

**Popular Culture and  
the Intellectual  
Media Trends and Social Change**

**Edited by**

William P. Huddy and Andrea Marshall

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## List of Contributors

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**Susan Liesenberg** is a journalist with a Master in Communication and Information (UFRGS, 2012), focusing on social networks and new technologies. She is presently finishing her Doctorate on Communication and Consumers Practices at ESPM, São Paulo. Ms. Liesenberg is dedicated to studying celebrity-making on the Internet and the processes of communication energization (linked to buzz and affection agency of web media consumption).

**Andrea R. Marshall** is a PhD candidate at Drexel University's College of Computing and Informatics. She is a digital anthropologist who applies critical pedagogic approaches to STEM learning and studies feminist sociotechnical identity formation within digital geek cultures and modern maker cultures. Her fields of interest include accessibility within design thinking and gendered learning practices in STEM education.

**Kerry McElroy** is a cultural historian of women, film, and performance, currently completing her doctoral thesis on women in Hollywood as classed subjects at Concordia University, Montreal. She is also a freelance writer and author of the Independent magazine series "Bette, Marilyn, and #MeToo: What Studio-Era Actresses Can Teach Us About Economics and Resistance Post-Weinstein." She holds master's degrees from Columbia and Carnegie Mellon Universities.

**Walter Metz** is a Professor in the Department of Cinema and Photography at Southern Illinois University, where he teaches film and television studies. He is the author of three books: *Engaging Film Criticism* (2004), *Bewitched* (2007), and *Gilligan's Island* (2012). His film criticism website can be found at: <http://waltermetz.com>.

**Belinda Middleweek** is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Technology Sydney, Australia. Her research focuses on gender and journalism as well as mediations and technologies of intimacy. She is the co-author of *Real Sex Films: The New Intimacy and Risk in Cinema* (2017).

**Bernardo Palau Cabrera** is a Chilean filmmaker and creative producer with a MA in Media, Television and Cross-media Culture from the University of Amsterdam. He directed a feature film called "Salvarte" ("Saving you"), along with several short films and web-series for different brands. In recent years he has specialized in online video and branded content.

**MJ Robinson** is an Assistant Professor of convergent journalism and media studies and the Bernard H. Stern Professor of Humor at Brooklyn College/CUNY. She is the author of *Television on Demand: Curatorial Culture and the Transformation of Television* (2017). Her current research examines the historical role and effectiveness of televised political satire on political culture and debate.

**Janne Salminen** is a doctoral student at the University of Helsinki. He is currently writing his dissertation on the gender narratives of serialized blockbuster films. While most of his research revolves around gender, his other interests include diversity, popular culture, queer narratives, US politics, technology, and fandom.

**John Tulloch** is Professor Emeritus in Media at Charles Sturt University, Australia and Adjunct Professor in Communication at Newcastle University, Australia. He has a BA in History from Cambridge University, England, an interdisciplinary Masters in the Sociology of Art and Literature and PhD in the Sociology of Theatre at Sussex University, England. His recent books are *Risk and Hypeconnectivity: Media and Memories of Neoliberalism* (2017) and *Real Sex Films: The New Intimacy and Risk in Cinema* (2017).

# Introduction

William P. Huddy and Andrea Marshall

The tensions and oppositions – real or imagined – between ‘high-art’ and ‘popular art’ have been described and analyzed by scholars, intellectuals, and critics for years. Of course, cinema and television productions have not escaped this scrutiny, and more recently, new media as well.

In this edited volume, authors discuss the ever-changing contours of this often-binary debate about the value of mass-market media productions. They also delve into the radical transformations, both in the media industry and in society, that popular culture, critics, industry practitioners, and scholars both study and enable.

Should popular culture be seen in opposition or in complementarity to the progress of a more informed and engaged citizen? Is popular culture intellectual and pedagogical, or pure entertainment? What is its value to society? What is the role of journalists, critics, industry practitioners, and scholars in these endeavors? How has popular culture – manifested in cinema, television, and online – evolved in recent years with a rapidly changing society and technological environment? By asking these questions, the authors of this volume, who are themselves involved in popular culture – as scholars, journalists, critics, etc. – are positioned both as investigators and objects of their investigation.

The book charts a warped course to explore the fluid tensions and pressures, collisions even, between what is popular (hence mere entertainment to keep the masses attention away from key sociopolitical issues) and what is intellectual (and therefore, perhaps, useful to social progress) in television, films, and new media.

The authors of this volume provide both answers and pose new questions, investigating filmmaking, television, journalism and new media through the evolution of their work and the examination of never-ending societal changes.

The book first chapters investigate the current state of filmmaking which continues to reflect the strange contradictions present within the reality of modernity, whilst applying conventional narrational tropes to construct imaginaria that disrupt societal protocols as well as support them. The authors of these chapters apply interdisciplinary approaches to questions of audience participation, film criticism, Hollywood conventionality, iconoclastic characters, gendered critiques, societal change, and most importantly the



opportunities for activism at all levels of filmmaking, film critiques, and film studies. These scholars ask crucial questions about how film can function as a reflexive medium, sentimental propaganda, one extended view of an artist's vision, and finally, a catalyst for sociopolitical change.

Walter Metz's paper *Northrop Frye in Reel Time: Reinventing American Film Criticism* proposes that popular media discussions of films, subject to the whims of the film industry, and academic film criticism, constrained by the disciplinary conventions of Film Studies, have between them an analytical schism. Metz's critical deconstruction of films demonstrates how bridging this gap through the generation of a new type of analysis might find common ground within such discrete domains. To create symbiotic interactions between those who make films and those who write about film and formulate new ways of understanding reflexive perspectives therein, it is crucial for discussions of filmmakers and critics within scholarly and popular domains to occupy the same analytical terrain.

Camila Cornutti Barbosa and Susan Liesenberg seek to extrapolate the messy and multiple narrative contexts that emerge within modern Brazilian film in their paper *Refuse, resist: 'Aquarius' and the cinema of resistance in Brazil*. Filmmaking as critique and commentary are two core themes explored by the authors as they investigate the blurred lines between contemporary Brazil and its cinematic representation in the movie "Aquarius." The authors examine the uproar created by the film's release during the zenith of the political coup d'état in Brazil at the time, and desire to understand how filmmakers, critics, and audiences can converge as "agents articulated with activism." In this instance, the act of viewing the film continues the narrative as a declaration of social activism; depictions of gender, media, economics, politics, and culture exist in a simulacrum that reflects both the civil unrest within Brazil during the film's release and how the film itself contributed to the uproar, refusing and resisting to be silent.

Ian Dixon's *Twisting Fate in Rosemary's Baby: Cassavetes/Polanski Interface as Hollywood Influence* uses John Cassavetes' film "Rosemary's Baby" to demonstrate how his oeuvre defies classification solely as a herald of independent cinematic tropes that include improvisation and cinema vérité. Dixon's analysis uses Braudy's open/closed axiom to highlight the conflict Cassavetes had with Roman Polanski and how, throughout his career, Cassavetes subverted the Hollywood system to create cinematic masterpieces that explored the human condition. Dixon illustrates the opportunity for celebrity and film scholars to apply Cassavetes' revolutionary approach to narratives as an activist strategy to create new conversations and support dynamic critical perspectives.

Kerry McElroy's *The Actress as Activist: Subversion of a Century of Hollywood Misogyny in Five Modes* inquires how social justice activism in film studies can function as a gendered critique of Hollywood as a patriarchal-capitalist apparatus. McElroy employs the methodological approach of social justice historiography to present women's and actresses' authentic experiences within the Hollywood misogynist machine through their own voices. McElroy reveals how women's writings on the gendered discrimination of Hollywood can function as social justice texts, and indeed, how dismantling misconceptions of gendered exploitations within Hollywood is scholarly activism.

Janne Salminen's *Another Day of Sun: The Conservative Gender Politics of Damien Chazelle's Whiplash and La La Land* investigates how heteronormative gender politics within two of Damien Chazelle's films promotes androcentric ideals of white masculinity. Salminen's gendered analyses identify idealized protagonists that are dedicated to the traditional artistic notion of genius as male as well as the narrative journeys of heteronormative white men as characters who are social successes. Salminen's critique situates these ideological constraints to reveal an insistence on rigid and asymmetrical gender roles within these two movies, as well as an emphasis on the white straight male as Everyman trope that is both troubling and reductive. Bridging the gap between heteronormative patriarchal practices and alternative masculinities that are possible within scholarly conversations about modern cinema, Salminen uses feminist approaches to cinematic critique as a frame within which to better understand the conservative sentimentality present within Chazelle's work.

Next, the book moves into the realm of television and new media. The rapid and transformational way we obtain and generate news and other information has had profound sociopolitical impacts. Indeed, the democratization of information dissemination, the rise of reality television, and the shifting boundaries between news and spectacle have created questions about the credibility of information and the value of intellectuals. As a consequence of the transformed citizen participation and media landscape, the prominent role of politicians, scholars, and journalists has been altered.

In that respect, the first chapter of that series by Leocadia Diaz Romero explores the "intertwining of politics and entertainment" in an examination of the *Implications of Political Entertainment Today*. Diaz Romero asks the question: does political entertainment on television enhance or hinder citizens' political involvement and engagement? Moreover, regarding the issue of public trust, she questions whether this new genre is a reliable source of political information. These questions are central, according to many scholars, to the efficacy of working democracies.

Collin Ackerman then critically examines the television series *Teen Mom* (MTV) in his paper *Learning from Young Mothers and Dr. Drew: MTV's Teen Mom as Public Pedagogy*. Ackerman investigates whether the show's cast members could be considered intellectuals, and to what degree the show meets the requirements of public pedagogy. The author points out the "dichotomy between traditional and organic intellectuals" and provides an interesting point-of-view on the impact of popular culture on society.

John Tulloch and Belinda Middleweek examine the role of celebrities and public intellectuals in television coverage. Their paper *Talking of Terror: British Television Intellectuals and Bridging the Gap between Celebrity and Intellectual Culture* brings forth a contrasting public discourse and analysis emanating from the British television series *Atheism*, the documentary series "I Survived," and television news reports produced by British and Dutch journalists. Contained in their research, Tulloch and Middleweek illuminate "institutional constraints" imposed on the media when reporting on terrorist attacks. Their research also relies on the real-world narrative of Professor Tulloch, a survivor of the horrific 7 July 2005 terrorist attacks in London which killed 52 people and injured more than 700.

Aleksandra Krstić brings attention to the role of academics in society and their relationship with television journalists in Serbia. *Expert Crisis or Journalistic Laziness: Bridging the Gaps between Academics and TV Journalists in Serbia* examines key aspects of the gap between academics and journalists, with each group having expectations and perceptions of the other that differ. Furthermore, Krstić points out that academics who 'go public' are criticized by their peers for "betraying their discipline." Yet, many academics think of reaching out to the population through media as their civic duty, but they fail to understand mainstream media requirements. On the other hand, television journalists also do not understand academics. Krstić's research, however, identifies a commonality between academics and journalists: both desire contributions based on knowledge.

The next chapter by MJ Robinson, *Curatorial Culture's Challenge to the Television Critic as Public Intellectual* continues on the topic of television and the rapidly changing media landscape. MJ Robinson's paper suggests this change includes a new power for consumers of information – one highlighting the consumer/critic as "driver" of this media vehicle in a new landscape highway referred to as a "curatorial culture." Robinson contends this new landscape has created a "media environment in which academics, public scholars and intellectuals can create and distribute television programming that makes important and crucial interventions in our polis." The author argues that accomplished television critics wedded to traditional forms of media have suffered a "loss of gravitas, authority and audience" due to a "demassified and

vastly fragmented audience” caused in large part by this new curatorial culture. This research portends major changes in traditional media in the years to come.

The final two chapters delve into the impact of technologies. First, Bernardo Palau Cabrera maintains that there is a “new visual language” being offered to all purveyors of film – largely the result of a new aesthetic brought to the public through online video. In *Towards an aesthetic of amateur online video*, Palau claims that this new recording format has brought forth the birth of a new visual language that breaks through the barriers of established video formats. He suggests that online video provides a path to the future of film and television production, “especially considering that the millennial generation, which is the main consumer of this kind of content, will lead the development of television and film in years to come.”

Finally, Jenny Hauser critically analyzes the role of the professional journalist in the digital age in her chapter, *Guarding the Gates in Interactive Newsgathering*. Hauser observes that social media have become “an integral part of many journalists’ toolkits, offering both opportunities and posing risks for the profession.” Hauser says that journalists find themselves in a constant position of “negotiating” their role in an increasingly online world. The paper investigates how journalists maintain “their roles as ‘gatekeepers’ and professionals” in a news environment that has become “open, de-professionalized and inherently participatory.”

As Co-Editors of this volume, we would like to thank Dr. Samita Nandy (Director, Centre for Media and Celebrity Studies), Dr. Andrew Mendelson (Assoc. Dean and Conference Host, Craig Newmark School of Journalism, CUNY), and the WaterHill Publishing team for their input and guidance throughout this project.