

Tele- vision Genres

DC 229-301; DC 229-310 Online; Autumn, 2016

WEEK ONE: *Thursday, September 8th, 2016*

"Introduction To Television Genres; Variety"

(A)

I N T R O D U C T I O N

In a letter to Robert Hooke in February 15th, 1676, Isaac Newton said, "If I have been able to see further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants," meaning, the mathematicians who came before him aided and abetted his quantum leap (including formulating quantum leaps, see Newtonian Physics).

The same exact thing is true with the history of television and television genres. The good, new shows and various styles of shows, are standing on the shoulders of other "giant" shows. And in a profession that thrives on precedence (that is to say, the development of television programming) it is for certain... something came before.

In teaching this class, TELEVISION GENRES, I would like to take each week, each genre, in three distinct stages:

BLACK AND WHITE (or ancient history), an early example of the genre taken from back in the 1950's and 1960's, when shows were broadcast in black and white.

COLOR, (or recent history), a more recent example of the genre in question, taken from the 1970's and 1980's when shows were broadcast in color. What have they kept from the bygone era? What have they improved upon? Is what they're doing an improvement?

HD, (or history in the making), the current incarnation of the preceding shows and eras. Thinking from a non-technical standpoint, judging the program from a purely narrative standpoint, what improvements have been made or not?

In class, we'll review two examples each week—a **BLACK AND WHITE** (ancient history) version, as well as a **COLOR** (or recent history) version, taking notes. Then, in the course of the week that follows, you'll watch the **HD** version of that genre.

Based upon your notes from class, of the older examples of the genre and based upon your observation of the current show, you'll write a theme paper, 2-5 pages in length, discussing what worked and didn't work in the episode. Incorporate your

observations in terms of the episode's zeitgeist (or spirit of the times), the show's point of view, and how it might be based on elements pioneered by the earlier examples.

(B)

O V E R V I E W O F T E L E V I S I O N G E N R E S

Students will analyze and discuss some of the most important and influential shows in television history. Students will learn all the writer-centric form of scripted television, where it's been and where it's heading. Students study serials and procedurals, network and cable shows, principal leads, partnerships and ensemble, comedy and drama, prevalent themes, innovations in content and form, the impact of DVR, and the impact of the internet.

WEEK ONE: Thursday, September 8th, 2016

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VARIETY, work that is generally hosted and consists of different acts, sketches and/or dance and musical performances, combined in a non-narrative matter. Although predominantly for television, some theatrical film variety work has also been produced. Examples:

- * **BLACK AND WHITE** (or ancient history), "Sid Caesar"
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c5KKAdFnOwQ>
- * **LIVING COLOR** (or recent history), "The Carol Burnett Show"
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PwubhFtI_jc
- * **HD** (current), "Saturday Night Live"

ASSIGNMENT: Watch this week's episode of "Saturday Night Live," and take notes based upon your personal emerging criteria with regards to what constitutes quality programming, and how it defends a given genre. Write a theme paper, 2-3 pages in length, discussing what worked and didn't work in the episode. Incorporate your observations in terms of the episodes zeitgeist (or spirit of the times), the show's point of view, and how it might be based on elements pioneered by either the Sid Caesar example(s) or The Carol Burnett Show example(s).

WEEK TWO: Thursday, September 15th, 2016

DETECTIVE AND MYSTERY, fictional work in which a detective (sometimes merely an endangered individual forced to "detect" for his own self-protection) attempts to solve a crime, usually a murder or theft. Emphasis is placed on the search for clues and rational power of the detective, rather than the efforts of police or lawbreakers.

WEEK THREE: Thursday, September 22nd, 2016

COMEDY, fictional work for television, normally running a half-hour in length, which creates humor around the lives of a cast of recurring characters and the "situations" in which they find themselves. Generally, regardless of what happens in any given episode, the characters remain in the same relationships, and positions as they were before, and much of the humor derives from this predictability. The characters seldom change, and react in an expected manor to whatever challenges them, and generally the overall tenor of the shows is upbeat, expecting a happy, satisfying resolution. Everyday life is often an important element, and as a result, although the setting could be almost anywhere, most situation comedies are set in the home or workplace.

WEEK FOUR: Thursday, September 29th, 2016

DOCUMENTARY, nonfiction work defined by documentary pioneer John Grierson as the creative treatment of actuality. Grounded in some aspect of real life, documentaries may vary from a very deliberate account of facts to an extremely interpretive rendering of a subject, advocating a particular viewpoint on a political, social, or historical issue. In documentaries, actuality should still be dominate over the creative treatment, which while often staged for the camera, should not go so far as to be dramatized for emotional impact and belong to such genres as historical films or propaganda. Documentaries my include films that merely use a realistic technique in telling a fictional story.

WEEK FIVE: Thursday, October 6th, 2016

ANIMATION, work created by recording a series of still images, such as drawings, objects, or posed people; when played back, the static images combine to simulate motion, creating the impression of movement.

WEEK SIX: Thursday, October 13th, 2016

POLICE, fictional work portraying the activities and personalities of official law enforcement officers and agencies (from municipal police to FBI to G-men) in tracking criminals. Police stories offer many of the same elements as the crime and mystery genres, but with an added concentration on the procedures of police work and characterizations of police officers. Narratives are often concerned with their excessive devotion to their work and police procedure as they cope with office routine, bureaucracy, and the death of fellow officers in the line of duty. Unlike detectives, policemen fear discovering that they will turn corrupt or are beginning to share traits in common with their criminal adversaries, by also adopting illegal tactics, although for the purpose of apprehending criminals.

WEEK SEVEN: Thursday, October 20th, 2016

PERFORMANCES, nonfiction work documenting a performance, event, or concert of dance, music, opera, operetta, theatrical stage productions, magic, circus, stand-up comedy, burlesque, or other vaudeville or variety stage acts. Although the work being performed may be fictional, as with a stage play, the intent of the work in hand is documentation of that performance rather than a fictional narrative about it.

WEEK EIGHT: Thursday, October 27th, 2016

MINI-SERIES, multiple-episodes, fictional program of limited duration, shown on a daily or weekly schedule, usually lasting fifteen hours or less in total running time.

WEEK TEN: Thursday, November 3rd, 2016

MADE-FOR-TV MOVIES, individual fictional work presented on television, usually from 90 minutes to three hours in length (which may include commercials), and is not part of a regular series or mini-series.

WEEK ELEVEN: Thursday, November 10th, 2016

TELEVISION SPECIALS, A single television program on a specific occasion, such as an award show, a holiday presentation, or a performance.

(C)

Q U I C K C R I T I Q U E

What goes into judging a specific television show, and/or entire genre? What are the elements that contribute to its worth? With regards to the show(s) and genre(s) you like, you might begin by asking yourself, why? Why do I like a given show? What are the reasons. Here's a quick list of questions to answer as you watch various shows, over the course of our time together:

1. Did you like it? (Yes/No) Why?
2. Define the program's logistical style:
 - a. What happens in the first five (5) minutes:
 - b. Describe the act breaks:
 - c. Describe the tag, or epilogue:
3. Define the program's thematic style:
 - a. Comedy, or dramatic elements
 - b. Characters
 - c. Story
4. What is it's entertainment value?
5. If it's a funny program, how funny? What kind of humor:
 - a. Scatological?
 - b. Homophobic?
 - c. Racist?
 - d. Misogynist?
 - e. Satirical?
 - f. Political?
 - g. Topical?
 - h. Timeless?
 - i. Universal?
6. Zeitgeist (or spirit of the times): what observations were made unique to the programs specific moment in time?
7. What's are the perceived points of view of the following:
 - a. Host
 - b. Star
 - c. Ensemble
 - d. Creators
 - e. Network executives
 - f. Writer
8. How original is the program? What's its precedent? What's been done in the past that's similar? Is it a remake? Is it a sequel?

(D)

T E L E V I S I O N G E N R E S

Basic Information

Name:
Phone:
Email:
Address:

Week One:

Week Two:

Week Three:

Week Four:

Week Five:

Week Six:

Week Seven:

Week Eight:

Week Nine:

Week Ten:

Week Eleven: