

GUEST EDITOR'S NOTE

Critical Media Literacy, Social Justice, and Equity in the Trumpocalypse

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A question, therefore, leaps to mind: is it really so bizarre that the incipient majority of humanity, formatted by the media and shrewd, pursuit-of-pleasure-promoting and pleasure-promising marketing techniques, views the public arena as an enormously expanded Woodstock-type stage or a timelessly extended TV sitcom; as a leisure time entertainment, with a potential for keeping the viewers pleasurably amused—despite (or because of) being irrelevant to the humdrum prose of daily routine? (Bauman & Donskis, 2016, p. 17)

It is an honor to be the guest editor of this issue of the *SoJo Journal* on critical media literacy. This issue is connected to the Annual International Critical Media Literacy Conference. Some of the articles in the issue have their roots at the conference. Some were generated through discussions at the conference. Ideally, the conference and this issue of the journal will foster additional conversations about the importance of critical media literacy and its

links with social justice particularly in times that Bauman and Donskis (2016) describe.

Critical media literacy is integral in understanding the present moment historically and critically. Every morning we awaken to a new media event whether it be the latest tweet from Trump, the latest climate disaster, the latest mass shooting, or the latest posting of people on Facebook. There is never a break from the onslaught of the media whether it is through television, smartphones, tablets, computers or other devices. Given our present global circumstances, our attention to media must be for our students and ourselves a matter of critical study. It is not enough to know how to manipulate media. That instrumentalist approach has received significant attention. It is not enough to know techniques with which we can wisely purchase the best media devices. It is not enough to use smart boards in classrooms. It is not enough to design dynamic power points. These instrumentalist orientations toward media are insufficient given the ever-present media in the present historical moment.

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Living in what Marshall McLuhan (1997) coined the global village, it is not enough to merely understand media, students need to be empowered to critically negotiate meanings, engage with the problems of misrepresentations and underrepresentations, and produce their own alternative media. Addressing issues of inequality and injustice in media representations can be a powerful starting place for problem-posing transformative education. Critical media literacy offers the tools and framework to help students become subjects in the process of deconstructing injustices, expressing their own voices, and struggling to create a better society. (Kellner & Share, 2005, p. 382)

This issue of the journal confronts questions on analyzing the Trump brand, critically teaching about the media, the ways in which critical media literacy enables the exploration of issues centering on hegemonic masculinity and the issues of critical media literacy in the age of the neoliberal university. All of these issues intertwine with the journal's focus on the centrality of social justice from a variety of disciplines. Media in the 21st century must be analyzed within a critical, social justice framework in order to address the phenomenon that "media have been and can continue to become the ultimate hegemonic WMD [weapons of mass destruction] to a complacent and ignorant audience" (Steinberg, 2007, p. xiv). This critique of the WMD of media becomes increasingly more crucial as the Trumpocalypse bombards us daily.

In this issue, scholars from political theory, media literacy, communications, and education delve into the issues in media with criticality that is undeniable. These essays work to demystify unquestioned hegemonic media. Simple media literacy with its "practical" agenda does not engage those issues. The articles in this issue are a testament to that critical orientation to media literacy.

The issue begins with Julie Webber's article on a new politics of representation, particularly the use of social media. It is the text of her key note address at the Critical Media Literacy Conference in 2016. Webber argues that there

is a new political strategy called branding that emerged with the Trump candidacy. She explores that strategy and the ways in which it uses social media and marketing to foster political candidacies of figures such as Donald Trump and Sarah Palin and the ways in which that social media continues to brand them as "political outsiders." According to Webber, branding is a new feature of democracy.

Jeff Share follows this political analysis of the use of social media in nefarious political agendas with an article that encourages critical media literacy education in the preparation of future educators. He demonstrates that education should encourage critical thinking and analysis of media and the 24/7 infotainment blogosphere. Share elaborates the ways in which critical media literacy in teacher education is lacking. He provides a description of a graduate class that works with critical media literacy. The article provides readers with examples of critical media literacy in practice.

Lori Bindig Yousman continues the discussion of the critical in media literacy in her article, which focuses on the "challenges, strategies, and rewards" of critical media literacy within the Neoliberal university. She makes clear the distinction between media literacy and critical media literacy. As discussed previously, it is a crucial distinction. That distinction is a thread that runs through this issue. Neoliberalism is defined and discussed with attention given to its intrusion into universities. The author posits that critical media literacy is the enemy of neoliberalism and explains the manner in which a neoliberal university actively works against critical media literacy. This puts critical media literacy in a long line of critical orientations that are increasingly disrupted and discounted in the quest for an instrumentalist education or as the author states vocationalism. The author leaves us with a hopeful conclusion that it is possible to confront the neoliberal university. Educating toward critical media literacy can be one way to accomplish this confrontation.

The author Bill Yousman's article presents an autobiographical portrait, based upon the

feminist challenge to conventional research. The notion that the personal is political runs through his article. Through the combination of the personal experiences and critical analysis, he demonstrates the manner in which cultural studies, feminist media studies and critical media literacy studies engage the limitations of hegemonic notions of masculinity. This essay demonstrates the power of all of these orientations particularly critical media literacy to demystify the cultural hegemony under which we all live.

Television, music, movies, the new technologies of enhanced video/computer games, and of course, the ubiquitous Internet have transformed culture especially popular culture, into the primary educational site in which youth learn about themselves and the larger world. (Giroux, 2000, p. 108)

All of the articles in this special issue contribute to our understandings of critical media literacy and the necessity of this work given our present cultural and historical milieu with its political branding, its lack of critical orientations to various forms of media, its neoliberal universities and its masculine culture hegemony. Since popular culture especially through, social media(s) is the primary educational site, this work in critical media literacy takes on ever-increasing importance.

NOTE

1. Trumpocalypse is a term that has appeared in a number of articles and in the blogosphere. One source for the term is: Nichols, B., & Broder, S. (2017, August). Horsemen of the Trumpocalypse: The most dangerous people in America. *The Nation*. Retrieved from <https://www.thenation.com/article/horsemen-of-the-trumpocalypse/>

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