

University of North Texas

Fall 2013

# RTVF 3610: Film and Television Analysis

Room 184, Tuesdays 12:30-4:20 pm

Professor: Dr. Harry M. Benshoff, RTVF 234, [benshoff@unt.edu](mailto:benshoff@unt.edu)

Office Hours: Tuesdays 11:00-12:30, Wednesdays 3:30-5:00 pm, and by appointment  
[www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com): class ID # is 6811004; class password is "FTVA"

TAs: Stephanie Oliver ([StephanieOliver2@my.unt.edu](mailto:StephanieOliver2@my.unt.edu))

David Goodman ([DavidGoodman@my.unt.edu](mailto:DavidGoodman@my.unt.edu))

**Overview:** This class is designed to introduce students to various qualitative methodologies used to study media texts and their relationship(s) to the real world, i.e. the cultures that produce and consume them. It will introduce students to the historical development of these approaches, as well as to the vocabulary, scholars, and concepts germane to these various schools of thought. Film and television texts will be screened in conjunction with lectures and discussions, so that students may practice the application (and possibly the critique) of the methods and concepts under consideration. Ultimately, understanding these methodologies will not only enrich your approach to film and television, but also to other aspects of culture and cultural studies.

**Objectives:** Students completing this class will learn:

- a variety of basic qualitative approaches to studying film and television
- how to apply said approaches to the analysis of individual film and TV texts
- the historical and cultural contexts surrounding the approaches studied

This is a 3000-level upper division course, designed as an intermediate class between RTVF 1320 and the rotating series of 4000-level critical-cultural studies classes. Students wishing to pursue 4000-level classes in RTVF critical studies are encouraged to take this class beforehand. RTVF 3610 is a prerequisite for many 4000-level classes.

*Students who are unwilling to explore issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality within an educational framework should consider enrolling in another class.*

*Any form of academic dishonesty will result in an F for the course and possible further sanctions at the university level.*

*Use of electronic equipment in class is only permitted for note-taking purposes.*

## Required Reading:

- 1) *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled*, ed. Robert C. Allen (1992) **\*\*COD\*\***  
(available for purchase and also on reserve at the library)
- 2) Selections from *Approaches to Popular Film*, ed. Hollows and Jancovich (1995) **\*\*APF\*\***  
(available via Blackboard, library reserves, and used book outlets)

In addition, there will be optional readings posted on Blackboard for some of the course topics. These readings are MS drafts of textbook chapters based on class lectures written by Professor Benshoff.

<b>Course Requirements:</b>	3 Short Tests	15% each x 3 =	45%
	3 Short Papers	15% each x 3 =	45%
	Attendance and Participation		10%

**Attendance** is mandatory, although everyone gets one free unexcused absence. Excused absences are acceptable with extenuating circumstances—talk to me. Each absence after your free one will result in the loss of 1 percentage point from your final grade. For example, missing 6 classes will cause you to lose 5 percentage points (half a letter grade).

**Attendance will be monitored with sign-in sheets;** it is each student’s responsibility to mark himself or herself present at the start of each class. Sheets will be available for several minutes into the start of each session, at which point they will be removed. Late arrivals will be marked as absent. It is courteous to other students and the professor to come to class **ON TIME**.

**In-class participation** will be used in determining your final grade. *In order to do well on participation, you should come to class prepared to engage with the topics based upon your reading of the material or viewing of the media.* There will also be several opportunities for extra credit.

**Examinations:** There will be 3 short multiple choice tests, each worth 15% of your overall grade. These tests will not be cumulative but will cover the basic concepts covered in class, the required readings, the screenings, and the discussions. The third test will be administered during the scheduled final exam period and will cover material from the last third of the class.

**Papers:** There will be 3 short (3-4 page) papers, each worth 15% of your overall grade. These papers will be essays in which you apply one of the critical methodologies under consideration to a media text of your own choosing. Students will be required to upload these papers to [www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com) and hand in a hard copy with the Turnitin “receipt” or confirmation number attached. ***No late papers will be accepted without a doctor’s excuse or evidence of family tragedy. Failing to hand in a paper ON TIME means you will automatically lose 15% of your overall grade.*** Further information on the papers will be handed out and discussed in class.

**NOTE:** RTVF classes work with the Office of Disability Accommodation to make reasonable accommodations for qualified students. If you have special needs, please register with the ODA and present me with a written copy of your Accommodation Request as soon as possible.

*“The University of North Texas is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of federal equal opportunity legislation; reference Public Law 92-112 – The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended. With the passage of new federal legislation entitled Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), pursuant to section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, there is renewed focus on providing this population with the same opportunities enjoyed by all citizens.”*

#### BREAKDOWN BY WEEKS AND CLASS MEETINGS:

- 1 (9/3) **Introduction to the Course; Ideology and the Culture Industries**  
 Read: *COD* Introduction and Chapter 5; *APF* Chapter 1  
 Case Studies: *Ballet Mecanique*, *The Flying Mouse*, *Aqua Teen Hunger Force*

- 2 (9/10) **Semiotics and Structuralism**  
Read: *COD* Chapter 1  
Case Study: *Palindromes* (2004, dir. Todd Solondz, 100 min.)
- 3 (9/17) **Auteur Theory**  
Read: *APF* Chapter 2  
Case Study: Tim Burton
- 4 (9/24) **Genre Theory**  
Read: *COD* Chapter 4, *APF* Chapter 3  
Case Studies: *All in the Family*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*
- 5 (10/1) **Test #1; Paper #1 Drafting Session**
- 6 (10/8) **Psychoanalysis 101** \*\*\*\*\***(Paper #1 Due)**\*\*\*\*\*  
Read: *COD* Chapter 6  
Case Study: *The Machinist* (2004, dir. Brad Anderson, 102 min.)
- 7 (10/15) **Lacanian Psychoanalysis; Screen Theory**  
Read: *APF* Chapter 6  
Case Study: *The Dreamers* (2003, dir. Bernardo Bertolucci, 115 min.)
- 8 (10/22) **Feminism(s)**  
Read: *COD* Chapter 7, *APF* Chapter 7  
*The Prize Winner of Defiance, Ohio* (2005, dir. Jane Anderson, 99 min.)
- 9 (10/29) **Postmodernism and Poststructuralism**  
Read: *COD* Chapter 9  
Case Study: *Pee-wee's Playhouse Christmas Special* (1988, 49 min.)
- 10 (11/5) **Test #2; Paper #2 Drafting Session**
- 11 (11/12) **Introduction to Cultural Studies** \*\*\*\*\***(Paper #2 Due)**\*\*\*\*\*  
Read: *COD* Chapter 8, *APF* Chapter 8  
Case Study: Madonna in the 1980s
- 12 (11/19) **Audiences, Reception, Fandoms**  
Read: *COD* Chapter 3  
Case Study: *Trekkies* (1997, dir. Roger Nygard, 86 min.)
- 13 (11/26) **Race/Ethnicity/Sexuality, Film and TV**  
Case Study: *Good Hair* (2009, dir. Jeff Stilson, 95 min.)
- 14 (12/3) **Beyond Identity Politics?**  
Case Study: *Paris is Burning* (1991, dir. Jennie Livingston, 76 min.)  
**Paper #3 Drafting Session**

- (12/6)           \*\*\***(Paper #3 Due)**\*\*\*   **Hard Copy due to box in RTVF Main Office 262**
- 15    (12/12)       **THURSDAY Final Exam (Test #3) 10:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.**

***KEY WORDS/CONCEPTS FOR CRITICAL/CULTURAL STUDIES COURSES***

**culture:** the characteristic features of a civilization or state; behavior typical of a group or class.

**ideology:** “A relatively coherent system of values, beliefs, or ideas shared by some social group and often taken for granted as natural or inherently true” (Bordwell and Thompson). French theorist Louis Althusser says control over a society is regulated by “repressive state apparatuses” (governments, armies, police forces, courts) and by “ideological state apparatuses” (schools, churches, families, and the MEDIA).

**white patriarchal capitalism:** the dominant ideology of the western world. Suggests that white men and the acquisition of wealth are the most important aspects of life. Reflected in most popular cultural artifacts to some degree.

**Hollywood Cinema:** The type of film you probably most often see. It screens at every multiplex theatre in America. It can usually be identified by a big budget, big stars, and big advertising campaigns. It can be differentiated from smaller budgeted independent features, documentaries, avant-garde films, and foreign films. Hollywood film follows certain patterns of formal construction called *classical Hollywood narrative form*, including a linear story, (usually happy) closure, a goal oriented and action-driven narrative, a singular (usually white male heterosexual) protagonist, “transparency” of style, and a simplified version of good and evil. It “spoon-feeds” information to the spectator, employs patterns of continuity editing, and is usually easily identifiable by genre (western, horror, musical, etc.).

**independent cinema:** films produced outside the Hollywood industry. Independent cinema tends to be more oriented towards social issues, radical formal techniques, or other subjects which are not considered “mainstream.” It tends to be exhibited theatrically in urban areas only.

**vertical integration:** a monopolistic practice in which all aspects of a capitalist endeavor (production, distribution, retail [exhibition]) are controlled by the same person or group of people. Throughout its history, the Hollywood film industry has been more or less vertically integrated, keeping foreign films and independent films from being seen by larger audiences.

**content vs. form:** all works of art (and popular culture artifacts) are made up of both form and content. Content is “what” the work is about, while form is “how” the artist chooses to present that content. Example: a poem can be about a rose, but may take many different forms--a sonnet, a limerick, blank verse, etc. In fictional film, the content is usually the “story” being told, and this can be accomplished by an infinite number of formal and stylistic variations that shape the content in specific ways.

**diegesis:** the world of the media text’s story.

**suture:** in its broadest sense, this term refers to how the spectator is positioned in relation to the diegesis, how he/she is pulled into the world of the text through specific patterns of editing, sound design, camera movement, etc. One of the main goals of Hollywood film practice.

**realism and formalism:** filmic styles, in which the events depicted seem to be either true to life (realism), or more obviously artistically mediated (formalism). These are not absolute categories but rather opposing poles of a continuum. Realist films tend to be more content oriented and socially conscious. Formalist films use more obvious cinematic tricks (flashy editing, odd lenses, etc.); they are more interested in evoking a mood or emotional response than in presenting some kind of objective reality. Of course, realist style is no more “true” than formalist style (both use the same systems of mediation).

**self-reflexivity:** as opposed to a “transparent” style (which is associated with the CHC), a self-reflexive style is one that reveals the means of its own construction. Ex: a film about filmmaking, or a film which constantly ruptures its diegetic world (deliberately breaking the “suture”) to draw attention to the fact that you are watching a movie and not some “real” or possibly real event.

**auteur theory:** approach to film study that argues that the director is the most important force behind the making of a film, that he/she is the “author” of the film. The director’s style and themes are therefore present in every film that he/she directs. Some producers, screenwriters, and stars might also be considered auteurs.

**stereotype:** a standardized mental picture held in common by members of a group that represents an oversimplified opinion, affective attitude, or an uncritical judgment (as of a person, race, issue, or event). To some degree, all media employ stereotypes for “instant” characterization.

**shot:** the building block of visual narratives. One uninterrupted take (run) of film or video. Can last for one frame or the length of an entire text.

**mise-en-scene:** literally “placement within the frame.” What and especially how you see what you see within a shot. Can include aspects of visual design (lighting, costumes, set design, make up and hair) as well as cinematographic properties such as choice of lens, camera angle, camera distance, film stock, blocking, and framing.

**montage:** in its broadest sense, editing. The way individual shots are combined to create meaning or tell a story.

### **Time Line: A Thumbnail Sketch of Hollywood and Twentieth-Century History**

1894-1896: Invention of Cinema. Early film is mostly shorts: travelogues, docs, comedies.

1911: Hollywood is incorporated as a city.

1915: BIRTH OF A NATION is released. Hollywood moves toward feature-length films.

1917-1919: US involvement in World War One. Hollywood film attains world-wide dominance  
 The 1920s: The Golden Age of Silent Cinema. The Jazz Age. The Harlem Renaissance. Sound in cinema arrives with *THE JAZZ SINGER* (1927). Radio is popularized.

1929: Stock Market crash. Great Depression begins and lasts until US entry into WW2.

The 1930s: The form and style of Classical Hollywood Cinema is codified. The Production Code, written in 1930, is put into effect in 1934 with the “Seal of Approval” provision. Radio is common and experimental TV tests begin.

1941-1945: US involvement in World War Two. United States and Western Europe defeat the Axis powers: Germany, Italy, and Japan. Atomic bombs dropped on Japan in 1945.

Late 1940s: Rise of film noir, cinematic realism, and social problem films. The Paramount Consent Decrees end the studios’ monopolies; rise in independent productions. Red Scare and anticommunist hysteria: HUAC comes to Hollywood in 1947 and again in 1951-52. TV networks arise in urban areas; Milton Berle becomes one of the first TV stars.

The 1950s: Return to domesticity, post-war economic prosperity, complacency and conformity. TV invades the American home and movies are forced to compete with widescreen, Technicolor, 3-D. Foreign films and independent productions start to break down the Production Code. Rise of youth culture, drive-ins, and rock and roll. Space Race. Build up of nuclear arsenals.

Early 1960s: Civil Rights movement. Kennedy assassinated in 1963. Civil Rights amendment of 1964. War in Vietnam escalates. Underground film and the vast “TV Wasteland.”

Late 1960s: Rise of the counterculture: women and minorities begin to demand their civil rights. Antagonism towards the war in Vietnam grows. Martin Luther King and Robert F. Kennedy assassinated in 1968. Hollywood industry in financial trouble; buy-outs by larger corporations. The Production Code is scrapped (1966) and replaced by a ratings system (1968).

1970s: National cynicism following Watergate and Vietnam. Nixon resigns in 1974. US becomes a debtor nation. TV begins to address racial minorities and “liberated” women. Rise of the Nostalgic Hollywood Blockbuster, which will fuel Hollywood into the new millennium.

1980s: Conservative and/or reactionary politics and films. Yuppies. Development of video and cable as alternative outlets for film. AIDS and the politicization of the LGBTQ community.

1990s: an attempted return to more liberal politics with Bill Clinton plus a conservative fear of the millennium. Film and TV industries are increasingly merged into larger global trans-media corporate conglomerates. Independent film distributors bought out by larger studio corporations.

2000s: New media technologies emerging and converging: digital and high definition video set to replace film. Internet distribution of media already controlled by corporate conglomerates.

2010s: What is the future of Film and Television?