

# Wynn Chamberlain's *Brand X* and the Wasteland of American Television

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**Via ZOOM: <https://hku.zoom.us/j/92333450296>**

Wynn Chamberlain's riotous film *Brand X* (1970) offers a satirical take on the state of American television's form and content in the middle of the 20th century. A dizzying array of commercials for ludicrous products like dirt and sweat intercut hysterical parodies of talk shows, soap operas, and weather reports. Chamberlain enlisted a cadre of underground film stars, such as Taylor Mead, Candy Darling, and Tally Brown, as well as countercultural icons, like activist Abbie Hoffman, musician Jimi Hendrix, and poet Anne Waldman, to critique the medium's intersection with politics, consumerism, conservative ideologies, and the countercultural movement of the 1960s. This paper considers the ways in which *Brand X* is indicative of an era characterized by the rise of television—part of a cultural shift labeled both a “vast wasteland” and “revolutionary.” Chamberlain, like his fellow Pop artists, understood mass culture as a formulaic readymade, but his film offers a powerful socio-political, albeit satirical, critique of the far-reaching, hegemonic medium through which consumers are sold the day's news, commercial items, and dominant ideologies. As such, the film is more closely aligned with the American countercultural movement marked by the waning idealism of the era—the aftermath of the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy, the inauguration of Richard Nixon, and the ongoing conflict in Vietnam. This connection is established through the film's absurdist presidential press conference, the spoof game show “What's My Sex?,” and the marketing of taboo products like sex and drugs that were forbidden on commercial television. Labeled a “tacky, vulgar, hilarious” movie in the *New York Times*, *Brand X*, I contend, exposes and undermines the mechanisms of network television's conservative programming, the incessant flow of the medium, and the capitalist structure underpinning it all.



Dr Kara Carmack is Assistant Professor of Fine Arts at Misericordia University in Dallas, PA. She specializes in modern and contemporary art and visual culture with a particular emphasis on creative communities, gender and sexuality, media and technology, and archives. Her current book project, titled *Marginal Centers: Parties on, off, and through Manhattan Public Access Television, 1972-1983*, examines the significant role public access television played in the creative and social lives of artists in New York City throughout the 1970s and early 1980s.

The talk will be conducted via Zoom: <https://hku.zoom.us/j/92333450296>  
All are welcome. No registration is required.  
For enquiries, please contact Ms Lucilla Cheng via [luci@hku.hk](mailto:luci@hku.hk)



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IMAGE CREDIT: Film still from Wynn Chamberlain's *Brand X*, 1970.