

Contemporary Film and Television Genres in Comparison

Course Description:

This course provides students with an introduction to genre studies facilitated through an overview of a sampling of highly contemporary film and television genres. As the course uses genre studies to introduce students to the synergized yet stratified film and television industries, each genre is represented through one film example and one example from television, creating a closely comparative study of genres across different yet related industrial spheres. The course engages several key questions: (1) Where do genres come from and how do they evolve? (2) What is the relation between genres and the industry (i.e., did the industry invent genres?) (3) What is the relationship between genres and popular audiences? (4) How have genre studies evolved over time and how are they keeping up with contemporary genres? (5) Do contemporary genres fulfill similar functions as their ancestors during the classical era, such as furnishing viewers with popular myths? The current popularity of the genres selected for this course ensures that this sampling reflects American popular culture in representative manner. Later iterations of this course may substitute certain weeks, should other genres emerge as more popular. The course readings have been selected with an eye to striking a balance between overarching critical takes on genre in general and specific case studies of individual genres.

Summary of Course Objectives:

- Students will be introduced to a range of contemporary genres popular in film and television.
- Students will study popular genres to gain insight into the stratified yet synergistic relation between the motion picture and television industries.
- Students will study contemporary genres to understand the basic principles of how genres work economically and culturally, that is, as industrial branding tools and as building blocks for modern-day mythologies
- By mastering the particularities of the sampling of genres selected for this class, students will be able to apply the principles of genre study to the most recent ebbs and flows in film and television production.

Course Scope and Distribution of credit hours:

This class meets over 14 sessions, each consisting of an in-class lecture/discussion portion that requires preparatory media viewing, which, however, is individually arranged by students. As this course constitutes the academic component of the LA Study Abroad program, the course structure is shaped to accommodate the particular time demands of the program's practical component, the internship. During the first 4 weeks, the course will meet twice a week for 2 ½ hours each session. Over the remaining 6 weeks, the course will adopt a once-a-week meeting schedule, each session 2 hrs long. In addition, the syllabus includes a total of 8 hours of activities closely related to the curriculum, including a required class visit to the Getty Museum and the attendance of a panel of experts discussing the relation between the film and television industries.

Course Requirements:

Regular attendance of lecture and discussion sections is mandatory. Grades will be distributed according to grade breakdown listed below.

The midterm paper is a concise (1,800 words) take-home exam that tests students' knowledge of course materials and in-class discussions.

Students will file weekly journal entries with the instructor and also keep a blog on the designated course website. Journal entries should include the synthesis (not just summary) of the assigned readings and the application of those readings to contemporary film and television artifacts. Blog posts will track the student's central interest in genre, how that interest evolves as the course proceeds, and how that interest ultimately manifests itself in the final paper.

[Note: To respond efficiently to the competing, but potentially fluctuating, demands of the program's academic and internship portions, future instructors may elect to reduce the parameters of the midterm paper and, in turn, expand the weekly journal entries and blogging assignments. Grade Breakdown will be adjusted accordingly.]

The final paper is an individualized argument/research project, for which students will submit a proposal to the instructor on a designated date.

Grade Breakdown:

Journal: 20%

Midterm paper: 20%

Final paper: 40%

Blog and overall quality of class contributions: 20%

Plagiarism Statement:

"Plagiarism is the act of representing someone else's creative and/or academic work as your own, in full or in part. It can be an act of commission, in which one intentionally appropriates the words, pictures or ideas of another, or it can be an act of omission, in which one fails to acknowledge/document/give credit to the source, creator and/or the copyright owner of those words, pictures or ideas. Any fabrication of materials, quotes or sources, other than those created in a work of fiction, is also plagiarism. Plagiarism is the most serious academic offense that you can commit and can result in probation, suspension, or expulsion."

Use of laptops, cell phones, and other electronic devices prohibited in class:

While some of you may consider laptops instrumental for note taking, I consider the introjection of an interface between you and me in the classroom alienating and counterproductive. If laptops are used in class, I am unable to tell whether students pay attention to lectures and class discussion or to the multiple functions of their laptops. The use of laptops in my classes thus violates my notion of a productive oral communication scenario that involves the attention and commitment of all students for the duration of the class. The prohibition of cell phones and i-phones should be self-explanatory

Syllabus of Screenings and Readings:

Week 1: Introduction to Genre in Film and Television: Where Do Genres Come From? How Do They Evolve?

Session 1: Transforming Common Understandings of Genre Film Genres vs. Genre Films; Culture and Genre

Viewing: Selected Excerpts from American television and films

Readings: Jason Mittell, "*Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture*, Chapter 1, "Television Genres as Cultural Categories," pp. 1-29.
Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (British Film Institute, 1999), Chapter 2: What is Generally Understood by the Notion of Film Genre?," pp.13-29.

Due: Journal entry submitted to professor and Blog Post entry on Blackboard

Session 2: Genres as Industrial Categories; Genre and Hollywood

Viewing: Selected Excerpts from American television and films

Readings: Gary Edgerton and Kyle Nicholas, "I Want My Niche TV: Genres as a Networking Strategy in the Digital Era," in Gary Edgerton and Brian Geoffrey Rose, eds., *Thinking Outside the Box: A Contemporary Television Genre Reader*, pp. 247-270.
Robert E. Kapsis, "Hollywood Genres and the Production of Cultural Perspective," in Toby Miller ed., *The Contemporary Hollywood Reader* (Routledge: 2009), pp. 3-16.

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Week 2: The Dominance of Movie Horror and the Scarcity of TV Horror

Session 1: The Long Life of Horror in Movies

Viewing: *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992, Francis Ford Coppola)(outside viewing)
The Twilight Saga (2009-2012) (selected excerpts)

Reading: "Specularity and Engulfment: Francis Ford Coppola and Bram Stoker's Dracula," in Steven Neale and Murray Smith eds., *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (Routledge, 1998), 191-207.
Susan Chaplin, *The Post-Millennial Vampire: Power, Sacrifice, and Simulation in True Blood, Twilight, and Other Contemporary Narratives* (London: Palgrave, 2017). (113 pages; focus esp. on *True Blood* and *Twilight*)

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**Session 2: Horror as a Recent Development on TV
Industrial and Moral Constraints in Early Television
Horror and HBO's Industrial Strategies**

Viewing: *True Blood* (HBO) (selected episodes)

Reading: Jonathan Hardy, "Mapping Commercial Intertextuality: HBO's *True Blood*." *Convergence: The Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 17 (1): 7-17.
Heather Hendershot, "Masters of Horror: TV auteurism and the Progressive potential of a disrputable genre" in Michael Kackman, Marnie Binfield, Matthew Thomas Payne, Allison Perlman, and Bryan Sebokeds., *FlowTV: Television in the Age of Media Convergence*(Routledge 2011), p. 144-163.

Due: Journal entry submitted to professor and Blog Post entry on Blackboard

Week 3: Musicals between Tradition, Failure, and Rebirth

Session 1: TV Musicals

Musical failures and successes on commercial TV

Industrial complications: original compositions vs. covers

Target audiences and popular music

Can genres programs be ahead of their time?

Genres and procedurals vs. Genres and serials

Viewing: *Cop Rock* (ABC) (selected episodes)
Glee (ABC) (selected episodes)

Reading: George Plasketes, “*Cop Rock* Revisited: Unsung Series and Musical Hinge in Cross-Genre Evolution.” *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 32 (2): 64-73.
Kyra Hunting and Amanda McQueen, "A Musical Marriage: The Mash-Up Aesthetic as Governing Logic in *Glee*." *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 31 (4): 289-308.

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Session 2: Movie Musicals

Failures and Rebirths: from Industry Staple to Niche Product

Do Genre Studies Make Sense?

The Musical’s Questioning of Genre

Theory Subcycles of Musicals: Backstage Dramas, Dance Films, Jukebox Musicals, Professionals vs. Amateurs

Viewing: *La La Land* (2016; Damien Chazelle dir.) (outside viewing)
All That Jazz (1979; Bob Fosse dir.) (excerpt)
Saturday Night Fever (1977; John Badham dir.) (excerpt)
Step Up (2006; Anne Fletcher dir.) (excerpt)

Reading: Karen Backstein, “‘Stayin’ Alive’: The Post-Studio Hollywood Musical,” In Cynthia Lucia, Roy Grundmann, Art Simon eds., *American Film History: Selected Readings, 1960-Present* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2015) pp. 286-303

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Week 4: Gangster Treatments as Vehicles for Quality and Industrial Prestige

**Session 1: TV Gangsters
Moral Panic and TV Gangsters
Violence and Quality Television
Crime Family Melodrama—the Meeting of Film and Television Genre Traditions
Male Antiheroes/Difficult Men**

Viewing: *The Sopranos* (HBO) (selected episodes)

Reading: Deborah Jaramillo, “The Family Racket: AOL Time Warner, HBO, The Sopranos, and the Construction of a Quality Brand.” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 26, pp. 59-75.
Horace Newcomb, “This is Not Al Dente: *The Sopranos* and the New Meaning of ‘Television’” in Horace Newcomb, ed., *Television: The Critical View*, 7th edition (Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 561-588.

Due: Journal entry submitted to professor and Blog Post entry on Blackboard

**Session 2: Movie Gangsters
Two Classic Sociological Models of the Gangster
Gangster Films and Movie Censorship: a Historical Outline
Gangster Films as Expressions of the Cinematic Auteur
The Evolving Role of the City: from Mythical Backdrop to Authentic Locale**

Viewing: *Goodfellas* (1990; Martin Scorsese dir.)

Reading: Robert Warsaw, *The Immediate Experience: Movies, Comics, Theater, And Other Aspects of Popular Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 1962), Chapter: “The Gangster as Tragic Hero,” pp. 97-103.
Robert Casillo, “Scenes from the Eastern Frontier: *Goodfellas* by Martin Scorsese,” *Italian Americana*, 9:2 (Spring/Summer 1991), pp. 271-278.
Linda Mizejewski, “1990s Movies and the Off-White Gangster,” in Chris Holmlund and Krin Gabbard eds., *American Cinema of the 1990s* (Rutgers, 2008), 24-44

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Week 5: TV Buddies

Buddy Shows and Television Formats Gendered Buddy Treatments Friendship and Sexuality

- Viewing: *Friends* (selected episodes)
Will & Grace (selected episodes)
Lethal Weapon (selected episodes)
- Readings: Julie D'Acci, "Television Representation and Gender," in Robert C. Allen and Annette Hill eds., *The Television Studies Reader* (Volume 2) (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 373-388.
Ron Becker, "Prime-time TV in the Gay Nineties: Network Television, Quality Audiences, and Gay Politics," in Allen and Hill eds., *The Television Studies Reader* (2004), pp. 389-404.
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Week 6: Movie Buddies

Masculinities and Male Friendship Historicizing Hollywood Buddy Treatments Mixed Race Buddy Films Male vs. Female Buddy Films

- Viewing: *Lethal Weapon* (1987; John Badham dir.) (outside viewing)
Rush Hour (1998; Brett Ratner dir.) (excerpts)
Bridesmaids (2011; Paul Feig dir.) (excerpts)
- Reading: Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994), Chapter 2, "Hard Bodies: The Reagan Heroes," pp. 24-63.
Laleen Jayamanne, "Let's Miscegenate: Jackie Chan and His African-American Connection," in Meaghan Morries, Siu Leung Li, and Stephen Chan Ching-kiu eds., *Hong Kong Connections: Trans-National Imaginations in Action Cinema*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), pp. 151-162.
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Week 7: Women's Stories: Television

Women's TV as a Concept
Gendered Audiences/Gendered Programming
The History of Women's Television
Reality Shows and Representations of Heterosexual Couplings
Women at Work
Female Antiheroes

Viewing: *UnREAL* (Lifetime) (selected episodes)

Reading: Dana Cloud, "The Irony Bribe and Reality Television: Investment and Detachment in *The Bachelor*," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 27 (5), pp. 413-437.
Heather Hundley, "The Evolution of Gendercasting: The Lifetime Television Network—'Television for Women.'" *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 29 (4): 174-181.
Jackie Byars and Eileen R. Meehan, "Once in a Lifetime: Constructing 'The Working Woman' through Cable Narrowcasting" in Newcomb ed., *Television: The Critical View*, 7th ed., pp. 144-168.

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Week 8: Women's Stories: Film

Women's Films
The Woman's Film as Hybrid Genre
The Significance of Melodrama and Comedy
Stardom as Genre

Viewing: *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006; David Frankel dir.)(outside viewing)
Hidden Figures (2016; Theodore Melfi dir.)

Reading: Janine Basinger, *A Woman's View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women, 1930-1960* (Wesleyan, 1995). Introduction.
Linda Mizejewski, "Feminism and Femininity in the Era of Backlash," in Robert Eberwein and Aaron Baker eds., *Acting for America* (Rutgers U Press, 2010), pp. 201-222.

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Week 9: Superheroes and American Television

Irony and Comedy in Television Adaptations of Superheroes Comic Books and TV

Media Conglomeration and the Superhero Franchise Independent Production Companies and Major Studios

- Viewing: *Batman* (ABC) (selected episodes)
Marvel's Agents of SHIELD (ABC) (selected episodes)
- Reading: Lynne Spigel and William Jenkins, "Same Bat Channel, Different Bat Times: Mass Culture and Popular Memory," *The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and His Media*, pp. 114-146.
Clark, Jennifer S. "Liberating Bicentennial America: Imagining the Nation through TV Superwomen of the Seventies." *Television & New Media* 10, no. 5 (September 1, 2009), 434-454.
- Recmmd.: Matt Yockey, Introduction and Ch. 1 from *Batman* (Wayne State University Press, 2014)
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Week 10: Superheroes on the Big Screen

Superheroes in American Culture The Superhero and the Movie Franchise The Significance of Fandom and the Role of Fan Communities

- Viewing: *The Avengers* (2012; Joss Whedon dir.)
- Reading: Bart Beaty, "The Blockbuster Superhero," in Cynthia Lucia, Roy Grundmann, Art Simon eds., *American Film History, Selected Readings, 1960-Present* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), pp. 423-437.
Derek Johnson, "Cinematic Destiny: Marvel Studios and the Trade Stories of Industrial Convergence," *Cinema Journal* 52 (1), pp. 1-24
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Barry Keith Grant, *Film Genre Reader VI*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012.

Edgerton, Gary and Brian Geoffrey Rose, eds. 2005. *Thinking Outside the Box: A Contemporary Television Genre Reader*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.

Thomas Elsaesser, *The Persistence of Hollywood*. London: Routledge, 2011.

Cynthia Lucia, Roy Grundmann, Art Simon eds., *American Film History: Selected Readings, 1960-Present*. Malden, Mass., and Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015.

Toby Miller, *The Contemporary Hollywood Reader*. London: Routledge, 2009.

Paul McDonald and Janet Wasko, *The Contemporary Hollywood Film Industry*. Malden, Mass. and Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008.

Mittell, Jason. 2004. *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture*. New York: Routledge.

Steven Neale and Murray Smith eds., *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*. London: Routledge, 1998.

Newcomb, Horace, ed. 2006. *Television: The Critical View*, 7th edition. New York: Oxford University Press.

Janet Wasko, *How Hollywood Works*. SAGE Publications, 2003.

Yockey, Matt. 2014. *Batman*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.