Rodriguez Julieta Atenas

# From Lockdown to Media Lens
## Review on *Covid-19 in Film and Television: Watching the Pandemic,* Routledge, 2025.

Pro&Contra 8

No. 2 (2024) 77–82

https://doi.org/10.33033/pc.2024.2.77

## From Lockdown to Media Lens
## Review on *Covid-19 in Film and Television: Watching the Pandemic,* Routledge, 2025.

The Covid-19 Pandemic reshaped not only global society but also the way visual media responded to and represented crises, offering new ways to understand and interpret cultural shifts. The consequences of this disruption became evident in film, television, and digital media, particularly in the current aesthetic shifts that emerged. The book offers a fitting, well-curated, and broad analysis of these developments. Bringing together scholars across disciplines, the volume examines not only how the Pandemic appeared in visual media, but also how it modified the modes of production, storytelling, and broader representational politics through an intersectional lens. While primarily focused on UK and US examples, the volume offers essential insights into the global shifts in media representation brought on by the Pandemic, contributing to the growing body of Pandemic-related research and offering a compelling read for anyone interested in how crises reshape the stories we tell and the ways we tell them.

The framework offered by *Covid-19 in Film and Television* is built on an interdisciplinary foundation of media studies, cultural theory, and crisis scholarship, advancing an analytical approach that treats Covid-19 as both content and context. The authors and editors are especially careful to trace out the numerous paths along which the Pandemic reshaped audiovisual cultures, from its disruptive impact on production to how it rewired character and space in narrative. The effect is a broad survey of how screen media accounted for, reacted to, and, in many cases, actively made public knowledge of the Pandemic. Early in the book, it is noted that "the Pandemic represented an opportunity, in that it brought to light issues that had been simmering in the background for a long time and were suddenly given renewed attention," including innovations and developments in diverse media products and their reception by audiences. (2) Chapters 7 and 8 particularly focus on intersectionality by exploring how the Pandemic disproportionately affected marginalized groups, with Chapter 7 examining racial and class-based disparities in healthcare access and media representation, while Chapter 8 notably analyzes how *The Good Fight* (2017) incorporates a racialized gothic narrative to reflect these inequalities in its Pandemic storytelling.

The book's intersectional perspective, embedded in its narrative analyses, extends its critical scope by examining how the impact of the Pandemic varied by race, gender, class, and labor. The editors stress that Covid-19 was "not just a medical crisis but a social, economic, political and cultural one as well," revealing and expanding existing inequalities. (2) The book consists of eight chapters, with the first one discussing changes in how cinematic and social events were perceived by people, prior to discussing changes in production environments. In contrast yet in alignment with the first chapter, the later chapters explore how the Pandemic

was incorporated into stories and what political implications arose from these decisions. For instance, Chapter 6 documents that "the entertainment industry could choose to ignore the Pandemic" but highlights how many shows decided to tackle it directly, by incorporating it and offering a biting commentary on the crisis through its narrative strategy, on-screen subjects' development, and camera-work. (102)

The volume opens with a clear theoretical premise retelling how Covid-19 has affected every aspect of the media ecosystem in both a negative and positive manner, pointing out how it signaled the end of several media production elements but also forced more audience engagement as the lockdown occurred. Along with this the first chapter frames the political input that was present through the different stages of the Pandemic, as well as the plurality of voices in those scenarios. This attention to both political dynamics and the multiplicity of voices during the Pandemic works not only as a backdrop for the individual case studies that follow, but as a central organizing principle that highlights the collective experience shaped by the crisis. The essays in the collection are diverse in focus, spanning from mainstream television series, independent short films, streaming practices, to reality TV. Yet, they share a commitment to the Pandemic as a structuring force in media and as a diagnostic lens through which they examine evolving cultural forms.

One of the volume's most compelling recurring themes is its focus on narrative strategies, particularly how storytelling adapted to Pandemic-era conditions and reflected the influence of the Youtubization of media. Various shows adopted formats and aesthetics reminiscent of YouTube content through their cinematography, spatial composition, and focalization. Several chapters investigate how the home interior, isolation, and disjointed temporalities became central aesthetic and thematic preoccupations of the lockdown-era media. Previously assembled storytelling and big-budget films used to dominate, whereas during the Pandemic stories were inward-turned towards the interior of the house, the screen-within-a-screen, and the recurring cycles of solitude. Multiple chapters argue that these changes in the narrative were not simply a reflection of production constraints but actually represented a profound cultural response to anxiety, uncertainty, and broken frameworks of time. This turning away from prior narrative linearity, both on television and in daily life, is also exhibited in the public-private space mixing, the attention to interior spaces, and the linearity of temporality that governed the texture of Pandemic storytelling.

Of equal significance is the volume's strict emphasis on production cultures, where the Pandemic catalyzed an unprecedented rebalancing of work flows and working conditions in media. Rather than merely offering inventory disruptions, the essays examine how the crisis was, to some extent, normalized, how safety protocols were retooled as production, virtual previsualization tools repurposed as long-term solutions, among other facets. A telling example arises in the discussion in Chapter 3 of daytime talk shows, where hosts' makeshift home studios

quickly turned into a new paradigm of how audiences could "welcome the host into their homes on a daily (weekday) basis," eroding boundaries between private space and broadcast infrastructure. (63) The volume emphasizes how what appears on the horizon is not a clean break but a diagnostic filter: the Pandemic disclosed and amplified the industry's pre-existing addictions to precarious labor, just-in-time logistics, and algorithmic control. The book thus reframes Covid-19 as both a propeller and as a diagnostic tool for the changes in media.

What sets this volume apart from other accounts of Pandemic media is its close attention to how Covid-19 reshaped the formal and temporal dimensions of storytelling. Instead of listing Pandemic-themed content, the chapters investigate how the virus altered narrative form, genre conventions, and aesthetic tone. Some works address the Pandemic directly, while others reflect its impact through changes in pacing, space, and social dynamics. This distinction between Covid-19 as a narrative topic and as a shaping force helps structure the volume's analyses. By following this approach, the contributors show how media responded to the Pandemic not only in content but in form, capturing shifts in tone, rhythm, and viewer experience. These essays trace how stories adapted to new conditions and how those changes reflect deeper cultural responses to uncertainty, risk, and prolonged disruption.

Since the book tackles different media and forms, the collection might have benefited from more sustained dialogue across contributions. While the inclusion of numerous and varied media forms reflects the fragmented and omnipresent nature of Pandemic media itself, the variety sometimes comes at the expense of depth. Some of the chapters include thickly packed critiques, while others are explanatory and create a patchy reading experience. For instance, although the Pandemic is approached through multiple frames, this diversity, apart from the final chapters, tends to concern spatial representation rather than discursive variation, which contributes to an uneven reading experience. Therefore, the book at times lacks coherence and a sustained theoretical thread except for the fact that all the events occurred during the Pandemic and are somehow related to media. This weakens it as a unified scholarly intervention, although remaining quite useful as a set of case-based remarks. Nevertheless, the decentralized form also reflects the distributed and international nature of the Pandemic itself, a crisis which refused tidy narrative or disciplinary containment.

Overall, *Covid-19 in Film and Television* will be of most significance to media and cultural studies scholars, but it also productively converges with sociology, public health, labor studies, and gender studies. Its interdisciplinarity makes it well-suited for discussions about the future of screen media. The essays are accessible without sacrificing depth, and the diverse range of case studies assures applicability across a wide spectrum. Ultimately, what the collection offers is not necessarily an archive of Pandemic media, but a critical approach to conducting media research in times of crisis. Its interdisciplinarity and focus on intersectionality makes it a valuable contribution to media industries, cultural studies, and the social sciences, offering

critical insight into the evolving visual culture of the Global Pandemic. This collection not only charts the cultural impact of the different stages of Covid-19 but also calls for critical self-examination regarding the evolving nature of media and global crises in the 21st century.