VLT #93: Reconsidering Mass Media

Summer 2022 saw *Top Gun: Maverick* gross $1 billion globally in its first month of release; in Fall 2021, *Squid Game* became Netflix's most popular series, with 1.65 billion hours streamed in its first four weeks of release; on May 6, 2022, Bad Bunny became the Spotify artist with the most one-day streams globally, with 183 million streams; and TikTok has received over 3.5 billion downloads since 2018. Additionally, streaming platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime have massive reach over international audiences, despite their varied location-specific libraries. In terms of reaching a large audience or consumer base, these instances fit historical definitions of mass media. However, studying these phenomena require conjunctural and complex analyses of mass media that highlight both historical continuities and contemporary transformations of the concept through industrial, textual, and audience lenses.

Scholars, commentators, journalists, and audiences have used the concept of mass media to refer to media industries and companies with vast reach, popular genre formulas, and widely-consumed media artifacts ranging from consumer electronics to programming and content. More recently, assumptions of the homogeneity and uniformity of "the mass" have been challenged by industrial trends toward audience fragmentation and content diversification. Trends beginning with the widespread introduction of cable television in the United States in the 1970s through the present ever-expanding online media landscape—including app-based, algorithm-driven personalization of content—have resulted in the segmentation of audiences, media industries, and content across gendered, racial, ethnic, sexual, generational, and cultural lines. However, within segmented audiences, networks of users, and local spaces, there are instances of broadly disseminated and collectively shared mediated experiences. For example, we have seen mass media phenomena occur within specific digital publics, social cohorts, other groups, and spaces such as Black Twitter and Gay Twitter, BookTok, or local news telecasts. Beyond the recognition of internal heterogeneity of the mass and the fragmentation of audiences, global media production, distribution, and consumption challenge and reimagine the national boundaries as a privileged site of distinction. Even as current scholarly and industrial discourses challenge the assumed homogeneity and unity of mass media, many of these logics and tactics continue to shape the media landscape.

The Velvet Light Trap #93 seeks a variety of topics and approaches to reconsider mass media in both contemporary and historical contexts. We welcome submissions that work to revisit, redefine, renegotiate, complicate, or challenge previously-held notions of mass media through a multitude of approaches, including (but not limited to) audience studies, cultural geography, discourse analysis, distribution studies, global media studies, localism, media industries studies, sports media studies, taste cultures, and textual analysis. We welcome contemporary and historical explorations of any of the following themes:

- Defining and understanding mass media and the notion of "the mass"
- Examining under- or unstated assumptions of gender, race, sexuality, and/or representation within mass media, both in terms of texts and audiences
- Mass media and geo-cultural markets, distribution, and/or consumption
- Distinctions or intersections between mass media and popular media
- Reconsidering notions of "mass" in a global, multi-pronged media landscape
- Mass media as a framework to describe texts that are made for mass consumption
- Considering how methods of remediation, reevaluation, or revisitation may construct mass media

- Mass media and audience maximization
- Locating and negotiating mass media within niches (and vice versa)
- Reconsidering taste cultures as they have been assigned to mass media
- Complicating notions of nationality within mass media
- Highlighting instances of "unintended" mass media (e.g. sleeper successes)
- Interrogating ideas of "going viral" and "viral media"
- Imaginations and constructions of the audiences privileged as "mass"
- Mass mediation as it pertains to data mining, surveillance capitalism, and machine learning

Open Call

The Velvet Light Trap is pleased to announce that, in addition to accepting submissions that relate to the above theme, we will accept general submissions broadly related to the journal's focus on critical, theoretical, and historical approaches to film and media studies. We aim to create a new space for scholarship that enhances the journal's overall mission and work that continues the research conversations to which our themed issues have contributed. We hope that scholars inspired by the work published in our themed issues, past and present, will especially consider submitting their work. Even as our themes will continue to change each issue, we want to sustain ongoing investment in and investigation of the questions each issue of *The Velvet Light Trap* poses.

Submission Guidelines

Submissions should be between 6,000 and 7,500 words, formatted in Chicago Style. Please submit an electronic copy of the paper, along with a separate one-page abstract, both saved as Microsoft Word files. Remove any identifying information so that the submission is suitable for anonymous review. Quotations not in English should be accompanied by translations. Send electronic manuscripts and/or any questions to vltcfp@gmail.com by January 31, 2023.

About the Journal

The Velvet Light Trap is a scholarly, peer-reviewed journal of film, television, and new media. The journal draws on a variety of theoretical and historiographical approaches from the humanities and social sciences and welcomes any effort that will help foster the ongoing processes of evaluation and negotiation in media history and criticism. While *TVLT* maintains its traditional commitment to the study of American film, it also expands its scope to television and other media, to adjacent institutions, and to other nations' media. The journal encourages both approaches and objects of study that have been neglected or excluded in past scholarship.

Graduate students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the University of Texas at Austin coordinate issues in alternation, and each issue is devoted to a particular theme. *The Velvet Light Trap*'s Editorial Advisory Board includes such notable scholars as Manuel Avilés-Santiago, Lauren S. Berliner, Andre Brock, Dolores Inés Casillas, Aymar Jean Christian, Norma Coates, Brian Fauteux, Allyson Nadia Field, Racquel Gates, Aniko Imre, Deborah Jaramillo, Derek Kompare, Lori Morimoto, Ruben Ramírez-Sànchez, Debra Ramsey, Bob Rehak, Samantha Noelle Sheppard, and Alyx Vesey. *TVLT*'s graduate student editors are assisted by their local faculty advisors: Mary Beltrán, Ben Brewster, Jonathan Gray, Michele Hilmes (emeritus), Lea Jacobs, Derek Johnson, Shanti Kumar, Charles Ramírez Berg, Thomas Schatz (emeritus), and Janet Staiger (emeritus).