual language of *The Walking Dead* franchise. Alan McGreevy offers his expertise in

microbiology and explains, together with Christina Fawcett, how *Resident Evil* medicalizes the undead. Finally, Timothy A. Wiseman reviews the history of zombies and the copyright law. He explains how a failure in copyright protection has led to their current proliferation in media. Without this mistake, "...zombies in video games may never have arisen in the way we know them today" (249).

Zombies are a very convenient enemy for game designers and developers. In fact, their slow pace, lack of coordination, and complete absence of strategic reasoning reflects the current state of AI in games. To provide a professional perspective from the industry, Matthew Barr presents the results of interviews with 20 game designers who worked on a variety of zombie games, from *The Walking Dead* series to the early Ukrainian classic *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*

To gamers, a zombie massacre is a guilty pleasure without guilt: zombies do not think, do not feel, and do not hesitate to kill any human within their reach. However, Adam Chapman warns us against taking the "Nazi zombies" at face value: out of the historical context, it is too similar to the usual dehumanized depictions of enemies in war propaganda. "There is... a banality to the evil of the zombie," he writes, referring to Hannah Arendt (52). Indeed, going a bit further than the scope of this book, I can attest that the "Nazi zombies" were in fact invented by the Soviets, as WWII posters clearly show. This may become another groundbreaking topic for future research informed and inspired by *The Playful Undead*.

The only notable issue with the book is that we just cannot get enough of zombies. There are 18 chapters in this middle-sized, 276-page publication, and some of them feel abrupt and inconclusive. Their authors would benefit a lot from just a bit more space to develop their arguments. Hilariously, the name of the philosopher Georgi Agamben is misspelled as "Amamgen" in the last chapter. This is a minor problem, but we might wonder how small things like this could happen to a publication that costs over \$150 in hardcover. Finally, it might be a stretch to state that "the draugr of Old Icelandic mythology has... a history as rich as that of his Haitian counterpart" (68). While the authentic Norse mythology has been profoundly developed and well documented at least as early as in the twelfth century, zombies as we know them are a product of Western colonialism, and they are at least five times younger. Other than that, *The Playful Undead* provides an indispensable groundwork for further explorations of zombies in games. It takes its readers along a wide array of safe pathways across horrific imaginary worlds. Such

guided tours are even more important now, when the real world has come dangerously close to the fictional image of a zombie apocalypse.

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Wiggins, Bradley E. *The Discursive Power of Memes in Digital Culture: Ideology, Semiotics, and Intertextuality*. Routledge, 2019.

Media scholars tend to take small, relatively inconsequential things, and by using dense academic language, make them seem far more important than they are. Internet memes – the pictures, the gifs, the remixes of popular culture, the inside jokes passed throughout social media – could be one such topic. In the grand scheme of things, what impact did the death of Harambe, the Cincinnati Zoo gorilla who was shot in 2016 and quickly became an internet meme, really have on most people’s lives? (The book reviewed here is dedicated to him, so perhaps some impact). Thankfully, in his new book *The Discursive Power of Memes in Digital Culture: Ideology, Semiotics, and Intertextuality*, Bradley Wiggins has taken the low-brow form of communication that is internet memes and expounded on their significance in a way that adds greatly to our understanding of online communication practices.

Many people know that the word “meme” was coined by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins in his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*. Wiggins lays out a case that the Dawkinsian definition of a meme, while important for explaining how things like slogans and song lyrics get repeated ad nauseum in culture, is insufficient for understanding internet memes, which he defines as “a remixed, iterated message that can be rapidly diffused by members of participatory digital culture for the purpose of satire, parody, critique, or any other discursive activity” (11). The function of an internet meme is “to posit an argument, visually, in order to commence, extend, counter, or influence a discourse” (11). Folding in concepts like ideology, semiotics, intertextuality, structuration, hyperreality, and more, Wiggins successfully establishes a theoretical foundation for discussing relatively simple and primitive digital images that can be made and shared by anybody. As someone who teaches visual communications and has a module on memes, I have been looking for a text like this that provides a solid theoretical understanding for talking about this genre of communication. While the messages behind internet memes are

often humorous in intent, the visual argument behind such memes can be quite complex in some cases, setting up premises and leaving conclusions unstated (Wiggins sees the visual *enthymeme* as the backbone of internet memes) in a way that allows the imagined audience to fill in any gaps.

Wiggins often breaks from the theoretical discussions to focus on specific applications, showing how the theory can be used to understand memes related to current events, such as Catalonian secessionism or Russian political interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, as well as memes related to Russia's own presidential election in 2018, among other events. Wiggins is diligent in discussing internet memes outside of a strictly American context; as an American and frequent user of social media myself, I was familiar with many of the memes discussed in this book, but seeing how these memes are used in other cultures shows how this genre of communication can be appropriated in different ways.

The book also spends time overviewing commercial applications of internet memes, such as Geico Insurance's attempt to use the *Numa Numa* video guy in one of their 2009 commercials, five years after the original *Numa Numa* video went live on the website Newgrounds. Approaching these commercial uses of memes through the lens of "the semiotics of cool," Wiggins discusses how such attempts by companies or organizations to capitalize on memes' popularity can backfire with audiences. There is also an interesting legal debate here about whether commercial use of memes falls under the "fair use" clause of copyright law. The chapters on genre and audience are particularly helpful in establishing what is gained by speaking of memes as a genre of communication. The analysis of audience shows how difficult it is to speak of a meme's audience when the meme itself may reach people never intended by the creator, and likewise may never be seen by the intended audience due to the ephemeral nature of social media.

The final chapters on memes as sites for identity construction and memes as art offer some interesting theoretical possibilities, but they have less development and connection with the theoretical foundation laid in the first half of the book, making them feel more tangential than integrated. For example, Wiggins articulates that the Babadook meme, based on a 2014 horror film, has particular affective resonance with the LGBTQ+ community, thus rendering it a tool for constructing one's identity in online spaces, particularly in the aftermath of the 2015 Supreme Court case *Obergefell v. Hodges* which legalized gay marriage in the United States. The challenge with viewing memes as sites for identity construction is that we rarely



know who the authors of memes are, or their intentions, and we have limited understanding of how audiences are reacting to memes or internalizing them.

Wiggins's book is strongest when it focuses on discursive power, the ability of audiences to engage in quite serious discourses using a genre of communication noted for its contradictions: memes are simultaneously silly and serious, simple and complex, deployable by anybody yet often understood only by those in the know. There is a "newness" to this book, focusing on numerous memes popular between 2015-2019, but these examples will quickly fade from people's memories as new memes replace old ones. The theoretical ideas laid out here, though, will hopefully remain impactful well into the next decade.

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