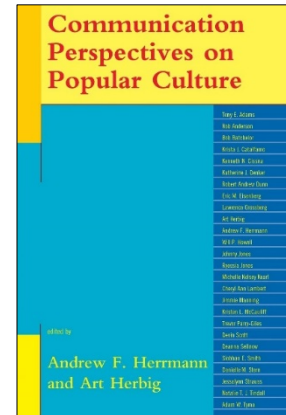


Andrew F. Herrmann and Art Herbig (Eds.), **Communication Perspectives on Popular Culture**, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016, 290 pp., \$105.00 (hardcover), \$46.00 (paperback).

Reviewed by
John Chapin
Penn State University, USA

Editors Andrew F. Herrmann and Art Herbig describe the book **Communication Perspectives on Popular Culture** as a primer. Contributors were asked to provide a jumping off point, challenging readers to write the next chapter or write the next book. That identifies the readers as other academics. I would disagree, describing the book as more of a sampler for college students. Following a header of “Not another pop culture series!” the editors argue that the book is needed, because technology has changed and pop culture has changed:



Unless you have been asleep for the past 25 years, you must have noticed that almost everything about popular culture has changed: from its content to the way we (and here we mean creators, audiences, fans, and academics) participate with and through it, and to the way content is delivered. The dilemma is that while all those aspects of popular culture changed dramatically, research and scholarship—even the terminology we use—has barely kept up. (p. ix)

Given the introduction, it was unfortunate to find the essays largely referencing traditional media anchored mostly in early works, such as Goffman (1959), McLuhan (1964), Burke (1966), and Radway (1981). While many of the essays constitute “another book on popular culture,” some excellent standouts fulfill the promise in the introduction.

In chapter 2, “CultPopCulture: Reconsidering the Popular Culture Framework via the Engage, Adapt, and Transform (EAT) Model,” Bob Batchelor offers a unique theoretical approach: the EAT Model. Batchelor (2011) is the author or editor of more than 20 volumes on pop culture, including a series on cult pop culture, which the essay seems to be drawn from. Using alternative musician Tom DeLonge (Blink 182, Angels & Airwaves), Batchelor demonstrates turning pop culture from an object to a verb. Angels and Airwaves is described as art project, music, visual communication, publishing, and animation. Other examples of technology eliminating barriers between audience, creator, and medium include YouTube influencers, Minecraft, and the Coke campaign featuring personalized bottles.

In chapter 11, “Polymediating the Post: Reclaiming Feminism in Popular Culture,” Danielle M. Stern and Krista J. Catalfamo examine the antifeminist movement on Facebook and Twitter. The authors argue that as women increasingly claim agentic spaces online, it is more important than ever to study the uses of that agency. The chapter defines polymediation and provides a review of literature on feminism and popular culture, before analyzing the antifeminist movement on social media.

In chapter 16, "Video Gaming: Aggressively Social," Robert Dunn offers a twist on the established research on violent video games and aggression by focusing on prosocial impacts, including cooperation, social connectivity, cohesion, and community building. This would no doubt be a welcome change to young scholars who grew up on video games who do not view themselves as ticking time bombs.

While these three essays rise to the challenge of addressing the changes in media and popular culture over the last 25 years, as presented in the introduction, the remaining essays would fit well into any of the existing books about pop culture. This is less a criticism than a challenge to the authors and editors of the next books.

Chapter 1, "Queering Popular Culture" uses TV shows (*The Golden Girls*) and films (*Inside Out*) to explore how queer readings of popular culture provide a critical response to negative cultural assumptions.

Chapter 3, "'Saving People. Hunting Things. The Family Business': Organizational Communication Approaches to Popular Culture," utilizes an organizational communication approach to analyze the TV show *Supernatural*.

Chapter 4, "Who's the Boss: Leadership in the Popular Imagination," describes the development of leadership over time and chronicles representation of leadership in popular culture (entertainment and news coverage). The entertainment examples come from broadcast TV (*CSI*) and HBO (*Sopranos*). News examples include hierarchical models, such as the creation of the Office of Homeland Security following the 9/11 attacks.

Chapter 5, "In Space . . . Our Worst Will Make Us Scream: Reality Reflected in the Cultural Artifact *Alien*," argues that if we are what we eat, we are also what we consume. In this case, the focus is the impact of horror science fiction films on the author of the essay.

Chapter 6, "Music's Pervasive and Persuasive Role in Popular Culture," argues that music speaks to and for us. The chapter provides a good introduction for students, starting with what music is as communication in popular culture. The chapter offers a mini-literature review and finally answers the age-old question about why Earl had to die in the popular Dixie Chicks song.

Chapter 7, "Reflection and Deflection: An Approach to Popular Culture and Politics," uses analysis of the 1986–87 graphic novel *Watchmen* and the 2009 film to argue that art cannot accurately or fully capture political reality, so it's better to focus on how art contributes to political opinions.

Chapter 8, "Public Relations Representations in Popular Culture: A "Scandal" on Primetime Television," includes analysis of the television shows *Scandal* and *Ray Donovan* to anchor an exploration of the representations of public relations professionals, including the myth of the highly efficient but unethical PR professional.

Chapter 9, "Critical Rhetoric on Popular Culture: Examining Rhetoric's Relationship to the Popular," takes a macrolevel approach to the rhetoric of popular culture. The author argues that popular culture is

rhetoric. This one is more suited for current academics. It assumes more prior knowledge than most students possess.

Chapter 10, "Prison Is Bullshit: An Intersectional Analysis of Popular Culture Representations of the Prison Industrial Complex in *Orange Is the New Black*," is a mini-literature review that is more approachable for students and provides an opportunity to discuss how the show represents the prison industrial complex and in what ways those representations are empowering or disempowering for people of color.

Chapter 12, "Thinking Conjecturally about Countercultures," describes the political right and left as contemporary countercultures that originated from two interrelated strategies in the 1960s: Nixon's invention of and deployment of the politics of resentment (ordinary folks against cultural elites) on the right and politics based on the countercultures of the 1960s on the left.

Chapter 13, "Rethinking Studies of Relationships and Popular Culture: Notes on Approach, Method, and (Meta)Theory," offers new approaches, methods, and theories to study popular culture, with a focus on the relationship and popular culture. The chapter argues that popular culture provides significant relational moments (the importance of that trip to Disneyland; father taking his son to a baseball game); popular culture serves as a connector (soap opera fans and Usenet groups); and popular culture serves as an indicator (how we approach a similar problem). New methods include interview methods, diary methods, and autoethnography.

Chapter 14, "Public Opponents Cooperating: Possibilities for Dialogue in Popular Culture Controversies," is promising. At the time of publication, Donald Trump was being "seriously considered" as a presidential candidate. His rhetoric intensified the culture wars. His opponents weren't just wrong, they were "stupid" or "losers." Using dialogue studies as a basis, the authors argue that culturally rich dialogue could recast opponents as collaborators, despite extreme disagreements, producing productive results. History would tell a different story. Using the correspondence between well-known behaviorists B.F. Skinner and Carl Rogers, who advocated for humanism in psychology, the chapter illustrates how discourse can open collaborative dialogue.

Chapter 15, "You Don't Know Me: Portrayals of Black Fatherhood and Husbandhood in *T.I. and Tiny: The Family Hustle*," uses the VH1 reality TV series to discuss media representations of the Black family.

Chapter 17, "Popular Culture, Pedagogy, and Dialoguing Difference: Starting Difficult Conversations in the Communication Classroom," promotes the use of popular culture references to encourage student participation and combat the perception that lectures favor some people, while discriminating against women, minorities, and first-generation college students. The chapter offers a brief literature review on critical literacy and communication pedagogy, followed by a personal case study of one of the author's syllabus and classroom experience.

Social media has become a dominant force in pop culture, where people create their own content to be consumed by other creators. What's missing in the current volume are new approaches to studying interactive pop culture like SnapChat and TikTok. Consumers are cutting the cord of broadcast television

and cable. Streaming services targeted to niche tastes (DC Comics versus Marvel) are challenging both the economic and cultural models of traditional media. At the publication of this volume, Donald Trump was not yet elected U.S. President and Baby Yoda memes were not yet conceived. There's fertile ground yet to be explored by the next generation of pop culture scholars.

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