Course title: Screen Cultures
Course code: VIST 3001 NETH
Programs offering course: Business and Culture, Social Sciences and Humanities
Language of instruction: English
U.S. semester credits: 3.00
Contact hours: 45.00
Term: Spring 2021

Course Description

Beginning from the premise that we live mediated lives, and that the visual media texts we consume on a daily basis shape our understanding of our own identity and the identity of others, Screen Cultures will explore the ways in which media at large -- and film and television, in particular -- produce meaning, articulate ideology and identity, and both reflect and effect cultural change, specifically as it concerns dominant and subversive articulations of gendered, raced, and sexual identity/ies. After an in-depth overview of the major theoretical approaches that inform the study of gender, race, and sexuality in popular culture, this course will home in on the representation of discrete and historically situated lived identities across a wide range of film and television texts, hailing from the post-World War II period up to the present. Ultimately, the goal of this course is to illustrate how critical theory and popular culture inform one another, paving the way for us to come to a renewed understanding of the complex dynamics that shape the changing representations of gender, race and sexuality -- both on and off the screen.

Learning Objectives

By completing this course, students will:

- Actively engage with and interrogate theories of popular culture, specifically those approaches that draw on feminist theory, critical race theory, psychoanalytic theory, queer theory, and disability studies;
- Demonstrate a keen understanding of the changing conceptions and representations of masculinity/ies and femininity/ies in American film and television from the 1950s to the present – and the way(s) in which these are inflected by questions of race, sexuality, class, and ability;
- Apply theories of popular culture and film/television criticism to visual media texts, both orally and in writing, in service of crafting and arguing for their own original reading of those texts;
- Have become more discerning and critical consumers of film and television.

Course Prerequisites

None

Methods of Instruction

Screen Cultures runs for 15 weeks (in other words, it spans the entire length of the semester) and meets twice a week for 2 hours. Every single class, students will be assigned one or two theoretical texts and one or more primary texts (i.e. one film or one or more episodes of a television series). We will discuss the primary and secondary texts in unison, and since this class takes the form of a seminar, students will be expected to demonstrate their understanding of the interrelationship between the two in class by analyzing selected scenes from the film or television show under consideration.

Although each class will be introduced and facilitated throughout by the instructor, it is imperative that students contribute actively to the discussion. Seminar-style classes rise and fall by the participation of the students, which makes it essential that everyone comes to class prepared. At a minimum, students should have closely read the assigned texts, watched the assigned film or television show(s), and taken (extensive) notes on both.

Assessment and Final Grade

1. Pop Quizzes 10%
Course Requirements

Pop Quizzes

These **two unannounced quizzes** are designed to test that students have read the assigned readings and watched the assigned visual media texts, while also giving you an idea of which type(s) of questions you can expect on the final exam. Students will have 20 minutes to answer one to three questions (ranging in level of difficulty); one of these questions will cover the plot of the assigned film or television show, while one or more will interrogate students’ understanding of the assigned readings.

Podcast Episode

Since their arrival on the cultural scene in 2004, podcasts have undergone a period of unprecedented growth, and have become one of the most popular and influential media in the dissemination of news, opinion, and critical commentary. Today, podcasts play an influential role in shaping the national conversation, specifically as it concerns the historical and contemporary analysis and reception of film and television, with podcasts ranging from:

- weekly conversations about the state of popular culture in the US writ large (e.g. Slate’s Culture Gabfest, NPR’s Pop Culture Happy Hour, Pop Rocket, The Watch);
- debates on specific aspects of American film and television, from the representation of race (Slate’s Represent), to the creation of television series (Remote Controlled), Hollywood as an industry (Hollywood Breakdown), and the state of film scholarship (The Film Comment Podcast);
- in-depth discussions of every episode of a particular television series (e.g. Talk the Thrones, The Talking Dead, Mission Log, Gilmore Guys);
- deep dives into specific genres or eras of Hollywood cinema (e.g. You Must Remember This, Out of the Past, The Dead Air Podcast).

You will be asked to follow in the footsteps of (amateur and professional) podcast hosts across the United States by contributing to the discussion and analysis of American film and television with a focus on unpacking the gendered, raced, and sexual dimensions of an American pop cultural text.

In a **fifteen-minute podcast episode (if you opt for a podcast with two hosts) or a twenty-minute episode (if you choose to have three hosts)**, you will demonstrate how your analytical skills have evolved by the halfway-point of the semester by parsing a film or TV series of your own choosing.

Envisioned as an oral response paper, your episode will be evaluated on the same criteria; needless to say, you will not be asked to quote authors at length, but you will have to weave their theoretical insights into your conversation. Ultimately, your podcast episode should take the form of a thoughtful conversation between two or three well-read individuals, which will advance your listeners’ understanding of the gendered, raced, and sexual issues raised by the film or TV series you select as the focus of your podcast episode.

Response Paper #1

Response Paper #2

Students will be asked to write **two 1,500-word response papers** (the first is worth 10%, the second 15%) in which they will be given the opportunity to respond to that week’s readings and viewings by providing an integrated analysis of both. These response papers should include:

- a title and subtitle
- an introduction, culminating in a thesis statement
- one or more paragraphs that refer to **specific scenes** from the student’s chosen film and/or television show(s) and **specific arguments** made in the assigned reading(s) to support the thesis statement
- a conclusion, which may include further/future avenues of approach to the question(s) raised

These response papers must take the form of an argumentative research paper, which means that students must go beyond a mere one-to-one summary or application of the theory and the (visual media) text(s) under consideration and must instead craft and support an original argument about the chosen film or television show that is grounded in the assigned theoretical reading(s).
These papers must be formatted according to MLA guidelines, and must include a list of works cited; if a student is unfamiliar with the MLA annotation method, the instructor will provide the student with an overview of the most important MLA guidelines. In addition to this summary, students are encouraged to consult Purdue University’s Online Writing Lab (or OWL), which offers a comprehensive and easy-to-use overview of the MLA citation method: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/.

Crucially, students must write and submit one response paper in each block of the class. Students who have prepared a response paper must upload it to Canvas no later than 11:00AM on the day when their chosen film or television show(s) will be discussed. Additionally, students who have written a response paper may be asked to share the points they raise in their paper during the in-class discussion.

**Final Exam**

This written exam is designed to test students’ understanding of the theories discussed in class, and, crucially, how these help viewers make sense of the changing representation of gender, race, and sexuality in film and television texts from 1950 until the present. During this cumulative exam, which will cover material culled from the entire length of the semester, students will be asked to answer three or four questions (out of seven questions that will be provided) and will have to demonstrate -- in a cogent and well-structured response -- their knowledge of the major changes in the lives and visual representations of men and women since the end of the Second World War.

**Class Participation**

As mentioned above, the success of seminar-style classes depends in no small part on the active – and informed – contributions of students; you will therefore be expected to come to class prepared and ready to engage with your fellow students on the assigned readings and visual media texts.

*Note:* Although all of you are experienced viewers of film and television, there is a difference between watching a movie in bed before you go to sleep and watching a movie in order to unpack its gendered underpinnings. While some of you may choose to watch a film two times, all of you will have to take copious notes and bring these to class in order to support your arguments with specific references to scenes, camera movements, dialogue, etc.

Students who make active connections to the concepts from the reading materials in class discussions, students who actively ask questions, and students who actively reflect on out-of-class experiences in class will receive extra points for participation. Participation points will be deducted when students do not participate in class or have not read the assigned reading materials before coming to class.

Since we will be discussing culturally sensitive issues in class, the classroom must be a safe space in which students are able to express their opinions openly. Discriminatory comments or language of any kind will not be tolerated.

Laptops are allowed, but only when they are used to take notes or to look up information directly related to the class discussion. The instructor reserves the right to prohibit laptop use in case this distracts other students or this privilege is abused.

**Important:** Please note that in case you are not present for a pop quiz or the final exam -- or fail to hand in a response paper on time because of illness -- you are required to hand in a written doctor’s note with your teacher.

**Resits are not offered for CIEE courses.**

**CIEE Grade Conversion Scale and Rubric**

Your performance in this course will be graded in accordance with the CIEE course grading scale and rubric adopted for all CIEE courses, which you can access in your Canvas course page under Files.

**Screenings**

A number of screenings will be organized throughout the semester, which will give students the opportunity to see a variety of films or TV shows that both function as additional source different illustrations of the theories discussed in class and lend themselves well to a comparative response paper.

Since these screenings depend largely on the movies and TV shows that are shown in the movie theaters of the city of Amsterdam, most of these screenings will be announced on a rolling basis through Canvas.

**Attendance**

Each student is expected to attend all sessions of the course and to participate actively in class discussions.
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Attendance will be taken every class session by the course instructor. Absences will be penalized according to the CIEE Amsterdam attendance policy outlined below:

1 or 2 absences = complete 1,500 word make-up assignment
3 absences = 10 points deducted from the student’s final grade
4 absences = the student fails the course (F is listed on the transcript)

- If you arrive to class 15+ minutes late, this counts as a ½ absence.
- At all times, you need to inform the instructor – before the start of class – of any absences. Failure to notify the teacher in advance will result in an extra assignment.
- If you are sick (i.e. physically incapable of attending class), you may miss class, but you will have to complete a makeup assignment.
- Going on/returning from a trip are not valid excuses for missing or showing up late to a CIEE class.
- Note about all assignments: Late assignments will be marked down by 1 point (out of 10) for every day the assignment is late. Assignments that are more than 3 days (72 hours) late will not be accepted.

N.B. Course schedule is subject to change due to study tours, excursions, or local holidays. Final schedules will be included in the final syllabus provided to students on site.

**Weekly Schedule**

**Week 1**

**Class: 1.1 Introduction to Screen Cultures**

An introduction to the course, its learning outcomes and objectives – and, crucially, each other

Reading: None

Due: Select – and be prepared to present in class – a brief clip from a film or television series that resonates with you and/or illustrates the capacity of film and television to shape our thinking about ourselves, as well as the world and people around us

**Class: 1.2 Under His Eye: Women, the Patriarchy, and Sexual Politics**

Reading [44 pages]:


Viewing: *The Handmaid’s Tale* (Hulu, 2017-present): "Offred" (S1E1) and "Birth Day" (S1E2)

**Week 2**

**Class: 2.1 The Importance of Body Language: The Female Body, Above and Below**

Reading [32 pages]:


Viewing: *The Little Mermaid* (Ron Clements and John Musker, 1989)

**Class: 2.2 From Top to Bottom: Spectatorship, Power, and Pleasure**

Reading [20 pages]:

Week 3
Class: 3.1 A Flaw in the Iris: Theorizing the (Female) Spectator I

Reading [20.5 pages]:

Viewing: Chinatown (Roman Polanski, 1974)

Class: 3.2 Looking (Back) at Difference I: Lacing in Femininity and Race

Reading [38 pages]:

Viewing: Gone with the Wind (Victor Fleming, 1939) [part 1 only]

Week 4
Class: 4.1 Looking (Back) at Difference II: Lassoing Masculinity and Race

Reading [35.5 pages]:

Viewing: The Searchers (John Ford, 1956)

Class: 4.2 At Least I'll Be Seen: Theorizing the (Female) Spectator II

Reading [21 pages]:

Viewing: Imitation of Life (Douglas Sirk, 1959)

Week 5
Class: 5.1 Looking (Back) at Difference III: Queering Gentlemen, Queering Blondes

Reading [27 pages]:
- Rowe, Kathleen. "Feminism and the Carnevalesque" and "Dumb Blondes" (excerpts). The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995. 8-12; 169-172; 178-183. [12 pages]

Viewing: Gentlemen Prefer Blondes (Howard Hawks, 1953)
Class: 5.2 "I'd Kill to Be Part of This Story": Theorizing the (Female) Spectator III

Reading [20 pages]:

**Week 6**

Class: 6.1 Review Class: All Gazes (Re-)Aligned

Reading:
No new reading; instead, re-read your notes and the PowerPoint presentations from classes 1-10.

Viewing: *The Neon Demon* (Nicolas Wending Refn, 2016)

Class: 6.2 Mad Women: Fixing Femininity in Post-World War II America

Reading [39 pages]:

Viewing: *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007-2015): "Ladies Room" (S1E2) and "Babylon" (S1E6)

**Week 7**

Class: 7.1 Mad Men: Manufacturing Masculinity in Post-World War II America

Reading [29 pages]:

Viewing: *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007-2015): "Marriage of Figaro" (S1E3) and "The Grown-Ups" (S3E12)

Class: 7.2 Picture (Im)Perfect: Jackie Kennedy, Feminist Historiography and Counter-Memory


Viewing: *Jackie* (Pablo Larraín, 2016)

**Week 8**

Class: 8.1 Far from Perfect I: Historicizing Intersectionality

Reading [24 pages]:


Class: 8.2 Far from Perfect II: Crash-ing into Intersectionality
Week 9
Class: 9.1 Who's Gonna Make It After All?: Television Feminism in the 1970s

Reading [40 pages]:

Viewing:
Group A: The Mary Tyler Moore Show (CBS, 1970-1977): "Love Is All Around" (S1E1) and "What's Wrong with Swimming?" (S7E4)
Group B: Maude (CBS, 1972-1978): "Maude Meets Florida" (S1E3) and "Florida's Problem" (S1E18)

Class: 9.1 Carrie's Right to Shoes: Postfeminism at the Dawn of the Millennium

Reading [30 pages]:

Viewing: Sex and the City (HBO, 1998-2004): "Ring a Ding Ding" (S4E16) and "A Woman's Right to Shoes" (S6E9)

Week 10
Class: 10.1 Latina from the Block:

Situating Latinx Identity/ies in Third-Wave Feminist Television

Reading [37 pages]:

Viewing: Cristela (ABC, 2014-2015): "Pilot" (S1E1) | Modern Family (ABC, 2009-present): "Patriot Games" (S6E22) | One Day at a Time (Netflix, 2017-present): "This Is It" (S1E1)

Class: 10.2 Terminal Masculinity: Reconfiguring the Raced and Gendered Body I

Reading [34 pages]:

Viewing: Terminator 2: Judgment Day (James Cameron, 1991)
Week 11

Class: 11.1 The Problem with Fembots: Reconfiguring the Raced and Gendered Body II

Reading [12 pages]:


Viewing: Ex Machina (Alex Garland, 2015)

Class: 11.2 Now, Sink: Reconfiguring the Raced and Gendered Body III

Reading [36 pages]:


Viewing: Get Out (Jordan Peele, 2017)

Week 12

Class: 12.1 Pictures of a Revolution I: Transgender Representation in Contemporary Television

Reading [28 pages]:


Viewing: 20/20 (ABC, 1978-present): "Bruce Jenner, In His Own Words"* | I Am Cait (E!, 2015-2016): "Meeting Cait" (S1E1) | Orange Is the New Black (Netflix, 2013-present): "Lesbian Request Denied" (S1E3)

Class: 12.2 Pictures of a Revolution II: Isn't Life a Drag? –

- or Gender Performativity on the Small Screen

Reading [36 pages]:


Viewing: RuPaul's Drag Race (Logo/VH1, 2009-present): “Glitter Ball” (S6E11; 20:41-35:25) and “RuPaul Book Ball” (S8E8)

Week 13

Class: 13.1 Final Exam

Reading: Review all assigned readings
Course Materials
Readings


Rowe, Kathleen. "Feminism and the Cameovalesque" and "Dumb Blondes" (excerpts). The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995. 8-12; 169-172; 178-183. [12 pages]


