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How does the “stuff” around us, the things we consume and share space with, such as objects, branded merchandise, and alcohol or drugs affect our experience of film and television? In her cogent, original, and highly readable *The Stuff of Spectatorship: Material Cultures of Film and Television*, Caetlin Benson-Allott takes on this question by exploring six fascinating film and television case studies in American culture since the 1970s. Benson-Allott’s approach draws on an array of subfields within film and media studies including media industry studies, spectatorship and reception studies, new cinema history, and material culture studies. She uses these approaches as a springboard for her analyses, drawing on insights from each as she contributes novel ideas and challenges some of the assumptions of the subfields. Ultimately, she argues that “material culture is inextricable from contemporary film and television culture” (p. 15), and it provides a “new rationale and frame for textual analysis as it invites scholars to consider how a text’s composition and narratives are understood in conversation with the physical world” (p. 19).

Chapter 1 examines the remediation of the classic television series *Battlestar Galactica* (ABC 1978-79) across formats and platforms such as off-the-air (OTA) recordings, prerecorded video cassettes, DVDs and Blu-rays, and video-on-demand platforms. Benson-Allott does a close analysis of each format and platform and argues that they shape the experience of viewing and the perceived historical value of the television series through the context and the format or platform that the viewer encounters the series. Chapter 2 continues Benson-Allott’s investigation of the effects that format can have by examining the film *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* (dir. Richard Brooks, 1977), which was last distributed on VHS cassette in 1997 and advances a critique of the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 70s. Those VHS tapes are currently decaying but are the only way to view the film. Benson-Allott employs Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s concepts of “paranoid reading” and “reparative reading” in analyzing the video, re-
vealing a latent feminism in the film’s critique of the sexual revolution. She also introduces the productive term “sitting with” to describe a critic’s relationship with a decaying object such as the 1997 video cassette of *Looking for Mr. Goodbar*. To sit with is “an act of observance that marks film as a durational art form whose duration in this world is bound by material reality” (p. 84).

Chapter 3 examines the materialization of media consumption through the television station Turner Classic Movies (TCM) and its branded merchandise and travel packages. Benson-Allott argues that beyond showing movies, TCM is in the business of taste-making and views itself as a lifestyle brand, which has important implications for how a viewer experiences films and film history. TCM successfully commercializes cinerphilia and film history, making it less about spectatorship and appreciation of films and more about conspicuous consumption and the façade of cultural sophistication that an association with classic films provides. Chapter 4 turns to the consumption of alcohol or what is called “adult concessions” (p. 133) in the film industry and its effect on theatergoing and film viewing. Benson-Allott explores the history of alcohol and movies, specifically how it has been used to attract theater goers for decades and has recently become a way for theaters to “keep the lights on” (p. 133) as well as spawning a crop of boutique cinemas such as Alamo Drafthouse. Benson-Allott argues that alcohol has always been a part of moviegoing and its presence and consumption by audiences is an unacknowledged but important part of film history and its future.

Chapter 5 turns from alcohol to cannabis, specifically how “television creators are embracing inebriation among TV viewers ... for commercial and aesthetic ends” (p. 171). Benson-Allott argues that TV series such as *Broad City* (Comedy Central, 2014-19), *Jersey Shore* (MTV, 2009-12), *Breaking Bad* (AMC, 2008-13), *High Maintenance* (HBO, 2016-), and *Atlanta* (FX, 2016-) operate as “virtual intoxicants” (p. 18) that use narrative, style, and other elements to reach a spectator who is high. This “poetics of inebriation” (p. 18) involves distraction, enhanced focus, and paranoia that are furthered by both the state of inebriation of the viewer and the televisual strategies of the shows. Inebriated poetics are also political and mutable, according to Benson-Allott, and can either reflect or challenge dominant ideologies of race and gender in the United States. In chapter 6, Benson-Allott moves from consumption of intoxicants to the racialized reception of US cinema violence. The chapter is based on extensive archival research and discursive analysis, and argues that between 1979 and 2011 cinema violence was racialized, with panicked reception cultures emerging from films concerning African American young men and gang members, categories that, according to Benson-Allott, were interchangeable in white Americans’ consciousness. Through case studies of *The Warriors* (dir. Walter Hill, 1979), *Boyz N the Hood* (dir. John Singleton, 1991), and *The Dark Knight Rises* (dir. Christopher Nolan, 2012) among others, Benson-Allott demonstrates that white violence (in 2012 and beyond) is often portrayed as random while Black violence is blamed on cultural environments and the content of films.

Benson-Allott advances a provocative argument across the six chapters, namely that spectatorship is tightly bound to material environments and objects, and one cannot fully understand or analyze a given film or television series without acknowledging this often-unacknowledged force. But Benson-Allott is not arguing for a new subfield or method of material media culture studies within film and media studies. Rather, she sees her approach as a “frame” (p. 254) through which we can analyze media cultures through material cultures. The stuff of material cultures is meaning-producing in the same way the content of a film or television show is; it expands the scene of the screen. As Benson-Allott argues, “expanding the scene of the screen expands the potential of film and me-
dia studies and overrides its divisions. It opens our discipline to the world and vice versa” (p. 254). *The Stuff of Spectatorship* will be of interest to historians of material culture and twentieth- and twenty-first-century American history as well as all scholars of film and media studies.

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