

The *Popular Culture Studies Journal* Reviews: Introduction

CHRISTOPHER J. OLSON

With the rollout of vaccines developed by Moderna, Pfizer, AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson, people can once again engage in communal activities following a year of quarantine, lockdown, and shelter-in-place policies. This is good news for fans of popular culture, as they can once again visit movie theaters, host in-person game nights, attend comic book or sci-fi conventions, and go to mass sporting events.

Yet the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact the popular culture landscape, as it has led to the closing of movie theater chains, affected the long-term growth of various industries, and changed how people gather at mass events. For instance, Decurion Corp., owner of the Arclight Cinemas and Pacific Theaters chains of movie houses, recently announced that they were closing all locations due to their business being “decimated by the pandemic” (McClintock). Likewise, the board game industry, which experienced a 20% growth throughout 2020, now faces new problems caused by the pandemic, including a rapidly aging fanbase, a preference for simple single-player games over complex strategy games, and slower supply chains (Matalucci). The pandemic has also affected large-scale professional wrestling events such as WrestleMania, as fans can gather but only while “masked, in pods, and with limited capacity” (Spata). Thus, it appears as though COVID-19 will have long-term impacts on how people engage with popular culture.

While not covering texts that deal with the pandemic directly, some of the reviews collected in this issue look at books that consider how the popular culture landscape has evolved during the early years of the 21st century. For example, Kailyn Slater of the University of Illinois at Chicago discusses Stuart Cunningham and David Craig’s *Social Media Entertainment: The New Intersection of Hollywood and Silicon Valley*, which explores the new ways that people produce and engage with screen-based entertainment. Meanwhile, Dennis Owen Frohlich of Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania reviews the vital new anthology *Fake News! Misinformation in the Media*, edited by Josh Grimm. This collection offers

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insight into how new communication technologies such as social media have altered our relationship to the very concept of the truth and considers the fallout of this development. Joyleen Christensen of University of Newcastle examines Roxanne Samer and William Whittington's *Spectatorship: Shifting Theories of Gender, Sexuality, and Media*, an edited anthology that collects essays originally appearing in the journal *Spectator*, published the University of Southern California. These essays, spanning more than two decades, offer new perspectives on spectatorship as well as issues regarding gender, sexuality, and media. Janelle Malagon of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee reviews Souvik Mukherjee's *Videogames and Postcolonialism: Empire Plays Back*, which seeks to shine a light on the colonialist aspects of videogames while also pointing to the emerging postcolonial tendencies of games like *Assassin's Creed: Freedom Cry*. Finally, Bethan Jones of Cardiff University looks at Matthew Freeman's *The World of The Walking Dead*, a book that explores a transmedia franchise set in a world forever altered by a zombie apocalypse, but which also illustrates how storytelling has changed since the turn of the millennium. Also included in this issue are reviews of the fourth edition of the landmark anthology *Understanding Video Games: The Essential Introduction*, the monographs *The Power of Sports: Media and Spectacle in American Culture* and *Amazons in America: Matriarchs, Utopians, and Wonder Women in U.S. Popular Culture*, and the video game *Mass Effect Legendary Edition*, which, when taken together, all serve to demonstrate the breadth and variety of 21st century popular culture.

Before ending this introduction, I would like to thank my assistant editor, Sarah Pawlak Stanley, for her invaluable assistance in preparing these reviews for publication. We hope you find these reviews useful. We also hope they inspire you to consider writing a review of a monograph, anthology, film, television series, roleplaying game, or some other popular culture text for the *Popular Culture Studies Journal*. The review section relies on the contributions of reviewers from around the world, and we would like to encourage you to consider becoming one of our reviewers. Our website features [extensive lists of books](#) from various publishers, and we would love to see reviews of any or all these texts in the pages of this journal. More importantly, perhaps, publishers will often send copies of these titles to reviewers free of charge, so writing a review is also an opportunity to build your scholarly library. Therefore, I urge you to visit the site and check out the list to see if any of the titles interest you. Alternately, you can reach out to me via email at olson429@uwm.edu to suggest other titles not on the list, or to pitch ideas

for reviews of films, TV shows, videogames, YouTube series, Twitch streams, or other popular culture texts. We only require a brief paragraph explaining why this text is worthy of review and highlighting its potential usefulness in pedagogical or scholarly situations.

What popular culture exists and how people experience it may be changing, but popular culture will always be fundamental to people's everyday lives. We look forward to sharing more reviews and inspiration for what to study and what to experience for your own enjoyment.

Works Cited

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