Call for Papers: Popular Culture and the Civic Imagination. Conference with Henry Jenkins, May 2–3, 2022

The Department of Culture and Aesthetics, Stockholm University, welcome you to the conference Popular Culture and the Civic Imagination with Henry Jenkins (University of Southern California) as key note speaker. The conference will take place May 2–3, 2022, Stockholm University, Auditoriet, Frescativägen 24 E.

The conference aims at bringing together scholars – PhD students as well as senior researchers – interested in all kinds of popular media. The conference’s specific concerns include, but are not limited to, the relations between popular culture/media and the civic imagination and between participatory culture and political activism. The sessions will be based on the case studies and ideas generated and presented by the participants. Presentations and discussions are intended to encourage participants to explore specific approaches, challenge assumptions and develop new perspectives on their work.

Deadline for paper proposals, including abstract (300 words) and bio (100 words), is February 15, 2022. Submit your paper proposal to: sonya.petersson@arthistory.su.se.


Together with the research group The Civic Imagination Project, Jenkins has recently published two books that directly relate to the conference topic: the edited volume Popular Culture and the Civic Imagination: Case Studies of Creative Social Change (2020) and the handbook Practicing Futures: A Civic Imagination Action Handbook (2020).

Below you find a number of excerpts from Jenkins’s website (https://www.civicimaginationproject.org/theory) that shed more light on the conference topic popular culture and civic imagination:

“We define civic imagination as the capacity to imagine alternatives to current cultural, social, political, or economic conditions; one cannot change the world unless one can imagine what a better world might look like.”

“Research on the Civic Imagination has represented a space where the humanities meets the social sciences, where we can explore the political consequences of cultural representations and the cultural roots of political participation.”

https://www.su.se/institutionen-for-kultur-och-estetik/
“Over the past few decades, popular culture has increasingly offered the resources people have drawn upon to spark the civic imagination – from the multicultural, multiracial, and multiplanetary communities depicted on *Star Trek* to the struggles of ragtag rebels against autocratic empires in *Star Wars*, from images of female empowerment and collective action in *Hunger Games* to the depiction of an American Muslim superhero in *Ms. Marvel*. […] Many minority groups are struggling for inclusion and representation within popular media or to overcome decades of negative stereotyping. In other parts of the world, American popular culture surfaces, alongside local alternatives, as part of the culture of protest and democratic struggle, with superheroes or zombies becoming widely used as reference points in debates and protests.”

“If stories can inspire and empower social change, stories can also shatter communities, feeding our fears and suspicions, re-enforcing stereotypes in particularly vivid ways. Examples might include the use of Hindu mythology in Modi’s India, the ways that the Nazis drew upon imagery from Wagner’s *Ring Cycle*, or the ways that *The Birth of a Nation* helped to revitalize the Klu Klux Klan. In many cases, the only way to combat the corrosive power of such stories is through other stories which invite us to understand the world from alternative perspectives, which help us to understand how other people live and what they feel about their conditions. There are some signs that Hollywood is trying to be more inclusive of diverse experiences, as suggested by likely Oscar contenders such as *Fences*, *Moonlight*, and *Hidden Figures*, or by television success stories, such as *Fresh Off the Boat*, *Blackish*, or *Jane the Virgin* or even in the diversification of the cast in recent entries in the *Star Wars* and Marvel Extended Universe franchises.”

“Yet, we recognize that the crisis in American politics that has unfolded over the past few years is far from unique around the world, as witnessed by the Brexit vote, the rise of right wing nationalism in Europe and Asia, the political disorder in Brazil, struggles with drug lords in Latin America, and religious extremism in the Middle East, to cite just a few examples. Our early research is discovering ways that indigenous peoples around the world are tapping *Avatar* and other science fiction texts to dramatize their struggles, the ways that the three finger salute from *Hunger Games* is being deployed by student resistance movements in Thailand and Hong Kong, the ways that the Islamic world and Russia are developing their own superheroes to reflect their own sense of social mission, and the ways that Brazilians have used the visibility brought by the Olympics and the World Cup to question the priorities of their national government.”

Read more about Henry Jenkins here: http://henryjenkins.org/

Organizing committee: Staffan Bergwik, Doron Galili, Per Israelson, Jacob Kimwall, Johan Klingborg, Sonya Petersson.