



Entertaining Ideas

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Ent. Studies to Establish an Academic Journal

By **Danny Shipka** ESIG Head



The proliferation of entertainment programming in the media has been an amazing sight to witness. In the last decade entertainment has seeped into

every aspect of the media from politics, news, public relations, advertising as well as the traditional mediated avenues such as film, music and gaming. Because of this unprecedented growth and academic interest, the time has finally come for Entertainment Studies to have its own academic peer-reviewed online journal. A long time coming, plans are underway in the next year for the formation this new journal dedicated to the advancement of this exciting field of inquiry.

The definition of Entertainment Studies has been a constantly evolving ideal that has been bandied about by academics for a long time. Long ignored by scholars, Entertainment Studies is increasingly being seen as necessary to fully understand the media environment. The current application of traditional mass media theories, media ef-

fects research as well as the creation of such theories as Entertainment Theory (Bryant) have all help shape, though gently, what constitutes the field today. This journal seeks to advance many of these past groundbreaking ideas in the field of entertainment as well as give a voice to a new generation of scholars that see entertainment as an integral part of the mass media environment. What makes Entertainment Stud-

ies such a popular area for academic research is the diversity of its subject matter as well as its inclusion of a variety of different methodologies. The journal's goal will be to continue this academic diversity while being committed to scholarly excellence. As we begin the process of putting this endeavor together, it is important for reach out to those in the field that can offer their own

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ESIG Welcomes Sports Int. Group

By **Kelly Poniatowski** Vice Head

AEJMC has welcomed two new interest groups to its ranks this year, sports and political communication. As AEJMC continues to grow and change, these events are a great addition to the ever changing dynamics of journalism and mass communications. While ESIG has and will continue to accept sports-themed papers for both the annual and mid-winter conferences, the addition of a sports interest group also affords ESIG many new joint opportunities.

One opportunity is a chance to program a teaching panel for the 2011 conference on making students marketable for jobs in sports and entertainment. We'll know more about this after the chip auction. Other opportunities might include

off-site trips to sports and entertainment venues, interviews with sports and entertainment professionals, and even a joint best teaching methods related to sports and entertainment practices. Topics for discussion might include the role of bloggers in the press box, the role of sports films in American society, how violence in sports provides a kind of entertainment for fans, and the impact of Super Bowl ads as entertainment.

It only seems fitting that entertainment studies and sports create joint sessions. After all, sports is a form of entertainment in our society. Sports journalism is often referred to as sportainment, the blurring

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of entertainment and journalism. A 2007 study conducted by the John Curley Center for Sports Journalism indicates there are over 150 sports journalism programs at institutions affiliated with AEJMC. And while not all schools may actually offer some time of sports journalism degree or minor, numerous schools offer electives in courses such as Media, Sports and Society, Sports Journalism, and Public Relations in Sports. Sports careers are increasing in popularity amongst college students. With the increasing multi-platform coverage of sports, preparing students for sports careers is increasingly crucial. Current popular sports research topics include: the presence of bloggers in the press box, ethical issues in athletes' use of Twitter, the representation of female athletes in traditionally masculine sports (hockey, football etc.), and the use of multi-platforms to reach fans. There is a trend to offer more sports courses and degrees in higher education, as well as, increasing research in the area of sports. The Broadcast Education Association recently added a sports division as well. ESIG looks forward to working with the sports interest group in many exciting new projects to come.

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knowledge of the subject. I'd like to ask your help in helping us put together the very best editorial board possible. We are looking for those scholars who are leaders in the field as well those from a variety of different areas including but limited to, film, television, cultural studies, public relations, advertising, political communications, music, digital media, gaming. If you would like to help in some



For more information on sports journalism visit the following sites:

John Curley Center for Sports Journalism:

<http://comm.psu.edu/about/centers/john-curley-center-for-sports-journalism>

National Sports Journalism Center

<http://sportsjournalism.org/>



way or know of people that you believe essential to this process please feel free to contact me at dshipka@lsu.edu at anytime.

- Danny ★

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New Journal Focuses on Image of Journalist in Pop Culture

By Joe Saltzman Member



The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture Journal, a peer-review journal established in

2009, is now accepting manuscripts for its third edition to be published in 2011. For more information and manuscript submission guidelines, go to the IJPC Web Site – ijpc.org – and click on IJPC Journal or contact one of the three co-founding editors: Joe Saltzman of the University of Southern California (saltzman@usc.edu), Matthew C. Ehrlich

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of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (mehrich@illinois.edu), or Sammye Johnson of Trinity University (sjohnson@trinity.edu).

“The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture Journal (IJPC Journal) is an online academic journal that adheres to the highest standards of peer review,” wrote the three editors in their mission statement. “Its purpose is to further the mission of the Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture to investigate and analyze, through research

and publication, the conflicting images of journalists in every aspect of popular culture, from film, television, radio, fiction, commercials, cartoons and comic books to music, art, humor and video games – exploring their impact on the public’s perception of journalists.”

The editorial board members are Maurine H. Beasley, University of Maryland; Bonnie Brennen, Marquette University; Mary-Lou Galician, Arizona State University; Howard Good, SUNY, New Paltz; Loren Ghiglione, Northwestern University; Norma Fay Green, Columbia College, Chicago; Richard Ness, Western Illinois University; Radhika Parameswaran, Indiana University; Karen Miller Russell, University of Georgia and Barbie Zelizer, University of Pennsylvania.

IJPC founder and director Joe Saltzman says this research field is wide open: “There is a body of work analyzing the image of the journalist in motion pictures and some work done on the image of the journalist in fiction, but relatively nothing has been done on the image of the journalist in television, in radio, in video games, commercials, music, art and other aspects of popular culture. We believe The IJPC Journal is rectifying that situation.”

There are hundreds of articles in the IJPC Database now available online at ijpc.org. More than 76,000 entries are listed covering all aspects

of popular culture. “For example, if you click on Novels, Mystery, 3,360 items pop up filled with ideas for an article on the image of the journalist in mystery novels (or a particular series of novels). There are 96 examples of the image of the journalist in music, 1,103 items regarding gossip columnists. The list is endless,” said Saltzman who compiled the IJPC Database over the last two decades. He urged young scholars to search the database for ideas that appeal to their research agenda.

Issues of The IJPC Journal are available online at ijpc.org.



Coming Soon to a Journal Near You.

Bates, S. & Ferri, A.J. “What’s Entertainment? Notes Toward a Definition, *Studies in Popular Culture*, in press.

Ferri, A. J. (2010). “Emergence of the Entertainment Age?” *Social Science and Modern Society*, 47,5 pp., 403-409

Krakowiak, K. M., & Oliver, M. B. (in press). When good characters do bad things: Examining the effect of moral ambiguity on enjoyment. *Journal of Communication*.

Research Report: The Traffic in (Blue) Women: Gender, Romance, and Colonial Power in Avatar

By Carole Bell Webmaster

Though Avatar was well tremendously successful in commercial terms (a recent accounting totaled more than two billion in worldwide receipts (“Avatar’ Passes \$2 Billion in Global Receipts,” 2010)), the film received infinitely more complex and problematic reactions from critics. In addition to addressing Avatar’s artistic shortcomings, many reviewers attacked the film’s presumed politics. In fact, a wide range of critics hailing from a multitude of geographies from London to Los Angeles to Calcutta, and representing a variety of political positions ranging from the most conservative to the most liberal found much to dislike in the film’s perceived politics (Agrell, 2010; Atzmon, 2009; “Avatar A Box Office Hit, But Some Say It’s Racist,” 2009; Globe & Mail; “When Will White People Stop Making Movies Like Avatar? [Rant],” 2009). While some actually praised the film for its positive portrayal of indigenous communities, others called it “racist,” “colonialist,” “anti-military”, pro-environmentalist drivel or worse (“Some see racist theme in alien adventure ‘Avatar,’” 2010). Influential conservative pundit John Podhoretz of The Weekly Standard, for example, condemned what he called Avatar’s “deep expression of anti-Americanism” (Adams, 2010).

Unpacking the Symbolic Politics of Avatar

To begin to better understand these passionate and varied responses to the film, a panel of scholars, sponsored by the Feminist and Women’s Studies Division of the National Communication Association Conference (NCA), assembled at the recent annual conference to contemplate Avatar from a variety of critical and cultural perspectives. One paper (Bell, 2010), for example, focused on the film’s mix of genres as a causal factor in the controversy, arguing that part of what makes the film so problematic for so many is that Avatar is firmly grounded in, and ultimately constrained by the genre conventions of the past, repackaged for the 21st century. The film is at once a science fiction fantasy about exploring new worlds, a cautionary colonial adventure and anti-war narrative and, finally, perhaps less obviously, a mid-twentieth century interracial romance. In this view, along with these conventions comes another prominent feature of James Cameron’s film—that it is laden with competing, not entirely coherent beliefs. While recognizing that all of these influences are essential to unpacking the film’s central beliefs and potential

impact, this approach focused in particular on the extent to which the movie’s themes are conveyed through the evolution of the central relationship between Neytiri and Jake. In this perspective, Jake and Neytiri represent a new stage of the “unlikely couple”

figure in which romance is a vehicle for social critique (Wartenberg, 1999). Of course, as I noted in that presentation, to say that Avatar’s (Cameron, 2010) principal protagonists make an unlikely couple would be an understatement in the extreme: the heroine is a feline anthropomorphic blue being from the planet Pandora, the young hero an injured army veteran from Earth. Their relationship would seem to be in a class of its own, resembling no other in the canons of film fiction. Yet, even though the film is science fiction and the central romance is cross-species rather than cross-racial, this 21st century film recreates and reinvents some of the most well worn representational practices of traditional interracial film depictions. The familiar accusatory rhetoric of racial betrayal, for example, is directed at the couple from both sides, in the voices of Jake and Neytiri’s friends, family and peers. Jake and Neytiri’s relationship is also presented as a vehicle for the human and native peoples’ mutual learning, healing and ultimate, triumphant reconciliation. In combination, these practices are hallmarks of movie romance as liberal allegory. By employing such familiar narrative strategies, Cameron encourages the audience to see the parallels between the interspecies and interracial conflicts in a multitude of ways that are alternately subtle and overt.

In a related vein, the film’s postcolonial sexual politics presented another fruitful avenue for exploration. Reminiscent of Terrence Malick’s rendering of the Pocahontas myth in the New World (Malick, 2006), the Avatar love story recreates the gender politics of colonialism, with the female native as a site of contested male authority. Specifically, in the romantic liaison between the ex-marine Jake Sully, played by Sam Worthington, an Australian actor of European heritage, and Neytiri, played by an African American actress Zoe Saldana,

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Sangeet Kumar finds a trope frequent within colonial encounters. While writer-director James Cameron's plot arguably presents this liaison as one of benign (even ideal) apolitical love, disconnected from the Na'vi's exploitation and annihilation, Kumar reads Neytiri as "a signifier for the postcolonial female subject whose body is conflated with the nation both by the colonial power that desires it, and by the anti-colonial patriarch that seeks its "unsullied" preservation."

While these two papers centered on the cultural and racial symbolism inherent in the romance between the two central protagonists, other essays by David Morris and Nicole Defenbaugh attended to the contextual politics with which the love story is intertwined, for, in addition to racial allegories, the film also abounds with prominent (albeit simplistic) metaphors about imperialism and resistance, and lessons about privileging environmental/humanistic values over capitalist/mercenary ones. Metaphors of imperialism and colonialism are underscored by several creative choices that dominate the audience's experience of the Na'vi world. Not only were the depictions of the alien Na'vi pastiched out of broad stereotypes of African and Native American indigenous cultures in a variety of ways from language to dress, the casting of Native American and African actors as the voices of the Na'vi also reinforced this interpretation.

These cultural and gender issues were explored in depth by Nicole Defenbaugh. Applying a critical social lens to Avatar, Defenbaugh argues that Western ideologies of race and gender are constructed in the movie Avatar with stereotypical portrayals of gender identity (masculinity and femininity) as defined by White-ideals represented both verbally in the characters' spoken words and nonverbally in their attire. Furthermore, Defenbaugh also finds a binary world of invaders and natives with dominance and domination of white culture over seemingly simplistic indigenous populations and technology presented as the defining line between the two worlds. This analysis of verbal and nonverbal rhetoric exposes the gender



and cultural rift between the humans and Na'vi people-- a division that Defenbaugh says serves not only to reinforce stereotypical portrayals of indigenous culture; rather, it also further marginalizes those who defy and resist dominant ideologies. Though the interpretations of Avatar' politics varied widely, the panelists found much that is meaningful and worthy of serious contemplation in the film. This subject promises to yield much more scholarship in the future. In particular, as discussant Aimee Carrillo Rowe suggested, scholars may want to address why, while so clearly problematic and stirring so much controversy, the film is also undoubtedly successful in commanding audiences' attention and in creating a great deal of pleasure as well.

Panel Participants:

Respondent: Aimee Carrillo Rowe (University of Iowa)

Presenters: David Z Morris, (University of Iowa), Carole V. Bell (The George Washington University), Nicole Defenbaugh (Bloomsburg University), Sangeet Kumar (University of Iowa).

ENDNOTES

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