GENRE

STUDIES

IN

MASS

MEDIA

A HANDBOOK

ART SILVERBLATT

GENRE STUDIES IN MASS MEDIA

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M.E.Sharpe
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To my "first generation" of friends, who have been supportive for so long:

Rick Rosenfeld, Linda Holtzman, Karen Techner, John Goldstein, Alan Osherow, and Gary Tobin.

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Preface

Genre Studies in Mass Media offers a range of theoretical approaches to the study of genre. Each chapter consists of at least two parts. The first part consists of a detailed discussion of one of the theoretical approaches to genre study. This is followed by a "Lines of Inquiry" section, which summarizes the major points of the discussion section and suggests directions for analysis and further study. Some chapters also include examples of genre analysis that illustrate how the particular theoretical approach is applied.

The text focuses on the *process* of genre analysis, using the selected approaches discussed. The book provides examples and analyses of genres in an effort to support, illustrate, and extend any abstract concepts that have been introduced. More important, it gives students the theoretical tools to conduct their own primary research into genres. In that sense, the methodology is expansive rather than reductive. Presumably, two students could conduct an analysis of the same genre using different approaches and come up with divergent interpretations. In all cases, for an interpretation to be valid: (1) the analysis must be systematically applied, and (2) the analysis must be supported with concrete examples from the text (i.e., film, television episode, newspaper). It must be emphasized, however, that depending on the specific area of study, one approach may be more useful than another.

This text builds on the qualitative methodologies I developed in previous works (*Media Literacy: Keys to Interpreting Media Messages* and *Approaches to Media Literacy: A Handbook*), and applies many of the principles of media literacy discussed in those works to the study of genre. For this book, I relied heavily on the popular press for resource materials, particularly the *New York Times*. My strategy involved moving from specific accounts to exploring the implications of these articles. The stories that appear in the press about genre (often in the business sec-

tion, or "looking at the arts" section) illustrate the ways in which genres reflect, reinforce, and shape cultural attitudes and preoccupations, and are products of historical events.

Although a familiarity with media literacy principles is helpful, this text should provide you with the necessary theoretical tools to apply to the study of genre. For those who would like additional discussions of these concepts, I would refer you to the *Keys* and *Approaches* texts. For those who are already familiar with the concepts, the brief discussion in the text should be a helpful review.

I would like to thank my research assistants, Don Miller and Jeff Nelson, for their support and contributions to the text.

GENRE STUDIES IN MASS MEDIA

— 1 —

Introduction

Overview

We are all familiar with TV reality shows such as *The Apprentice, Survivor,* or *Big Brother*. But what exactly is a reality show? What elements are common to all of these programs? Their shared characteristics are what define the reality genre.

The word *genre* simply means "order." As applied to artistic works, a genre is a type, class, or category of presentation that shares distinctive and easily identifiable features. Examples of genres include romances, science fiction, situation comedies, and news programming. Even popular music falls within basic genres—or, as they are more commonly known, formats. Radio stations are organized around particular formats, such as country, rhythm and blues, hip-hop, and talk radio.

A genre can be identified by its own distinctive patterns in premise, plot, structure, character, worldview, style, and conventions. Because of these characteristic elements, *generic programming* (that is, a program that belongs to a particular genre) can be considered as a body of work. Brian G. Rose explains: "The term genre implies that these groups of formal or technical characteristics exist among works of the same kind, regardless of time or place of composition, author, or subject matter."[1] (For a discussion of formula, see Chapter 3.)

premise: předpoklad, výchozí bod

Because most media programs belong to a particular genre, such as science fiction or romantic comedy, a genre acts as a portal through which the audience typically receives media messages. Each genre presents a consistent worldview that shapes the ways we think about our world.

A Media Literacy Approach to Genre Studies

A media literacy approach to genre studies presents a range of approaches to the study of genres. Becoming familiar with these various approaches

provides students with a number of theoretical "lenses" through which they can conduct primary research into the genre. These strategies also provide a framework that can facilitate the discussion of media content with others—including children, peers, and the people responsible for producing media programming. Media literacy also enables students to apply these approaches to areas not generally thought of as genres, such as political cartoons, radio talk shows, and Internet blogs.

This text incorporates many of the principles and strategies of media literacy to the study of genre. Media literacy is a critical thinking skill that is applied to the source of most of our information—the channels of mass communications. Media literacy offers a critical framework for the systematic analysis of *media messages,* that is, the underlying themes or ideas contained in a media presentation. These messages work on several levels:

- *Manifest messages* are direct and clear to the audience. We generally have little trouble recognizing these messages when we are paying full attention to a media presentation.
- *Latent messages* are indirect and beneath the surface, and, consequently, escape our immediate attention. Latent messages may reinforce manifest messages or may suggest entirely different meanings.
- *Cumulative messages* occur with such frequency over time that they form new meanings, independent of any individual production. Consistent messages appear in media presentations with regard to gender roles, definitions of success, and racial and cultural stereotypes. These cumulative messages are then reinforced through the countless hours of media programming.

Media literacy should not be understood merely as an opportunity to bash the media. A well-produced media presentation can provide audiences with enormous benefit and pleasure. Indeed, the media literacy approach to genre studies should enhance individuals' enjoyment and appreciation of a particular genre. At the same time, genre studies encourages individuals to look outside of the boundaries of a particular genre, to explore other genres or avant-garde programming that flies beneath the radar of mainstream channels of the media.

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Process

Overview

Function refers to the purpose for creating and receiving media presentations. As it relates to genre study, a function approach addresses the following questions:

- Why do media communicators produce particular genres?
- What purposes are served by watching a genre such as a horror film or a reality show?
- Why are people (both media communicators and their audience) attracted to particular genres?
- What can we learn about a genre by identifying its functions?

LATENT: skrytý, utajený, na venek neznatelný

Genres generally share a common *manifest function*. Manifest function refers to a clear purpose for producing or receiving genric programming. As an example, in news programming (e.g., newspaper articles, news magazine shows, or Sunday morning interview programs), the manifest purpose is to provide information to the public. However, a genre may also fulfill a number of *latent functions* as well. Latent functions are secondary purposes that may not be immediately obvious to the audience. Taking the news genre as an example, in 2005 it was disclosed that the U.S. Department of Education had paid conservative columnist Armstrong Williams $240,000 to promote the Bush administration's No Child Left Behind education initiative on his syndicated television program. Thus, although Armstrong's audience thought that the function of the program was to provide information, Williams was actually being paid to persuade his audience to support Bush's education initiative.

The manifest function of a genre is often subordinate to its latent purposes. For instance, websites directed at children typically include games, with the chance to win free "stuff." However, the contest forms that they fill out are actually marketing surveys that furnish marketing firms with invaluable data they can use as the children grow up. Moreover, marketing companies often sell this information to other companies who want to separate children from their money.

In addition, a genric program may contain multiple functions. For instance, the summer 2005 reality series *The Scholar* (ABC), which was a competition among ten high school seniors, contained a series of manifest functions:

- *Education:* The contestants competed in a variety of academic challenges. Consequently, the audience had the opportunity to learn about a variety of academic subjects.
- *Entertainment:* The format of the show was designed to make the competition exciting, interesting, and entertaining.
- *Community service:* The series provided educational opportunities for the participants. The winner received a grand prize of a full college scholarship, valued at $250,000, covering tuition and expenses. In addition, the other contestants received scholarships totaling $300,000.
- *Advertising:* The sponsor of the series, Wal-Mart, appeared during the commercial breaks, promoting its stores and products.

In addition, the program contained layers of latent functions:

- *Product integration:* Wal-Mart entered into *a branded-entertainment agreement* with the reality series. This means that, in addition to the commercials, Wal-Mart was actually incorporated into each episode. For instance, in one of the "events," the five members of the winning team each received a $2,000 Wal-Mart gift card to outfit their dormitory rooms.
- *Image enhancement:* Sponsorship of shows like *The Scholar* was designed to send positive messages to its young audience about Wal-Mart, to counter the recent negative publicity about the company's low salaries, deficient employee benefits, and frequent violations of safety codes, as well as news stories about the impact of these megastores on small businesses as they spread into local communities.

Significantly, the Wal-Mart and Sam's Club Foundation's program only offered these scholarships to students in towns where it operated stores and distribution centers—offering a subtle inducement for the young audience to welcome Wal-Mart stores to their communities.

Occasionally, genres are designed to fulfill several *competing functions,* which can actually undermine *each* function. As an example, TV journalism was originally established as a public service. But in order to remain economically competitive, broadcast journalists have been pressured to present information in an entertaining fashion. However, these information and entertainment functions may conflict with one another. Thus while some information is complex and difficult (if not tedious) to understand, journalists often feel compelled to dress up their reports, which alters the content in the process. And increasingly, TV news presents entertainment as news, so that Michael Jackson's legal troubles and Jennifer Lopez's love life have become the fodder of news broadcasts. In 2004, the ABC news magazine *20/20* featured a story about adoption, entitled "Be My Baby," that contained the formulaic elements of a reality show. The news magazine program followed a sixteen-year-old mother from Ohio as she selected among the five couples vying to raise her baby. Co-anchors John Stossel and Barbara Walters promoted the hour-long news segment as a reality show. Stossel declared, "Barbara will bring you what might be called the ultimate reality show. As you watch, a pregnant teenager will decide which of five couples gets her baby." Walters added, "We were joking about the fact that it's like 'The Bachelor' or 'The Bachelorette': you are in or out tonight."[1]

FODDER: materiál, e.g.: the cheapest broadcast fodder - nejlevnější vysílací programy

CAPITALIZE ON: využít

Unfortunately, this effort of the news magazine to capitalize on the popularity of reality shows undermined the legitimate news value of the story.

Other Functions of Genres

As mentioned earlier, two of the primary functions of popular genres are *entertainment* and *information.* In addition, genres may fulfill a range of other functions.

Education. Genres serve as a vast reservoir of knowledge. Print and broadcast journalism convey information to the public about daily events. Documentaries expose audiences to a range of subjects in depth, including history, science, and the arts.

In some countries, popular genres have emerged as a primary vehicle

for informing the public about social issues. A joint report by the United Nations program on AIDS and the World Health Organization (2002) found that popular genres aimed at AIDS prevention appear to be making a difference across the globe.[2] To illustrate, Population Communications International (PCI), a New York–based nonprofit group, developed partnerships with media outlets around the world to incorporate social messages into popular genres:

- A serial drama developed by PCI in partnership with China's CCTV, *Ordinary People* features a female heroine whose story promotes the acceptance of girl children. In scripts scheduled for broadcast in 2007, she persuades villagers to accept and support a character whose heterosexual promiscuity has led to AIDS.
- A PCI radio show broadcast in the Caribbean nation of St. Lucia used "catapult" as a euphemism for condoms to test public awareness of the program's emphasis on safe sex practices and family planning. People who did not even listen to the show were familiar with "catapults"—so much so that a locally produced condom with that name is now the country's best-selling brand.
- A PCI radio show that began airing in 2002 in India promotes safe sex practices and family planning; it was developed in conjunction with Jamani, an Indian network of 25,000 rural health care providers.[3]
- In the South African version of *Sesame Street* (*Takalani Sesame*), one of the Muppets is Kami, who is HIV positive. The presence of Kami on the program promotes an awareness of AIDS among its young audience.

Persuasion. The persuasion function occurs when a communicator's objective is to promote a particular idea or motivate the audience to action. For instance, advertising attempts to persuade consumers to purchase their products.

At other times, programming is designed to influence the audience with respect to political and social issues. For instance, in 2005 two mini-series were produced on Arab television stations and broadcast throughout the Arab region, which were timed to coincide with Ramadan, a period in which families gathered nightly to break their fast—and watch TV. The function of each series was to focus attention on the damage that extremism is wrecking on the Arab world. At 11 P.M., the Saudi-owned Middle East Broadcasting Company presented *Hour el Ayn,* or *The Beautiful*

Virgins, based loosely on the account of a militant attack on an expatriate compound in Saudi Arabia in 2004 that left seventeen people dead.

At 11:30, prime time in Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi TV broadcasts *The Rough Road,* a dramatic series about a documentary filmmaker who discovers corruption among those involved in the cause of mujahedeen in Afghanistan. Director Ali al-Ahmed declares, "We have allowed the extremists to tell their story. Now we are warning the quiet majority to watch out for them. We are telling the society to be careful of these people, and we are allowing the drama to serve this cause."[4] (For additional information on persuasion as a latent function, see Chapter 6.)

Profit. In the market-driven media industry, profit is likely a driving underlying function. This economic imperative has an influence on the content of genric programming. Ted Koppel, former anchor and managing editor of the long-running ABC news program *Nightline,* comments:

> Now, every division of every network is expected to make a profit. And so we have entered the age of boutique journalism. The goal for the traditional broadcast networks now is to identify those segments of the audience considered most desirable by the advertising community and then to cater to them. . . .
>
> Even Fox News's product has less to do with ideology and more to do with changing business models. Fox has succeeded financially because it tapped into a deep, rich vein of unfulfilled yearning among conservative American television viewers, but it created programming to satisfy the market, not the other way around.[5]

Therapeutic Function. Genres put people in touch with a range of *affective responses,* or emotional reactions. In fact, many popular genres correspond to our primal emotions. Comedies make us laugh. Romances make us cry. The horror genre arouses feelings of terror. Action/adventure programs tap into our feelings of anger. Genres often play on the affective responses of the audience to build dramatic tension in the narrative. For instance, in the romantic comedy *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993), the two leading characters plan to meet at the stroke of the New Year at the Empire State Building. But as in a dream, they pass by each other, not recognizing one another, letting the moment pass. The film plays on the knowledge that the audience yearns for the two to finally get together. And horror films like *The Exorcist* (1973) play on the primal fears of the audience to enhance the terror on-screen.

Figure 2.1 *The Exorcist*

Genres can fulfill a therapeutic function, putting audience members in touch with their primal emotions. For instance, horror films arouse feelings of terror. In addition, films like *The Exorcist* (1973) play on the affective responses of the audience by arousing their primal fears to build dramatic tension. (Photo by Warner Bros./Getty)

Emotional displays are a central element of genres such as reality shows, soap operas, and afternoon talk shows. Indeed, the "feel good movie" is an emerging genre, designed to leave the audience in a jolly mood. Reality shows focus a large proportion of each episode on the emotional reaction of the participants. In *The Biggest Loser,* the camera scrutinizes the faces of the contestants as they approach their weekly weigh-in. Tears—both of joy and despair—abound.

Affective responses put the audience in touch with their primal emotions. For instance, watching horror genre enables individuals to confront those dark aspects of life that are fundamentally terrifying to human beings. Filmmaker Larry Cohen explains: "In my movies, these things crawled into the people's minds and forced them to face the dark side of their personalities. The monster is always themselves."[6] Filmmaker Guillermo del Toro adds, "At its best, horror

shows us the humanity that lies within that otherness, and helps us make peace with the hidden and the monstrous side of ourselves. It's an antidote to the rest of the media, which only shows the chirpier side of life."[7]

Genres can even help people cope with these primal emotions. Genres provide a controlled environment that enables individuals to confront these elemental emotions in relative safety. The horror genre externalizes the vague sources of fear that are beyond human control. But the more people experience fear without real danger to themselves, the more they tame its effects on the psyche. By knowing that the danger is not real, people can take the experience of fear to new levels of imagination and understanding. Dr. Michael Otto, associate professor of psychology at Harvard Medical School, observes, "If you see a snake in a movie or someone dressed up as a snake for Halloween, you know the snake can't bite you. It's the anxiety that bites you. And if you're lucky, after a while you realize that anxiety doesn't hurt."[8]

Thus, Wes Craven, director of the *Scream* horror series, describes his films as "boot camp for the psyche."[9] The horror genre touches primal emotions, but under non-threatening conditions. Reporter Holly Selby refers to this as "reasonable fear":

> By watching a frightening film, you are, in a certain sense, re-enacting your childhood fears. If you can sit through the whole thing, you have conquered those fears, and that feels good.
>
> There's no question feeling safe—and in control—contributes to the pleasure I get when watching scary movies. Part of the fun is knowing that it isn't real. I can leave the theater any time I want. I assume I'm safe here, in this theater, surrounded by (I suppose) nice, law-abiding citizens. . . . You've arranged it so that you'll get the maximum amount of reasonable fear. You have set things up so you know 'this is scary movie, but I'm safe at home and the doors are locked.'[10]

The popularity of occult, horror, and science fiction films may be an expression of feelings of powerlessness within the culture. Steven Spielberg commented that his production of *War of the Worlds* (2005) was a response to the traumatic effects of the events of 9/11 on American culture. Spielberg explains: "It's certainly about Americans fleeing for their lives, being attacked for no reason, having no idea why they are being attacked and who is attacking them."[11]

At the same time, however, genres can provide a healthy emotional

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release for audiences. An integral aspect of comedy, for example, is tied to the *pleasure principle,* in which laughter puts people in touch with their "inner child"; in that sense, being silly and infantile can be regenerative. Comedies are often a direct reaction against the *reality principle,* in which people have to act like "adults" in society by controlling their emotions and acting responsibly. Thus, a common storyline in the Three Stooges comedies puts the Stooges in a formal setting, such as an upper crust dinner party. Inevitably, they toss a pie at one of the pompous guests, and the party swiftly regresses into an infantile free-for-all.

Genres can even provide physical benefits. According to psychologist Jack Vaeth, the burst of terror that we experience when we watch a horror film "releases chemicals including adrenaline and endorphins into your blood, which are similar to opiates. So what we are doing is stimulating ourselves to a point of chemical release which in turn is rewarding to our bodies."[12]

Genres such as demolition shows (*Battlebots, Robot Wars,* and *Junkyard Wars*) provide a healthy outlet for the *destructive* side of human nature—what D.H. Lawrence called "creative dissolution." Norm Fluet, head of the Department of Psychology at Scott & White Memorial Hospital, explains:

VICARIOUS: zprostředkovaný, nepřímý (TV can be a vicarious form of social life. Televize může být zprostředkovanou formou společenského života.

> I think we get some vicarious pleasure out of seeing things destroyed. It releases anxiety, tension, feelings of aggression. . . . Society has evolved, but I think we still have that in our biology. I think we need these vicarious outlets. Fortunately, there's a difference between what we fantasize about and what we actually do.[13]

CATHARTIC: očisťující, očistný
VIGILANTE: samozvaný strážce zákona

Within this context, a genre can fulfill a cathartic function, giving expression to the destructive impulses in the members of the audience. For instance, vigilante films resonate with the audiences' primal revenge fantasies. A notable example of this genre is the series of five *Death Wish* films, which were produced over a twenty-year period beginning in 1974. These films starred Charles Bronson as Paul Kersey, an architect whose wife had been murdered on the streets of New York City. The release of the initial film was a minor phenomenon; audience members, who felt victimized by urban criminals, stood and cheered as Kersey took his revenge on the hoods and punks. The vigilante subgenre also ties into the need for people to assume control in their lives, tapping into the American cultural myth of rugged individualism and self-determination. (For further discussion of cultural myth, see Chapter 9.)

TAP INTO: začít čerpat z (bohatého zdroje), napíchnout se na (databázi)

However, author Robert Wright argues that, too often, the latent function behind this genric programming is to *exploit* these feelings in the interest of commercial success:

> Movies like "Collateral Damage," "The Patriot," and "Death Wish" don't help us to work through our fear of losing loved ones, our impatience at not being recognized, our sense of impotence. They just exploit them. They prey on those primitive emotions for the sake of softening us up, enraging us, leaving us open to jolt after gratifying jolt—payback. Anyone who threatens a spouse or child must die, die in pain, die many times if possible, die in recognition of our power. Until tomorrow, that is, when they're back on their feet and we're powerless again.[14]

Mechanism for Socialization. Socialization is the process of preparing individuals to become a member of society. Genres act as agents of socialization, providing guideposts by which people learn about societal rules and expectations. As an example, a new genre has emerged as a primary source for the socialization of a new social class: the tween. The term *tween* refers to a new stage of life, the young demographic between the ages of nine and fourteen. The tween genre, with pograms like *Drake & Josh, Ned's Declassified School Survival Guide, Romeo!* and *Unfabulous* (Nickelodeon), shape the attitudes, behaviors, values, and preoccupations of this subculture by instructing the tween audience about what is "cool." According to critic Kate Authur, programs like *Zoey 101* present a worldview that serves as a model for tweens:

> The shows present fantasy worlds of school and home life, where tweens fill their leisure time with a multiracial group of friends, clothes and gadgets. Songs are another fundamental element, particularly if the star of the show is musically inclined. And increasingly, these series cast the relatives of very famous people.[15]

At the same time, genres can provide positive role models for their target audience. Because audiences tend to select a limited number of genres, the behaviors exhibited in these genres could be construed as primary sources of modeling. Author Mark Bennett advises people to find their "inner TV character" by looking closely at the way that TV characters handle their problems:

> Anything you want to do, you can use TV as a tool to get there. I think there's nothing better being than able to jump into a favorite character

in a real-life situation that might not be so great. It can save you from a bad scene. . . .

It works wonders at social functions I can't get out of. . . .

You have to embrace your co-workers as friends and family like Mary Richards (of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*) does. They share all of their important events with each other, like Lou Grant's birthday party is at Mary's house. TV can really teach you to embrace the people you are closest to and spend every day with.[16]   SELF-SERVING: vypočítavý, prospěchářský
     HUBRIS: namyšlenost, pýcha, domýšlivost FOLLY: hloupost, bláznovství

Within this context, sitcoms can be regarded as morality plays, which dramatize the folly of hubris and self-serving behavior, while rewarding honesty and supporting one's community at the end of each episode. Dramas present conflicts between good and evil and address the question of living honorably in an unjust world.

Moral instruction is even part of the reality series *Real World* (MTV), which tracks a group of young people living together. Jonathan Murray, co-creator of *Real World* notes: "If a particular cast member acts badly, in telling our story we like to show the part where he realizes he acted badly, and that he's learned something from it."[17] SELF-INDULGENT: požitkářský, nestřídmý

At the same time, however, genres can glorify violent, self-destructive, self-indulgent behaviors. Video games like *Grand Theft Auto* present a world without consequences. The protagonist takes to the streets, killing indiscriminately. This type of behavior recurs throughout the genre of video games. (For further discussion, see Chapter 5.)

Finally, genres promote social conformity by regulating individual behavior. Genric programming establishes standards of conduct by dramatizing appropriate and inappropriate behavior.

Escape. Popular genres permit individuals to explore in fantasy the boundaries between the permitted and the forbidden and to experience in a carefully controlled way the possibility of stepping across this boundary. In the words of Bernard Timberg, "They turn to fictitious worlds which are less painful and which promise symbolic fulfillment of desires and aspirations which are thwarted in their actual environments."[18] Thus, watching a gangster program like *The Sopranos* (HBO) enables the viewer to vicariously experience thrills associated with living outside the law without suffering the consequences. Indeed, in *The Sopranos,* Tony is a mobster who makes that identification easier by leading a conventional, suburban lifestyle. Tony is plagued by many of the daily issues commonly experienced by the audience. He has trouble with his

mother, suffers the anxieties of being a parent in this modern age, and is burdened by troubles in his "waste management" business. As a result, he suffers from anxiety attacks and goes into therapy. But Tony leads a secret life—much like the fantasy world of the audience. As a mob boss, he is a ruthless killer who simply takes what he wants from his weaker prey. And although Tony is overweight and balding, he is continually engaging in extramarital affairs with gorgeous women.

Genres also offer an escape into a world as it *could* be. For instance, the adolescent dramatic series *Gilmore Girls* (CW network) presents a portrait of an ideal relationship between the mother, Lorelai Gilmore, and her daughter Rory. Media critic Alessandra Stanley explains:

PIPE DREAM: planá naděje, nesplnitelný sen, prázdná iluze

> "Gilmore Girls," [a story] in which the mother and daughter get along splendidly and converse in arch, screwball comedy shorthand, is a mother's pipe dream, but all teenage shows traffic in the adult fantasy that teenagers and parents can come to an understanding in a crisis (AIDS, condoms, eating disorders, death of a grandparent).[19]

Providing Comfort. Popular genres serve as vehicles through which individuals are able to put their own lives into perspective. Talk shows like *Dr. Phil* provide a public arena for what formerly had been "private" problems such as spousal abuse and alcoholism.

In the face of social upheaval, audiences often turn to genres for their very predictability. To illustrate, in the aftermath of 9/11, the audience for situation comedies increased over the previous year, in part because the familiarity of the genre provided a degree of comfort to the audience. Robert Thompson, director of the Center for the Study of Popular Television at Syracuse University, argues that

> a sitcom can be an anesthetic to the sad and horrible images we see. Watching *Friends* is like watching *Gomer Pyle* during the Vietnam War. It was terribly comforting to watch Marines not fight any battles. Just as it's terribly comforting to watch Ross and Rachel not mourn the loss of any friends.[20]

Genres can also provide a safe way for people to contend with uncertainties in their own lives. For instance, the monsters in the horror genre may serve as external manifestations of those dangerous elements within human experience that comprise the underside of seemingly safe areas of life. Colin McGinn observes:

(Horror films) enable us to engage with the fears, anxieties, lusts, childish exhilarations and delusions of power that occur in our dreams. . . . Critical inattention, then, is a form of collective repression. I don't mean in the Freudian sense that we disguise our true unconscious feelings in our dreams—indeed, I think these feelings are only too apparent—but rather in the sense that we don't want these feelings to be rewarded. We are dream puritans, and this attitude conditions our feelings about the movies we like or esteem.[21]

By "seeing" devils and monsters as they appear on the screen, individuals can (at least while watching) deal with these demons. Moreover, the resolution of the genre, in which the monsters are vanquished, furnishes a ritual by which individuals resolve their own internal conflicts. Of course, taken as a whole, the flood of horror films conveys the message that there are always new forms of the same old demons to take their place.

Fostering Community. Genres provide a way for individuals to break through their personal isolation. Genres create shared cultural experiences and offer individuals an opportunity to share these experiences with others. For example, sporting events like the Superbowl bring people together, offering individuals an opportunity to participate in a group.

Genres also can extend communities by transcending national boundaries. As an example, even if an American audience is unfamiliar with Dutch culture, the formula for the Dutch version of the reality series *Big Brother* establishes points of commonality that make it understandable. (For further discussion, see Chapter 11.)

Comparative Media

Overview

The comparative media approach addresses the question: What is the influence of the medium on a genre?

A genre is not confined to one medium. As an example, Superman, which belongs to the Superhero genre, has appeared in print and on radio, television, and film. Every medium is defined by unique characteristics, which have an impact on how it can best present information. For instance, radio obviously cannot employ visuals in transmitting information. However, the radio producer can appeal to the imagination of the listener through creative use of dialogue, music, and "natural" sound effects.

The effective media communicator is able to take full advantage of the unique properties of the medium, using the "language" of that medium to reach the intended audience.

Today it is a common practice for a genric program presented in one primary medium to work in tandem with other media to take advantage of the characteristics of each medium. For instance, the reality series *Big Brother* spawned *House Calls,* a Web talk show, in which the participants discussed individual episodes in exhaustive detail. In addition, there was a daily radio program in which fans were encouraged to phone in and participate in the chat on a NON-toll-free number. Extended programming may also include live performances. After the first season of *American Idol,* Fox brought back the thirty participants from the singing contest for a two-hour special concert show in Las Vegas.

A mix of different media has become part of the formula of political talk shows. Phone calls from listeners, emails, and blogs promote audience participation and convey a democratic message that the opinions of the audience—and in a broader sense, the people—matter. However, the latent message of many political talk shows is far from democratic. The hosts of these radio talk shows insult their callers and use media technology to cut off their guests. INSTALLMENT: část, díl, epizoda (seriálu)

The distinctive characteristics of a medium can have an impact on the structure of a genre. For instance, the serial structure of the soap opera has been influenced by the episodic nature of magazines, radio, television. Individual episodes serve as installments in a much longer, more complex story that, combined, make up the worldview of the program. This episodic structure contributes to the *verisimilitude* (i.e., appearance of reality) of the narrative. For instance, the characters celebrate holidays like Christmas and New Years on their shows, along with the audience. Moreover, in a long-running soap opera, such as *As the World Turns,* which has been on the air for over forty years, the appearance of the characters changes; fans actually witness the actors (and their characters) age. Executive producer of *General Hospital* Jill Farren Phelps observes, "We have audience members who remember characters who were here 20 years ago. . . . These are their stories, and they go into their living rooms. They feel a kindred association with the characters on the show."[22] KINDRED: spřízněný

The choice of medium can also influence the *content* of genric programming. For instance, in April 2003, New Line Cinema released a movie called *The Real Cancun* in more than 2,000 theaters, the first attempt by a Hollywood studio to transfer the TV reality genre to the

VERISIMILITUDE: věrohodnost, autentičnost, reálnost

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movie screen. Sixteen young men and women were transplanted to an upscale Yucatan hotel for an all-expenses-paid spring break week and were filmed as they frolicked. The looser constraints of the medium of film enabled the reality genre to be more sexually explicit than its TV counterparts. Producer Jonathan Murray declared:

STAPLE: základní součást, jádro, podstata

> It just seemed to us that there was an opportunity to take a form of entertainment that is really working on cable and prime time and bring it to the big screen. Spring break has been a staple of youth movies since the 1950's. We decided it would look good on the big screen and doing it this way would give audiences something they don't get on television, which is, quite frankly, some nudity, some sexual situations and language that's more realistic and honest.[23]

TAG LINE: slogan, motto

As the promotional tag line for the film promised, "No scripts. No actors. No rules. Anything can happen during spring break, and it did."[24]

Some genres adapt comfortably as they move from one medium to another. For instance, American Westerns first appeared in novels, beginning with James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1832) and *Leatherstocking Tales* (written between 1823 and 1841). In the 1920s, the Western made the transition to film. Filmmakers took advantage of the visual nature of the medium, making the breathtaking Western landscapes an essential part of the genre. And with its action-filled plots and spectacular feats of horsemanship, the Western became a staple of the medium.

Westerns also made their way to radio in the 1930s. Assisted by the sound effects of galloping horses and blazing guns, the audience used their imaginations to conjure up their own vision of the West. In the popular series *Gunsmoke,* the hero is Marshal Matt Dillon, who is described as six-feet-six-inches tall, with broad shoulders and narrow hips. In the radio adaptation of *Gunsmoke,* Matt Dillon was played by William Conrad, a short, stocky man with a six-foot-six-inch voice.

When television made its way into American homes in the late 1940s, Westerns made the journey as well. Radio programs, including *Gunsmoke,* moved to the small screen. Conrad was replaced by James Arness, a tall, strapping man who looked the part of Matt Dillon projected by Conrad. During the 1950s, Westerns began appearing in "ancillary" media such as comic books, cereal boxes, toys, and games. ANCILLARY: doplňkový, přidružený

However, in some respects, genres are often bound by the characteristics of the medium. For instance, the visual properties of special effects

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have become the featured attraction in science fiction films such as *War of the Worlds* (2005). But no matter how compelling the narrative may be, the audience is seeing Steven Spielberg's particular vision of the H.G. Wells novel. In contrast, Orson Welles's radio adaptation (1940) encourages listeners to use their imaginations to picture the earth invaders and the devastation caused by their attack.

However, some genres do not translate particularly well from one medium to another. For instance, computer games based on blockbuster movies generally have not been successful (as defined, at least, by sales). Unlike film, which is characterized by a linear structure (with a clear-cut beginning, middle, and end), computer games use a technology that enables the player to move around the virtual world at will. Jeff L. Briggs, chief executive of Firaxis Games, said, "Great games, the ones that do very well in the market, try to build in a very open-ended world where each time a player plays it can go very differently and each game tells its own story."[25] Consequently, *The Matrix* was the only film-based video game to make the list of the top-ten-selling games of 2003.

To cite another example, there is an ongoing debate among the comic book community whether appearing on the Internet changes the essential character of comics. According to Scott McCloud, who produces "Understanding Comics," the Internet represents a return to its original form—cave paintings: "The ancestors of printed comics drew, painted and carved their time-paths from beginning to end, without interruption, And with the help of digital technology . . . comics could break out of their boxes and get back to the infinite canvas."[26]

However, others contend that the Web has altered the essential character of the traditional comic strip. For instance, critic Sarah Boxer contends that the most successful comics on the Internet contain few words, and rely predominantly on pictures. Commenting on the fifth annual Web Cartoonists Choice Awards, Boxer observes: CONTEND: tvrdit, prohlašovat, trvat na čem

> The prize for best-written comic went to "Narbonic," by Shaenon Garrity. . . . [But] the problem with Narbonics is that the plentiful words almost crowd out the pictures, and reading them on the screen is a lot more eye work than reading them on a page. What's more, you can't catch up on previous entries without subscribing to something called "Modern Tales."[27]

Moreover, critics contend that Web comics are actually animated cartoons, in that moving from one frame to the next requires scrolling up and down to look at the thumbnail sketch. Boxer continues:

And then there are the comics that really try to use digital technology. The prize in the category "outstanding use of flash" was shared. One prize went to "Alpha Shade" (the one with the great page-turning feature). Another went to "The Discovery of Spoons" by Alexander Danner and John Barber. That tale, about a man who wraps small poems around spoons and throws them in water, is told in pages that dissolve one into the next when you click on them. It's a great use of the Web. But it verges on animation.[28]

Some media communicators have found ways to overcome the limits of their medium in the production of genric programming. For instance, unlike media such as books and television, which are episodic, films are stand-alone presentations: audiences can only watch the same film over and over. Because people became more interested in seeing new chapters of the story, film companies in the 1930s began to produce sequels to successful movies, including *The Thin Man, Andy Hardy,* and *Tarzan.* (For further discussion of sequels, see Chapter 3.)

New advances in media technology have given the audience unprecedented access to action on-screen and in the process have had a tremendous influence on the popularity of certain genres. To illustrate, before the invention of mobile, lightweight camcorders in the 1980s, it would have been impossible to produce reality shows. Shooting in video rather than film is less expensive and does not require large, artificial lighting. One of the most recent technical innovations is the "lipstick camera," which is tiny enough to be worn or unobtrusively installed in a room and remotely operated. Fifteen of those were placed in fixed locations throughout the house in *The Surreal Life,* and are used at both the beginning and later phases of the dates on *Blind Date*.

These new cameras have revolutionized the popularity of genres such as cooking shows and poker.

All wonderful, and yet all pale in comparison to the great leaps made in poker broadcasting. Long a somnolent exercise in marginal programming, poker was made magical by placing tiny lipstick cameras on the table in front of the players. When they peeked at their cards, we peeked right along with them. The resulting voyeuristic frisson made ESPN's telecasts of the World Series of Poker among the most riveting sports broadcasting of the year.[29]

FRISSON: rozechvění, vzrušení, záchvěv

The innovations in media technology can affect the premise, plot, and theme of a given genre. To illustrate, beginning with *The Matrix* (1999)

the action genre moved away from simply plot-driven stories toward greater thematic and character complexity. Sophisticated computer-generated special effects enabled dramatic actors to assume leading roles previously reserved for stars who were better known for their athletic prowess. For instance, in *The Matrix,* special effects enable Neo (Keanu Reeves) to defy the laws of gravity and the time/space continuum in order to join in a rebellion against an advanced generation of machines that had subjugated humankind. More important, Neo's ability to dodge bullets and leap over buildings is a metaphor for the limitlessness of the human mind and spirit.

New developments in media technology also have altered the relationship between the media communicator and audience. Thanks to interactive media, audience members have the opportunity to respond to the media communicator immediately and directly. Betsy Frank, executive vice president for research and planning at MTV Networks, observes, "Technology has taken down boundaries between the ones producing and the ones receiving. Young people have an incredible need to use the media to connect with their peers, to validate their choices. After every episode of 'Real World,' they're on the Internet talking about what happened."[30] Thus, new media technologies have become integral to the formula of genres. For instance, in the genre of the political talk show, a new segment of programming has been added—the audience question/answer session. Indeed, the style of political talk shows reinforces the message of democracy in action. The political talk show has been transformed from the pundit variety to one in which the boundaries between expert and nonexpert opinion are much more fluid.

Interactive media technology also provides follow-up opportunities for the audience, through websites, virtual bulletin boards, and chat rooms. Thus, this genre conveys a cumulative message of empowerment to the audience: that their voice matters.

However, as mentioned earlier, despite this technology, some hosts of political talk shows have developed techniques to cut off callers (and guests). In fact, another formulaic element of the shows involves the hosts insulting the callers, denying them the opportunity to speak out.

Technical innovations can even open up new programming possibilities within a genre. For instance, in 2003 the National Geographic Channel introduced a new reality series, based on the development of the "crittercam," a lightweight video camera in a harness that could be fitted on animals. On the new show, appropriately entitled *Crittercam,* biologist

Greg Marshall mounted a crittercam on Molly, a domestic cat, so that the audience could follow the cat in the course of her normal day, extending this genre into the animal kingdom. The crittercam was then fitted on sea turtles, lions, emperor penguins, blue whales and leopard seals, sharks, rats, hyenas, and grizzly bears to get an "up-close and personal" look at their habitat.

In 2000 a new radio format appeared known as "Jack." This genre is a blend of all adult hits: country, hip-hop, rock, and pop songs that have reached the popularity charts over the past thirty-five years. One reason behind the development of this new genre is the popularity of the iPod, which shuffles songs, allowing the listener to hear a variety of familiar songs. In 2002 Vancouver disc jockey Bob Perry, aka Cadillac Jack, presented a program that featured his favorite songs mixed with once-forgotten hits. According to Jewels Riley, programmer of WACH-FM, 106.5, in St. Louis, Missouri, "What matters is that when you turn it on, you say, 'Hey I know that song.' It needs to be familiar."[31]

Audience Considerations

One line of inquiry in genre analysis focuses attention on the relationship between a genre and its intended audience. An early instance of genres being developed for specific audiences occurred in eighteenth-century Britain. "Domestic fiction," the forerunner of the soap operas, was written expressly for a female audience. The central characters were women; men only appeared in these novels insofar as they were involved in the lives of the heroines.

This genre was a result of the emergence of women as an identifiable social class that worked largely in the home, had more leisure time and discretionary spending than in previous years, and had been taught to read.

In the 1920s, the genre of domestic fiction moved to American radio and was given the label "soap opera." This term was a reference to the shows' sponsors—sellers of household products such as soap that catered to the needs of the housewife. Presumably, housewives watched their "programs" while engaged in domestic chores such as doing the laundry. However, this genre was considered the "poor relative" of other genres, reflecting the second-class status of women in society. These programs were characterized by miniscule budgets and second-tier actors. Today, however, a wide spectrum of society watches "soaps"—including teenagers, males, and college students.

Table 2.1

Subgenres

Crime	Reality shows	Talk shows
Super cop	Transformation	Evening talk shows
Spy	Environment	Therapy shows (e.g., *Dr. Phil*)
Detective	Voyeuristic	
Gangster	Matchmaking	
	Competition	

In the American media-market-driven system, the audience has emerged as a primary consideration in the communication process. Over time, the media market has become so large that it is now profitable to direct messages at specialized interests, tastes, and groups. Chris Albrecht, chairman of HBO, points out that

> the first thing you need is a plan, a target for your business model. And that's not just, how much are you going to spend and what are you going to charge the advertisers, but whom [sic] are you going after? More and more, that question determines a lot of what people are programming.[32]

For instance, the reality subgenre featuring the Elimination Contest has been reconfigured to appeal to audiences with the following interests:

- Art (*The Art Scholar*)
- Politics (*American Candidate*)
- Business (*The Apprentice, The Law Firm*)
- Fashion (*Project Runway*)
- Music (*American Idol*)
- Social status (*I Want to Be a Hilton*)
- Acting (*I Want to Be a Soap Star*)

Indeed, entire cable TV networks now cater to the interests of subcultures. For instance, the Cooking Channel is entirely dedicated to the culinary arts. The network carries programming that focuses on ethnic cooking, regional food preparation, and dietary-based menus (such as vegetarian or low-carb dishes). In addition to providing recipes, the hosts furnish information about the cultures that give rise to one cuisine or another.

Audience considerations have an impact on the content of genric programming. For instance, until 2005 LucasArts and Sony's online game *Star Wars Galaxies* had appealed to an older audience, based on a sophisticated strategy. However, in 2005 LucasArts abruptly announced that it was completely changing the science fiction video game to appeal to its target market of 14-to-26-year-old males. According to Nancy MacIntyre, the game's senior director, the game was reconfigured to give the younger players "instant gratification: kill, get treasure, repeat."[33]

The media industry uses genres to deliver the desired audience to its advertisers. The most sought-after audience consists of people between the ages of eighteen and thirty-four. Alan Wurtzel, president of research and media development for NBC, explains that the goal is to train this group for future consumer behaviors:

> None of the networks can afford to ignore this generation anymore. In 10 years, Generation Y will take their behaviors and look at the world and media in a different way than we do. Generation Y never knew a time when there wasn't the Internet, or 75 to 100 channels, and music was purchased instead of downloaded. They will take that behavior with them as they get older. If we don't figure out how to appeal to them, we will all be in trouble.[34]

As a result, it is not merely the size of the audience, but the profitability of that audience that determines whether a genre appears in the media. For instance, by 1998 (before the emergence of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*), the once popular quiz show genre had largely disappeared from the American television landscape. Only three quiz shows appeared on network television: *Wheel of Fortune, Jeopardy!* and *The Price Is Right*. One reason for this decline was that these quiz shows were unable to attract a young audience. Sixty percent of the audience was over the age of fifty-five.[35] Lucy Johnson, senior vice president for daytime and children's programming at CBS, observed, "For a 25-year-old, it may be the pacing that's old-fashioned. We've created a nation of viewers who demand instant gratification and payoffs every 30 seconds."[36] Consequently, advertisers, who are fixated on a young target market, had little interest in game shows. Roy Currlin, an executive at the advertising agency Ammirati Puris Lintas, declared, "The audience is just so old that we tend to avoid them."[37] However, in 1999, when *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* suddenly attracted a young audience, an influx of new game shows on the air soon followed.

Table 2.2

Average Prime-Time Viewers, Ages 18 to 49, 2002

Network, with and without top hour-long show	Viewers, ages 18–49 (in millions)
NBC	5.5
Without *ER*	5.2
CBS	5.2
Without *CSI*	4.9
FOX	5.3
Without *American Idol*	4.8
ABC	4.4
Without *The Bachelor*	4.3

Source: Nielsen Media Research (p. C1). www.nielsenmedia.com

Thus, a key to the emergence of the reality genre on television is its ability to attract a young audience. In 2002 *American Idol* (FOX) reached 30 percent of the audience between the ages of eighteen and forty-nine—the highest share ever for a Fox show with that group—and did even better among those from eighteen to thirty-four, by posting a 35 share. During the last half-hour, the show reached almost half the female teenage viewers in the country.[38]

During the 2002 season, *American Idol* delivered its young audience to the following sponsors: Coca-Cola; Ford Motor; DIRECTV; Domino's Pizza; Gap (Old Navy); Hershey Foods; Johnson & Johnson (Acuvue contact lenses, Neutrogena); Levi Strauss; Procter & Gamble (Cover Girl makeup); Sprint; T-Mobile, formerly VoiceStream; and Yum Brands, formerly Tricon Global Restaurants (KFC).

Beyond the immediate sales pitch for its product, the latent function of the Coca-Cola promotion was to develop a long-term relationship with its young audience. During the 2002 season finale of *American Idol,* a Coca-Cola commercial that ran before the winner was declared saluted the two finalists with the words, "Good luck Kelly and Justin from your friends at Coca-Cola."[39]

Because media programming is now directed at particular segments of the audience, genres that target this audience can furnish a perspective into the issues of interest and concern to that group. To illustrate, *Gana la Verde* (*Win the Green*), a hit reality show on Spanish-language stations in the United States, is a commentary on the many indignities that immigrants must endure to obtain a "green card" (the permit that

entitles them to remain in the United States). Contestants are required to complete a series of senseless and humiliating tasks, such as eating worm-stuffed burritos, catching a buttered pig, or washing skyscraper windows. The contestant who emerges victorious in the contest wins a year's worth of legal fees to help acquire a green card.[40]

Lines of Inquiry

1. Select a sample of programs belonging to a particular genre, focusing on *function:*
   a. What is the *manifest* function (or functions) of the genre?
      1. Information
      2. Entertainment
      3. Generating affective responses
      4. Providing instruction
      5. Offering escape
      6. Comfort
      7. Fostering community
      8. Socialization
      9. Providing role models
      10. Other (explain)
   b. Can you identify any other functions? Explain and support your observations.
   c. How does the primary function operate?
   d. Are there *latent* functions? Explain.
   e. Identify any *competing* functions.
   f. What does this analysis of function reveal with respect to:
      1. The essential appeal of the genre?
      2. Cumulative messages?

Be specific in your analysis. Use aspects of the programming to *illustrate, support,* and *extend* your observations.

2. Examine a selection of programs belonging to a particular genre, focusing on the impact of the medium on the genre:
   a. How does the medium affect the *style, structure,* and *content* of the genre?
   b. What is the impact of new technologies on the genre?
   c. What is the impact of the medium on the structure of the genre?

   d. What is the impact of the medium on the content of the genre?

   e. What is the impact of the medium on the style of the genre?

   f. Examine a genre that appears in two or more media (e.g., television and comics).

3. In some countries, genres have become a prime vehicle for informing the public about social issues. Examine a selection of genric programming and identify:

   a. What social issues are being raised?

   b. How does the genric programming present the social issue (e.g., through plot, character)?

   c. What messages about the social issue are being conveyed through the programming?

   d. What does the construction of these messages reveal with regard to the values and preoccupations of the culture?

4. Compare and contrast genric programming that appears in two different media (e.g., a science fiction novel that also appears as a film). How does each medium influence the presentation of the genric program?

   a. In what ways does the programming differ as a result in the change of medium?

   b. What are the limits (if any) of each medium on the presentation of the genric program?

   c. In what ways do the distinctive characteristics of the medium contribute to the presentation of the program?

5. Select a genric program that appears in one medium (e.g., a science fiction novel). Now consider switching the program to another medium (e.g., to television): In what ways would this affect the structure, style, and content of the original?

6. What is the impact of the audience on the popularity, style, and content of a genre?

   a. What is the audience for a particular genre?

   b. Examine how the audience affects the appearance, style, and content of a genre.

   c. Work backwards; can you identify the audience by analyzing: (1) the style, and (2) plot of the genre?

7. Examine programs belonging to a subgenre, focusing on audience.

   a. Who is the audience for the subgenre?

   b. What does this subgenre reveal about the cultural attitudes, concerns, and preoccupations of the audience?

—–— 3 —–—

Formulaic Analysis

Overview

Genres are characterized by common formulaic elements. Formula refers to patterns in *premise, structure, characters, plot, and trappings.* As John Cawelti observes, "Individual works are ephemeral, but the formula lingers on, evolving and changing with time, yet still basically recognizable."[1] Formula serves as a guide for the audience, providing clues and cues that help them negotiate meaning as they read a novel or watch the news on television. Early on, children learn the "language" of film: for instance, how to recognize a flashback or identify heroes and villains. Film critic Neal Gabler explains:

FLASHBACK - zpětný záběr do minulosti, retrospektiva

> Formulas are designed to elicit predictable responses through predictable means—predictable because they have worked in the past. You show an audience an attractive young man and woman who playfully bicker at the beginning of a movie and it roots for them to wind up together at the end. Or show a bully pushing around a decent fellow and viewers root for the latter to defeat the former. The audience reacts not because it knows the formula—it reacts because the formula knows the audience.[2]

BICKER - haštěřit, hádat se

Thus, despite language and cultural differences, international audiences can pick up the cues provided by a genre's formulaic elements. The British game show *Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire,* which is now exported to thirty-one countries, maintains a standard formula throughout its "empire." British technicians are sent to train the local crews so that the look of each set is identical. A computer program standardizes the music and lighting in all countries. Ravinath Menon, executive producer of the Indian version of *Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire* (*Kaun Banega Crorepati*), states, "It's all a formula. . . . They send us a production bible, about 300 pages. Our idea was not to reinvent the show, but to duplicate the show."[3]

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The success of a genre largely depends upon the audience's ability to recognize, identify, and respond to the formula of a genre. Thus, formula is tied to the audience's expectations: what they anticipate when they attend a horror movie or romantic comedy. Satirists often use the audience's familiarity with formula as a source of humor. For instance, *The Colbert Report* pokes fun at Fox News's patriotic graphics by overwhelming the screen with American flags and eagles. In addition, Colbert's persona exaggerates the pomposity that characterizes many broadcast news personalities.

Artists are challenged to be innovative within the constraints of the formula. Indeed, the need to adhere to formula can sometimes *inspire* creativity. As an example, in the sixteenth century Elizabethan poets were judged on their ability to create within the tight constraints of sonnets, a lyric poem of fourteen lines consisting of four divisions: three quatrains (each with a rhyme pattern of its own) and a rimed couplet. The typical rhyme scheme for the English sonnet is: *abab, cdcd, efef, gg.* These standard rules establish a frame of reference that determines the artistic merit of the poems (as well as the poets). What distinguished Shakespeare's sonnets from those of his contemporaries was his ability to work so magnificently within these artistic limits.

In like fashion, what determines the enduring quality of a genric presentation is how well it works within the formula. For instance, what has established *I Love Lucy* as a classic TV sitcom is what the show was able to achieve within the standard sitcom formula.

One of the major challenges facing media communicators is exploring complex themes and issues within the constraints of the formula. In his film *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), director Charlie Kaufman used the established formula of the romantic comedy to examine a range of thorny questions about human nature. Film critic A.O. Scott observes:

> How much do we know, Mr. Kaufman asks—about ourselves, about the world we inhabit, and, most crucially, about other people—and when do we know it? What do we do with this knowledge, and what good does it do us?
>
> If learning can be dangerous, is unlearning—in this case the literal erasure of memory, as practiced by Tom Wilkinson's ethically compromised Dr. Mierzwiak—any safer?
>
> Couching such inquiries inside a romantic comedy—a romantic comedy that stars Jim Carrey, for that matter—may sound like a too-clever

stunt, but the film's adherence to the rules of the genre is part of its point. The Hollywood romantic comedy, at its apex in the mid-1930's and early 40's, was a sleek vehicle for philosophical inquiry. Lurking beneath the glossy, silver-toned surface of movies like "The Awful Truth" and "The Philadelphia Story"—or, rather, displayed on that surface, disguised as witty banter and romantic vexation—are a set of knotty ethical puzzles and epistemological conundrums of the sort illuminated in the work of sages like Plato, Emerson, Wittgenstein and Kant.[4] FOIL: překazit, zmařit, zhatit
REHASH: omílat

Unfortunately, many genric presentations are simply a repetition of formula. For instance, many film sequels simply rehash the successful elements of the original movie, such as *plot.* For instance, John McClane, the lone wolf policeman in *Die Hard* (1988), then foils yet another terrorist attempt in *Diehard: With a Vengeance* (1995). Another formulaic reprise involves repeating the *relationship dynamics* between the main characters, as in the case of Martin Riggs (Mel Gibson) and Roger Murtaugh (Danny Glover) in *Lethal Weapon I–IV* (1987–92).

But some series, like the *Star Wars* movies, take advantage of the narrative possibilities of the medium of film, as the narrative develops from one "chapter" to the next. The episodes trace the evolution of the Skywalker family and Darth Vader, providing insight into the characters. (For further discussion of sequels, see Chapter 8.)

But at times, the formulaic conventions of a genre can obstruct artistic endeavors. For instance, Bob Dylan's "Like a Rolling Stone," which was named the greatest rock 'n' roll song of all time by *Rolling Stone* magazine, was nearly scuttled by Columbia Records because it breached the formula of a pop song. SCUTTLE: zhatit, zmařit, zničit

After the song was recorded (on June 15, 1965), the producers and engineers predicted that it would be a hit. Despite their recommendations that the single should be released immediately, the sales and marketing departments objected, due to the unusual length of the song ("Like a Rolling Stone" was nearly twice as long as the formulaic length of three minutes). Dylan was then instructed to cut the song in half. After he refused, the single was downgraded from an "immediate special" to an "unassigned release"—meaning that it would be junked.

Eventually, the record was released—but only under extraordinary circumstances. Shaun Considine, an employee at Columbia, discovered the disc in the studio and took it home. He fell in love with the song and subsequently played the recording at Arthur, a disco in which he owned an interest. The song was heard by a D.J. at WABC, then the leading

top forty radio station in Manhattan, as well as a music programmer at the equally powerful WMCA. The next morning, both called Columbia Records and demanded a copy of the recording.

Significantly, the marketing people prevailed in this dispute; the song was cut in half. The label on side one read, "Like a Rolling Stone (Part 1). Timing 3:02," and side two read, "Part 2. Timing 3:02." But some D.J.s simply recorded both sides of the disc on a tape and spliced the whole thing together as a single.[5]

Evolution of Formula

Every genre is characterized by its own distinctive formula. That is, for each genre the formulaic elements are constelled in a constant, identifiable fashion. Thus, the plotlines, structure, and characters that appear in a soap opera are distinguishable from how these formulaic elements are found in the evening news.

Once identified, a careful analysis of these formulaic elements can predict the success of media presentations. Software programs such as Hit Song Science forecast, with mathematical precision, whether a song is going to be a top 40 hit. The Hit Song Science program uses mathematical algorithms to identify the shared formulaic elements of hit songs. Reporter Clive Thompson observes:

> At the heart of the program is a "clustering" algorithm that locates acoustic similarities between songs, like common bits of rhythm, harmonies or keys. The software takes a new tune and compares it with the mathematical signatures of the last 30 years of Top 40 hits. The closer the song is to "a hit cluster," the more likely—in theory—that the kids won't be able to resist it.[6]

Record companies have begun to use Hit Song Science in the studio. Producers take a rough mix of a new song and tweak it until it has "good mathematics," giving it a good chance to be a hit. Polyphonic HMI used this software to predict that Nora Jones's "Come Away with Me" would be a success. A few months later, Jones's album went multi-platinum. The evolution of a genric formula generally falls into three distinct stages.

Formative Stage

In the early phase of a genre, the formula and conventions that come to characterize a genre have yet to be clearly defined. As a result, this stage

is characterized by innovation. The origin of the TV talk show format, for example, was wildly experimental. In the late 1940s, Ernie Kovacs got his start at WPTZ-TV, a local television station in Philadelphia. In those early days there was far more time on the air than actual scripted content. As a result, Kovacs had the freedom to play with the format, camera angles, lenses, music, and the audience. On one occasion, he attached a homemade kaleidoscope made from a toilet paper roll to the camera lens and displayed weird visual patterns to some equally weird music.

Kovacs also concocted elaborate gags that displayed his creative genius. On one show, he tilted the entire set at a slight angle. However, by setting the television camera at exactly the same angle, the set appeared to be level to the audience at home. Kovacs then performed a simple skit, in which he sat at a table and unpacked the contents of a lunch box. As Kovacs put the contents on the table, they rolled down the table and onto the floor, apparently defying gravity. By today's standards, the skit was far too long. However, without an established formula, Kovacs was able to play with the conventions of the medium to fill up the time.

Popular Stage

In this phase, the formula of a genre is established. The evening talk show genre hit its stride with *The Tonight Show, Starring Johnny Carson,* which dominated the genre for thirty years (1962–1992). After Carson retired, Jay Leno took over as the host.

During Carson's tenure, the standard formula of the evening talk show was established. The program time was reduced from ninety to sixty minutes. Each show featured a blend of comedians, musicians, and movie or television stars. In addition, the basic structure of each program was established: JOSH - škádlit, popichovat

- First, Carson presented a monologue. This session included joshing with sidemen, such as Ed McMahon and bandleader Doc Severinsen.
- Carson then moved over to the primary set, consisting of a desk, which the host sat behind, and a sofa for the announcer and guests.
- The pecking order of the guests was also established in order of celebrity. The most renowned guest would appear first; the end of the show was relegated to relative unknowns, such as young comics or authors. PECKING ORDER - společenský žebříček, hierarchie

Mature Stage

At this phase, the genre is well established, with many versions of the genre appearing in the media. Today, the competition for the *Tonight Show* on broadcast television alone includes *Late Show with David Letterman* (CBS), *Conan O'Brien* (NBC), *Late, Late Show with Craig Ferguson* (CBS), and *Jimmy Kimmel Live* (ABC). In addition, talk shows began appearing in the morning and afternoon slots.

In an effort to appear distinctive, these programs experiment with the established formula. For instance, breaking with the traditional cadre of celebrity guests, David Letterman has made a semi-regular of Rupert G, who owns a deli down the street from Letterman's theater. Ironically, by playing with the conventions of the talk show, hosts like David Letterman are harkening back to the innovations of their predecessors from the formative stage, such as Ernie Kovacs.

Formulaic Elements

Formulaic Premise

A *premise* is defined as the initial circumstance, situation, or assumption that serves as the point of origin for a narrative. Each genre has its own distinctive formulaic premise; that is, a characteristic situation in which characters find themselves. This premise furnishes information about what the audience can expect when it comes upon a program belonging to a particular genre.

For instance, a situation comedy is a half-hour series focused on episodes involving recurring characters. The humor is based on everyday situations rather than on individual jokes. The characters survive minor problems—only to face new trials in the next episode.

The premise of a genre begins with a describable *worldview*. For instance, scholar Ken Burke describes the premise of the disaster genre in terms of the following worldview:

> [In] the disaster film, a contemporary counterpart to "States of the Future," . . . modern society is threatened by natural problems such as earthquakes, tidal waves, fires, and runaway airplanes. In these sensationalistic breakdowns of the old hero story, some portion of the planet is endangered by a force beyond control, leaving a bevy of celebrities to scurry out of harm's way in time for a sequel.[7]

One way, then, to identify a premise is to begin with this statement: *The x genre presents a world in which. . . .* As an example, the premise of action/adventure video games such as *F.E.A.R.* is rooted in a nihilistic worldview—a world in which life has no meaning. Critic Charles Herold describes the premise of *F.E.A.R.*:

> I can easily handle a dozen men armed with assault rifles. I stand firm before defense drones, blasting away with my shotgun. . . . In the game, you are part of an elite strike force designated First Encounter Assault Recon. . . . Called in to track down the psychic leader of an army of tele-kinetically controlled soldiers, you discover that you are not the only one who wants them dead, and you explore warehouses and office buildings filled with dead bodies and blood dripping from the ceilings.[8]

Based upon this premise, the characters in *F.E.A.R.* simply exist from moment to moment, completely at the hands of fate (or, more specifically, the skill level of the players). Success is defined by the player's ability to survive in a world that is one big battleground.

A premise can simultaneously exist in layers: (1) the premise of a genre; (2) the premise of a subgenre; (3) the premise of an individual series. To illustrate, the premise of the reality genre is as follows:

Non-actor contestants are placed in a competition or artificial circumstance that they must contend with in the course of the series. Often, these people are placed in conditions that require them to work together as a team to accomplish difficult tasks.

Subgenres have a more narrowly defined premise. Thus, the premise for transplantation reality subgenre can be described as follows:

A person is moved into a new environment. The program centers on how he or she reacts to the new situation, as well as how those in that environment react to a stranger in their midst.

Finally, each series *within* a genre has its own distinct formula. For instance, below are examples of premises for a transplantation series:

- *Faking It* places a person from a low-end profession to work in a high-end career. Examples include training a bike messenger as a polo player or teaching a sheep shearer to pass as a high-end hairstylist.
- *Now Who's Boss* challenges an executive to perform low-level jobs in his own company.
- *Worlds Apart* transplants American families to Borneo, Mongolia, and other remote locales.

- *The Simple Life* follows celebrity debutantes Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie as they work on a farm in Arkansas.
- *Wife Swap* features the exchange of two mothers into very different households.

Identifying the premise of a genre, subgenre, or individual series can reveal cultural issues, preoccupations, and myths. As an example, disaster films such as *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) and *The Core* (2003) reflect concerns about the growing instability of the environment due to global warming.

Another approach to the study of premise is to identify distinctive patterns in the *introductions* of genres. The introduction of a program provides cues about what genre the program belongs to. The opening of a film or a television or radio program acquaints the audience with the primary characters, plot, and serves as a preview of the entire presentation.

Titles can also be revealing. To illustrate, the title *Reality Show* establishes the expectation that what the viewer sees is a slice of real life. However, this genre typically sets up artificial rules that affect the behavior of the "cast" (such as eliminating one contestant from a group each week). Moreover, the hours of video footage are edited down to thirty- or sixty-minute segments to make the content more dramatic and entertaining.

In addition, the titles of genric programming often encapsulate the essential meaning of the presentation. For instance, the title of a sitcom on Oxygen cable network—significantly targeting women—is *Good Girls Don't. . . .* In the 1970s, feminists argued that referring to females as "girls" instead of women denies them the credit and responsibilities of adulthood. Thus, this term subtly reinforces females' subordinate role in society. Consequently, the title of the premiere episode of the 2004 season, "My Roommate Is a Big, Fat Slut," signals a backlash—or at least a cultural retreat—from the 1970s, during which sitcoms like *All in the Family* made fun of chauvinists like Archie Bunker, or 1980s programs like *Murphy Brown,* in which the heroine epitomized feminist ideals.

Formulaic Structure

Popular genres generally operate within a readily identifiable structure. The formulaic structure of a genre reinforces the worldview of the genre. For example, the standard framework found in sitcoms is *order/chaos/order:*

- The initial order of the story is disrupted almost immediately.
- The chaotic stage consumes the majority of the program and is the source of much of its interest.
- The status quo is finally restored in the conclusion.

The beginning of a sitcom finds the world in harmony. However, the initial order of the story is disrupted almost immediately signaling the beginning of the chaotic stage. Cathy Baron compares the structure of a sitcom to a man climbing a tree:

> The setup is the man climbing the tree. The "act break" (right before the first big commercial) is that "oh, my God" moment when the man is now up the tree and the audience is wondering how he'll ever get down. After the commercial comes the "second-act complication," which could be his realizing that there's a hornet's nest in the tree. The resolution, in any script, comes next: That hypothetical man who was up the tree is safely on the ground again, for good or bad.[9]

At the conclusion of the sitcom, order is finally restored. This formulaic structure reaffirms cultural values. A latent message is that problems are all solvable, and justice always prevails. Characters who have violated the moral code of sitcoms (e.g., by lying or trying to be something they are not) suffer the consequences. Misunderstandings are cleared up, and characters who were at odds are reconciled.

In the structure of the horror genre, the resolution stage is not quite so absolute. As with the sitcom formula, horror films typically begin with a sense of order, but then quickly descend into the chaos stage. The characters soon discover that the initial order was only an illusion. Behind this fragile façade, evil is lurking—such as monsters that had heretofore been dormant or forces that are hidden within human beings.

Horror programs generally conclude with the resolution stage; the monster is slain and the world is saved. But although the crisis has been momentarily averted, the story raises questions about evil that cannot easily be dismissed. Consequently, the emotional response of the characters combines sorrow and relief, rather than celebration.

Soap operas operate according to a variation of the order/chaos/order formula. Within this "serial" model, a program typically features several different *subplots* (secondary stories that are frequently interwoven into narratives) at different stages of completion, interweaving throughout the episode. These subplots are in different stages of development, so that while

Table 3.1

Structure—Genres

Soap operas
Stage 1	Opening scene—hook
	Brief musical introduction
	Narrator opening the day's episode with a recap of what happened before
Stage 2	Two segments of action separated by a commercial break
	Rising action at end of episode (to carry audience to view next episode)
Stage 3	A closing word from the narrator suggesting the problem ahead

Local television news
Stage 1: Introduction	Top story—hook
	Voice-over
	Music
	Kicker
Stage 2: News	Lead story—most important
	In descending order
	Final story—uplifting, of human interest
Stage 3: Sports	
Stage 4: Weather	

each subplot ultimately works according to the order/chaos/order structure, it does not occur within a single episode. One subplot may be at the inception stage, two others may be in the process of unfolding, and a final one may be at a point of resolution. Taken collectively, this model has the effect of unfinished stories that are carried over to the next episode.

Vladimir Propp's *morphological analysis* is useful in identifying the unifying structure in a genre. A morphology focuses on the structures—the systems, relations, and forms—that make meaning in any cultural activity or artifact.[10] Propp did not look for meaning in individual texts but rather through the structural patterns that characterize these texts. No single item in such a system has meaning except as an integral part of a set of structural connections.

Propp dissected the fairy tale, divesting it of its individual embellishments in order to identify its skeletal formula. He then traced the sequence of elements in a story to identify the basic structure common to this genre. Propp found that the number of structural elements, or "functions," in the fairy tale is limited and complete. Thus, despite the distinctive embellishments of individual stories, the essential structure of genres is uniform,

reflecting a constant set of questions, issues, and concerns. To illustrate, the essential structure of courtroom dramas is as follows:

I.   *Introduction*
    A. Background–justice system
    B. A crime is committed
        1. The truthfulness/veracity of the account of the crime is established
        2. The guilty party is identified
        3. The innocence of the defendant is established
II. *The defendant is apprehended*
    A. The defendant confesses his/her guilt to his/her lawyers
    B. The defendant confesses his/her innocence to his/her lawyers
III. *The jury selection process*
IV. *The development of the defense team's strategies*
V.   *The defense attorney's tactics in court*
VI. *The prosecutor's tactics in court*
VII. *The verdict is rendered*
    A. The jury deliberates behind closed doors
    B. The defendant admits his/her guilt under cross-examination

This structure furnishes a complete framework for the genre while providing for considerable variation within this framework. Every series that falls within this genre, such as *Perry Mason* or *Law & Order* permits individual embellishments. Moreover, each episode within the series contains its own specific nuances. For instance, in *Law & Order* the criminal and the nature of the crime vary each week.

Beyond any differences in specific detail, a slight manipulation of the formula can drastically alter the narrative. Some structural elements may be omitted entirely from a series (or episode), while the order of the other functions remains the same. For instance, in *Law & Order* only elements 1 and 2 listed under "A Crime is Committed" (IB) are employed:

I.   *Introduction*
    A. Background–justice system
    B. A crime is committed
        1. The truthfulness/veracity of the account of the crime is established
        2. The guilty party is identified

Element B3, *The innocence of the defendant is established,* is eliminated.

Figure 3.1 *Law & Order*

Fred Thompson, Michael Bloomberg, and Sam Waterson, from an episode of *Law & Order*. (Photo by Getty Images/Getty)

Under this structural framework, the audience knows who is guilty. Because 3C is left out of this construct, *Law & Order* operates from the point of view of the *prosecutor.* Consequently, any efforts by the defense to protect the civil liberties of their clients would be perceived by the audience as an obstruction of justice. Thus, this structural framework actually promotes an authoritarian legal system. Unlike the American system of justice, in which defendants are innocent until proven guilty, this system of justice is cleaner and simpler, although the prosecutors are faced with cagey defense lawyers who use civil protections to ensure that their clients prevail.

On the other hand, *Perry Mason* always eliminated B1 and B2 and employed variation B3:

I. *Introduction*
   A. *Background–justice system*
   B. *A crime is committed*
      3. *The innocence of the defendant is established*

In this configuration, the series is presented from the point of view of the *defendant;* the audience does not know if the defendant is innocent or guilty, or whether the prosecution's account is accurate.

The sequence of a tale also can be rearranged; *interpolated* elements can be inserted in the middle of a tale, complicating the plot. For instance, episodes of *Perry Mason* do not include structural element III, the jury selection process. The film *My Cousin Vinny* (1992), on the other hand, repeated the courtroom sequence several times:

IV.   *The development of the defense team's strategies*
V.   *The defense attorney's tactics in court*
VI.   *The prosecutor's tactics in court*
V.   *The defense attorney's tactics in court*
VI.   *The prosecutor's tactics in court*
V.   *The defense attorney's tactics in court*

This interpolation was central to the humor of the story. The plot involved the miscues of novice attorney Vincent Gambini (Joe Pesci) as he attempted to defend his clients, who have been accused of murder. The repeated sequence also reveals Vinny's growth as an attorney; he quickly learns proper deportment in the courtroom and begins to apply his argumentative strengths to their best advantage.

Finally, reversing the order in which functions appear creates wide plot variations. For instance, in *My Cousin Vinny,* if element II (*The defendant is apprehended*) had appeared *before* element I (*Introduction*), the audience would no longer have been a witness to the crime, which established the innocence of Vinny's clients. Consequently, the dramatic emphasis would have shifted to discovering whether Vinny's clients were innocent or guilty, as opposed to whether Vinny can successfully defend his innocent clients.

Formulaic Plot

A plot is a planned series of events in a narrative, progressing through a struggle of opposing forces to a climax and a conclusion. For instance, Bob Ivry describes the formulaic plot that typifies the action/adventure genre:

> It goes like this: Our hero, an average Joe Blow, gets his wife and/or children massacred/kidnapped/threatened by Yankee renegades/Nazis/Arab terrorists/Eurotrash gangsters/malevolent visitors from the future and vows vengeance. Betrayed by his friends/neighbors/fellow police/comrades-in-arms/evil twin, Blow must endure intense physical hardship in order to restore peace/freedom of expression/fair play/unimpeded commerce to the community. Blow's reward: the girl and/or a sequel.[11]

Figure 3.2   *The Amazing Race*

Three weeks after introducing "villains" Rob Mariano and Amber Brkich into *The Amazing Race,* ratings jumped from 10.3 million to 12.4 million viewers. (Photo by Donald Weber/Getty)

Conflict is central to any plot. Characters are initially confronted with some sort of dilemma, which must be resolved by the end of the story. As horror film actor/director Wes Craven observes, "The story begins when the conflict starts and ends when it's over."[12]

In the reality genre, conflict is artificially built into the plots. For instance, in *Survivor*, one cast member is voted off the island at the end of

Table 3.2

Plot Characteristics of Genres: Conflict Between Order and Chaos

Genre	Focus of Conflict
Western	The locale of the American frontier
Supercop	The invulnerability of agents of law and order (includes spies)
Detective	Personal initiative in preserving law and order
Gangster	Personal ambition as superior to law and order (includes subgenres of Robin Hood, Big Caper, prison and film noir)
Futuristic science fiction	Technological dependence in a future locale
Disaster	Natural catastrophe
Fantasy	Heroic triumph in an enhanced environment
"Creature feature"	Giant beasts
Science fiction	Plausible contacts with extraterrestrial life
Psychological horror	Intensely heightened rational fears
Horror	Metaphysically based fears (subgenres of man/God and "powers of darkness")
Musical (includes subgenres of revues, backstage, performance, operetta, and fantasy)	Thematic presentation through song and/or dance
Comedy	The amusing fallibility of human conflicts and creations (subgenres include conflict, satire/parody, complication)

Source: Ken Burke, "Charting Relationships in American Popular Film." *International Journal of Instructional Media* 25, no. 1 (1998): 87–109.

each episode, which pits the contestants against one another. In addition, personality conflicts make up important subplots. For instance, in 2005, after "villains" Rob Mariano and Amber Brkich were introduced into *The Amazing Race,* the ratings climbed from 10.3 million to 12.4 million viewers within three weeks. Kelly Kahl, CBS's senior executive vice president for scheduling, said, "What [Mariano and Brkich] brought more than anything is a real sense of competitiveness and controversy—they're playing the game in a new way. Some in the audience like it and some don't."[13] Host Phil Keoghan agrees: "I think they've been incredibly tenacious, smart, engaging, and charismatic. That doesn't mean that people have to necessarily agree with all the choices they've made, but there's no denying that they've made for some entertaining moments. They are good

TV."[14] This environment of hostility and back-biting conveys the latent message that conflict is more interesting to watch than cooperation.

In the same vein, conflict has been incorporated into political talk shows, in an effort to move the genre beyond the static "talking heads" format typically seen on Sunday morning television. Today, moderators bait the guests into the verbal sparring matches by asking leading questions and personalizing the discussion.

In order to keep the stories fresh, media communicators rely on contemporary issues, trends, and points of interest. As a result, the collective plots of a genre are a barometer of cultural attitudes, values, trends, and preoccupations. As an example, the plot summaries of American soap operas covering the week of July 11–15, 2005, are as follows:

ALL MY CHILDREN: *Ryan flipped out when Greenlee said she's pregnant. Later, he walked out on her. Worried about the outcome of Greenlee's pregnancy announcement, Zach and Kendall kept tabs on her. Di (Dixie) told everyone she really is Dixie and then agreed to a DNA test to prove it. Everyone was nervous when Aidan arrived with the test results. Tad told Di (Dixie) he doesn't hate her. After watching Di (Dixie) and Tad together, Krystal told Tad that their romance is over and she can't marry him. Babe told David to stay out of her life because he set up the whole Di-Dixie scenario. Amanda fantasized about being married to Jamie (after he becomes a wealthy doctor), and later flirted with Josh in hopes of making Jamie jealous. Garret warned Daniel not to tell Reggie she slept with Josh.*

AS THE WORLD TURNS: *Dusty found Jennifer after she fell while in a remote cabin. Dusty delivered Jennifer's premature baby, then got her and the baby to the hospital. Gwen also gave birth to a premature baby. Craig spent a moment in the nursery with both babies, the one he fathered (Jennifer's) and the one he and Rosanna plan to adopt (Gwen's). Jennifer was devastated to later learn her baby had died. Craig rushed to the hospital after learning his and Jennifer's baby was dead. Craig heard Jennifer insist that the dead baby wasn't her son. Casey got into a fight with Will after Gwen admitted Casey was her baby's birth father. Celia broke up with Casey after learning he fathered Gwen's baby. Jack met Iris, the woman in the photo with Carly's father (Ray).*

THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL: *Thomas and Gaby decided they had to tell Ridge and Taylor that they secretly married, but Agent Dunn got to them first, stunning Ridge and Taylor with the wedding news. After Ridge said he isn't sure he should be with Taylor, Brooke told him to make*

up his mind between her and Taylor. *Jackie and Brooke were suspicious when Stephanie recovered from her heart attack in such a short time. Massimo got angry with Jackie when she talked about proving Stephanie used her heart attack to manipulate Ridge into renewing his marriage vows with Taylor.*

DAYS OF OUR LIVES: *Mimi panicked when Rex said he wanted to know what Jan had been holding over Mimi's head (her abortion), but Jan kept mum. Belle advised Mimi to tell Rex about her abortion while Shawn told Mimi not to tell Rex. Sami vowed to find proof that Kate and Eugenia set her up with Brandon after Lucas promised a second chance if Sami gets the proof. Hiding under Eugenia's bed, Sami heard Eugenia tell her psychic she has proof Kate (and Eugenia) ruined Sami's relationship with Lucas. Eugenia recorded all her dealings with Kate. Brady and Chloe made love after he gave her the name and phone number of a specialist who may be able to repair Chloe's face. Kate was pleased Bo was forced to arrest Shawn for jumping bail, but got upset when Judge Karen Fitzpatrick granted Shawn bail—at Philip's request.*

GENERAL HOSPITAL: *Trapped on Alcazar's estate during a hurricane, Carly and Reese argued. Carly later found Reese unconscious in the stable, and when she began to regain consciousness, Reese came close to revealing she is really Charlotte. Alcazar was angry with Carly when he learned she had broken into Reese's penthouse and searched the place. Reese stopped herself from telling Sonny she is really Carly's childhood friend Charlotte when Sonny said he couldn't forgive betrayal. Surviving their car crash, Ric brought Alexis to Alcazar's estate. Emily and Elizabeth took care of Alexis, who worried she would go into labor. At the remote cabin, crooked cop Murphy, who is in cahoots with Jenna, held Maxie and Jesse at gunpoint. Jenna later "accidentally" let Murphy escape after Maxie and Jesse overpowered him. Maxie and Jesse returned home.*

GUIDING LIGHT: *Harley tricked Alan into admitting he killed Phillip. Alan tried to shoot Harley and Gus to keep them from revealing he killed Phillip, but Mallet got the drop on Alan. Alan was arrested after Alex revealed she has the bloody gloves Alan wore when he shot Phillip. Posing as a cop, Sebastian helped Alan escape police custody. Alan locked Sebastian in a closet when he tried to blackmail Alan into giving him Spaulding Enterprises. Coop rescued Lizzie, whom Sebastian planned to use as a bargaining chip to make Alan do his bidding. Harley was reunited with Gus and her sons after she was cleared of Phillip's murder. Alan is up to something mysterious. Nate (Alfred) disappeared after Reva tried*

to frame him for stealing Lewis Construction money. Jonathan took the money. Edmund learned Dinah miscarried his and Cassie's baby. To keep from losing Cassie, Edmund had Dinah continue faking her pregnancy.

ONE LIFE TO LIVE: *Marcie told Bo that in the original "Killing Club" murders (they were fictional), the killer had an accomplice. The "Killing Club" killer left a cryptic note for Evangeline. From a description, Bo realized it wasn't Hayes who left the note. After the killer called John on Natalie's cell phone, John found the cell phone buried under the bleachers at a football field. John also found a threatening note written on a page of the journal the killer stole from Marcie. The killer phoned Viki and taunted her about Natalie. A young man, Nash, confronted Tess (Jessica), who had stolen his car. Nash prevented a man at a party from drugging Tess'[s] (Jessica) drink. Nash took Tess (Jessica) to his place after she passed out. During a dinner date, Spencer told Kelly she might be able to have children after all. Dorian realized Spencer has a thing for Blair. Bo worried when Nora passed out.*

PASSIONS: *Luis rescued Sheridan after her boat hit a log and blew up during a chase to catch the boat Beth and Marty were in. Sheridan was devastated Beth made it to the airport. Beth flew off with Marty on Alistair's jet. Sheridan told Luis, who was going after Beth, she never wanted to see him again because he caused her to lose Marty. Luis vowed to find Marty. From the jet, Beth taunted Sheridan by calling her and putting Marty on the phone. Alistair had Sam fired as police chief after Fancy said Noah almost got her killed. Noah confronted Alistair. After Noah punched Alistair, Alistair vowed to ruin Noah and his entire family. Believing Spike loves her, a dimwitted Jessica moved in with him then agreed to prostitute herself to make money to rebuild his club. Pilar fumed when she saw Katherine and Martin sharing a (farewell) kiss. Whitney worried Chad will learn Miles is his son.*

THE YOUNG AND THE RESTLESS: *In Malibu, Nick caught Daniel. Later, Daniel and Lily were arrested. Daniel and Lily were cleared of any involvement in the convenience store robbery. Nick returned home, then got angry when he learned Sharon and Noah attended a Fourth of July party at the Abbotts so soon after Cassie's death. When Nick fired Phyllis from Newman Enterprises, she accused him of feeling guilty for letting Cassie go out the night she was killed. Nick was also upset when Phyllis said Cassie might have been driving the car when it crashed. Devon told Dru he saw his mother, Yolanda, who is using drugs again. When Yolanda refused Dru's offer of help to relocate her, Dru told Devon that Yolanda*

wants him to stay away from her. Dru caught Devon trying to steal money from her purse to give to Yolanda. J.T. continued to help Bobby bring down Vinny. Michael asked Paul to get info on Lauren's son, Scott.[15]

A major theme that emerges in these storylines is contending with *change.* In the world of the soap opera, extraordinary things happen to ordinary people: car accidents, hurricanes, medical emergencies, and criminal assaults such as blackmail, theft, and murder. Soap opera characters are striving to establish some degree of equilibrium in this rapidly changing world.

In addition, soap opera plots typically focus on *relationships.* In all of the capsule summaries above, couples are engaged in romantic quests for true love. These programs include all of the stages of a romance: the blissful beginning, trouble in paradise, and resolution. However, a cumulative message that emerges from these plots is that happiness is fleeting.

Beyond romantic love, the soap opera plots reinforce the value of relationships, particularly issues around children. Significantly, a number of plots deal with the separation of mothers and children (through death or abduction), despite the efforts of the women to hold on to their children.

In the worldview of soap operas, the key to survival is a clear sense of identity. Numerous subplots deal with the issue of *identity:* "lost" relatives, cases of amnesia, and inheritance issues. In this rapidly changing world, the protagonists are unable to see the motives of the villainous characters.

Subplots

Subplots may appear to be unrelated; however, because the characters operate within the same worldview, subplots often comment on different aspects of the same thematic concerns. Consequently, identifying thematic connections between subplots can furnish a perspective into the cumulative messages contained in a program.

To cite an example, in a 2004 episode of *The Amazing Race,* the seven remaining teams headed to Egypt. During this leg of the journey, the teams chose between leading camels by horse to the Pit Stop or pulling heavy blocks for several hundred feet. The episode consisted of the following subplots:

- The brothers drag behind because Marshall can no longer run with his bad knees.

- Bowling moms Linda and Karen miss the flight and drop to last place. The moms finish last, but because it's a non-elimination round, they stay in the race. The catch: they have to start the next leg with no money.
- Colin and Christie finish a day ahead of everyone. But instead of enjoying their inevitable victory for this leg of the race, Colin and Christie get into a fight. As a result, the couple opt to use the Fast Forward, a one-time break allowing a team to skip all tasks.
- Charla and Mirna get a tip on an early flight, wait for the others to fall asleep, and then sneak to their gate.

Although the teams were ostensibly in competition with one another, the subplots reveal that they all shared the same feelings, concerns, and experiences. All of the contestants were immersed in the quest; however, no one appeared happy or inspired by the competition. Instead of enjoying the journey of life, the teams were focused entirely on the finish line, which offered the promise of fulfillment. The rules of the "game" (a metaphor for society) divided the contestants, so that they were willing to cheat one another to get "ahead."

At other times, subplots are *latent*—that is, not formally introduced but often of more interest to the audience than the manifest plot. For instance, in *The Great Race* the impact of the competition on interpersonal relationships was an unspoken but central element of the plot. Contestant Zachary Behr explains:

> [In 2002] my college friend Flo Pesenti and I finished first in the CBS-TV reality show "The Amazing Race." Flo and I didn't get along—she was constantly threatening to quit. And I wouldn't let us spend more than a few dollars on food, which I somehow deemed unnecessary. In fact, the tension between us eventually became one of the main subplots of the show that season.[16]

Indeed, this approach can be expanded: identifying subplots in programs belonging to a particular genre can disclose patterns with respect to characteristic themes and messages in the genre.

In addition, genres contain distinctive *plot conventions:* that is, recurrent incidents that appear within a narrative. Plot conventions can appear across a number of genres. However, some plot conventions appear so frequently within a particular genre that they have become associated

with that genre. Examples include the gun duel in a Western, the wedding scene in a romance, and the car chase in the action genre.

Identifying plot conventions can provide insight into the essential appeal of the genre. A prime example can be found in the *Jerry Springer Show,* which became so popular that in 1998 it surpassed the eleven-year reign of the *Oprah Winfrey Show* at the top of the ratings. One of the formulaic plot conventions of the program was The Fight. Each episode included a confrontation between two people—a person confessing to their partner that he or she was cheating on the partner or had a secret life of some sort. This admission would set off a violent outburst. In the melee, females would tear off one another's clothing in the heat of battle, further inciting the audience. Security guards would eventually break up the fight, to the cheers and exhortations of the audience.

However, after politicians such as Senator Joseph Lieberman (D-Connecticut) and former secretary of education William Bennett publicly decried the tone of the program, industry executives began to express concerns. Robert Iger, president of ABC, declared, "I question the logic of putting him on the air, and I believe the entire industry suffers from the association."[17]

Adding to the controversy, it was then disclosed that guests were given explicit instructions prior to the shows, such as "We want four fights," and were even threatened with lawsuits if there were no fisticuffs.[18] Bowing to public pressure, Springer Studios USA finally announced that the show would eliminate the fighting. Significantly, after the changes were implemented, the ratings for the show plummeted. Clearly, violence and sex were critical elements in the popularity of the show.

Another troubling formulaic plot convention in the reality genre is *ritualistic humiliation.* Being shamed publicly as punishment for failure is found throughout the universe of reality shows, including *Joe Millionaire, Are You Hot?*, *Celebrity Boxing, Big Brother, Survivor, American Idol,* and *Fear Factor*. For instance, *American Idol* always includes a contestant whose noticeable lack of talent makes him (or her) the butt of jokes. Indeed, judge Simon Cowell gained notoriety for the cruelty of his critiques. Although there is no bloodshed, being shamed publicly is clearly a form of emotional violence. That audiences find this to be entertaining is disturbing. Moreover, the willingness of contestants to subject themselves to this humiliation demonstrates the lengths that people will go to attract attention—even if it is negative.

Stock Characters

Every genre is characterized by its own set of *stock characters.* Stock characters appear so frequently in a genre that they are instantly recognizable. The appearance of stock characters enables the audience to become involved in the story immediately.

Even unscripted reality shows employ stock characters. Casting directors audition potential participants in reality shows with an idea of filling stock character roles from among the applicants. The challenge for the casting director is to find "real" people who fit into the following stock character roles for reality shows:

- The Good Girl
- The Bitch
- The Pot-stirrer (someone who fans the flames of controversy)
- The Groovy Guy

Applicants face an intensive selection process: six rounds of cuts, two extensive questionnaires, a medical exam, an intelligence test, and the kind of background check to help them identify cast members who "authentically" fit into these preconceived roles. Several producers have hired psychologists, who participate in the casting process to make sure that the finalists fit the psychological profile they are looking for.

In 2005, Rob Mariano and Amber Brkich of *The Amazing Race* emerged as reality television's premiere villains (see earlier discussion). During the competition, they showed no compunction about trampling on others in their efforts to win the competition. In one episode, the couple stole a cab from another team to get them closer to the finish line. The couple became so celebrated in their designated role of villains that CBS broadcast their wedding in the Bahamas as a two-hour special, simply called *Rob and Amber Get Married.*

Every genre is characterized by its own set of stock characters. Westerns, local TV news, and soap operas provide examples of their assemblage of stock characters, along with their characteristics (see Table 3.3).

The designation of stock characters can provide insight into international attitudes toward particular groups of people. For instance, in 2006, *Valley of the Wolves,* an action/adventure film in which Americans fill the role of the stock villains, was released in Turkey. The plot of the film in-

Table 3.3

Stock Characters

Genre	Stock characters	Examples/characteristics
Westerns	Heroes	The Historical Hero (*Wyatt Earp, Bat Masterson, Jim Bowie*)
		The Wanderer (*Cheyenne, Restless Gun, Have Gun Will Travel*)
		The Anti-hero: Clint Eastwood (*The Man with No Name*), from *Fist Full of Dollars* (1964); *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*
	Villains	Indians Gambler/Saloon keeper Capitalist—owns the town Gunslinger
	Sidekick	Old galoot Partner
	Women	Virgin Whore (saloon girl) Tough pioneer School marm
Local TV journalists	Anchorperson	Formal dress; conservative; standard dialect Males: Exude authority, certainty, and wisdom Females: Young, attractive
	Weatherperson	Likeable
Soap operas	Heroine	Attractive; virtuous; young; clueless about motives/strategies of Villain
	Villains, women (The Bitch Goddess)	Attractive; young; rivals and antagonists of Heroine
	Hero	Male love interest; handsome; young; a professional man (e.g., a doctor)
	Benevolent characters	Solid family types
	Villainous parents and grandparents Professional men and women Children (toddlers to teenagers) Con men	
Game shows	Emcee	Amiable; attractive; masculine; listening skills; in control
	Contestants	Usually average people; sometimes celebrities; likeable
	Hostess	Attractive, glamorous
	Audience	Predominantly female; enthusiastic

volves Turkish gunmen who seek revenge against a tyrannical occupying army. The opposing forces are Americans, reflecting anti-U.S. sentiment in Turkey due to the U.S. role in Iraq. Journalist Sebnam Arsu notes, "The commander's name is Sam—as in uncle— . . . a sociopath, killing people without a second's thought and claiming that he is doing God's will. While fictional, some of the movie is based in part on real events, and many of the scenes elicit knowing looks from the audience."[19]

Formulaic Setting

The setting is the physical background against which the action of a narrative takes place. The elements that make up a setting include:

- The geographical location (including its topography and scenery)
- The physical arrangement of the location such as the windows and doors of a room
- The time or period in which the action takes place

In some genres, the setting is the defining element. For instance, in science fiction programs like *Star Trek* (1966–69), the exploration of outer space was the focus of the series. At the same time, this setting served as an arena for the exploration of a range of social issues, including race relations, the cold war, and humans' place in the universe.

The formulaic setting is also an essential element of the horror genre. For instance, the castle contributes to an atmosphere of gloom and terror. This gothic structure contains secret panels and underground catacombs—secret places unknown to others. Altogether, the castle is symbolic of the dark, dangerous, and evil world that awaits.

The formulaic setting furnishes perspective into the worldview of a genre. Indeed, the meaning of the same setting may vary, depending on the genre. New York City offers a good case in point. In situation comedies such as *Sex and the City,* New York City is a bright, exciting place, filled with opportunity and glamour. In *Friends,* the city was a homogeneous place, populated almost exclusively by white people of about the same age and income level as the stars of the series. In *Seinfeld,* New York even had a small town feel to it. Jerry always seemed to be bumping into George, Kramer, or Elaine on the street.

However, in dramas, New York City is depicted as a dark, foreboding place. For instance the former WB network's *Everwood* was the story of

Dr. Andy Brown, who had taken his family to the small town of Ever-wood after the death of his wife. However, in 2005, the Brown family returned to New York—with disastrous results. Greg Berlanti, the creator of *Everwood,* notes that

> for us, the city represents the shattering of Andy's life and ego and where his life, his family's life, came tumbling down. The upcoming New York episodes will be the first time Andy has ever come back. He's probably terrified, and when he arrives, all of his worst nightmares come true.[20]

The crime genre extends this dark vision of New York as a dangerous place. Indeed, the worldview of the CBS *franchise* (that is, programming based on an established series) *CSI: New York* was so filled with despair that eventually the ratings were affected. Anthony E. Zuiker, the creator of the *CSI* franchise, explains, "We were going much too dark in the tone of the show, too aggressively, and there's no doubt we lost some viewers in that patch."[21] Finally, Nina Tassler, the head of CBS Entertainment (and a New Yorker), issued an order to mix in more diverse portraits of the city.[22]

However, the setting can also depict a false reality. For example, the 2001 edition of CBS's reality series *Survivor 3* was set in the Shaba National Reserve, a poor area in equatorial Africa. Eighteen people were challenged to survive the rigors of this arid desert land over a four-month period. Although the huts were set up to look authentic, the campground for the contestants—which included satellite telephones, television hook-ups, a swimming pool, a modern sewer system, and a water processing plant—was far more luxurious than what the natives endured.

For the natives of this area, the artificiality of asking these privileged people to pretend they were facing the realities of survival was highly ironic. Mohammed Leresh, who lived around the Shaba National Reserve, declared, "I could win that show. I live for several days without eating, just a little water."[23] F.D. Lolosoli added, "I don't have a TV. There are only five TVs in the entire town, and none of us have ever heard of 'Survivor.' We don't know what all this . . . is about, but we do know that we're barely surviving."[24]

Trappings

Trappings are artifacts that appear so often that they have become associ-ated with a genre. For instance, Stetson hats, horses, and spurs are items

that subtly establish the authenticity of the Western genre. Trappings also furnish cues about people, events, and situations. Heroes in Westerns are identifiable by their white hats; conversely, villains wear black.

Using different trappings may give the illusion of a new genre. For instance, it can be argued that police dramas are actually contemporary Westerns. Horses have been replaced by hot cars, and the prairie and rough towns of the Old West have been transformed into the urban landscape. However, the essential conflicts of good verses evil remain the same.

For example, *Syriana* (2005), a film about today's geopolitical landscape, consists of numerous subplots that overwhelm audiences and critics alike. Moreover, a multitude of characters appears to operate independently as they jockey for position in an oil-based global economy. Film critic Roger Ebert admits, "The movie's plot is so complex we're not really supposed to follow it, we're supposed to be surrounded by it. Since none of the characters understand[s] the whole picture, why should we?"[25]

However, one way to make some sense of the film is through comparison with another genre: the Western. In this incarnation, gold has been replaced by oil. The character of the gambler—the gent with the dark, greasy hair, moustache, and cutaway coat—now appears as a multinational oil executive. Just as the gamblers "owned" the local sheriff, the oil companies influence the U.S. military. The Indian chiefs have been replaced by Arab sheiks; but instead of being bought off by trinkets and whisky, these tribal leaders have been diverted by expensive playthings such as yachts and condos. Thus, despite these differences, the essential formula remains the same, as do the themes of greed and betrayal.

Formulaic Twists

Producers of popular genres are faced with the same challenge: programming must be fresh enough to attract an audience but not be so innovative that it loses that audience altogether. Faced with the glut of programming, media communicators often feel the necessity to *push the envelope;* that is, to make their programs distinctive by extending the parameters of the formula. Peter Roth, the president of the Warner Brothers television production studio, explains:

> The business is challenging and it seems more so this year than any in a long time. There is only one answer for the traditional show creators. You

have to be much more demanding than ever before. Being good or less is not going to make it. You have to really stand out.[26]

As an example, the sitcom has long been a mainstay of the prime-time television lineup:

- In every year except one since 1956, the average rating for situation comedies has been higher than that for the average program.
- In 1964, sitcoms accounted for 43 percent of regularly scheduled programming.
- In 1974 of the fifteen sitcoms on network television, ten were in the Nielson top twenty programs.
- In 1978–89, comedy shows filled nine of the top ten positions on television.
- In 1983–84, there were five comedies in the top ten and five in the second ten.

However, a genre sometimes falls out of favor simply because the audience becomes bored with the formula. Gary Newman, co-president of 20th Century Television, declared, "For a lot of young people, the sitcom format feels retro and tired."[27] As ratings declined, the networks cut back severely on sitcom programming. NBC, which at one point in the late 1990s had sixteen half-hour comedies on its schedule, scheduled only four comedies in its fall 2005 lineup.

In order to revive interest in a genre, media communicators must challenge the parameters of the formula. For instance, the Fox series *Arrested Development*, which garnered seven Emmy nominations and an award from the Television Critics Association for best new program and best comedy, departs from the usual sitcom formula by featuring running gags that extend over several episodes, absurd plot twists, surreal flashbacks, and unsympathetic heroes.

But even the creators of programs that challenge the parameters of a genre are highly conscious of its formula. For instance, *Arrested Development* departs from the usual sitcom formulas. The series bounces off of the sitcom formula, playing with the audience's expectations for comedic purposes. As an example, the end of an episode often includes a "teaser" that previews the next week's episode. However, the teaser often turns out to be a stand-alone joke.

Formulaic twists occur when a slight change in one of the following formulaic elements makes a program distinctive.

Characters. In 2004 Fox introduced *House, M.D.,* a new series about medical investigators, in which the distinctive element is the lead character —Dr. Gregory House, a blunt nonconformist. This character is a twist on the stock character of the smooth, omnipotent physician.

Gender. The gender of characters can also be switched to give a formula a fresh look. For instance, in *Trial by Jury,* a derivative of *Law & Order,* the dominant roles are played by women. Alessandra Stanley describes this "feminization" of the formula of *Law & Order*: "There are a few token men in the latest Dick Wolf series. A cad interrupts passionate sex to answer his telephone, a weak defendant is bullied by his brassy female defense attorney. . . . Justice is meted out almost entirely by women."[28]

Sexual Orientation. The success of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* led to the development of a derivative program: *Queer Eye for the Straight Girl*. The shows have an identical premise and format. But instead of five gay men "making-over" a straight male, the latter series involves three gay men and one gay woman transforming a "fashion-challenged" woman.

Age. Changes in the age of the characters can give a show a fresh appearance. For instance, prime-time soap operas, which harken back to the 1980s heyday of *Dynasty* and *Dallas,* have reemerged in the form of teen-centered dramas like *O.C.; One Tree Hill; The Brotherhood of Poland, New Hampshire; Joan of Arcadia,* and *Skin*.

Setting. A change in setting can create a fresh appearance for a genre. For instance, the fall 2004 schedule for the WB network included *The Mountain,* a dramatic series, described by critics Bill Carter and Stuart Elliott as "'Dynasty' on skis."[29] The series takes place at a luxury sky resort inherited by a young man. According to *LAX* executive producer Mark Gordon, the setting makes the difference: "This arena is fresh and different and someplace that we haven't seen before."[30]

However, this imperative to "push the envelope" can sometimes cross the bounds of propriety and taste. Vince Russo, a scriptwriter for World Championship Wrestling's *Monday Nitro,* recalls, "We would look at each other and say, all right, let's see how far we can go this week. How much can we get away with?"[31] As an example, in a pay-per-view episode, a

wrestler pulled the prosthetic leg off of his opponent and beat him with it—much to the delight of the crowd.

Franchise Formulas

As noted above, a franchise refers to programming based on an established series. For instance, *CSI* (CBS), a crime drama that made its debut in 2000, has spawned the following *franchise properties: CSI: Miami* (2002), *CSI: New York* (2004), and *CSI: Dark Motives* (2004). Franchises contain common formulaic elements that establish points of continuity with the original program as a way of connecting with its fan base. A common formulaic element is the *premise* of the franchise. For instance, all of the *Law & Order* series work from a common premise: a crime has been perpetrated and it is up to an investigating agency to solve it. The audience is taken through the entire process (i.e., arrest, questioning, court hearings, and sentencing). Interlaced in the narrative are two subplots involving the team of characters charged with solving the crime.

Franchise properties may also make use of the appearance of familiar *characters* from the original series. Lenny Briscoe (played by Jerry Orbach in the original *Law & Order* for more than a decade, until his death in 2005) appeared fleetingly during the first season of *Trial by Jury*. Other characters from the original, including prosecutor Jack McCoy (played by Sam Waterston) also made a cameo appearance during the *Trial by Jury* pilot episode.

The *setting* can also provide continuity between the two series. For instance, a replica of the familiar wood-paneled office of District Attorney Arthur Branch (Fred Thompson) was built for the *Trial by Jury* series.

In addition, formulaic elements may also serve as points of departure for the franchise properties. For instance, unlike the original series, *Trial by Jury* presents the case from the point of view of all of the principals involved in the narrative: prosecutors, police, judges, jurors, grand jurors, suspects, and defense lawyers. This approach gives the audience a "complete" picture of the crime. (For further discussion of franchises, see Chapter 8.)

Lines of Inquiry

Formulaic analysis, which defines the formulaic elements that are characteristic of a genre and examines the messages conveyed by the formula, can involve the following:

- Comparing the formulaic patterns in different genres establishes a way of understanding how a culture chooses to understand and value certain symbolic characters and actions.
- Examining formulaic elements in a genre can provide insight into corresponding cultural attitudes, values, behaviors, trends, preoccupations, and myths that define the culture.
- A formulaic approach considers variations within the formula in generic programming.
- Formulaic analysis provides a way to identify similarities in dissimilar programming.

1. Identify the formulaic elements characteristic of a genre (e.g., reality shows). What would we expect to see in these program categories? Focus on the following elements in the analysis: function, premise, structure, plot motifs, and conventions.
   a. Detective show
   b. Quiz show
   c. Afternoon talk show
   d. The network news

What messages are conveyed by this formulaic configuration?

2. Analyze a sample of programs from a particular genre (e.g., reality shows, or TV news broadcasts). What media messages can you identify through an analysis of one of the following formulaic elements?
   a. Formulaic premise
   b. Formulaic structure
   c. Formulaic plot
   d. Stock characters
   e. Formulaic set
   f. Trappings
3. Select a sample of programs belonging to the same genre, focusing on variations that occur *within* the formula.
   a. Identify the variations that occur.
   b. What is the significance of these variations with respect to themes, worldview, and messages in the program?
4. Based on your understanding of the evolution of formula, examine a sample of programs that belong to a genre which has reached the Mature phase of development (see p. 33).
   a. Have these shows broken through the formula? Explain.

5. Analyze a sample of genric programs produced over a period of time (e.g., sitcoms between 1955 and 2005), identifying any shifts in the formula over that period.
    a. Describe the shifts in formula.
    b. In what ways do these shifts reflect changes in the culture?
6. Hybrid programming: Examine a program in which formulaic elements from one genre have been incorporated into another genre.
    a. Which genres are at work in the narrative?
    b. Where does this infusion occur in the narrative?
    c. What messages are conveyed by infusing this formulaic element from another genre into the primary genre?
7. Compare the formulaic patterns in different genres.
    a. How do these formulaic elements differ?
    b. In what ways do these differences account for differences in the worldview of the genres?
8. Conduct a genre analysis, focusing on *premise.*
    a. Select a sample of programs from a genre and describe the premise.
        1. Is it logical or illogical? Explain.
        2. What does the premise reveal about the worldview of the genre?
    b. Examine the *introductions* of media presentations.
        1. Examine the titles of programming that make up a genre (e.g., reality genre).
        2. Are there patterns with regard to the titles?
        3. What do the titles reveal with respect to areas of cultural interest, preoccupations, and values?
        4. Examine ads promoting programming within a particular genre (e.g., previews for films, or promos for TV shows).
    a. What aspects of the programs are emphasized?
    b. Are any aspects overemphasized (given more attention than is warranted in the programs)?
    c. Are any particular characters emphasized?
9. Identify the premise of the following genres. Finish the statement: "(The genre) presents a world in which . . ."
    a. Science fiction
    b. Broadcast news
    c. Sports broadcast (e.g., basketball game)

10. Examine the titles of a sample of programs belonging to a particular genre (e.g., horror or romances). Can you identify any patterns with regard to the worldview of the genre? Do any patterns emerge with regard to areas of interest, concern, or worldview?

11. The premise of a genre begins with a describable worldview that is being threatened. Examine a sample of programs falling within a particular genre and consider:
    a. What is the worldview of the genre at the beginning of the programs?
    b. What (or who) is threatening this worldview?
    c. What messages are being conveyed with regard to the threats to this worldview?

12. Examine the premise of the following:
    a. A genre
    b. A subgenre within the genre
    c. A specific series within the subgenre

   What does this analysis reveal with regard to themes and messages contained in the genre?

13. Analyze the premise of a genre, subgenre, or individual series. Does the premise furnish perspective into cultural issues, preoccupations, or myths?

14. Analyze programming that comprises a *franchise.*
    a. What are the guideposts that establish a connection to the original program?
    b. In what ways are the "satellite" programs distinguishable from one another?

15. Using a selection of programs from a genre, conduct a *morphology* to identify the essential structure of the genre.
    a. What is the characteristic structure of the genre?
    b. Identify any points of departure from the essential structure:
        1. Embellishments within the particular series
        2. Embellishments within the specific episodes
    c. Identify any manipulations of the *structural elements* that occur:
        1. Reordering of the elements
        2. Omissions
        3. Interpolations

d. What messages does this morphological study convey with respect to the cumulative worldview of the genre?

16. What does an analysis of *plot conventions* reveal about the appeal of the genre? Examine a selection of programs belonging to a particular genre, focusing on *plot conventions.*
    a. What plot conventions can you identify?
    b. Do these plot conventions provide insight into the basic appeal of the genre? Explain.
    c. What do the plot conventions reveal about the expectations of the audience?

17. Examine a sample of programs belonging to a particular genre, focusing on *elements of plot*.
    a. What is the conflict that is characteristic of the genre?
    b. What do the plots reveal about cultural attitudes, values, behaviors, preoccupations, and myths? Explain.
    c. Identify patterns in the plots to detect popular attitudes, values, behaviors, preoccupations, and myths.

18. Examine a sample of programming, focusing on *subplot*.
    a. Identify the subplots that make up the program. What themes do these subplots share? What cumulative messages are conveyed by these subplots?
    b. Can you identify any *latent* subplots not formally acknowledged but of more interest to the audience than the manifest plot?

19. Conduct a genre analysis, focusing on *stock characters.*
    a. Describe the characteristics of the stock characters appearing in a genre.
    b. Why do these stock characters appear in this genre?

How does the function and formula of the genre account for the appearance of these types of characters?

    c. What clues and cues do these stock characters provide with regard to the worldview of the genre?

20. Compare/Contrast the *stock characters* that appear in two (or more) genres.
    a. Identify any similarities
    b. Identify any differences
    c. Discuss whether this analysis can be indicative of:

1. The individual genres
2. Both genres
3. Cultural attitudes, values, behaviors, preoccupations, myths

21. Discuss how the appearance and characteristics of stock characters in a genre furnish a perspective into aspects of self and human nature. (Be specific in your analysis.)
22. Subplots: Identifying subplots in programs belonging to a particular genre can disclose patterns with respect to characteristic themes and messages in the genre.

   Conduct a genre analysis, focusing on subplots. Select a sample of programs belonging to a particular genre:

   a. Examine individual programs. What do the subplots in these episodes have in common with respect to themes and messages?
   b. Compare the subplots in these programs.
   c. What does this analysis reveal with respect to themes and messages characteristic of the genre?

23. Taking a sample of programs from a genre, identify characteristic trappings.
   a. What messages do the trappings convey about the culture?
   b. What messages do the trappings convey about the characters?
   c. What do these elements reveal with respect to the worldview of the genre?
24. Formulaic analysis provides a way to identify similarities in dissimilar programming.

   New conventions may make an established genre appear different. Examine the trappings of one genre and see if substituting one set of genric trappings for another furnishes perspective into the genre.

25. Examine an international program (e.g., television program, film), focusing on formulaic cues. Be sure that you are *not* familiar with the language, that the program is not dubbed, and that you do not read the subtitles.
   a. What genre does the program belong to? How do you know?
   b. What nonverbal and formulaic cues enable you to follow the narrative?

c. What do you learn about the country from watching the program?
   1. Worldview
   2. Cultural attitudes, values, behaviors, preoccupations, myths
   3. What are the characteristics of the hero? The villain? What is the significance of your findings?

Genre Analysis: Formulaic Approach • by Kim Wood

Soap Operas and The Bachelor: *A Comparison of Formulas*

These days reality TV is a hot commodity for major television networks. With shows like Fox's *American Idol,* NBC's *The Apprentice,* and CBS's *Survivor* consistently dominating television ratings each week and new reality shows constantly being added to prime-time lineups, it is practically impossible to dismiss this pop culture phenomena as a fleeting trend. The Academy of Television Arts and Sciences could not. In 2003, the ATAS added a new category to its fifty-fifth annual Emmy Awards ceremony—Outstanding Reality/Competition Program—which was won by CBS's *Amazing Race.* Other media forms are also starting to accommodate the idea that reality shows are here to stay. *Reality Check,* a special interest publication devoted entirely to the coverage of reality shows and the celebrities who have emerged from them, hit newsstands in mid-January of 2004.

   With viewership and popularity both high in numbers, reality television programs show no signs of dying out anytime soon. With that in mind, it is important to recognize the attributes that make these shows so successful.

What Formulas Breed Reality TV Success?

Some claim that reality television's unscripted approach makes for innovative programming, but take away the shows' use of real people and real dialogue and you may find there is not much innovation there at all. In fact, many reality shows seem to follow derivative formulas commonly used in conventional scripted television programs. The formulas used in daytime soap operas, for instance, are the same formulas used in many

reality shows. Compare any episode of any soap opera to an episode of a reality series, like *The Bachelor,* and note the resemblance.

In season three of ABC's *The Bachelor,* twenty-five single women competed for the heart of Andrew Firestone, a young, handsome millionaire and heir to the Firestone tire fortune and vineyard. In the beginning Andrew became acquainted with the women through group dates and at the end of each episode ceremonies were held that allowed Andrew to present long-stemmed roses to the women he wanted to remain on the show, thus cutting the women whom he felt less of a romantic connection with. After weeks of rose ceremonies, the number of competitors dwindled down to just three: Tina, Jen, and Kirsten. At this point, Andrew met each of the three women in different cities for individual dates. This allowed both the woman and the bachelor to get to know each other better in a more intimate setting. After Andrew decided on the final two, both women, on separate occasions, went to Andrew's home to meet the Firestone family. Each member of the family offered to Andrew their opinions of which woman would be the better match for him, but ultimately it was Andrew's decision. In the end, the last woman standing, Jen Schefft, was proposed to by Andrew in the final minutes of the show.

As in a soap opera, the storyline of *The Bachelor* is dragged out over the span of many weeks. For the duration of the show, the female contestants are put up in a secluded mansion, thus restricting them to interacting only with each other and the bachelor. This controlled environment is also comparable to the small world represented in soap operas. Storylines of soap operas focus primarily on the complicated relationships within a community of characters who typically live in the same town and interact only with each other.

Good versus evil is another characteristic of soap operas that has made its way to reality TV. A prime example is the depiction of the final two women competing for Andrew, Jen and Kirsten, who seemed as opposite as night and day. Jen was portrayed as the girl-next-door type. She was pretty, sweet, easygoing, and well-liked by the other women, making many friends along the way. She cared for the feelings of the other women and was there when they needed her. Her smiles and adorability made it impossible for anyone not to like her.

Kirsten, on the other hand, was not there to make friends. Due to her antisocial behavior and talking about the other women behind their backs to the camera or to Andrew, she was quickly assigned as the antagonist of the show. There was no doubt that she was beautiful, but there seemed

to be no real redeeming qualities about her. Rarely did Kirsten smile and her kindness was directed only to Andrew. Only when Kirsten, in essence, lost the game, did we see any emotion from her. After Andrew confessed to her that he had fallen in love with Jen, Kirsten cried in the back of the limo and declared to the camera that her ultimate fear had come true and the thought of Andrew with Jen made her sick.

Although their actions may not have been as over-the-top or exaggerated as the actions in soap operas, there were definitely defined roles established for Jen and Kirsten. The show made it easy for viewers to boo Kirsten and to root for Jen and Andrew to live happily ever after. The act of Jen and Kirsten both vying for the heart of Andrew and Andrew expressing feelings for both women also takes advantage of another soap opera essential—the love triangle.

Just as betrayal, lies, and sex are all active ingredients in soap operas, *The Bachelor* also incorporates these elements within the show's storyline. Acts of dishonesty and deception are present when Kirsten's status of singlehood is questioned. It is never clearly revealed whether or not Kirsten has a boyfriend back at home. She tells Andrew that she and her boyfriend broke up before she left to do the show, but while living in the mansion she occasionally suggests to others that there may be more to the story than just a clean and simple break up. The show gives viewers the impression that Kirsten's story about her ex-boyfriend is shady. Even Andrew's family thinks something is suspicious about her explanation. At one point during the show, Andrew's brother, Adam, takes Andrew to the side and tells him that he needs to confront Kirsten about her previous relationship. Adam contends that he thinks Kirsten is still involved with her boyfriend and that the boyfriend has no idea she is doing this show. During their final date, Andrew questions Kirsten about the topic, and she explains that she and her boyfriend have broken up, but remain friends. This explanation seems to placate Andrew for the moment. However, with Kirsten already designated as the evil character of the show, it is hard to take her word as truth, leaving the situation unresolved.

Although sexual encounters between the female contestants and the bachelor are never clearly aired on the show, insinuations of such trysts are fed to viewers when each of the final three women agrees to stay the night with Andrew at the end of their dates. The last scene of each date shows the door of the hotel room closing, leaving the rest of the night up to the viewer's imagination.

Production values of soap operas are also applied to *The Bachelor*. Dramatic music, concentrated close-ups, and long suspenseful pauses all come into place when intensifying climactic moments. For instance, during rose ceremonies when Andrew would cut women he did not feel a romantic interest in, the camera would remain on the women's face to show the emotions that they were feeling, however awkward it was. This method and others were utilized in order to add more passion to the show.

A study of *The Bachelor* reveals many indications that reality television shows follow conventional formulas that have been around for many years. While, instead of characters, there are real people and, instead of a script, there is natural dialogue, the real people and real dialogue ultimately appear to succumb to the old formulas of television: sex, lies, and good versus evil.

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— 4 —

Historical Context

Overview

A historical approach to genre analysis offers a way to <mark>put prominent events and figures of the day into meaningful perspective.</mark> A historical approach <mark>can provide insight into the influence of current events on genres.</mark> For instance, the events of 9/11 had a discernable impact on the focus of the crime genre. The plotlines of crime programs such as *CSI* and *Without a Trace* represent a departure from the old crime shows.

Without a Trace presents a dark and uncertain worldview, raising issues about the fine line between appearance and reality. Each week, an FBI missing persons unit in New York City tracks a different person. In the course of the investigation, the protagonists uncover secret lives of the victims. In this post-9/11 world, it is difficult to trust anyone; even neighbors can be a threat. The series has another touch of dark realism: the FBI team does not always find the victims alive.

Historical events may provide a context for the premise of the program. For instance, in *Materials and Labor,* a popular makeover reality show in Iraq, the ongoing conflict provides the context for the series. In this series, presented on Al Sharqiya, an Iraqi satellite network, Baghdad residents whose homes have been destroyed are selected to have their homes rebuilt at no cost to them. In the process, the program tells the stories of the people who had lost their homes.

As an example, the first house that the program repaired was destroyed in a munitions explosion. The male family member was killed, and his wife and three children were left homeless. The series focused on the reconstruction of the home, which now has concrete walls, green trim on the windows and doors, and a marble plaque by the outer gate that says, "On April 10, 2004, the Al Sharqiya network began to rebuild this home damaged by war."[1]

Figure 4.1 ***Without a Trace***

A historical approach can provide insight into the influence of current events on genres. For instance, crime dramas like *Without a Trace* (CBS, starring Enrique Murciano and Anthony LaPaglia) present a pessimistic worldview that reflects the impact of 9/11 on American society. (Photo by CBS Photo Archive/Getty)

One reason for the popularity of the show is that the "makeovers" symbolize hope and community spirit amid a tragic landscape. Since its premiere, *Materials and Labor* has financed the repair of six homes. Majid al-Samarraie, the writer of *Materials and Labor,* said, "There are hundreds of homes damaged across Iraq, Falluja, Najaf, Karbala, Tal Afar, Haditha, Qaim. . . . With our show, we're trying to plant a smile on the lips of those people."[2] Indeed, historical events may influence

genres, even if the events are not explicitly mentioned in the programs. For instance, various episodes of the sitcom *Friends* included indirect references to the events of 9/11. Characters would sometimes wear caps reading "N.Y.F.D." or "N.Y.P.D." In addition, "I Love New York" stickers and an American flag decorated the characters' apartments.

Moreover, the study of genre can add to our understanding of historical events. Historical genres and biographies provide information about significant events and figures. To illustrate, the British reality program *The Autopsy* (BBC Channel 4) shows actual autopsies on the air. However shocking, this series is actually a continuation of public autopsies, which were popular forms of public entertainment in sixteenth-century Britain. British physicians were accorded the right to dissect in 1565; in fact, dissections were sometimes ordered by judges to add to a criminal's punishment. When placed within a historical context, this series reflects people's longstanding fascination with violence, gore, and death.

However, popular genres may also *distort* historical events for dramatic purposes. Docudramas routinely alter historical events for dramatic emphasis. As an example, *Braveheart* (1995) starred Mel Gibson as William Wallace, the thirteenth-century Scottish patriot who lead the resistance against British rule. However, historian George MacDonald Fraser finds the film to be an inaccurate portrait of the period:

> *Braveheart* commits as many historical errors as can well be contained in 170 minutes. . . . It gives a misleading picture of the man and his background, distorts history shamelessly and often risibly, and presents the knightly hero as an unkempt peasant. A footnote to the film admits that 'certain incidents portrayed have been dramatised'; it would have been fairer to say that they have been thoroughly misrepresented.[3]

According to Fraser, the film contains the following historical inaccuracies:

- It features a love affair between Wallace and Isabella, daughter-in-law of Edward I. In fact, she was an infant at the time.
- It depicts Edward II as a significant figure during this time period. In actuality, he was only thirteen years old when the events of the movie unfolded.
- It operates on the premise that Scotland had endured one hundred years of brutal occupation by England. However, the countries actually had been at peace for most of the previous century.

- In the film, the rebels declare that Scotland had never been a free nation. According to Fraser, this is simply not true.[4]

Children's cartoons frequently alter historical events for entertainment purposes. As an example*, The Road to El Dorado* (DreamWorks SKG) is an animated film of two scallywags who discover a map leading to El Dorado, the fabled city of gold. After an adventure-filled journey, they finally reach the shores of El Dorado, where they are worshiped as gods by the natives. Although this cartoon may have been intended as a harmless entertainment for children, it sends an erroneous message about the people and events that are being characterized. In 2000, the Mexika Eagle Society organized a boycott of the film. The association contended that the cartoon trivialized the systematic exploitation and extermination of great numbers of the indigenous Mexican natives. Patricia Gonzalez of the Mexika Eagle Society explains:

> It is a blatantly racist misrepresentation of native culture and history. . . . It is extremely ignorant for the makers of "El Dorado" to use the slaughter and genocide of a people as the backdrop for a children's cartoon. . . . This misrepresentation of history only serves to reinforce and validate the American public's total disregard for true native history. To dismiss it as a mere cartoon suggests that feeding racist lies to unwitting children is perfectly fine. "The Road to El Dorado" is but a link in a continuous chain of dehumanizing propaganda unleashed upon our people by American society as a whole.[5]

Historical context is also an approach that can account for the popularity of a genre. For instance, in 2004 Michael Moore's film *Fahrenheit 9/11* moved the documentary into the mainstream of popular genres. The film, a scathing indictment of the George W. Bush administration, was the top-grossing film in the United States during the first weekend of its release, outdrawing *Shrek 2* and *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban. Fahrenheit 9/11* won the Golden Palm at the Cannes Film Festival and the People's Choice Award in the United States.

Largely because of the commercial success of Moore's documentary, NBC purchased *Deadline,* a documentary produced by filmmakers Katy Chevigny and Kirsten Johnson for an undisclosed price and presented it on *Dateline NBC*. Only about ten minutes of the two-hour documentary was cut, mostly to make room for commercials. David Corvo, the executive director of *Dateline NBC,* said, "This comes in an era where

documentaries are blossoming like never before. There's a real interest in documentaries of all sorts."[6]

In like fashion, historical events can account for a genre's *loss* of popularity. For instance, shortly after the events of 9/11, reality shows suffered a brief decline in the ratings. Two new series, *The Amazing Race* (CBS) and *Love Cruise* (Fox), suffered from low ratings. Even highly successful series such as *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* (ABC) and *Survivor* (CBS) suffered slumps. During the 2001 season, the audience for *Survivor* had shrunk to about 22 million, 8 million fewer than the preceding year.[7] In January 2002 ABC canceled *The Mole* and abandoned plans to introduce another new series, *The Runner*. Media critic Bill Carter points out that "the very notion of 'reality' programming may seem contrived to viewers when compared with the tragedy and American attacks in Afghanistan."[8]

In this post-9/11 environment, audiences preferred the comforting worldview of sitcoms. Jeff Zucker, president of NBC entertainment, explained, "After Sept. 11 there was a rush to familiar faces and familiar friends, programs where you knew the characters and cared about them. That's why shows like 'Frasier' and 'Raymond' and 'Friends' have prospered."[9]

Phil Rosenthal, creator of *Everybody Loves Raymond,* added, "Why we're doing so well is that there's a renewed sense of family in the country, we're realizing how fragile life is and we're not taking our families for granted—whether they're conventional or unconventional families, whether they're a family of friends or co-workers."[10]

Tracing the History of a Genre

Examining the development of a genre places current versions into a broader context. For example, TV news satires like *The Daily Show* have a long tradition in America. The television era has produced a steady supply of news spoofs like *Not Necessarily the News* and *That Was the Week That Was* in the 1960s and *Weekend Update* on *Saturday Night Live* beginning in 1975.

In addition, tracing the evolution of a genre over time can provide insight into shifts in culture. To illustrate, quiz shows originated on the radio during the 1930s as elitist programming and were designed to enlighten their listeners and heighten the public's appreciation of intellectual pursuits and achievements. For instance, on the hit show *Information Please*

(NBC), contestants called upon a panel of experts to answer questions on topics ranging from performing arts to natural history. On *The G.E. College Bowl,* teams of college students competed by demonstrating their mastery of history, literature, science, and mathematics.

However, by the 1940s, as quiz shows began catering to a broader audience, the contests became less intellectually challenging. As an example, *Kay Kyser's Kollege of Musical Knowledge* combined elements of musical variety with a comedy quiz show. *You Bet Your Life* was another popular quiz show, in which the quiz element was merely a pretext for the wisecracks of host Groucho Marx.

Today, as part of this continuing effort to attract the largest possible audience, questions on current programs are aimed at an elementary school level of difficulty. For instance, one question posed by host Bob Saget on the 2007 quiz show *1 vs. 100* was, "What is the most popular topping on Domino's pizzas"? This "dumbing down" of questions makes everyone feel smart—in some cases, smarter than the contestants. Richard Goodwin, who led a congressional investigation of television quiz shows in the 1950s, comments, "In the fifties, we cited [quiz show] contestants as examples of how we were intellectually ahead of the Russians. The shows were designed to create heroes, people to admire and look up to for their learning and knowledge. Now they're trying to make audiences feel better about themselves."[11]

In addition, the categories of quiz show questions have changed over the years. Rather than posing questions about established academic disciplines, quiz shows now focus on aspects of popular culture. As an example, one of the categories that frequently appears on *Jeopardy* is "Famous Country Singers."

Even the format of the questioning has changed from the early days of the quiz show to make it easier on the contestants. Instead of asking open-ended questions, programs like *Millionaire* employ the multiple-choice format, which gives the contestants (and the audience) the opportunity to guess the correct answer.

Identifying the development of *subgenres* can also reveal areas of cultural interest. To illustrate, Jason Chow traced the evolution of reality show subgenres between 2002 and 2004:

> The newest crop of reality shows reveals how much the genre has evolved since *Survivor I.* Since those early days, producers have had time to examine the mundane lives of their viewers, and with . . . the premiere of *The Swan* (Fox/Global), we see what they're going to do about it.

Compare the two shows and quickly *Survivor* looks like an ancient workhorse, generations removed from *The Swan. Survivor* was a major innovating force behind the first phase of the reality genre's evolution, but *The Swan* shows we've gone far beyond that in just four short years.

*Survivo*r brought forth Phase I of reality TV: The Battle of Wits. Other networks soon copied this idea, with fare ranging from *Big Brother* to *The Mole*. These were simple times for the reality genre, where there was a straightforward mix of game show and serial drama. Characters were average people, there was a pot of gold for the ultimate winner and plenty of Machiavellian moves were required to snatch the prize.

But viewers are smart, and in two years they quickly learned the structure and drama of the Battle of Wits shows (and the Find Your Mate shows, spawned by *The Bachelor*). Enter Phase II: The Joke. We all became familiar with the reality storylines, so producers thought of ways to subvert themselves by twisting the premise, like lying to a bunch of eligible women that the hunky guy they're trying to net is a millionaire. Other jokes: Average Joe and My Big Fat Obnoxious Fiancé.

. . . Then came the Seinfeldian moment in reality shows. Phase III: Nothing. These shows showed no evolution in the characters at hand or any improvement in a situation. Among them were *The Simple Life* and *Airline*, the Bravo reality show about customer complaints at Southwest Airlines check-in counters. (Yes, they actually do lose your luggage.) Even *The Restaurant* had very little to say once chef Rocco DiSpirito opened the doors to the place.

Of course, Something is more interesting than Nothing, and Phase IV brings the most powerful of storylines: Aspiration. It comes from that great American notion that one can be whoever he or she wants to be. Now, reality TV promises that can happen, be it the perfect job (*The Apprentice*), the perfect body (*Extreme Makeover*), or the perfect house (*Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*). Through the miracles of plastic surgery, you can look just like your favorite celebrity on MTV's *I Want a Famous Face.*

The Swan takes it a step further, promising not just a perfect body, but a winning personality, thanks to the therapists and life-coaches. . . . Maybe we can't relate to sweating it out in the jungle like on *Survivor* or being duped by an allegedly rich suitor like on *Joe Millionaire*, but this stuff is different. A million-dollar prize (assuming you won the *Survivor* contest) would be a salve to a lot of people's problems, but we're all told money can't buy happiness. Self-improvement, for some, means taking language lessons; others think about a facelift. To others, a rewarding job in the Trump Empire can bring happiness. But on *The Swan*, the show vows to improve everything about yourself: The body and, most importantly, the

brain. They tell us a new smashing smile, tight buns and a positive attitude is the holy trinity of life, and anyone can attain all three.

Who knows what this will lead to next: A reality show on engineering the perfect child? Or maybe *The Swan* will go the way of *The Mole*: down-market with cheap celebs, perhaps drug-addled rock stars who want to take the straight-and-narrow to a happy and dry life. First round of contestants: Tommy Lee, Axl Rose and Courtney Love. Either way, we're a long way from those innocent days on the island of Pulau Tiga.[12]

In like fashion, the history of the war genre reveals how America's military experiences have affected its citizens' attitudes toward war. The war genre has undergone significant changes, reflecting shifts in attitudes toward war as a result of America's war experiences.

Although there was some dissent and antiwar attitudes surrounding World War II, this conflict was generally supported by the public and regarded as a just cause. This attitude was reflected in films like *The Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949), *Flying Leathernecks* (1951), and *Operation Pacific* (1951), which clearly distinguished the heroic Allied forces from the villainous Axis powers.

However, films about the Viet Nam War reflected the shift in American attitudes toward authority in the wake of this unpopular and unsuccessful conflict. In films like *Coming Home* (1978), *The Deer Hunter* (1978), and *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), the protagonists felt betrayed by their leaders and were forced to fight two enemies: the Viet Cong and their own government.

More recently, the war genre reflects American's ambivalence toward the war in Iraq. In 2005, Steven Bochco produced *Over There,* a thirteen-episode television drama on the FX cable station, the first dramatization of the war in Iraq on American television. This fictional series focused attention on the war by putting the events into a personal context with which the entire audience could identify. Unlike Viet Nam War films, this series assumed a sympathetic view of the soldiers while graphically showing the violence and destruction of the war. However, columnist Eric Mink questioned the efficacy of a fictionalized account of the war, given the ongoing drama of the Iraq war: "The middling fictional drama of "Over There" falls drearily flat next to media's nonfiction accounts of the war. Not when the valor, pain, joys and tragedy of real life are so abundantly available."[13]

Contrasting genric programs from different eras can provide insight into

corresponding changes in culture. For instance, two animated children's cartoons, *The Flintstones* and *Scooby-Doo,* reveal dramatic shifts in American culture during the decade of the 1960s. *The Flintstones* premiered in 1966, before the protest movement surrounding the Viet Nam War reached mainstream American culture. Journalist Daniel P. Finney observes:

> Just three years separate the end of "The Flintstones" run on ABC prime time in 1966 and the debut of "Scooby-Doo" on Saturday mornings in 1969. But those three years show a remarkable shift in the culture. . . . They represent an evolving culture's take on family and young people.
>
> "The Flintstones" is, excuse the pun, bedrock family-values fare. Fred is a working-class hero trying to make his way in the world. Wilma is his stay-at-home wife who spends her days shopping, cooking and chatting with a neighbor.
>
> . . . Though cosmetically set in the era of cavemen, Fred and Wilma [Flintstone] were actually the quintessential suburban dream, a house crammed with the most modern gadgets; a nice yard, maybe a swimming pool and good, friendly relationships—and fierce rivalries—with the neighbors. The music of the show is jazz, and the sport of choice is bowling.
>
> Even the opening credits to the first season of "The Flintstones" show Fred peddling home on a freeway into the waiting graces of Wilma, who has a sandwich and drink waiting before he relaxes in front of the TV.[14]

But three years later, when *Scooby-Doo* first appeared on television, the American landscape had changed dramatically. Finney continues:

> The "Scooby-Doo" gang is a 1960s hipster view of modern young people. The music of the show is bubble-gum rock 'n' and roll. There are no adults in sight, except for the dastardly villains who are, in essence, substituting for the proverbial establishment that keeps young folks down.
>
> "Scooby-Doo" is the late '60s "youth power" ideal realized. These kids not only stumble onto the wrongdoing of the adult world, but unravel it and make the world a better place, except, of course, for the disgraced oldster mumbling that he would've gotten away with it "if it weren't for these blasted kids and their dog."
>
> Though probably not an intentional overture to the drug culture of the era, Shaggy is the quintessential hippie stoner. He's always hungry, clad in loose-fitting, sloppy clothes and a poorly managed goatee. Fred is an ascot-wearing jock. Daphne is the dim-witted, sweet-natured rich girl whose dad bankrolls the kids' Mystery Inc. gig. Velma is a closet feminist

kept down only by her bookish looks and bad vision—and apparent inability to keep her glasses on her nose or purchase contacts.[15]

Because media communicators look closely at historical trends as material for media presentations, some genres actually *anticipate* future developments. As an example, since the initial success of the dramatic series *24,* terrorism has become a standard backdrop for the action/adventure genre. Faced with competition from dramas like *Sleeper Cell* (Showtime) and *The Unit* (CBS), *24* has demonstrated a willingness to take on sensitive issues. Plots from the 2005 season included a middle-class, Islamic sleeper-cell family in Southern California, nuclear footballs, deadly rocket attacks, and strained Sino-American relations. Professor Clifford Peterson declares that *24* "has raised a number of issues before it was raised by the media. That's a real contribution the show makes beyond the entertainment value."[16]

Science fiction writers are often well versed in scientific achievements and can envision new possibilities. For instance, science fiction stories such as Michael Crichton's novel *Prey* and the film *The Matrix* (1999) create worlds in which robots have assumed human characteristics and have become adversaries of the human race. As farfetched as this idea sounded when it first appeared, scientists have now reported successful experiments in developing muscle fibers that enable robots to power themselves instead of relying on external electrical power—just like real muscles.[17] In addition, the latest generation of robots has demonstrated the ability to draw inferences from information—in other words, to "think." Indeed, a new generation of robots has even been programmed to *reproduce* themselves. Professor Hod Lipson explains, "We really want to make something that can adapt and can have a lot of different configurations and change its morphology as needed. Self-replication is the ultimate form of self-repair."[18]

In this era of rapidly evolving technological developments, it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish between science fiction and current realities. In his review of the science fiction program *Level 9* (2000), Neil Genzlinger wonders which of the surveillance technologies on the show have already been developed, and which ones are still part of the imaginary landscape:

> The scariest thing about "Level 9," a slick new cyber cop series . . . is that it gives no clue which of the dazzling technologies in its stories actually exist and which are made up.

Could someone parked in a car outside your house really tap into your home security system and use its motion detectors to tell which room you're in?

Are satellites in fact taking pictures of us every 15 seconds and can they really zoom in on individual vehicles? Could a hacker indeed seize control of the nation's air traffic control system?

. . . Anyone even slightly susceptible to paranoia will be on full alert after watching 15 minutes of "Level 9," not so much because of the bad guys as because of the good guys, who seem able to peer in on anyone anywhere. . . . "Go ahead," a savvy friend tells the still skeptical Burrows early in the show, "underestimate the level of unauthorized government surveillance." We hear the conversation because "Level 9" is eavesdropping on it.[19]

In fact, <mark>trends in genres can even serve as an economic indicator.</mark> Reporter Daniel Akst points out that 1998 sitcoms such as *Maggie Winters* and *Encore! Encore!* shared a common premise: the hero has returned home in defeat from the wider world:

> Television is downshifting as the economy threatens to do likewise. And as a tinge of blue creeps into TV's collars, a dose of blue is coloring its characters' situations and their psychology.
>
> Could it be that television, with its antenna forever riveted to the Zeitgeist, has detected a kind of prosperity fatigue. . . .
>
> Could the direction of the current TV season, planned months ago, be an early symptom of the economy's Asian flu?
>
> I am aware of no study of television's effectiveness at this sort of prognostication, but there is logic to the idea of TV as economic indicator. Whether television reflects consumer thinking or directs it can be argued long and hard. But mirror or lamp, we know television is created by executives striving mightily to produce programming that is of its time.
>
> So this fall, think of your set as an electronic version of a woolly caterpillar, portending a hard winter.[20]

Significantly, by 2000, the American economy began to move into recession. Indeed, in 2006, columnist Nicholas D. Kristof has posed the following scenario for a disaster movie, based on newly discovered consequences of global warming:

> It's a dark and stormy night, and deep within the ocean the muddy bottom begins to stir.

Giant squids flee in horror as reservoirs of methane frozen at the bottom of the ocean begin to thaw, releasing bubbles that rise to the surface. Soon the ocean surface is churning and burping gas like a billion overfed infants, transforming the composition of our atmosphere.

That's a scene from a new horror movie I'm envisioning, called *Killer Ocean.* I'm hoping it might play in the White House and Congress, because it depicts one of the more bizarre and frightening ways in which global warming could devastate our planet—what scientists have dubbed the "methane burp."

Methane is a greenhouse gas that is 20 times more powerful than carbon dioxide. And thousands of gigatons of methane, equivalent to the total amount of coal in the world, lie deep within the oceans in the form of ice-like solids called methane hydrates.

The big question is whether global warming—temperatures have risen about one degree Fahrenheit over the last 30 years—will thaw some of these methane hydrates. If so, the methane might be released as a gargantuan oceanic burp. Once in the atmosphere, that methane would accelerate the greenhouse effect and warm the earth and raise sea levels even more.

The best reason for action on global warming remains the basic imperative to safeguard our planet in the face of uncertainty, and our leaders are failing wretchedly in that responsibility. If we need an apocalypse to concentrate our minds, then just imagine our descendants sitting on the top of Mount Ararat beside their ark, cursing us for triggering a methane burp.[21]

Formulaic Elements

Formulaic elements can furnish perspective into the historical context of a genre.

Premise

The premise of genric programming is frequently based on historical events. For instance, the romantic comedy *Just Like Heaven* (2005) derives its significance from the controversy surrounding the Terri Schiavo case. In 1990, Terry Schiavo suffered brain damage when her heart stopped briefly because of a chemical imbalance. She could breathe on her own but relied on the feeding tube to keep her alive. Her husband requested her tubes be removed after court-appointed doctors determined she was in a persistent vegetative state with no hope of recovery. However, the case became a center of controversy after her parents insisted she could recover with

treatment. Pro-life advocates, including President Bush, weighed in on the case. Finally, in 2005, Ms. Schiavo's feeding tube was removed.

Just Like Heaven tells the story of Elizabeth (Reese Witherspoon), an attending physician at a San Francisco hospital. In the beginning of the film, Elizabeth is the victim of an automobile accident, which leaves her in a coma. Within the context of the film, there is no question that Elizabeth is alive. Although she is comatose, Elizabeth is in fact alert and is able to leave her body. She returns to her apartment and falls in love with its new resident, David (Mark Ruffalo).

Only by accepting this premise does the rest of the story make sense. The plot involves efforts by Elizabeth and David to prevent doctors from removing her life-support system. Elizabeth had signed a living will authorizing a physician to end her life under these circumstances. The physician who wants to "pull the plug" is cast as the unprincipled villain in the story. Film reviewer Victoria Alexander declares that this film had an influence on her attitudes toward the issue of euthanasia:

> *Just Like Heaven* is a solid, thought-provoking movie. Coming on the heels of the Terry Schiavo case, this movie makes a grand step forward in not pulling the damn plug on anyone. No matter what they once said. For the record, this is my declaration: If it ever happens to me, keep that damn feeding tube in. I want all heroic, expensive, and controversial procedures.[22]

Plot

Media communicators often incorporate current events into their plots. For instance, in January 2006, director Mahesh Bhatt announced plans to produce a Bollywood film entitled *Suicide Bomber* (*Bollywood* is a term used to describe India's booming film industry.) This film was inspired by the terrorist bombings in London the previous July. The film tells the story of a would-be suicide bomber struggling to reconcile the message of radical Islam with the Islamic belief in peace, mercy, and forgiveness. Bhatt contends that

> Muslims are demonized by the western nations especially after the so-called war on terror. The gulf between Muslims and the rest of the world is widening. The film will be an attempt to clarify Islam is not demonic and to delve into the mind of a young suicide bomber to try to find out what drives him to reject life for a violent death.[23]

During the 2005 season of the dramatic series *West Wing,* an ongoing storyline focused on a senior aide to the president of the United States facing indictment for leaking classified secrets to the media, and a journalist being jailed for refusing to reveal the source's identity. This plot paralleled the real-life CIA leak investigation that led to the indictment of the vice president's chief of staff, I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby, and the imprisonment of Judith Miller, a reporter for the *New York Times.* Executive producer John Wells explained, "We got interested in the idea of, what is the responsibility inside the White House for taking individual responsibility for leaking? How does leaking work? Why do people do it?"[24] In fact, the climax of the *West Wing* storyline was timed to coincide with the actual announcement of indictments in October by special prosecutor Peter Fitzgerald.

Character

Historical events may also influence the character development of popular genres. To illustrate, in the wake of the 9/11 tragedy, DC comics produced a new line of comics, *In the Line of Duty.* Instead of a superhero or sophisticated James Bond, the comics featured everyday heroes such as firefighters and police officers.

In addition, several dramatic series featured characters who were "average guys"—the types who served so heroically in the aftermath of the attack. These heroes had all been wounded—either physically or emotionally—by the 9/11 attack. In the TV drama *CSI: New York,* Mac Taylor (Gary Sinise) is a character whose wife had been killed during the terrorist attack. Consequently, his character is emotionally withdrawn, which TV critic David Kronke describes as "Sinise's bottled quietude; he barely speaks above a whispered monotone."[25]

Rescue Me (2004) is the story of a character who also has been affected by this historical event. Firefighter Tommy Gavin (Denis Leary) is emotionally traumatized, a result of losing his partner while they fought to contain the fires ignited when the planes crashed into the Twin Towers. In the series, Gavin has become an alcoholic and has lost custody of his children. Periodically in the show, he has hallucinations of his dead partner. Within the context of the program, these character flaws make Gavin's efforts to serve the people of the city of New York even more admirable.

Examining the evolution of genric stock characters can signal corre-

sponding shifts in culture. To illustrate, the lead character of the detective has undergone considerable changes since Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes popularized the genre in the nineteenth century. Holmes was a cerebral detective who solved many mysteries without leaving his Baker Street flat. Holmes relied on deductive reasoning, after detecting minute details that had escaped the notice of Scotland Yard. At the same time, Holmes was an introverted, brooding character, who was addicted to cocaine.

Raymond Chandler's hardboiled detective Philip Marlowe and Ross McDonald's Lew Archer emerged as the prototypical detectives of the twentieth century. These were men of action who took on the criminal element, along with the world of glamour, power, and corruption that went with it. These authors produced detective stories that emphasized plot and conflict and, consequently, were well suited for the transition to film and television.

Significantly, the newest generation of crime heroes like Gil Grissom of *CSI,* Adrian Monk (*Monk*), Robert Goren (*Law & Order: Criminal Intent*), and Jordan Cavanaugh (*Crossing Jordan*) take a cerebral approach to crime solving reminiscent of Sherlock Holmes. Like Holmes, these characters are isolated figures. Carol Mendelsohn, an executive producer of *CSI,* comments, "Was it Donne who said, 'No man is an island'? Grissom, I think, refutes that notion. I think he really is an island unto himself."[26] Monk's obsessive-compulsive personality lends itself to Holmes's method of deductive reasoning. The other detectives are laboratory scientists who are able to uncover evidence that would otherwise escape attention.

Another common characteristic is that all of these detectives are haunted by their pasts. In *CSI* it is explained that the character of Grissom had been drawn to the profession of medical pathology due to his mother's deafness. Goren's mother was institutionalized for schizophrenia, and Cavanaugh's mother attempted suicide and was eventually murdered. Monk suffers from an obsessive-compulsive disorder that is associated with his grief over the death of his wife. Like Holmes, these detectives are able to exorcise these demons only when they are involved in cases. In the words of Tony Shalhoub, who plays Monk:

> Holmes only needed the drugs when he wasn't working. When Holmes was engaged in a case, his brain was on fire and he was doing what he was born to do. The same is true for Monk. When he latches onto some important detail in a case, he's free of all his phobias and neuroses and at least for that moment is at peace.[27]

It can be argued that this return to flawed protagonists in the detective genre is a comment on the complexities of modern society. Even though these visionaries can catch criminals, they cannot change the world. Indeed, they are trapped, unable to solve their own problems. Jill Hennessy, who stars as Jordan Cavanaugh on *Crossing Jordan,* explains, "I think we all feel that we are imperfect or that we've made mistakes, and are struggling to make sense of our lives."[28] Vincent D'Onofrio, who plays Robert Goren on *Law & Order: Criminal Intent,* adds:

> Because of all we've gone through as a society, I think that the only heroes you can get away with now are the imperfect heroes. What we're seeing now are people who, yes, might save the day if the circumstance arises, but their lives are a mess just like my life is and they are afraid of the same things I'm afraid of because I think we are all afraid of the same things right now.[29]

Sitcom Dads. Tracing the evolution of the stock character of the sitcom dad reveals a radical transformation, which provides insight into changes in American culture. According to John Tierney, the omnipotent sitcom father, epitomized in such characters as Ward Cleaver of *Leave It To Beaver,* has been replaced by *Doofus Dads* like Doug Heffernan of *The King of Queens*: "There have always been some bumbling fathers like Dagwood Bumstead and Fred Flintstone, but now they're the norm. A study by the National Fatherhood Initiative found that fathers are eight times more likely than mothers to be portrayed negatively on network television."[30] Not only are these modern TV sitcom dads incompetent, but they are fat, lazy slobs. Reporter Rick Marin observes:

> From CBS, the network of "The King of Queens"' and "Still Standing" comes "Listen Up," the new Jason Alexander show, and "Center of the Universe," starring John Goodman's jowls. . . . And they're not just fat. They're lazy beer-and-TV slobs who never lift a finger around the house, have barely met their kids and think an emotion is something you only express on the Back Nine.[31]

The slovenly appearance of this stock character serves as a metaphor for the relative powerlessness of males, as women (and children as well) have begun to assert themselves in American culture. Fathers are no longer in absolute control—of their families or even of their own diets. According to psychiatrist Scott Haltzman, the cumulative messages about

adult males in these sitcoms can be summed up as follows: "Men are foolish, and now they have to be taught by their wives through the lesson of the dumb mistake they've made not just how to be a better husband and father, but how to be a better human being."[32]

Inter-genre Historical Analysis

An inter-genre approach examines issues, characters, and themes that appear over time across genres. Many issues, characters, and themes are characteristic of particular genres. However, others appear across genres, reflecting areas of widespread interest. (For further discussion of intra-genre analysis, see Chapter 6.)

   Inter-genre analysis can disclose the pervasive impact of historical events on culture. To illustrate, critic Stuart Elliott has identified a pattern of "escapist eye candy" in programming that cuts across genres, which he attributes to a response to the events of 9/11: "The trend toward the TV equivalent of comfort food began in the 2002–3 season, after 9/11, and continues as Americans grapple with war, a sluggish economy and uncertainty before the presidential election."[33] Kristi Argyilan, executive vice president and media director, adds, "Viewership is taking off for fun, escapist programming like 'The Apprentice.' Everybody loves the opportunity to try to hide from it all for a while."[34]

Lines of Inquiry

Historical context can be a useful approach in analyzing genres.

- The study of genre adds to our understanding of historical events.
- A historical approach can also uncover distortions in the depictions of historical events and periods.
- Historical context can help to account for the popularity of a genre.
- Genres are often arenas for social commentary
  - As cultural debate
  - Reflecting popular attitudes
- Tracing a genre over time can furnish perspective into cultural attitudes, behaviors, and preoccupations:
  - Tracing changes within a genre
  - Tracing the emergence of subgenres

- Contrasting two genric programs from different eras
- Tracing the evolution of a long-running series
- Examining changes in stock characters

1. Taking a selection of programming from a genre, what do you learn about the historical period or event being depicted?
2. Examine a selection of programs from a genre that is rooted in a historical period or event with which you are familiar. (Or, conduct some independent research to familiarize yourself with a historical event or period.) In what ways does an understanding of this historical period or event furnish perspective into the genre?
3. Select programming within a genre that serves as an arena for social commentary.
   a. In what ways does the genre lend itself to social commentary?
   b. What does the sample reveal with respect to attitudes in response to historical events? Be specific.
4. Trace the evolution of a genre. Select a genre, tracing changes in it as a reflection of cultural changes.
   a. Compare and contrast the early version of the genre with the current adaptation—particularly the format, style, and content of the genre.
   b. Identify significant developments, programs, and personalities in the evolution of the genre. In what ways do they contribute to the current version of the genre?
   c. In what ways did the genric programs reflect the historical and cultural period in which they appeared?
5. Contrast two genric programs from different eras. In what ways can this approach identify corresponding changes in the culture?
6. Trace the evolution of a long-running series. How does this analysis provide perspective into shifts in culture?
7. What accounts for the popularity (or loss of popularity) of a genre at particular times?
8. Examine a historical drama, documentary, or docudrama.
   a. Conduct independent research to identify any distortions or inaccuracies in the historical account.
   b. What messages or themes are conveyed by these inaccuracies?
9. Conduct research to find cases in which a genre anticipated historical events or scientific developments. Are there any current patterns in a genre that could anticipate events or developments?

10. Examine an old science fiction novel or movie that has a futuristic setting.
    a. Did the presentation anticipate any developments that can be found today, particularly in the following areas?
        1. Inventions
        2. Lifestyle
        3. Social issues/problems
    b. Have any "predictions" not appeared yet? Explain.
11. Contrast programs from the same genre but from two different eras. What do these programs reveal with regard to changes in cultural attitudes, values, behaviors, preoccupations, and myths?
12. Examine programming from two different genres that appear during the same era:

Identify any points of similarity with regard to:

    a. Area of focus
    b. Attitudes toward groups
    c. Worldview
    d. Response to historical events
13. An intra-genre approach examines issue or themes that appear over time across genres. Trace a theme or issue that appears in different genres over time.
14. Trace the appearance of the stock characters in a genre over time.
        1. Have these stock characters changed in any respect over time?
        2. If so, how?
        3. What does this reveal about shifts in the culture?

Genre Analysis: Historical Context

Art Silverblatt and Richard Rosenfeld conducted the following genre analysis, tracing the evolution of the youth film between 1938 and 1986.

Growing Up on Screen: The Cult of Adolescence in American Film, 1938–1986

Overview

This article focuses on images of adolescence and adulthood in American popular film. By "cult of adolescence" we refer to the preoccupation

with identity, social status, and quest for meaning that pervades American culture. The films examined in the following pages reveal common concerns about problems facing adolescents. In addition, however, these films serve as a means by which the adult writers and producers could safely explore their own uncertainties and fears related to the same developmental issues. Tracing the evolution of youth culture in popular film provides insight into the increasingly precarious position of adulthood in contemporary American society.

The critical attention devoted to films about young people since World War II has a decidedly discontinuous and policy-oriented quality. Critics and scholars have examined the "delinquent problem" films of the 1950s and the "youth movement" movies of the 1960s, but there has been little effort to make sense of the underlying themes connecting postwar youth films, up to and including the more recent "post–baby-boom" movies of the early 1980s. Youth films have been applauded and attacked for what they suggest about young people's values, desires, and behavior, particularly sexual and criminal. While they have been used to measure the social fevers of the young, youth films have rarely been taken seriously as film.[35]

*Crisis in Adolescence and Adulthood: Continuity and Change
in the American Youth Film*

In the mid-1950s a new genre emerged in American popular film: the *youth culture film.* Films in this genre share a common thematic focus on the struggle of young people to live honorably in a world corrupted by adult hypocrisy and weakness. While the youth culture genre underwent significant shifts in emphasis over the next thirty years, its fundamental themes of generational conflict, adult corruption, and young people's search for honor remained intact.

Without debating the often precious distinctions made in "genre theory," we propose that a movie must meet the following conditions in order to be considered a youth culture film: (1) it must be directed at a popular audience; (2) it must be "popular" in the sense of achieving at least modest commercial success; and (3) it must assume and idealize the point of view of young people.

The first two conditions establish the genre as part of popular as opposed to elite culture, meaning that a film such as *Blue Denim* (1959) should probably be considered a youth culture film, but *Jules and Jim* (1961)

should not. Among the films that fall within the genre, several emerge as archetypal: *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), *The Young Stranger* (1957), *The Graduate* (1967), *Alice's Restaurant* (1969), *Easy Rider* (1969), *Saturday Night Fever* (1978), *Breaking Away* (1979), *The Breakfast Club* (1985), and *Pretty in Pink* (1986). We focus our discussion of youth culture films on *Rebel Without a Cause, Alice's Restaurant, Saturday Night Fever, The Breakfast Club,* and *Ferris Bueller's Day Off.* These are among the most commercially successful and artistically interesting contemporary youth films, and they span the entire postwar period. They reflect and to some extent help to define important aspects of (and changes in) the youth culture of the past forty years.

The third condition establishes a film as worthy of serious analysis, thereby including *Alice's Restaurant* and *Rebel Without a Cause,* perhaps even *High School Confidential* (1958), but excluding, for example, *High School Big Shot* (1959), *High School Caesar* (1960; "He had more rackets than Al Capone!"), and *College Confidential* (1960), as well as the popular *Porky's* series of the early 1980s. These movies fall into a larger category of "teen exploitation films." Like the youth culture film, teen exploitation films are also directed at youthful popular audiences, many are commercially successful (although most are not), and they typically feature youth and adults in conflict. However, these films exploit their surface similarity to the more serious youth films on which they are often modeled simply to boost ticket sales, or more recently, the rental market. Most do not even pretend, in artistic treatment or social vision, to take young people seriously.

The youth culture film, in contrast, recognizes and affirms the youthful vantage point from which the adult world is critiqued. The genre thereby expresses in the symbols, myths, and media of contemporary popular culture the classic emphasis of Western Romanticism on youthful purity and the moral corruption of age. The differences in the way the films tell this Western morality tale of the cult of adolescence constitute the basic thematic change in serious popular films about young people released after World War II.[36]

Juxtaposing the youth culture film with the genre's prehistory in the Andy Hardy series clarifies its distinctive thematic perspective.

Adolescence as Apprenticeship: Prewar Youth Film

> *I won't be any trouble to anybody.*
> —Andy Hardy

The popular Andy Hardy films of the 1930s and 1940s, featuring Mickey Rooney, epitomize Hollywood's response to the Great Depression in the creation of a mythic pre-Depression world of economic security, social stability, and small-town values. The world of Andy Hardy is distinguished from the postwar youth films by the absence of generational conflict. The plots in these films do not center on basic value differences between the generations so much as the inevitable difficulties encountered by young people as they learn the rules and roles of a world run by adults.

Andy's father, Judge Hardy, represents the adult ideal. The judge clearly knows best; he dominates the world that he and Andy inhabit. Personal and social discovery for adolescents in the 1930s amounts to learning and respecting rules that, as children, they had to obey but could not fully understand. The family oriented teen comedies of this period portray adolescence as a process of growing into adult expectations. For it to function effectively, this process requires the firm and perceptive guidance of wise and powerful adults. Judge Hardy's power is based upon a mutually understood legitimacy. He does not wield naked and brutal power; he exercises legitimate authority. His power is rooted in traditional moralities that remain, as far as the 1930s movie myth is concerned, responsive to the universally agreed upon needs of young people.

The audience is never in doubt about what Andy's father does for a living: he is the Judge. His job is to interpret the most basic moral-legal principles and use them to solve practical problems, including those arising in his own family. He has the authority to render judgment, not simply authorization to execute the judgments of others. The opening scene of *Love Finds Andy Hardy* (1938) shows Judge Hardy in court presiding over a case in which an adolescent has committed a minor infraction. The judge admonishes the young man to inform his father about "this mess," thereby displaying his authority as a judge and, by extension, the power of all adults over the young. This message is underscored in the boy's response, "Dad, he'd skin me alive." Significantly, the judge refers to the boy throughout the scene as "Mr.," suggesting that he is judging him according to adult standards in order to prepare him to assume adult responsibilities. Judge Hardy rules on the basis of his own competence and experience, interpreting the law according to absolute moral principles. He operates in a harmonious universe in which adult-controlled institutions support one another. In the scene just described, judicial authority reinforces parental authority.

Judge Hardy represents the three types of legitimate authority defined by Max Weber: traditional, rational-legal, and charismatic. He exercises traditional authority by serving as the guardian of absolute moral standards. His rational-legal authority is rooted in his professional status, which empowers him to render judgments on the basis of their logical relation to formal rules. His authority, however, is not limited to his organizational function; it also resides in his personal qualities. His charisma is in his dignity and inner-direction, which draw others to him. The judge, not Andy, stands at the narrative center of these films.

During the course of the films, others approach the Judge for advice and approval. He rarely makes requests of others; instead, he deliberates on requests made of him. Andy's role is, in great part, to provide the judge with occasions for moral and practical teaching. Where the judge is self-confident, decisive, knowledgeable, and experienced, Andy is weak in all relevant respects. Andy's salvation lies in his desire to please and conform, to anticipate his father's wishes and, ultimately, to internalize these expectations so that he will be able to act as the judge would want him to when he becomes an adult.

What do Andy's problems amount to? Getting to the dance, getting the right car, getting the girl. Andy has not yet gained the vision or the wisdom to bring order to his complicated life. He moves from one desire to another (cars, girls, and money-making schemes) with little sense of connection or consequence. Small problems assume an exaggerated importance in Andy Hardy's world of moral certainty, because the fundamental problems of meaning and identity are so firmly fixed and taken for granted.

Andy knows who he is and who he wants to be: he wants to be an adult just like his father. The plot complications in the Hardy films reflect the distance he must travel to attain the experience and wisdom of adults. "Sometimes I wonder if it's all worthwhile," Andy asks in *Love Finds Andy Hardy*. Adulthood demands a kind of vision and self-control not easily achieved. Andy will have to learn the painful lesson of traditional adolescence, which is that his own development depends upon the support and direction of competent adults.

Andy's problems stem from his illusion that he can go it alone. After his schemes backfire (as they inevitably do), he professes to have learned his lesson. However, it is usually not long before he falls back into the myth of adolescent self-sufficiency. After his father has rescued him from one of his ill-conceived ventures, Andy declares, "I won't be any trouble.

I'll keep my room clean and wash before every meal. . . . In fact, I won't be any trouble to anybody. Everything's under control." As the audience watches him fall down the stairs, we get the message that eludes Andy: adolescence is an awkward apprenticeship.

The world of Andy Hardy is by nature future-oriented. Adolescents look ahead because, like adults, they regard the past (and the present) as connected to the future in a logical and relevant way. This sense of a meaningful past provides much of the foundation for adult authority. When the future is viewed as an extension of the past, adults can and must be counted on as reliable guides. The significance of the present resides in its function as a transitional period, a rite of passage. In the postwar youth film, both past and future have lost meaning, and the present becomes eternal. In such a world, adolescence is not simply painful but as we see in later films such as *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Alice's Restaurant,* it is perpetual.

For Andy Hardy, the stable connection between past and future makes growing up a process of moving into the past, taking on the standards of one's parents. When change does occur, it moves along traditional pathways and is, therefore, non-threatening. Judge Hardy understands what Andy is going through because they share a common worldview. Even when the judge is confronted with modern notions he does not understand (as when his wife informs him that women have ambitions beyond the kitchen), he can accept them because they are not presented in the form of fundamental social change or as serious challenges to his authority. Judge Hardy's exposure to the latest fashions in slang, automobiles, women's needs, etc., are almost always presented in a humorous context that trivializes their cultural significance and minimizes their potential for personal and social disruption. The Hardy films can, therefore, portray the modern world in a positive light precisely because the judge has it under control.

Stable connections between past and future also presuppose and reinforce strong institutions, as illustrated by the way the Hardy films treat sex. In *Love Finds Andy Hardy,* one of Andy's girlfriends tells him that they are getting too old for "huggin' and kissin'" on the porch. Sexuality is something adolescents grow *out of,* which is not surprising, considering Judge Hardy as their sexual role model. The white-haired patriarch is, to be sure, a physically imposing presence. However, dressed in the somber garb of the traditional Puritan, Judge Hardy is hardly a sexual animal. By postwar standards, he and his wife look and act more like

grandparents than parents. They relate to one another largely through their institutional affiliation, even referring to one another as "mother" and "father."

The result is that, for Andy and other adolescents, sex is safe because it does not venture beyond clear and secure institutional limits. In the Hardy myth, the family is intact and functional, furnishing the necessary protection for youthful sex and the sole purpose for adult sex. Sex will become dangerous in later youth films, when it is dislodged from its traditional social context and becomes a mode of youthful self-expression and freedom from adult control.

In the Hardy films, adolescence is comedy. By the mid-1950s, adolescence is tragedy—and dangerous. Generational conflict in the 1950s youth film begins with the discovery by adolescents and adults alike that, in the postwar period, Judge Hardy does not and cannot exist.

Rebelling Against Uncertainty: Anxiety and
Expectation in the 1950s

> *You're tearing me apart.*
> —Jim Stark

After World War II, an emerging youth subculture generated a market that made it profitable for filmmakers to address adolescent interests and concerns. Meanwhile, television, as a new medium with a limited but growing audience based in the home, continued the traditional adult perspective that had defined the 1930s small-town family film myth. The world of Andy Hardy became *Father Knows Best* and *Leave It to Beaver.*

The 1950s has generally been regarded as a period of sustained economic growth, expanding opportunities, widespread optimism, and faith in the future. The decade also was characterized, however, by cultural ambiguity and social contradiction: materially expansive, upbeat, and progress-oriented, yet anxious about a dangerous new world that seemed beyond the comprehension and control of the individual. The very progress that was (and continues to be) so widely celebrated reflected underlying changes that traditional values and institutions were ill equipped to handle. Growing affluence set into sharp relief the persistence of poverty and racial inequality, but also helped to generate the optimistic belief that domestic problems could be resolved through

enlightened social policy. Anxieties about the "anomie of affluence" and middle-class conformity provoked a lively social criticism.[37] The emergence of the United States as a superpower after World War II was accompanied by fears of impotence in a world spinning out of control; the threat of nuclear war helped set the stage for the politics of peace of the next decade. The social experimentation and political activism of the 1960s were rooted, to an extent not often appreciated, in the "worried optimism" of the 1950s.[38]

A problem that worried parents, policy-makers, and some filmmakers during the 1950s was juvenile delinquency. Concern with delinquency was widespread, and the movies were implicated in two ways: first, as a symbolic stimulus to delinquency, and, second, as a social setting conducive to vandalism and violence. In the 1950s, movie theaters became rowdy and, on occasion, dangerous places.[39] The growing numbers of films about teenagers that serviced the expanding youth market "seemed to be going out of their way to suggest that among American youth, delinquency, rather than being the exception, was the rule."[40]

However, the Hardy films notwithstanding, films connecting youth with crime and violence were nothing new. The delinquency rates of Depression films such as *Mayor of Hell* (1933), *Girls on Probation* (1938), *Crime School* (1938), and *Boys Reformatory* (1939) matched or exceeded those of most 1950s youth films. The new problem in the 1950s was not delinquency, but disrespect. With the first rumblings of an autonomous youth culture in the early postwar years came symbols of rebellion among the young and feelings of rejection among adults.

Generational conflict in *Rebel Without a Cause* is set in a favorite 1950s social problem—the erosion of the moral authority of father. James Dean, as Jim Stark, is an isolated and rootless adolescent who wants his father to stand up for him, to stand for *something*. His father, and by extension, the new postwar white-collar, middle-class suburban world has gone soft, impersonal, and abstract. What does Jim's father do for a living? The film does not say, but in contrast with the Hardy films, it matters very little. The audience only knows that he works in an office, most likely as a middle-level bureaucrat. Unlike Judge Hardy, Jim's father is an instrument of an organization that he does not control.

Mr. Stark does not really "make" anything, except money, which he lavishes on Jim ("Don't I buy you everything?"). Jim resents this transparent effort to buy his love, obedience, and respect. The 1950s rebels without a cause may not know what they *want,* but they do know

what they *lack*. They are looking for direction, affection, and adult role models who live up to the morality that they so easily espouse. As Jim's friend Judy puts it, they want "sincerity"—as much from one another as from adults. Ironically, the adolescents in *Rebel* need adults to help them avoid the hypocrisy of adult relations with one another and with their children.

"Nobody acts sincere," Judy laments at one point, referring to herself and other teenagers. "You shouldn't believe what I say when I'm with the rest of the kids." Conformity corrupts the young as well as adults, with deadly consequences. Jim rebels against his father's weakness, but he also rejects the destructive counter codes of Buzz and his gang. Nonetheless, he acts as if he were committed to them. So does Judy. Jim is trapped by his unwillingness to back down from a challenge to personal honor into playing a game of "chicken" that ends in Buzz's death. Judy's motivations, while evidently as complex as Jim's, are only suggested and not fully explored in *Rebel,* a double standard characteristic of the youth culture genre.

Jim needs his father to tell him what to do in a complicated moral dilemma in which honor is ensnared by conformity. If he goes on the chicken run, he is simply conforming to the gang's expectations, but if he does not go, he is a "chicken." Buzz is no help. When Jim asks, "Why do we do this?" Buzz answers that they "have to do something."

In the teen comedies of the 1930s and 1940s, generational relations are planted in traditional standards that support the authority and capacity of adults to socialize adolescents into adult roles. But in the postwar youth film, adults are incapable of providing protection or moral direction for their children. They exercise none of the Weberian authority of Judge Hardy. Traditional authority has no place in a modern, relativist world of shifting moral standards. Rational-legal authority loses its legitimacy for much the same reason. Logical standards are difficult to apply in a world that makes little sense. Finally, persons without power cannot, by definition, possess charismatic authority. Jim, Judy, and Buzz live in a world in which adults cannot be counted on to prevent young people from destroying each other. Jim asks his father for guidance, insisting that "it's a matter of honor." His father doesn't even understand the question and suggests that they "consider the pros and cons," "make a list," "get some advice"; that is, rely on moral experts of one sort or another. Later, after Buzz's death, Jim again comes to his father, who is now shown in an apron on his knees, picking up scraps of food he has

served to his wife, who is in bed with "a headache." He begs his father to stand up for him. This pathetic patriarch can only respond, "You can't be idealistic all your life."

Each day, the middle-class men of the white-collar world leave offices in which they are not engaged in honorable work for homes where they cower before their wives in full view of their sons: "She eats him alive and he takes it," Jim observes. "They make mush out of him," referring to both his mother and grandmother.[41]

The young respond to this world of collapsed standards and paternal weakness and retreat by attempting to use one another as parental surrogates and then, when that fails, by falling apart. Sal Mineo, as Plato, adopts Jim and Judy as substitutes for his parents who have abandoned him with a kindly maid and monthly checks. Jim and Judy cannot meet his emotional needs, and Jim is unable to prevent the police from killing him. Plato's fate, the film suggests, is a warning. At the film's climax, Jim's mother speaks directly to the camera: "You never thought it could happen to you."

Even ineffective parents are better than none at all, and Plato's personal disintegration is but an extreme form of Jim's, who screams to his parents at the beginning of the film, "You're tearing me apart." He confides to a police officer, who is a model of adult strength and support, that he is "all confused," tired of running away from problems, and just wants to "belong someplace." Significantly, this exemplar of institutional support is nowhere to be found when Jim needs him the most.

On the surface, the conclusion of the film is optimistic, offering a reconciliation of the generations, restoration of the traditional family structure, and a repudiation of youthful solidarities that threatened generational peace and adult authority. At the end of the film, as Plato's body is taken away in Jim's jacket, Jim's father gives him *his* coat, and says, "You can depend on me. Trust me. . . . I'll stand up with you." Jim introduces Judy to his parents, as one adult to others. This upbeat "fifties ending" seems contrived, but it is important to ask why such endings were so typical of the time. The claim that "Hollywood demanded happy endings" only begs the question. These endings, as contrived as they were, fit with the mood of the times, which held that all problems, social as well as technical, had solutions, and solutions were to be found in the restoration of traditional standards of conduct. They also presupposed an optimistic view of the future on the part of audiences, including a viable personal future for Jim and Judy. If they were typical of teenagers of the

time, Jim and Judy would be married by the time Judy turned twenty, and would have their first child a year or so later. Jim and Judy may have been abruptly transformed into adults at the end of *Rebel,* but the move from adolescence to adulthood, from high school to marriage and family, was in fact more rapid and abrupt than would be the case ten, twenty, or thirty years later. It is not unreasonable to suppose that many teenagers in the audience could imagine themselves in Jim and Judy's position as young people taking on major new responsibilities, and leaving kids' games and problems behind. In the 1950s, the myth, if not the reality, of adulthood remains strong.

The world Jim and Judy will enter, the film proposes, will restore parents to their traditional roles of moral guardians and thereby reconcile generational antagonisms. However, the film does not advocate the restoration of the premodern social conditions in which traditional values were rooted. The extended family of Judge Hardy's rural America is pointedly rejected when Jim puts his foot through his grandmother's portrait. Nor is the unyielding tradition-directed patriarch, represented by Judy's father, the answer to the modern discontents of youth and the family. Somehow, standards of personal integrity and honor will be reestablished in a highly complex and uncertain world. The only answer the film offers to this seeming contradiction is "sincerity," a firm but gentle touch.

However, the film's ending also contains elements that undermine this optimistic resolution. Jim's father concludes the vow he makes over Plato's body with these words: "I'll try to be as strong as you want me to be." Such a qualified pledge would be unimaginable coming from Judge Hardy. Although sincere, the vow rests on intention, not conviction. In its abrogation of responsibility. Jim's father's promise reinforces the very problem it is intended to resolve: the restoration of adult authority. If Jim's father is going to wield authority, it will certainly be of a different sort than that exercised by Judge Hardy, since it is now Jim's responsibility to define its limits.

A dominant theme of modern social criticism is that strong institutions produce strong adults who do not question their capacity to protect, support, and socialize the next generation. Weak institutions produce indecisive, anxious adults, unable to prepare themselves or others for a future they cannot imagine. Within this context, the postwar youth film depicts a world in which institutions must compensate for the weakness of others, have collapsed altogether, or have been seized by the young. In the world in the Andy Hardy films, adult-controlled institutions worked together to

socialize young people and to remind them who was in authority. But in the youth culture films of the 1950s, institutions also work together, but in a perverse way, conspiring against the young to block their access to adult roles and opportunities. Even the one "good" adult in *Rebel,* Ray, the juvenile officer who befriends Jim at the beginning of the film and tells him to "call me day or night if you need me," is nowhere to be found when Jim calls on him near the film's end. Instead, Jim is thrown out of the police station and forced back into the adolescent subculture.

The final scene takes place at sunrise, in the planetarium, after Plato has been killed. As everyone leaves the scene of the tragedy, a professor walks up the steps of the planetarium where, early in the film, he had lectured on "man alone" in a universe without meaning. There is a menacing sound to the music that comes up at the end, leaving the audience to wonder whether "sincerity" will be sufficient to meet the challenges of the new day.

*Youth Culture as Counterculture: Generational Conflict
and Social Transformation*

> *You can get anything you want. . . .*
> —Arlo Guthrie

As the baby boomers came of age in the 1960s, they directed the prepolitical rebelliousness of the 1950s youth culture to specific targets and replaced "the silent generation" with a social movement. For a decade that seems in retrospect to have been inordinately bleak (especially in its later years, marked by death, defeat, and despair for the future), a hopeless or defeated generation could not possibly have mounted the mass movements, created the alternative communities, or effected the cultural changes that characterized the 1960s. The sheer number of people who passed through their teens or early twenties during the decade virtually guaranteed that youth would be considered and would consider itself a significant political and cultural force.[42] Wave after wave of eighteen-year-olds, each one larger than the one before, hit the political and counterculture beachheads of the 1960s—the colleges and universities. In 1960, 24 million Americans were between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four; by 1970, the number of teenagers and young adults had grown to over 35 million strong.

Not only were more young people coming of age in the 1960s than

ever before, but the continuing prosperity of the postwar years enabled record proportions of them to go to college. In 1955, 31 percent of all eighteen- and nineteen-year-olds were enrolled in school; by 1965 the proportion had climbed to 46 percent. The proportion of twenty- to twenty-four-year-olds in school rose from just 11 percent to 41 percent over the same period. The baby boomers overwhelmed the institutions entrusted with their orderly socialization and control: the primary and secondary schools in the 1950s and early 1960s, the colleges and universities over the next decade, and of course their own families throughout the entire period. Controls inevitably weakened as the ratio of controllers to controllees declined. The probability that young people would socialize one another into distinctive cultural patterns independent of adult values and prescriptions likewise increased. In brief, "We would not be like our parents."

These conditions contributed to the development of an influential and autonomous youth counterculture. *Alice's Restaurant* rejects this growing youth power. In *Alice's Restaurant,* released during the cultural and political tumult of the 1960s, the moral high ground has been assumed by a youthful counterculture seeking to build an alternative communal order based on equality, tolerance, and love—the very values promised but ultimately betrayed by adults during the 1950s. The single most important element uniting these values is the effort to overcome alienation. Established institutions must be judged on the basis of their capacity to fulfill personal needs and, if necessary, altered or swept aside. The counterculture promised, in its turn, to unite work and play, family and friendship, social commitment and social expression—and to reconcile the generations by removing the artificial distinctions separating them. Alienation from the dominant society brought Arlo and his friends together to form a community in a church that had been purchased by Ray and Alice Brock, adults who presumably have broken away from the old order. Living in a church symbolizes the counterculture's quest to reclaim an alienated God, as men and women's own potential for good.

However, this transformative impulse is susceptible to corruption by a residue of dishonesty, possessiveness, and "power tripping" carried into the new order from the old one by the adults. The film also suggests that there are significant contradictions within the youthful counterculture itself: (1) the quest for community verses a "do your own thing" ethic of personal freedom, and (2) egalitarian democracy verses the need for some form of political authority. At the end of the film, Arlo is alone

again, disillusioned by the reemergence within the counterculture of adult hypocrisy and uncertain about the viability of the communal ideal. Arlo's shift from hope and despair was a microcosm of broader cultural tensions of the period. The Viet Nam War was a turning point in American history, in which traditional institutions, such as the family, government, and education, were explicitly questioned—in fact, these institutions, which had been the means of protecting the young, were now openly identified as agents of destruction. These tensions in many ways defined the 1960s as a period during which new communities of love were created, in part, out of nightmares of apocalypse.

Alice's Restaurant is ambivalent about whether adults can be trusted and whether the young can get along without them. However, far from advocating a return to traditional standards, the film subjects the status quo to unrelenting caricature and critique, offering at least the possibility of personal liberation from traditional institutional molds. In its rejection of the established order and affirmation, however tentative, of the counterculture, *Alice's* breaks with the repudiation the youth culture and call for restoration of adult authority found in *Rebel*.

Nonetheless, significant continuities exist between the youth films of the 1950s and 1960s. Like all youth culture films, they criticize the hypocrisy and corruption of adults and propose that adults can learn from the moral innocence and resolve of the young. In addition, the "high expectation" films carry some hope for a future in which, either by social restoration or transformation, generational conflict might be reconciled, permitting adults and young people to "stand together."

Saturday Night Fever: *Shrinking Opportunity and Declining Expectations in the 1970s*

> *Stayin' Alive*
> —The BeeGees

This segment of the postwar period—indeed, perhaps, the postwar era itself—ended abruptly in the 1970s with defeat in Viet Nam and the onset of economic stagnation. Nineteen seventy-three has been described as "the last good year," at least as far as economic conditions are concerned. Median family income peaked in that year at just over $28,000 and did not return to that level until 1986. Expanding opportunities were replaced by falling expectations; faith in the future, the sense of historical connect-

edness itself, gave way to a sense of impending disaster and a pervasive survivalist mentality.[43] Social institutions, especially the family and the school, which had defined the relations between the generations, imbuing adults with moral authority, underwent, in the fashionable phrase, a "legitimation crisis."

If the great American celebration collapsed in the early 1970s, dividing the period since World War II into "high expectation" and "low expectation" sub-periods, the youth culture genre may be subdivided in like fashion. In spite of their differences, *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Alice's Restaurant* are both "high expectation" films. *Saturday Night Fever* and *The Breakfast Club* are "low expectation" movies—again, their considerable differences notwithstanding.

By the mid 1970s, these optimistic impulses had all but disappeared from the American youth film. Tony Manero and his friends in *Saturday Night Fever* face a world of shrinking opportunities in which, to get ahead, or just to stay alive, one has to "dump on" somebody. Adults are, at best, wandering in search of meaning (as in the case of Tony's older brother, a lapsed priest).

Like his father and the other men who work with Tony in the paint store, adults are defeated and cynical. Tony's world may offer little opportunity, but he faces its limitations with dignity, grace, and style. It is instructive to consider *Saturday Night* as a musical, meriting some comparison with other American musicals. Think of Gene Kelly "singin' in the rain" in the 1952 film of the same title or in *American in Paris* (1951). He dances his way through adversity, despite how little it matters that he is a painter in the latter film, set in the confident early postwar years. Tony can dance, but the fact that he works in a paint store makes all the difference in the world of falling expectations of the late 1970s.

Saturday Night Fever is arguably one of the most pessimistic popular musicals ever made. The music permeates the film. It is inside the characters, especially Tony; it punctuates the action and both complements and contradicts the action. In the opening sequence, John Travolta as Tony Manero, is filled with music as he walks down a crowded Brooklyn sidewalk to the rhythm of the BeeGees' "Stayin' Alive"; he even swings his paint can to the beat. The scene suggests that "staying alive" means being in touch with one's musical sense and more basically, a particular aesthetic style very similar to that defined by the early Elvis Presley and Marlon Brando—and James Dean. Travolta owns the street while he is walking, eyes half closed, glancing from side to side with a cocky

smile that is not quite a sneer. He is on top of things, very much awake and alive.

But the lyrics undermine his cocky attitude, suggesting that survival requires more than mere stylistic expression. "Somebody help me," sing the BeeGees, not only contradicting the visual image but the song's rhythmic base, which is fast, sharp, steady, aggressive, and confident. The lyric is also self-contradictory, containing pleas for help that are immediately undercut by the refrain, "I'm stayin' alive." As the sequence closes, Travolta picks up his step and moves out of the beat as he heads into the paint store where he works and, for all he knows or cares at age nineteen in Brooklyn in the mid-1970s, will remain working.

The opening sequence of *Saturday Night* raises and dashes possibilities, suggesting that this is a multilayered film and, by extension, that the way these white working-class kids from Brooklyn view the world, is also filled with contradictions and inconsistencies, hopes and resignation, fearful ignorance and, occasionally, poignant insight. Tony and his gang are not "slobs," "hoods," or "greasers"—at least not on Saturday night, when they glide into the disco, nodding to the girls, slide into their table, calling themselves "the faces."

Who is Tony Manero? He works in a paint store, still lives with his family, hangs with his buddies, never gives any thought about going to college, and at least once a week (more, when he has the money) dances at the neighborhood disco. He is an extraordinary dancer (at least the disco crowd thinks so), who lives an otherwise very ordinary and often painful life. Except for dancing, his life consists of little more than a series of constraints, pressures, and frequent failures. He has always been pegged as the no-good in the family; his mother even insinuates that he is somehow responsible for his brother leaving the priesthood. He pays room and board to his father but, as his father makes clear, that doesn't mean he gets any extra liberties at home—he still has to show up at the dinner table every night and eat with the family. When Tony gets a raise, his father, an unemployed construction worker, demeans his achievement by telling Tony that the extra money "won't buy shit" these days.

Unlike the 1940s musicals, the popular musicals of the 1970s (which includes *Car Wash,* as well as *Saturday Night*) do not turn the problems of everyday life into excuses for song and dance. The illusions of the 1940s and early 1950s concerning peace, individual opportunity, and prosperity—which sustained the fantasy of life-as-music and music-as-celebration—are all but gone in the 1970s. "It's a dog-eat-dog world," says

one of Tony's buddies. To get the good things in life, like a Mercedes or Cadillac, requires that "somebody get screwed." Another friend tells Tony that his uncle Nunzio got *his* Mercedes by driving his partner out of business. A third member of the gang adds that it is all a pipedream anyway; people like them will never have the money for the good things.

And yet *Saturday Night* is not a thoroughly pessimistic film. The music does not represent mere escape from the working-class world of the 1970s. It offers at least the possibility that Tony's world can be remade into one that provides a life of honor, grace, excitement, and style. It also suggests that escape from working-class Brooklyn is a struggle and that, even when successful, a high price must be paid in terms of what is left behind. Stephanie's plight illustrates the enormous emotional costs of upward mobility. In a telling scene, she breaks down in front of Tony and tries to make him understand what a difficult time she has had making it in the world of upper-middle-class Manhattan. "I didn't know shit, man. I had to learn things." She is referring not simply to learning her job as a secretary, but how the middle-class people she works with talk, act, and think. Implicit is the idea that Stephanie has left too much of her former world (and former self) behind. If Tony desperately needs her support and vision to make something of himself, she needs his lack of pretension and energy in order to retain some connection with the class and life she so desperately wants to escape. The movie thus contains a complex message regarding the ideal of "making it": while desirable, perhaps even necessary, mobility is fraught with perils, the most important of which is that one can leave strengths as well as weaknesses behind.

Significantly, *Saturday Night* returns to many of the popular themes of 1950s youth films: getting out from under the family, making it on one's own, dealing with peer pressure. This makes the counterculture films of the 1960s "flower generation" all the more anomalous. However, unlike Jim Stark in *Rebel,* Tony makes no attempt at reconciliation with his father. His father's fate is sealed, and his own seems uncertain at best. Like Jim, he rejects the gang, and gets "serious" with a girl. He grows up. But what sort of world awaits him? What sort of relationship, for that matter, is he in for? Jim and Judy, *Rebel* tells us, will make it as long as they remain "sincere." Implicit is the sense that the world is full of hope and opportunity.

However, none of the characters in *Saturday Night Fever* is able to make meaningful connections between past and future, between the self and others. Tony seems shaken, if not broken, at the end of *Saturday Night.*

It is not even clear that Stephanie will let him stay the night, much less have a "relationship" with him. He has no prospects in Manhattan—and she knows it. Stephanie cannot fit into the world of Manhattan office workers. Both of them are running from a traditional social order in Brooklyn that neither they nor the audience believes can be restored.

In the course of the film, Tony is betrayed by adults and peers alike. Tony finally discovers that in Brooklyn, which has been torn apart by group conflict, there is no place left for him. This realization follows his community's desperate attempt to reward one of their own by rigging a dance contest in his favor, cheating the Puerto Rican winner out of his prize. Tony recognizes that the community has violated the very standards of fair play and honesty it has taught him to live by. Generational conflict in the 1970s gives way to other group divisions based on ethnicity and class. Group antagonisms in a world of diminished opportunities and expectations result in the collapse of community itself, leaving every person alone.

In such a world, the best that youth can hope for is momentary fulfillment and fragmentary satisfactions provided by highly perishable objects, images, and relationships: the mirror in which Tony dances and combs his hair, his 1970s polyester dance clothes, discos, his relationship with Stephanie. All fade with use, just as youth itself is depicted in the 1970s youth film as a brief moment of developmental time that cannot endure. A demeaning adulthood awaits for which all smart young people should be prepared. When Tony's boss refuses to give him an advance so that Tony can buy a new shirt to wear at the disco and admonishes him to think about the future, Tony retorts, "Fuck the future." His boss responds, "No, Tony. The future fucks you."

Saturday Morning Detention:
The Entrapment of Youth Culture

> *My God, are we going to be our parents?*
> —The weirdo

In *The Breakfast Club,* filmmaker John Hughes models his characters on those in *Rebel*. But what a difference between 1955 and 1985! The baby boom has passed through adolescence. The scenes featuring crowds of kids in the halls at Jim's school have been replaced by long, wide shots of empty space, in the middle of which sit five students, isolated from

one another, bullied by a frustrated, corrupt, and dangerous school official. The film poses the question: What would happen if, unlike Jim and Judy in *Rebel,* these kids were given an articulate voice to speak to one another about their condition? What if they possessed self-understanding of the sort that comes from having no illusions about the world and one's place in it? They would, first of all, speak in the language and style of therapy, for that is the moral vocabulary of the 1980s. They would see through the limitations of their roles as jock, princess, brain, delinquent, and weirdo. They would, like the adolescents of the 1960s counterculture, find meaning and release in their solidarity. But to what end?

The Saturday detention serves as a metaphor for adolescence—a period of benign incarceration. Adolescence has always involved "doing time"; a protected period in which young people could explore adult roles and values without sacrificing the rough intimacies and equalities of childhood. Andy Hardy's quest for adulthood meant hurdling the barriers set up by adult expectations, as well as by his own immaturity. In contrast, the young people in *The Breakfast Club* devote their energies to frantically constructing barriers, so that they will not have to face the realities of adulthood. Where once adolescence meant a time of departure, transition, and exploration of limits, it has now come to stand for vacancy, accommodation, corruption, and brutalization. Coming of age in the 1980s entails the realization that after adolescence, there is neither resolution nor departure, because there is no place to go. "Adolescent" preoccupations are permanent, incessant, without hope of resolution.

At the beginning of the film, it is apparent that the students have been sentenced to Saturday detention against their will. However, as the film progresses, it becomes evident that to some degree their imprisonment is also self-imposed. *The Breakfast Club* is a respite from the alienating roles imposed on them by their parents, the school, and those constraints they impose on one another through the adolescent subculture, itself a replica of the hypocritical and brutal adult world. Only in the Breakfast Club can members of the conflicting classes of adolescent society treat one another as equals who share common feelings and problems. Bender, the delinquent, initiates a series of confrontations with each member of the group. He manipulates the others into painful disclosures that reveal the degree to which they have been disabled by their parents. By responding to his attacks, the group pulls itself together around a common fear: "My God," asks the weirdo, "are we going to be our parents?"

The tragic answer is . . . yes. Although they have seen through the

barriers dividing them and established real contact with one another, they are, finally, unable to accomplish the social changes that would permit them to act on these new feelings and insights. When school resumes on Monday, they know they will reassume their prescribed conflicts and roles. Unlike adolescents of the 1960s, who were naive enough to believe they could change the world, the members of the Breakfast Club are trapped in their self-awareness.

All trappings of adult legitimacy drop away in *The Breakfast Club,* where adult authority has collapsed into a corrupt and destructive power. Vernon, the school official who monitors the Saturday detention session, wields power but no legitimate authority. He is empowered through the totalitarian organization that employs him, rather than through any personal qualities that merit respect. His delusion is that, as an adult, he has transcended the pains of adolescence.

At one point, Carl, the school janitor, discovers Vernon in the basement of the school, rifling through personnel files to find dirt he can use to undermine colleagues. In other words, Carl finds Vernon engaging in the type of behavior that would earn him detention in the Breakfast Club. In the scene that follows, Vernon confides his fears and insecurities to Carl, at the same time as the Breakfast Club is meeting in the library detention center. He admits that he has trouble sleeping at night, knowing that one day his students will take over the world as adults. The irony of his fear is twofold: First, they have *already* taken over—Vern goes to detention every Saturday. He has never left school. Second, the dividing line between adolescence and adulthood has disappeared. Vern's fears of his students in essence reflect the conditions of his own life and the dangers that that presents. As a stunted adolescent, Vern is his own worst nightmare.

The film opens with a slow pan of the school, which has the look of an abandoned warehouse. The walls are marked with dirt and graffiti, the corridors are littered with trash. The camera quickly passes over a display of photographs honoring each class's "Man of the Year." Close inspection reveals that the Man of the Year in 1968 (the year that *Alice's Restaurant* was released) was none other than Carl the janitor. Carl is the film's only respectable adult. He remains trapped in the school; however, unlike Vern, his self-awareness is his redemption. Like the students in the Breakfast Club, he accepts the limits of his condition. In a world that is portrayed as a prison, the film suggests that, for adults, honor lies in doing your time without illusion.

Judge Hardy's Nightmare: Generational Role Reversal
and Postmodern Adolescence

> *Life moves pretty fast. You'd better move fast*
> *or you'll probably miss it.*
> —Ferris Bueller

The transformation to postmodern adolescence not only reflects the changing power and status of young people but signals the end of adulthood as a desirable culmination of individual development and basis for social authority, and may mark the end of the youth culture film. Generational conflict has been replaced in more recent youth films by the theme of generational role reversal, acknowledging that the crisis of adolescence is no longer confined to teenagers. By the mid-1980s, the last of the baby boomers, born in the early 1960s, had reached the age of adulthood. However, the problems of identity, meaning, and power remain pressing and unresolved. The crisis of adolescence has become the crisis of adulthood. Adults have been stripped of the illusion that issues of identity and fulfillment are confined to a distinct stage of life soon to be outgrown.

Generational role reversal culminates in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off.* In the fast-moving postmodern world that has lost the innocent illusions of fixed moral standards, adolescents are best suited to act decisively, with wisdom, courage, and honor.

In his confidence and competence, Ferris Bueller has more in common with Judge Hardy than with Andy. Ferris fully understands the complexities that define this new world and, further, is quite comfortable operating in a culture characterized by change and relative values. At the conclusion of the film, Ferris races to get home before his unsuspecting mother arrives there by car. Ferris dashes on foot through backyards and, in the process, must hurdle fences, broad jump over vicious watchdogs, and generally overcome obstructions that suddenly appear in his way.

Although he cannot not possibly anticipate the exact nature of these obstacles, Ferris is prepared to meet the unexpected, which enables him to win the race home and accounts for his general success as a postmodern adult. In a world without comforting certainty, Ferris maintains a sense of balance; he adapts to whatever circumstances arise and, in the process, shapes events to satisfy his own best interests and those of his friends.

In contrast, the film portrays the established adult-controlled order

as little more than a farce run by dunces. The adults in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* are irrelevant and impotent. Ferris's nemesis, the school disciplinarian, Mr. Rooney, is obsessed with "getting Bueller." His obsession emerges from envy. Strangely, Ferris serves as Rooney's role model, as he clearly possesses the imagination and power that Rooney lacks. Rooney's responsibility is to ensure that students show up for school. Ferris has decided to take the day off. By capturing and disempowering Ferris, Rooney hopes to accomplish several things. First, he wants to reduce Ferris's influence over the other students, which would reestablish adults, that is, Rooney, as traditional authority figures.

In addition, Rooney dreams of sentencing Bueller to a condition of servitude now common to adults—powerlessness, mindless subservience to rules, and loss of identity. However, Rooney is essentially a comedic figure, whose bumbling attempts to discipline Ferris are a primary source of humor in the film. The perfect bureaucrat, Rooney's efforts can only lead to his self-destruction. Casting the principal as a comic figure questions the competence of adults to provide young people with effective direction—indeed, the value of adulthood itself.

Conclusion

Adolescence emerged as a social class in twentieth-century America, largely as a product of industrial society and popular culture. The evolution of the youth culture film provides considerable insight into the changing power and status of young people in society and the role of popular culture in shaping and defining this social class. In Andy Hardy's world, generational relations are planted in traditional standards that support the authority and capacity of adults to socialize adolescents into adult roles. Generational conflict emerged as the dominant theme of postwar youth films such as *Rebel Without a Cause,* which questioned the competence of adults to provide young people with effective direction, even the desirability of adulthood itself. By the 1980s, adolescence, even with its uncertainties, emerged as the center of popular culture, with adulthood reduced to irrelevance.

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Cultural Context

Overview

Genres *reflect* cultural attitudes, values, behaviors, preoccupations, and myths. How does this work? Popular programming reflects a level of acceptance and shared values among large numbers of people. People tend to watch programs that meet their approval. If we are truly offended by violent programs, we will not watch them. Within this context, a popular genre can furnish perspective into the prevailing cultural, historical, political, economic, religious, and legal sensibilities of a country. For instance, examining a program belonging to the classic detective caper genre can provide insight into the following areas of cultural interests:

- Defining a country's heroes and villains, in terms of social class, gender, race, and ethnicity
- Identifying the groups that comprise the criminal element
- Exploring criminal behaviors of particular societal concern
- Analyzing the relationship between "justice" and the legal system
- Conveying messages about human nature (i.e., good and evil in humans)
- Revealing the relationship between crime and social class, gender, race, and ethnicity

At the same time, media messages are *reinforced* through the countless hours of media programming that repeat, directly or indirectly, the cultural script. To illustrate, in 1999, the *World Championship Wrestling* (WCW) television series (WTBS) introduced the gay character Lenny to its cast of wrestlers. The Lenny character exploited the homophobia of the audience and, indeed, of the culture as a whole. Described by reporter Lisa de Moraes as "a pigtailed, body-glitter-adorned, ultra-fey wrestler,"[1] Lenny was an object of hate and derision as he entered the ring. The script

always called for Lenny to lose, giving the audience an opportunity to vent its anti-gay feelings. De Moraes notes, "When Lenny entered the arena, the live audience would chant anti-gay slurs. . . . And when he got the stuffing beat out of him by an opponent, the crowd roared."[2]

Scott Seomin, media director of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance against Defamation (GLADD), draws a connection between the crowd's reaction to the Lenny character and hate crimes directed at individuals like Matthew Shepard, a gay college student who was found bludgeoned to death in Wyoming only six months before Lenny began appearing on the pro wrestling circuit. "The crowd is incited to very base homophobic behavior that's shocking but is unfortunately a reality in 1999, and the audience's reaction gives permission to viewers to do harm to gay people in a very literal way. It's appalling."[3] After a protest orchestrated by GLADD, Lenny was eventually cut from the WCW roster.

Seomin maintains that GLADD would welcome more gay characters in media presentations—including the professional wrestling genre—provided they are not depicted in a stereotypical manner and that sexual orientation is not the sole defining characteristic of the character: "It would be great if WCW introduced a wrestler for a given amount of time, a dozen appearances or so, and then revealed that he was gay."[4]

By 2005, a new villain emerged on the wrestling scene: an Arab character named Muhammad Hassan on UPN's *Smackdown.* The appearance of Hassan—whose real name is Mark Copani, an Italian-American—exploited the fears of Arabs and Muslims by the American public in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attack.

A popular genre can also serve as an arena in which social issues are brought to public attention. In South Africa, charges of racism were raised in regard to the reality series *Big Brother 2* (2002), when only non-whites were nominated for the first eviction. In the letters to the editor section in the South African newspaper *The Star*, readers discussed whether *Big Brother* was "a racist game for racists," and questioned whether the rules were designed for white players.[5] In response, in the following year's version, *Big Brother Africa* (2003), the contestants were primarily black; only one contestant was a white male. Significantly, however, the number of white South African viewers dwindled.

Cultural Preoccupations

A genre can also serve as a barometer of *cultural preoccupations*. A cultural preoccupation can be defined as the relative importance that a

culture places on a particular issue. Cultural preoccupations may occupy various degrees of prominence in different genres. Examples of U.S. cultural preoccupations found in genres include the following.

Sex

Sex is pervasive throughout all genres. However, how certain genres treat this subject furnishes perspective into the targeted audience's attitudes toward sex. Discussing sex in teenage dramas, Alessandra Stanley explains:

> Love is all-consuming, but sex is no longer much of a teenage trauma on the most successful shows. On "The O.C.," of course, all the kids are sexually active and confident. Marissa's hunky ex-boyfriend, Luke, has an affair with Marissa's mother, and even Seth, the nerd with the high I.Q. and nervous speech patterns, has a sexy girlfriend, Summer, and no inhibitions.
>
> On other shows, teenage sexuality is fodder for dramatic tension. On "Gilmore Girls" on WB, the teenage heroine keeps her virginity in high school; on "Everwood," the teenage hero has a hard time losing it. But mostly teenage sex is very adult, only better.[6]

Appearance

In American culture, appearance is everything. Indeed, studies show that beautiful people are listened to more attentively than others, are promoted more swiftly, and find beautiful mates. Rosalyn Weinman, an NBC executive who holds a doctorate in sociology, says, "All the stuff our parents told us didn't come true. No one cares if you're good. People only care if you're good-looking and rich."[7]

This preoccupation with appearance affects the attitudes and behaviors of teenagers. To illustrate:

- Among twelve- to seventeen-year-old boys, use of steroids and similar drugs jumped 25 percent between 1999 and 2000, with 20 percent saying they use them for looks rather than sports.
- Concern about weight and the drive to be thin increase the risk that a girl will become a daily smoker by the time she is eighteen or nineteen.
- More than one in four teenage girls has symptoms of eating disorders such as bingeing and purging.

- A majority of twelfth grade girls were unhappy with their body weight and shape. This discontentment was strongly related to the frequency of reading fashion magazines.[8]

Within this context, transformational reality programs promise to give people a total change, based on physical enhancements. In *I Want a Famous Face* (MTV), which targets an adolescent audience, young people undergo plastic surgery to look like their idols. The premise of this subgenre—that happiness stems from looking like a famous person—raises serious questions about the source of identity and self-worth in American culture.

Celebrities

From the heyday of fan magazines in the 1940s to today's cable channels like E-Network and the Fashion Channel, the genre of celebrity journalism reflects the public's fascination with the celebrity lifestyle. Indeed, while more "serious" publications such as newsweeklies and men's titles declined during the first six months of 2005, celebrity magazines actually *increased* their circulation.[9]

Celebrity weeklies are increasingly popular among teenage girls. During the first six months of 2005, 23 percent of teen girls reported having read *US Weekly*, compared with only 6 percent in 2000. Ken Baker, West Coast executive editor at *US Weekly*, declares, "Celebrity has become the most powerful marketing tool. Teens identify with them and maybe aspire to look like them. The celebrities are brought down to a human level now, and it almost makes them more powerful."[10]

The genre of reality programs demonstrates what people are willing to sacrifice to become famous. One reality subgenre follows the exploits of ex-celebrities who are no longer in the public spotlight. This exposure immediately transformed these people back into minor celebrities—even if their notoriety stems from looking foolish in front of a large audience.

Crime

The world of crime and criminals is truly a cultural preoccupation in the United States. Mobster genre and police drama focus on crime and criminals, from different points of view. Further, crime is integrated into the storylines of many popular genres, including action/adventure stories and the evening news.

Examining the types of criminals who appear in genric programming furnishes perspective into modern culture. As scholar Ken Burke notes, "Our preoccupation with various forms of crime films in recent years reflects the hard reality of life on the street, or even in the board room or the Oval Office where hostile takeovers and clandestine policies undermine our hopes for stability in a high-pressure environment."[11] The continual appearance of crime in popular genres perpetuates the misimpression that crime is increasing in the United States. Thus, even though crime is down in the United States, our *awareness* of crime is up.

One way to identify cultural preoccupations is to examine the topics, guests, and themes that appear in a group of genric programs over a span of time. As an example, research assistant Jeff Nelson conducted an indicative, one-week study of the following three afternoon talk shows: *Jerry Springer, Maury Povich,* and *Montel*. Table 5.1 lists the topics and guests on these afternoon talk shows between March 27 and 31, 2006.

Clearly, the predominant cultural preoccupation in this cursory survey is sex, in its many incarnations: paternity issues, cheating, relationships gone bad, and transgender activities. These shows feature the epic themes of revelation, betrayal, confrontation, revenge, and confession.[12]

Finally, genres do not merely reflect or reinforce culture but also *shape* attitudes, values, behaviors, preoccupations, and myths. For instance, the presence of a lesbian heroine on the long-running soap opera *All My Children* has played a significant role in changing the attitudes of its fans regarding the issue of homosexuality. In 2000, a lesbian character, Bianca Montgomery (played by Eden Riegel), was introduced to the series. This plot development was highly controversial when it was first introduced. However, over time, the audience began to sympathize with the character, as she bravely endured a series of "soap opera" plot twists. First, she was the victim of a rape that left her pregnant. Next, her baby was kidnapped. Then, Bianca was faced with the dilemma of whether to keep the baby or give it up for adoption.

Due to the episodic nature of the soap opera genre, the characters are "guests" in people's homes five days a week. Consequently, the audience responded as though Bianca was a member of their family, making the issue of homosexuality more personal and, therefore, less threatening. Joan Garry, Executive Director of GLADD explains:

Table 5.1

Jerry Springer, Maury Povich, Montel Williams: Topics and Guests, March 27–31, 2006

Monday
Jerry Springer: "Love Against The Odds." Janie was born without hands or feet, but has beaten the odds! She has fallen in love with Doug and given birth to a beautiful baby boy. Now, she faces yet another hurdle as Doug, the father of her child, confesses he no longer loves her! Joining Janie today are her estranged parents who now vow to stand by her and want Doug to leave their daughter alone!

Maury Povich: "Take The Test . . . Shocking Family Sex Secrets." Maury's guests think their lovers are lying and they are here to get answers. Is RJ cheating on his fiancée? [Is] Judy [sleeping with] one of her cousins? Did Nette's boyfriend sleep with their neighbor? Lie detector tests will reveal the truth!

Montel: "Lies Destroying Lives." Today's guests thought they were helping people in need . . . but they were getting scammed.

Tuesday
Jerry Springer: "Update: Love Against The Odds." Janie, who was born without hands or feet, is remarkably self-reliant and even has a son! When Janie first appeared on our show, she and her boyfriend, Doug, who is the father of her child, were having some major relationship problems. Viewers were outraged at Doug's harsh words to Janie when they were dating, and wrote in to the show expressing their disgust! Doug and Janie haven't seen each other since he left her and their child 4 months ago. Now, Janie has a new boyfriend and she's here today to give Doug a taste of his own medicine.

Maury Povich: "I Was Ugly Back Then . . . Now I'm A Hot, Sexy Ten!" Maury's guests were ugly ducklings and wallflowers growing up and were teased endlessly. Today they are the envy of their friends and now they want to flaunt their stuff to the people who teased them the most. Watch as they turn their past bullies into beggars.

Montel: "Family Destroyed By Lies." Today, three girls who've accused their father of sexual abuse will tell the truth about what really happened.

Wednesday
Jerry Springer: "My Boyfriend Is a Girl." Monique has been dating Reno for two months and she says he's a boyfriend sent from heaven. He's sweet, sensitive and treats her like a queen, but Reno has been reluctant to make a real commitment to her. He's here today to tell her why—Although Reno looks like a handsome young man, he's actually a woman! While Monique is furious that Reno has deceived her in this way, the story doesn't end there! To make matters worse, Monique's roommate Tammy and Reno's brother both knew the truth about Reno and kept it from her! Today, they'll reveal why.

Maury Povich: "I Was Only 13, But I Know You're My Baby's Daddy." Today Maury talks with angry teenage mothers who are struggling to raise babies on their own because the men they are 100 percent certain are the fathers adamantly deny paternity. Each side is positive that the paternity test results will prove that they were right all along. Maury has all of the results. *(continued)*

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Montel: "Sylvia Browne: The Unusual and Unexplainable." It's Wednesday and Sylvia Browne is here to answer the unexplainable.

Thursday

Jerry Springer: "I'll Never Let You Go." Taiwana is furious that her fiancé, Chrishon, is living with another woman—especially since they are supposed to be married in just three weeks! Then why does Chrishon deny he's even engaged to Taiwana? Next . . . Lauren is here to confront her ex-boyfriend, Bruce, for leaving her while she was pregnant. She's also going to confront the other woman and give her a piece of her mind! As it turns out, Bruce's new girlfriend doesn't want him around anymore! Will Lauren forgive and forget? Later . . . After dating Dave for six years, Leesa left him recently and is now dating his former best friend! Dave wants Leesa back, but she has other ideas.

Maury Povich: "Update: Bring Back That Wild Maury Guest." Did Maury make secret crush matches? Did the women in desperate need of makeovers keep their super new looks? What happened after Maury's guests left the show? Maury has the updates!

Montel: "Men vs. Women: Why Can't We Get Along?" Meet Norah: For over a year she transformed herself into a man. She's here today to share what the differences between living as a woman and as a man are.

Friday

Jerry Springer: "Jerry Rescues an Obese Man." Join Jerry as he begins the show on location in Cincinnati at the home of Denny Welch. Denny weighs over 800 pounds and has been unable to leave his bed for the past 5 weeks! He tells Jerry how he got to this dangerously excessive weight and says that he is so scared of dying that he is finally ready to change his life. In fact, construction workers had to knock down a wall of Denny's house to get him out and it took eight men to lift Denny into an ambulance to get him to the hospital! Today, we follow Denny's courageous journey as he puts his life back on track.

Maury Povich: "I'll Prove Your Husband Is The Father of My 2 Babies." Latalia is here to find out if her husband had two children with another woman. Sarah is determined to prove Jason is the father of her baby. And Vondalere is desperate to find the father she never knew. Maury has the explosive paternity test results!

Montel: "A Wife's Shocking Discovery." Today, find out from our guests how marrying the man of their dreams turned out to be disastrous.

Sources: www.jerryspringertv.com; www.mauryshow.com; www.montelshow.com.

> You cannot underestimate the power of Bianca being in homes across America every single day. Bianca is the lesbian that many American television viewers want to spend time with. What's been very powerful is her dimensions as a character. So many gay characters we see on network television are not three-dimensional like Bianca.[13]

Fans flooded the network with messages supporting Bianca and her decision that the best place for the baby was with her mother, regard-

less of her sexual orientation. President of ABC daytime programming Brian Frons witnessed a transformation in the audience's perspective on gay and lesbian issues during the course of the subplot: "The audience went from 'I don't want to see a lesbian relationship' to saying, 'Bianca should be in love.'"[14]

Genric analysis can also provide insight into shifts in cultural attitudes and behaviors. Tracing the evolution of a long-running series can also furnish perspective into shifts in the culture. A classic example is the *Tarzan* series, starring Johnny Weissmuller and Maureen O'Sullivan, which covered a span of ten years (1932–42). Observable changes in this series reflect the emergence of the middle class, as America moved out of the Great Depression. Dave Kehr explains:

> Watching the Tarzan series straight through tells a compelling story, though not necessarily the one presented by their maddeningly repetitive plots. . . . [The] lustful young lovers of the first two films soon evolve into a far more conventional middle-class couple, [defined by] the return to materialist values that the early years of the Depression had profoundly discouraged.[15]

Kehr describes an underwater swim scene in the first film, *Tarzan the Ape Man* (1932), as "an amazingly frank, sexy frolic."[16] But by the third film, *Tarzan Escapes!* (1936), the series had evolved into a middle-class domestic story, complete with split-level tree house:

> A social system is definitely imposing itself on this little corner of unspoiled nature. . . . The couple that seemed so bohemian, living blissfully beyond society in the first two films, are now struggling homeowners. Jane stands cooking in the kitchen, while Tarzan heads off for work each morning [gathering food] with the grim determination of a seasoned commuter.[17]

With the addition of their son in the later films, some of the formulaic elements of the series were reworked. By *Tarzan Finds a Son* (1939), the erotic swim scenes were transformed into a wholesome family activity. In addition, the characters changed over the course of the series. Kehr observes, "Jane seems more and more like a suburban matron, presiding over her little patch of upstate paradise. . . . Cheetah, Tarzan's lovable chimpanzee companion, has now become a sort of comic maid, helping Jane wash the dishes and operating the rope and pulley fan system that Tarzan has constructed to cool their arboreal retreat."[18]

Figure 5.1 **Tarzan**

Johnny Weissmuller and Maureen O'Sullivan in *Tarzan* (1932). (Photo by John Kobal Foundation/Getty)

In addition, differences in *remakes* can also be indicative of cultural changes. Film studios often produce new versions of older box office successes, feeling that they can also duplicate their earlier commercial success. As an example, *A Star is Born* has been made three times: in 1937 (starring Janet Gaynor and Fredric March), in 1954 (with Judy Garland and James Mason), and in 1976 (with Barbra Streisand and Kris Krist-

offerson). Some remakes are released with different titles, such as *The Philadelphia Story* (1940), which was renamed *High Society* (1956). In addition, studios sometimes remake successful films from another country. For instance, *The Magnificent Seven* (1960) is an American version of Japanese director Akira Kurosawa's *Shichinin no samurai* (1954).

Comparing remakes can reveal the interests, preoccupations, and values that characterize different eras or cultures. For instance, *War of the Worlds*, the 1898 H.G. Wells novel about the invasion of earth by a technologically advanced hostile force of aliens, has been retold several times. In 1938, Orson Welles produced a radio adaptation that was told so convincingly that it caused widespread panic among listeners, who tuned in late, missing the initial disclaimer that the program was only a dramatization.

Film versions of Wells's novel were produced in 1953 and 2005. According to Stephen Hunter, comparing the two film versions furnishes perspective into the mindset of American society in the wake of the terrorist attack of 9/11:

> What one notices instantly is the absence of that '50s voice of military or scientific authority. . . . Those conventions made perfect sense back then: Our government, victorious in war, facing a new Red challenge (the metaphorical undertone of the alien-invasion genre), was seen as benign, benevolent and efficient, able ultimately to deal with the enemy. . . . Perhaps now it doesn't, when terrorists can take out a big chunk of the Manhattan skyline and detonate IEDs on Baghdad roadways seemingly at will. Our general apprehension might be summed up in the phrase "out of control," and Spielberg capitalizes on that fear, giving us an out-of-control world as viewed from the ground. He's not much interested here in larger entities like The Government or Science; he focuses instead on working man Ray Ferrier (Tom Cruise) and his two kids, Robbie (Justin Chatwin) and Rachel (the great Dakota Fanning), and dramatizes how the Ferrier family just barely copes with the coming of the things from another world. We only glimpse soldiers, and one (brilliant) sequence shows them using Arabian desert tactics against the three-legged Martian fighting machines and perishing in a wall of fire for their impertinence. The government, the message runs, is powerless. [19]

Increasingly, the distinction between reality and fictional genre has become blurred. For instance, *Dave* (1993) is a film starring Kevin Kline as an ordinary guy whose resemblance to the president of the United

States lands him in the middle of a plot to take over the office after the president has suffered a debilitating stroke. The appearance of actual politicians such as the former speaker of the House Tip O'Neill and bona fide journalists Sander Van Oker and Helen Thomas adds an authenticity to the story that further blends fiction and reality.

Indeed, the influence of the media has become so pervasive that popular genres dictate how the public thinks about real life. TV news programs now cover significant events such as the deaths of Pope John II and Terri Schiavo as though they were reality shows—in effect, converting real life into a reality show. Conversely, TV news programs now devote considerable attention to celebrity "news," such as the Michael Jackson trial or the breakup of Jennifer Aniston and Brad Pitt.

According to columnist Frank Rich, the early popular support for the war in Iraq was largely a result of the Bush administration's strategy of promoting the conflict within the context of the war genre. Bush tagged Saddam as a villainous "evildoer" and positioned the United States as heroic "liberators." Rich explains: "The president has made a tic of hammering in melodramatic movie tropes: good vs. evil, you're with us or you're with the terrorists, 'wanted dead or alive,' 'bring 'em on,' 'mission accomplished.'"[20]

Ironically, by explaining this conflict in terms of the war genre, Bush established expectations among the public for a simple, formulaic "happy ending." Consequently, the protracted period of "insurgency" and growing list of U.S. casualties has led to a general disenchantment with the war. Rich continues:

> Mr. Bush has flubbed the basic storytelling essential to sustain public support for his Iraq adventure. . . . When you relay a narrative in that style, the audience expects you to stick to the conventions of the genre; the story can end only with the cavalry charging in to win the big final battle. . . . By contrast, Mr. Bush never marshaled the number of troops needed to guarantee Iraq's security and protect its borders; he has now defined "mission accomplished" down from concrete victory to the inchoate spreading of democracy. To start off sounding like Patton and end up parroting Woodrow Wilson is tantamount to ambushing an audience at a John Wayne movie with a final reel by Frank Capra.[21]

Worldview

What kind of world is depicted in soap operas or horror/suspense novels? Every genre presents its own distinct worldview that attracts its intended

audience. Indeed, it can be argued that the fundamental appeal of some genres is not the plot, but rather, its worldview. For instance, movie buffs may decide to go to the movies to see a particular genre—"I want to see a comedy" or "I'd like to see an action picture." Beyond any particular presentation, a fan of Westerns is attracted to their cumulative worldview—wide open spaces, rugged individualism, and the code of Western justice.

Each genre establishes its own set of expectations with respect to the following questions:

- What culture or cultures populate this world?
- What kinds of people populate this world?
- What is the ideology of this culture?
- What do we know about the people who populate this world?
- Are characters presented in a stereotypical manner?
- What does this tell us about the cultural stereotyping of this group?
- Does this world present an optimistic or pessimistic view of life?
- Are the characters in the presentation happy?
- Do the characters have a chance to be happy?
- Are people in control of their own destinies?
- Is there a supernatural presence in this world?
- Are the characters under the influence of other people?
- What hierarchy of values is in operation in this worldview?
- What embedded values can be found in the production?
- What values are embodied in the characters?
- What values prevail through the resolution?
- What does it mean to be a success in this world?
- How does a person succeed in this world?
- What kinds of behavior are rewarded in this world?

To illustrate, when we watch a horror movie, we vicariously step into a precarious world. Under the thin demeanor of safety, as represented by civilization, science, and adulthood, lie those "monsters" (both literal and figurative) that are fundamentally terrifying to humans. In some presentations, the characters are victims of supernatural forces (e.g., ghosts, monsters, Satan, Dracula). But in other works, humans are powerless to resist impulses within themselves. Many of the terror-filled aspects of life lie dormant within us or on the other side of our normal life experience. For instance, in Mary Shelly's novel *Frankenstein,* the inventor is

a victim of his own *hubris*—failing to understand his limits as a human being. As a result, he creates a monster that, in the novel, destroys all that he loves, including his father and his fiancée.

The subgenre of slasher movies presents a world in which *we* have become the monsters; human nature is bestial, wicked, and corrupt. In this world, the weak (usually women characters) are preyed upon and brutalized by the strong. This genre puts us in touch with an interior world characterized by evil impulses with which we are somehow familiar.

The soap opera is a world marked by dramatic, extraordinary change, in which anything can happen. All of the characters are engaged in a quest for control and understanding in this dizzying array of events. The heroes are seemingly blinded by their goodness; the true nature of other characters remains hidden to them. On the other hand, the villains know the ways of this world and are willing to cross any ethical or moral boundaries to attain their goals.

Many popular genres offer a more attractive and compelling world than we encounter in our own lives. As an example, in a review of a televised family drama *The Last Dance* (2000), critic Neil Genzlinger describes an ideal world that is often in stark contrast with the reality faced by senior citizens:

> The world portrayed in "The Last Dance," Sunday's pleasantly smarmy television movie on CBS, is an almost perfect place. It's a world where old people with fatal diseases look as great as Maureen O'Hara and where, when her character starts giving away the junk in her cluttered house, people actually want it. [22]

However, the underside of these worldviews extend, dramatize, and exaggerate areas of cultural concern. For instance, the sitcom *Desperate Housewives* presents a disturbing picture of the American Dream. The title of the series suggests that this comedy is rooted in tragedy. After attaining everything that women have been told they want, the main characters find a world without meaning.

In the opening scene of its premiere episode in 2004**,** Mary Alice Young is seen in her lovely suburban home, seemingly a perfect wife and mother. After completing her errands, she then proceeds to commit suicide. After this grim introduction, series creator Marc Cherry notes that "then, we've got to make that comic turn to let you know that this is going to be a fun romp for the next hour."[23] The series then follows Mary Alice's community of friends—women who, similarly, have achieved the

American Dream but who, in the words of Henry David Thoreau, "lead lives of quiet desperation."

- Lynette is a stay-at-home mom whose life is defined by her family: three bratty little boys, an infant daughter, a husband who continually travels on business.
- Susan is a children's-book illustrator who was devastated when her husband left her for his secretary.
- Bree is obsessed with maintaining the façade of good living—to the extent that it's a source of unhappiness and discontent. Her son complains, "Do you always have to serve cuisine? Can't we just have food?"
- Gabrielle is a wife whose husband seemingly gives her everything she wants; yet she has an affair with the teenage gardener.

The humor of the series stems from the female characters' desperate efforts to find diversion in this world without meaning. Cherry explains:

> This show is really about, at its core, the choices we make in life. When you get what you've chosen and you're still not happy, then what do you do? All these women have chosen this life, and [it's] going wrong. They're making some bad choices, which is where the fun comes from.[24]

The popularity of *Desperate Housewives* reflects the degree to which members of the audience identify with the pressures that drives these characters to acts of desperation. Felicity Huffman, who stars as Susan in the series, observes that her character finds motherhood largely stressful and unfulfilling:

> It so enrages me that there's one way to be a mother in America . . . and that's basically to go, 'I find it so fulfilling and I've never wanted anything else.' Suggest anything different and you're considered a bad mother. . . . What I really appreciated about this character is I think it gave voice to that other experience. I mean, if you're fulfilled, fantastic. But if you're not, that also has to be OK.[25]

Although the worldview of environment reality shows like *Survivor* and *Big Brother* ostensibly values community, the programs are set up in ways that undermine this community for dramatic purposes. The rules of the contest call for the members of their "community" to throw out

a member, thus pitting the contestants against one another. The world-view of reality shows presents a Darwinian world, characterized by the survival of the fittest.

Identifying *who populates the world of a genre* can provide considerable insight into its ideology. For instance, relationships are a primary focus of reality shows. *Big Brother* focuses on the dynamics of the household. *The Osbournes* and *The Anna Nicole Show* follow a person who had been in the public spotlight. During the shows, the audience becomes acquainted with the protagonists and the people they encounter.

One of the major areas of angst for adolescents is being accepted by the "popular" set of kids at school. As Liz Gateley, the creator and executive producer of *Laguna Beach,* observes, "At that age, it's all about the alpha clique-people trying to get into the alpha clique, how brutal it is to be in the alpha clique."[26] But simply by tuning into the adolescent reality show *Laguna Beach,* audience members vicariously become members of the most popular clique in an exclusive, privileged California community.

Another defining characteristic of the worldview of genres is the composition and role of *gender*. In romantic comedies, the predominant relationship is male/female. However, in a surprising number of genres, such as the "buddy" action/adventure and war genres, the primary relationships occur between two males. John Wayne, the prototypical guy-movie guy, almost never got the girl in four decades of moviemaking.

Even if there is often a female romantic interest, in "buddy" films like *Starsky and Hutch* (2004) the dominant mindset remains male. The female remains a subordinate character, kept at a safe distance—as the subject of locker room comments and an object of sexual conquest. According to film professor Chris Straayer, female audience members often identify with powerful male protagonists, rather than the passive female characters: "All women have to identify with men if they want to experience that vicarious rush of being a hero."[27] Columnist Bob Ivry observes that these male characters are only capable of emotional intimacy with other males: "That 'risk' of appearing gay is not an idle preoccupation of guy movies. That's because most action heroes find it impossible to have satisfying relationships with women. John Rambo, Harry Callahan, John McClane—and, OK, Robocop—are simply incapable of a tender exchange of emotions."[28]

But while acknowledging the predominance of male relationships, media communicators are faced with a dilemma: how to present male bonding without hitting the homophobic nerve of male audience mem-

bers. Thus, popular genres, including the "buddy" stories, Westerns, and the war genre provide safe arenas that permit intimacy without raising concerns about sexuality.

As genres target younger audiences, *age* increasingly influences the worldview of popular genres. (For further discussion, see Chapter 8.) For instance, in the reality show *Real World* (MTV), the cast members, all in their early twenties, live together in a house. Older adults appear only fleetingly in the series, as when Frankie receives a visit from her mother and stepfather.

Moreover, a popular genre features adults like Adam Sandler, Rob Schneider, and Tom Arnold, who *behave* like adolescents. In *Dumb and Dumber* (1994), Jim Carey and Jeff Daniels play nerds who, though technically adults, face all of the problems of teenagers: trying to fit in (the "joke" is that they actually think that they are cool), and finding girlfriends. Like awkward pubescent boys at a dance, they are much more comfortable hanging out with each other than members of the opposite sex. They even dress like young kids.

In addition, the worldviews of many popular genres, including action/adventure, Westerns, police dramas, and war genres operate at an adolescent level of development. This worldview is defined by absolutes: Good Guys verses Bad Guys. This is a direct world, in which diplomacy and negotiation are supplanted by a good beating. Heroes like the Rock and Vin Diesel triumph because of their physical dominance. Ivry speculates about why this adolescent fantasy is so popular with adult males: "Maybe these Peter Pan comedies are popular because they're wish-fulfillments, too. Or maybe it's just because they appeal to the inner dork in all men."[29]

International Perspectives

Many popular genres are transcultural, appearing in countries throughout the world. The escalating international presence of popular genres coincides with the development of many national media systems. For instance, in 2005 India emerged as the third-highest satellite and cable television subscriber base in the world (after China and the United States). Between 2000 and 2005, the number of cable and television channels increased from 165 to more than 250, and the total audience grew from 30 million to 61 million.[30] Moreover, an episode of the popular quiz program *Kaun Banega* (a version of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*) attracted ap-

proximately 18 million potential contestants.[31] In addition, India's film industry, known as Bollywood, makes nearly 1,000 films each year, 50 percent more than the number of features made in the United States.[32]

Popular genres now enjoy worldwide popularity and acceptance. For instance, over 400 million people in 110 countries tune in daily to soap operas like *The Bold and the Beautiful*. David Andrews declares, "Soap operas are the closest thing we have to a world religion."[33]

In Germany, a call-in quiz channel, *9Live,* is the nation's fastest-growing broadcast station. It offers eight hours a day of live call-in shows like *DreiZwoEins* (Three, Two, One), *Glucksrad* (Wheel of Fortune), and *Alles auf Rot!* (Everything on Red!). Viewers throughout Germany, Austria, and Switzerland call its switchboard in Munich, Germany, to participate in the station's quiz shows. Chief Executive Christiane zu Salm says, "We're getting 18 to 20 million calls a month. I think it's an enrichment in the German programming palette to have this type of TV format."[34]

Many popular genres are exported from the United States to other countries. Hollywood has found a lucrative global market for its block-buster films. As an example, in 2000 *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* doubled its domestic box-office take abroad ($316 million domestically compared to $638 million overseas).[35]

However, the United States has begun to import popular genres from abroad. Popular U.S. reality shows like *Big Brother* and *Survivor* originated in Europe. In addition, *telenovelas,* which are hugely popular throughout Latin America, have crossed over to the U.S. market. Telenove-las combine elements of soap operas, mini-series, and romance novels. They focus on one story exclusively for approximately six months. At the conclusion of the story, another one begins, complete with a fresh plot and characters. Telenovelas are currently presented on Telemundo and Univision, networks that cater to Hispanic viewers. Indeed, several telenovelas broadcast by Univision have attracted larger audiences than programs on English-language networks like UPN and the former WB.

As a result, Fox's plans for fall, 2006, included *Table for Three,* a new drama series based on a Colombian telenovela of the same name, *Mesa Para Tres,* which will help kick off Fox's new television network, My Network TV. This telenovela is scheduled to have an intense run—all five weeknights in prime time for thirteen weeks—with recaps on Saturday night. Fox's development and production unit plans to adapt at least three telenovelas a year. In addition, NBC Universal struck a two-year deal

for the production in English of telenovelas and other formats shown by Telemundo, its Spanish-language subsidiary. ABC has adapted *Yo Soy Betty La Fea* (Ugly Betty), a blockbuster Colombian telenovela.

Examining formulaic variations in popular genres can provide insight into the cultural sensibility of a country. At times, the formula and format must adapt to differences in cultures. To illustrate, the French adaptation of the children's series *Sesame Street* contained several significant differences from the American original. As Alexandre Michelin, programming director for France 5 explains, "We had to adapt it to keep 'Sesame Street' values and ours, finding a way to make it work with French issues."[36] Consequently, in *5 Rue Sésame* two major characters from the American original were eliminated. Kermit the Frog was dropped, since a "frog" is a disparaging term for the French. Big Bird was also dropped, because the producers felt that the yellow bird's quiet demeanor was not distinctive enough for the French audience. Michelin explained, "We had the feeling that it was a little bit too sweet, too nice. We need some irony. It's very difficult to evaluate, but we have the feeling that in France we can be a little edgier."[37]

The *plot* may also furnish insight into a country's distinctive social system. To illustrate, *Ekulu* (1994), a film produced in Nigeria about an African slave and a white woman who freed him, tells the story of how they become outcasts and are forced to flee into the jungle.

The popularity of a particular genre may also serve as an indication of the cultural tastes, attitudes, and preoccupations of a country. Elaine Sciolino provides this example about Iranian films:

> Today, Iranian films fall into a number of categories. One is the commercially popular junk film—the slapstick comedy or adventure film about murders or mummies. Another is the propaganda film, the kind that is shown on government-owned Iran Air's foreign flights and that invariably depicts a character gone wrong who is redeemed through prayer and the power of the Islamic Republic.[38]

Comparing versions of a program produced in different countries also can provide insight into the *customs* and *mores* of each culture. To illustrate, the premise of the reality show *Big Brother* is the same in Holland and the United States: a group of ten young people are placed in living quarters, and the programs focus on their group dynamics. However, the Dutch version of the series is much more open with respect to sex, including scenes of the cast showering and having sexual encounters.

A genre also furnishes perspective into the impact of political events on a

nation's inhabitants. As mentioned in Chapter 4, in *Materials and Labor*, a popular reality show on Al Sharqiya, an Iraqi satellite network, the context of the war provides the premise for the series. Baghdad residents whose homes have been destroyed have their homes rebuilt at no cost to them.[39]

Occasionally, a new genre emerges in a country as an expression of its own unique experience. To illustrate, the *Urban Generation* genre emerged in China during the 1990s, largely in response to two defining events: the Tiananmen Square massacre and the onset of the government's drive toward privatization. Stuart Klawans describes several films that make up this genre:

> In *On the Beat* (1995), [Ying] Ning invites us to tag along with the bicycle-riding cops in an old neighborhood of Beijing, one of those warrens of courtyards, lanes and two-story apartments that are fast being replaced by high-rises. Since the worst malefactor the cops meet is a three-card-monte player, the film on its surface is all shaggy-dog charm. Beneath, it is a catalog of frustrations, at everything from senseless policies at work to crumbling relationships at home.
>
> Lu Yue's *Mr. Zhao* (1998) follows the same pattern: amiable and even humorous on the outside unsettled within. Set in Shanghai, it's the cleverly constructed story of a philandering middle-aged professional who betrays, with exquisite clumsiness, his wife, his mistress, and his own best possibilities.
>
> *Mr. Zhao* and *On the Beat* are exceptional in maintaining an aura of rueful humor and focusing on characters with respectable jobs.
>
> If any figure defines the Urban Generation film, it's the ne'er-do-well, whose estrangement from society is portrayed with notable sympathy.
>
> In the epic-length *Platform* (2001), Mr. [Hongwei] Wang Wang plays a member of an acting troupe [whose] experiences mirror those of the Urban Generation. Having started in the 1970s by performing musical tributes to Chairman Mao, the character winds up after privatization playing rock music to an audience of dozens. In both roles, Mr. Wang is never without his cigarette, his slouch and an ill-concealed vulnerability.
>
> The story they tell about themselves may be dismal, but it suggests that Beijing's dingiest housing compound may contain energy and willpower, kept under high pressure and straining for release.[40]

Inter-genre Analysis

As discussed in Chapter 4, *inter-genre analysis* examines issues, characters, and themes that appear across genres and reflect areas of widespread

interest. Consequently, identifying trends that transcend individual genres is an indication of how widespread the attitudes are within a culture.

To illustrate, the gay and lesbian subculture has been introduced to television audiences through several different genres:

- Musical variety shows: *The Liberace Show,* 1952–55. Pianist Liberace starred in this program, produced during the early television era. Liberace was not explicitly "out" as gay. Indeed, he was adored for his charm, good looks, and flair.
- Game shows: *The Hollywood Squares* (1966–82), *The Match Game* (1962–69). Paul Lynde and Charles Nelson Reilly were panelists on these shows. Lynde and Reilly were not singled out as homosexuals. Instead, their witty, outrageous personas were popular with mainstream audiences.
- Sitcoms: *All in the Family* (1971–79). This highly successful sitcom featured Archie Bunker, a bigot whose outbursts against women, African Americans, and homosexuals were so outrageous and ignorant that they exposed the folly of these forms of prejudice.
- Evening soap opera: *Soap* (1977–81). Billy Crystal's performance as a gay character in this outrageous series was so controversial that the producers of the show had to scramble to find advertisers.
- Reality shows: *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (2003–). This show has turned conventional attitudes on its head. A crew of style experts (who are gay) are the norm, transforming nerdy straight men into social respectability. Thus, the straight men are deficient, while the gay males are in control.

Lines of Inquiry

1. Genre analysis can provide perspective into issues of interest and concern to the intended audience. Select a sample of programs belonging to a particular genre. What does the genre reveal with regard to cultural attitudes, values, behaviors, preoccupations, or myths?
2. Contrast two genric programs from different eras as a way to identify corresponding changes in the culture.
3. One way to identify cultural preoccupations is to examine the topics, guests, and themes that appear in a group of programs within a genre. Conduct an analysis of one of the following genres:

a. Afternoon talk shows
b. News roundtable television shows
c. Local newspapers

Record the guests and topics that appear on programs in the selected genre over a one-week span.

a. What patterns emerge with respect to the topics addressed on these shows?
b. What attitudes with respect to these topics emerge?
c. What inferences (conclusions) can you draw on the basis of your data gathering?

4. Examine an area of cultural preoccupation as it appears in a particular genre:
a. Sex
b. Consumer culture
c. Appearance
d. Other

What messages are conveyed with regard to these cultural preoccupations?

5. Conduct an analysis of a subgenre, focusing on the following:
a. Cultural preoccupations
b. The role and functions of these preoccupations in subgenres
c. Attitudes toward the topic/issue/preoccupation expressed in subgenres

6. Select a sample of programs belonging to a particular genre and conduct a genre analysis, focusing on worldview.
a. What kind of world is being depicted?
b. What kinds of people inhabit this world?
c. Are people in control of their own destinies?
   1. Is there a supernatural presence in this world?
   2. Are people under the influence of other people?
d. Does this world present an optimistic or pessimistic view of life?
   1. Are the people in this world happy?
   2. Do they have a chance to be happy?
e. What is the definition of success in this world?

7. Conduct an inter-generic analysis. Examining a selection of programming from two genres, compare one of the following as it appears.
   a. Issues
   b. Characters
   c. Cultural symbols
   d. Worldview
   e. Themes
8. Compare programs originating in different countries that belong to the same genre. Can you identify any differences between the programs? What do the differences reveal about differences in the countries?
9. Compare a genric program that is produced in different countries (e.g., *Survivor*)
   a. What genre does this program belong to?
   b. What are the points of similarity between the two presentations?
   c. Are there any differences between the two presentations? What does this tell you about the customs and mores of each culture?
10. Identify new genres that appear within a particular country. What do these genres reveal about new cultural/historical developments within that country?
11. Conduct research to identify a genre that enjoys a high level of popularity in a particular country. Can you account for this popularity? Focus on:
    a. Themes, messages, or plots that have particular significance in the country
    b. The distinct cultural/historical experience of the country
    c. Production values that transcend national barriers
12. In some countries, genres have become a primary vehicle for informing the public about social issues. Examine a selection of programs belonging to a distinct genre.
    a. What social issues are being raised?
    b. How does the genric programming present two issues (e.g., plot, character)?
    c. What messages about social issues are conveyed in the program?
13. Examine a sample of genric programs that are produced in two different countries.

a. What are the differences in content and structure?
b. What do these differences reveal with regard to the two countries?

Genre Analysis: Cultural Context of Celebrity Genre
by Adriane Hall

You Could Not Write This Stuff

VH1's self-proclaimed "sideshow"—*The Surreal Life,* which completed its fifth season in 2006—lives up to its P.T. Barnum predecessors. The reality show places seven celebrities in one tight space for two weeks of acts more shocking than sword-swallowing and fire-eating. Sandwiched between two other shows starring former celebrities, *The Surreal Life* epitomizes VH1's new brand: Celebreality. The network develops each show to serialize—perhaps exploit—the oddities of celebrities, to presumably make money off America's obsession with fame.

Whether seeking or observing fame, Americans want to experience something outside of their realities. *The Surreal Life* exposes both of these aspects of fame, constantly asking whether audiences want to see a celebrity as a character or as the truest form of himself or herself. The last two episodes of the series especially center on that idea, specifically concerning the feud between two housemates and how far one of them is willing to go to achieve notoriety. Examining these episodes using the ideological approach sheds some light on both the obsession and exploitation of fame. Like with many of the original sideshows, the "freaks" were not taunted as outcasts, but embraced for their peculiarities by the owners and operators of the shows. In short, they put themselves on display, allowing for themselves and others to profit from their gawking audiences. The stars of *The Surreal Life,* while not bearded ladies or conjoined twins, expose their faults, greed, and bizarre antics for the same reason—to profit off a TV audience eager for something incongruent with their own realities.

Celebrity is by no means a new concept, especially when viewed through the lens of Leo Braudy, a professor of literature who has focused on the study of fame throughout history. Alexander, Caesar, Cleopatra, Joan of Arc—the names he says stick in a person's mind—draw images of individuals too unique to fit within usual societal bounds. The quest for fame, he argues, is a reflection of society, and larger, more heterogeneous populations will produce more people seeking eternal renown.

"In a society committed to progress, the seeking of fame, the climbing of the ladder of renown, expresses something essential in that society's nature. Even the more grotesque forms of ostentation are connected to normal desires to be known for one's talents or for oneself."[41] Though celebrities strive for qualities that will set them apart, the ability for these qualities to be reproduced is essential to fame: "Once a vocabulary is created, once a group of gestures is made, they can be reproduced and refined by others"(p. 42). The media's perpetuation of a celebrity's image is vital for that person to retain their fame. "Whatever political or social or psychological factors influence the desire to be famous, they are enhanced by and feed upon the available means of reproducing the image," Braudy writes (p. 43).

> In the past that medium was usually literature, theater, or public monuments. With the Renaissance came painting and engraved portraits, and the modern age has added photography, radio, movies, and television. As each new medium of fame appears, the human image it conveys is intensified and the number of individuals celebrated expands. (p. 44)

Braudy's assertions have never seemed truer than in today's media, immersed in infotainment, reality shows, and innumerable Internet sites devoted to whatever people take the time and money to produce. Britney Spears is a prime example of the permeation of fame. She started as a teenage singer with an innocent face but lyrics that made listeners question that innocence. The juxtaposition made her rise to fame easy and quick, and soon she was the subject of photographs, interviews, tabloid exposés, coffeehouse chats, and the like. Radio, CDs, and music videos, though they were the original media to increase her fame, were joined by news outlets, films, Internet fan sites, and countless other sources. Eventually, her profession as a singer became almost overshadowed by her celebrity. Whom she was dating, where she was going—trivial facts like these became more important than the talents that had made her famous.

"Many seek fame because they believe it confers a reality that they lack," Braudy writes. "Unfortunately, when they become famous themselves, they usually discover that their sense of unreality has only increased" (p. 45).

Spears's life became her fame, and perhaps Braudy's assertion that reality becomes muddled plays into Britney's decision to turn her life

into a reality TV show. Spears and her husband, Kevin Federline, aired personal videos of their relationship on UPN, in a series called *Britney and Kevin: Chaotic*. Perhaps she was trying to tell her fans who she really was; perhaps her fans did not care.

According to Braudy, "The audience that awards the famous the ultimate accolade of its attention is less interested in what they think they 'really' are than in what role they play in the audience's continuing drama of the meaning of human nature" (p. 46).

Interestingly, this idea became the focus of the last two episodes of *The Surreal Life*. Two of the "characters"—as they are described on the show's website—come to a head at the end of their two weeks in the house. Each season, Sally Jesse Raphael appears on the show for a segment called "Dirty Laundry." As with her own talk show, Raphael interviews each of the cast members and reveals secret footage of their actual behavior. The second episode of *The Surreal Life* featuring "Dirty Laundry" centered on Omarosa, a member of the cast of the original *The Apprentice,* another reality show.

Omarosa has built a profession, as she calls it, out of being the self-proclaimed "biggest villain in reality TV." Raphael cornered Omarosa on a number of issues, the biggest being the distinction between acting and being herself. The object of the show is to see celebrities being real, Raphael told her; the public just wants to see and like the real person behind the image. In one of the episode's multiple screaming matches, Omarosa tells Raphael that she has been honest since the beginning—she is only participating in the show to further her own fame and gather research for a book on reality TV. She claims she is being real—the video segments later prove she is only being real to the character she has created.

In an interview with the show's executive producer—while Omarosa did not know she was being taped—she revealed that all of her housemates have alternate sources of income. Reality shows, she said, have become her profession: "This profession is called acting for unscripted dramas 101, by Omarosa."

In a later confrontation with another cast member, Omarosa makes a contradictory statement—she refuses to be herself while on reality television.

"My fans love it when I'm naughty," Omarosa tells Caprice, an international supermodel.

"We just want 'real,'" Caprice tells her.

"When I come to Europe, we'll get to hang and you'll get to see the real Omarosa—they're not going to see that here," she says.

Obviously upset, Caprice leaves the room, breaking down moments later into the arms of Bronson Pinchot, TV and film star. Her emotions are real, she says, but she is confused about the actions of her housemates.

"I don't know if it's for TV or real life; I don't know," she sobs.

This grotesque display of public celebrity hits all the points Braudy makes—in creating a heightened reality, these celebrities have blurred the lines between their true identities and the surreal reputations they build for themselves. Looking at the worldview of this group of people, the ideologies represented are grossly distorted versions of American culture. The seven people populating one California house are larger than life, and most compete to be the center of attention. Some of them insist on being real, like Caprice, raising the question, how real can anyone be when in front of a camera? Some of them are blatantly acting a part, like Omarosa. Nevertheless, all seven are inflated stereotypes:

- Omarosa: Self-described "bitch" who feeds off a public she says cannot tell the difference between acting and being real
- Janice Dickinson: Self-described "world's first supermodel" and wild child who keeps no opinion to herself
- Caprice: International model who uses assumptions about her as a blonde beauty queen to her advantage
- Pinchot: Actor typecast in roles as the goofy foreign guy, who in "real life" lusts after model Caprice and resents his abusive father
- Jose Canseco: Former star baseball player forced into early retirement by injuries, and who revealed his use of steroids in an autobiography titled *Juiced*
- Sandy "Pepa" Denton: A member of the hip-hop trio Salt 'n' Pepa, most famous in the 1990s
- Carey Hart: Freestyle motorcross daredevil who insists that he is just a normal guy willing to break his bones

The cast list resembles the stereotypes of a high school classroom. Carey is the skater kid who keeps out of the mainstream; Janice is the wild child in a group of outsiders; Omarosa is the success-minded member of the academic crowd; Jose is the athlete; Caprice is the popular beauty; Pepa is the quiet choir member with soul. These are people everyone

is familiar with, but who have just enough individuality to raise them higher than their stereotype.

The Surreal Life presents a world where dinnertime brawls are the norm, supermodels jump out of windows, and major league baseball players parade around in women's lingerie. Just as in a circus sideshow, the audience is left with both positive and negative reactions. Positive, in that celebrities have as many, if not more, vulnerabilities as everyone else. Negative, in that celebrities create so much drama in their own lives as to leave little room for real happiness. Following the theory of the ideological approach, these people are no longer in charge of their own destinies.

The perpetuation of their fame drives each of their actions. Omarosa's lies are visible in the videos taken of her when she is unaware—though a media literate individual would question just how unaware she could actually be. The conflict between Omarosa and Janice Dickinson was the highlight of VH1's season. Omarosa delighted in calling Janice a "crack whore" and took every opportunity to accuse Janice of using drugs, especially cocaine. Janice, in turn, took cheap shots back at Omarosa, baiting her to continue with her accusations.

In the final episode, Janice speaks to her lawyer about filing a defamation suit against Omarosa. Since Omarosa had answered the phone and had been told who was calling for Janice, she appeared later in Janice's bathroom with an apology. Later that night, at the cast mates' final dinner together, Omarosa told the group she had not known Janice had talked to her lawyer and claimed that she had never apologized to her.

The audience knew she had, in fact, apologized—the medium had revealed that through the video. The other cast members were unaware of these actions, and did not support Janice or Omarosa in the resulting battle. In this situation, the audience is omniscient—the people watching the drama know much more than the people living it. The cameras create a supernatural controlling factor in the house—the producers of the show can be totally in control of what will happen next.

During the members' last dinner together, each is given a card and asked to tell his or her cast mates about the subject on that card. The men in the house are asked embarrassing or heartrending questions: Bronson reveals his father's abuse of himself and his mother, Jose talks of the night he put a gun to his head, Carey speaks of his break-up with his girlfriend and how it drove him to a stunt that broke most of the bones in his body. Omarosa is asked to tell her roommates about her divorce; she will say

nothing except that her ex-husband is her best friend. The cast members are baited by the producers, and each question is intentionally posed to create tension and drama.

This is no truer than with Janice, who is told to ask Omarosa for a public apology for her accusations. Omarosa refuses to renounce her accusations, telling Janice that she is scared for her children, that she is a horrible mother because she is using drugs. This speech sends Janice into a tailspin, leading to a screaming match between herself and Omarosa before Janice leaps from the kitchen window to hitchhike away from the house. Though her cast mates eventually try to calm her down, a car is called for her and she leaves, hours before the actual final day.

Through all of this, the cameras rolled. They followed Janice down the hill as Pepa tried to persuade her to return. The producers arranged for Janice's question to be the last read, so the other cast members could reveal their secrets before the inevitable confrontation. These seven people lived for two weeks in a completely engineered world. The unreality Braudy spoke of is illustrated poignantly in this final episode. These people are not in control. Where their own greed for fame does not drive their actions, the greed of another group does—the producers, who exploit the pain of celebrities for the entertainment of a mass audience.

A question does, arise, however, that parallels the sideshow act. How much responsibility do the celebrities have for their own exploitation? Just as the sideshow owners were most often the most popular acts, the celebrities are participating in the flaunting of their own insecurities and indiscretions. Some of them might perceive this as a way of achieving another aspect of fame, or, especially in Omarosa's case, infamy. In fact, the preferred reading for this series seems to be the evils of Omarosa. She is the character who commands the most attention, and finds a way to star in situations she may have been on the periphery of. She creates drama when none is present, like during a photo shoot when she refused to have Janice standing over her with a fake knife, claiming she feared for her life. Part of Omarosa's fame can be put into historical context—she completed her appearance on *The Apprentice* two seasons earlier, and made several cameo appearances after that. *The Surreal Life* may be a hit because Omarosa's reputation is still being built, still very much in the forefront of pop culture.

The best known cast members are those who were popular in past decades; the younger cast members, like Carey Hart and Caprice, are not as well known. Janice, like Omarosa, is the only other cast member

to feature prominently in pop culture over the last several years—she returned to fame as a judge on the UPN reality show *America's Next Top Model*. Janice is reclaiming her fame, whereas Omarosa is trying to build hers—the conflict between them may center on this. As Jose said in an interview, both of them wanted to be the star—Omarosa was the winner. A graphic under her picture, accompanied by triumphant music, proclaimed her the WINNER.

In this way, production elements also played into the ideology presented through *The Surreal Life*. Omarosa's cackling laugh and constant scream of "crack whore" to Janice became consistent sound bites. In many scenes, her interviews are accompanied by spooky music, as if to reinforce that she is the villain of the show. In many ways, the production values raise her up as the protagonist of the show.

The editing of the final episode also reveals the message the producers wanted to send—the series was intent on creating drama. The initial conflict during dinner between Omarosa and Janice is shown before a commercial break in the hour-long finale. After the blow-up, Janice tries to flee through the kitchen window, while Pepa holds her in the house. The show breaks for a commercial, and when it returns, it shows the very same scenes once again, this time interspersed with cast interviews. That conflict, which VH1 touts on its website as something one has to "see to believe," was the moneymaker for the series.

"And when Janice asks for an apology at the last dinner in front of the rest of the cast, Omarosa flat out refuses," the website's synopsis reads, "saying she stands behind what she said about Janice's wild antics and her questionable skills as a mother, stating, 'You need help, Janice. I can't lie.' And the battle of the century begins. Who will win? Is the rest of the cast combat ready? And will the house still be standing in the light of day?"

VH1 stayed true to the hype, declaring Omarosa the winner in the end. She looked smug as she left in her limo, winking at the camera as her signature spooky music played. What did she really win, though? More fame, as she tried to destroy another character by attacking her parenting and accusing her of drug use. She was caught in consistent lies by Sally Jesse Raphael and by the video revealed to the audience. What did she, or her fans, gain by her obsessive pursuit of fame?

"In search of modern fame, we often enter a world of obvious fiction, in which all blemishes are smoothed and all wounds healed," Braudy

writes. "It is the social version of a love that absolves the loved one of fault, restoring integrity and wholeness" (p. 7).

Omarosa must expect this from her fans—she insists they love when she is naughty. Perhaps the producers of shows like *The Surreal Life* are absolved by the same logic—they may be the instigators of the conflict, but the stars decide how far they want to take the drama. Because life in the house is, in fact, surreal, the producers never expected to create anything but obvious fiction. As with the sideshows, the characters have obvious flaws—their pursuit of fame, however, blurs the question: were they victims of God-playing producers, or in the game for their own benefit?

Perhaps next season's cast—George Jefferson, Carol Brady, a playboy, a couple of rockers, a model/actress, and a reality show hunk—will show us a new side of VH1's freak show.

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Ideological Approach

Overview

An ideological approach is designed to identify the prevailing belief system of a genre. *Ideology* is defined as the system of beliefs or ideas that help determine the thinking and behavior of a culture. Genres such as Westerns, quiz shows, news programs, tabloid talk shows, spy programs, and sports programming send messages about what life is and what life ought to be. Examining the ideological underpinnings of genres can provide insight into ways in which a genre shapes the audience's expectations and understanding of content.

An ideology may be *political* in nature. Genres may contain assumptions about how the world should operate, who should oversee the world, and the proper and appropriate relationships among its inhabitants. A genre can also present a *religious* ideology—sacred tenets that believers are expected to follow. Finally, an ideology can be *cultural,* establishing standards of success as well as laying out a roadmap that defines how to get there.

Historical events sometimes invest a popular genre with an ideological significance. For example, in 2004 Palestinian Ammar Hassan was voted the winner of *Super Star II,* an Arab version of *American Idol,* broadcast throughout the Arab world on the satellite channel of the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation (LBC). The program held regional contests throughout the Arab world over twenty-one weeks, with the audience voting for their favorite singers. Hassan emerged as a cultural hero in Palestine. West Bank towns and villages set up large television screens in city centers so that everyone could watch the final program. Mr. Hassan's father, Hassan Ahmed Daqrouq, declared, "Palestinians, wherever they are, they see Ammar as an ambassador for them. The Palestinian people are not just throwing stones and bombs. In the struggle we have educated

people—doctors, intellectuals, musicians—and we have a singer. Ammar, too, is a defender of the people."[1]

Super Star II became a major source of disagreement among Palestinian political factions. The militant organization Hamas criticized the program as a diversion from the Palestinian struggle. And the fundamentalist Islamic Action Front issued a statement condemning the program: "We urge official and popular parties to put an end to this sad comedy. [This show] facilitates the culture of globalization led by America to change the cultural identity of the people."[2] However, the Palestinian Authority praised the program for calling attention to the political situation in Palestine. In an advertisement, the Palestinian Ministry of Culture in Gaza declared, "The creative art can participate in the life of the people and its struggle for freedom and independence. Let's shout with one voice: Ammar Hassan is the Super Star."[3] Before the finals, Hassan's father even received a telephone call of support from Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

As Hassan sang a song about Jerusalem, men and women gathered around a huge screen set up in Unknown Soldier Square, weeping and waving the Palestinian flag. When asked on the show why his tone is so sorrowful, Hassan replied, "I can't separate myself from the situation of my people."[4]

In a subsequent interview, Hassan admitted that as a boy in Salfit, he had thrown stones at Israeli soldiers. And he declared that he could now use his sudden celebrity more effectively as a form of social activism:

> Do you think throwing stones will lead to victory? There is no victory with ignorance. I want to reflect a human image of the Palestinian people, that despite all the difficulties we face, we exist, that there are people like me, and that creativity is our weapon. It's good to remind people what is going on in Palestine, but I want to say that through art and music. We can *serve the cause,* not vice versa.[5]

Significantly, the format of *Superstar II* reinforced a prodemocratic ideology. Viewers were able to vote via email or text message from all over the world, including Europe and the United States. On the final show, Hassan was announced as the winner, defeating a Libyan singer by a margin of victory of 52 percent to 48 percent. Rami Khouri, editor of the *Beirut Daily Star,* announced that the program was a victory for the democratic process:

I do not recall in my happy adult life a national vote that resulted in a 52 to 48 percent victory. Most of the "referenda" or "elections" that take place in our region usually result in fantastic pre-fixed victories. . . . So a 52 to 48 percent outcome—even for just a song contest—is a breath of fresh air. . . . Thank you, LBC, for allowing ordinary Arabs to show that they are not always willing participants in the political freak shows that are the "official elections" for president and other forms of Great Leader.[6]

However, the reaction to this "election" also revealed the fundamental mistrust of the democratic process by large segments of the society. After the results were announced, the studio audience erupted, with many people throwing chairs and screaming their displeasure. There was rioting in the streets of Beirut throughout the night.

A popular genre can also be employed as an instrument in a larger campaign to promote an ideology. In 2004, evangelical Christian groups in the United States mounted a vigorous grassroots campaign to support Pat Gillespie, a candidate in Showtime's mock election reality television series *American Candidate*. The Home School Legal Defense Association sent an email "action alert" under the headline "Home School Dad on the Front Lines," urging its 81,000 supporters to vote for Gillespie, whose socially conservative platform centered on his opposition to abortion. The email added, "If Pat wins, he'll be able to speak on TV for 20 minutes on any subject he chooses."[7]

In the final show, Gillespie beat Malia Lazu, 26, a liberal from Boston with a pierced tongue. After winning, Gillespie used his speech to endorse President Bush in the "real" election.

Genres can also serve as an arena that reflects the attitudes and beliefs of subcultures within a society. To illustrate, American documentary filmmaker Jacqueline Salloum observes that in Israel, a strain of rap music furnishes perspective into the experience of Palestinians living in Israel: "In Israel, there are too many Palestinian hip-hop groups to count. They sing about the racism and living as third-class citizens, police brutality and wanting to be united with all Arabs around the world."[8] According to Salloum, the rap song "Who's the Terrorist" by the group Dam (whose name means blood in Arabic) has become an anthem for Palestinian teenagers.[9]

Popular genres also can serve as a form of political expression in authoritarian countries—often at considerable personal risk to the artists. For instance, in February 2006, one of the bands at a rock concert in Tehran, Iran, sang an original composition with the following lyrics:

> I have a right to be caught by the cops
> Have a right to be called by the judge
> Have a right to be sent to the fronts
> And come back in the back of a truck in a box.
> Have a right to be ignored and neglected
> Have a right to be segued and be raided
> Have a right to be damned a right to be jammed
> Have a right to be sanctioned and banned.[10]

The audience responded enthusiastically to the music. However, both the musicians and attendees risked being jailed for their involvement in the concert. Reporter Michael Slackman notes:

> One concertgoer leaned over and said, casually, "I hope the Basiji don't rush the place." He was referring to the vigilante squads of bearded men who often use violence to enforce strict Islamic social codes. As the music played, the crowd swayed and clapped, shouted out choruses, and bopped the way any audience of young men and women might in the West. The music, though upbeat, had a slightly funereal quality to it, as the singer took the chance to share his thoughts, in public. When the show was over and the lights came up the band seemed exhilarated—and frightened.[11]

Popular genes have emerged as a way to export ideologies to other countries. In July 2005, *Wise Man Takes All,* a Chinese version of *The Apprentice,* premiered in Shanghai. The show is sponsored by Shui On Land, a leading Hong Kong property investor in Shanghai, Dragon TV, and China Business Network (CBN), a media group that publishes, among other things, a Chinese-language business newspaper. According to Vincent Lo Hong-shui, Shui On's chairman, one of the goals of the program was to cultivate the entrepreneurial spirit among young Chinese men and women. "We are trying to sharpen that spirit among the young people in this vibrant city. We believe that we will have a lot to learn from them too."[12] Thus, popular genres serve as a vehicle for introducing an ideology to audiences. In 2004, rap artist Will Youmans—known as The Iron Sheik—performed at the Dearborn Arab International Festival in Dearborn, Michigan. The Iron Sheik used rap as a vehicle to talk about the plight of the Palestinian people. His signature song, "Return aka 194," includes these lyrics:

> Palestine's their home, that's where they belong
> been living in these camps for way too long
> a sad song been displaced since '48
> time to return to where they originate.[13]

Most of the people in the audience were hearing the music (and the ideas contained in the lyrics) for the first time. Hussnia Zahriya, thirty-three, a Palestinian American, commented, "I thought it was awesome. I think we need more people like him to get the message out."[14]

Genres actually serve as an indirect form of American propaganda. Despite international expressions of concerns about American foreign policy, popular genres create admirers of America's popular culture. For instance, since spring 2004 numerous reality shows have begun to appear on Iraqi television. The series *Congratulations!*, produced by Al Sharqiya Iraqi satellite network, helps young, poor couples marry. The Sumeria network has produced its version of *American Idol*: *Iraq Star*. Journalist Edward Wong observes:

> Reality TV could turn out to be the most durable Western import in Iraq. It has taken root with considerably greater ease than American-style democracy. The phenomenon is a testament to both the globe-straddling reach of American popular culture and the ease with which people in other parts of the world—even those who are hostile toward the United States—adapt that culture for their own uses.[15]

Majid al-Samarraie, the writer of *Materials and Labor,* agrees: "This is the only good thing we've acquired from the American occupation."[16]

However, in some countries with traditional cultures, there is some concern that genres that reflect Western culture may undermine their own value systems. For instance, the Indian version of the game show *Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire* (*Kaun Banega Crorepati*), is watched nightly by more than 100 million people—particularly in slums such as Bombay's Geeta Nagar district, where living conditions are so abominable that there are only 24 toilets per 6,000 people. By defining success in terms of material success in this poor country, there is concern that the program breeds discontent among the masses. Reporter Barry Bearak observes:

> While the Indian masses are wild about [*Kaun Banega Crorepati*], some of the intelligentsia have been sniffy. P.C. Joshi, a retired academic, said he refused to watch the program but had an "instinctive revulsion" to it.
>
> In 1985 Mr. Joshi headed a national commission that warned that careful controls must be maintained on television programming or Indian culture would be befouled.[17]

In 2004 Saudi Arabia's top cleric, Grand Mufti Sheik Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al-Sheik, issued an edict against the Arabic version of the reality

television show *Star Academy,* objecting to the show's "mixing between sexes, facilitating debauchery. . . . It is obvious that this program is one of the reasons for bringing plague and disasters on Islam and Muslims."[18] The cleric declared that to broadcast, finance, participate in, watch, or even admire the popular talent contest violates Islamic tenets.

In authoritarian countries like China, even seemingly innocuous genric Western programming can be seen as subversive. In 2005 Nickelodeon was broadcast on Chinese television, including its popular *Kids' Choice Awards* program. One of the activities of the show involves "sliming," in which children dump a green goo over others. Another prank includes children whacking their parents with balloon bats. Although these activities appear harmless, journalist David Barboza points out that this brand of "playfully antiauthoritarian programming . . . undermines the traditional culture of respect for parents and authority reinforced by decades of Communist discipline and the ruthless competitiveness of an educational system that favors rigor over imagination."[19]

Xie Limin, a vice dean at the Shanghai Normal School, observes, "The children would probably love these shows, but the parents may find them hard to accept. Traditional Chinese culture requires children to behave in every moment of their life."[20] In contrast, most Chinese-produced children's programs are designed to maintain control and obedience. Barboza provides the following example:

> "The Big Windmill," a nationally broadcast program on China Central Television, recently featured a typical skit. It involved a couple of people who opened a new hotel and then overcharged travelers for their stay. Two of these travelers turned out to be government investigators, looking into just such crimes. The message of this show, which is intended for children 3 to 14? "Don't lie or cheat customers! And beware of undercover authorities!"[21]

However, there were some adaptations in moving the *Kids' Choice Awards* from the United States to China. For instance, in a popular segment in the American version, the children in the audience voted for their favorite movie star. However, in the Chinese edition, the children voted for their favorite scientist.

Indeed, in 2006, the Chinese government announced plans to impose regulations on *The Mongolian Cow Sour Yogurt Supergirl Contest,* one of China's most popular television programs. *Supergirl,* an *American Idol* knockoff that was carried on Hunan Satellite Television, was watched

by more than 400 million people in 2005. The winner of the contest, a twenty-one-year-old college student named Li Yuchun, became an instant celebrity in China. However, Chinese officials decided that the reality show undermined the state-sanctioned cultural values. Barboza explains:

> Some experts and commentators on the Chinese media called the notice a reaction against the show by conservatives in the government. . . . The contest was a significant shift away from China's usual television fare, which often revolves around soap operas and delicate women in traditional Chinese dresses, singing and dancing. . . . Many who watched the program said that Ms. Li, last year's "Supergirl" winner, dressed and danced like a boy, and that several other contestants gyrated wildly on stage. . . . Media experts here say the slightly rebellious nature of the show, which showed participants in baggy jeans singing with unusual emotion, crying on stage and punching their fists in the air, may have gone too far.[22]

In March 2006, the state administration of radio, film, and television issued a notice to the producers of *Supergirl,* declaring that the contests should not promote "philistinism" and avoid "vulgar" displays of clothes or jewelry. The notice also hinted that the show might not even be allowed to be broadcast in certain regions.

Certain genres lend themselves to particular ideological messages. For instance, the emergence of ideological broadcast news outlets in the United States provides a platform for promoting political agendas. As an example, while the manifest function of Fox News is to inform the public, its latent function is to promote the agenda of the Bush administration. Indeed, a survey found that regular viewers of Fox News were more likely to hold the following misconceptions about political events, as compared to audiences of other news outlets:

- Were weapons of mass destruction found in Iraq?
  - Yes: 33 percent of Fox viewers
  - Yes: 11 percent of PBS/NPR audience
- Were there links between Iraq and Al Qaeda?
  - Yes: 67 percent of Fox viewers
  - Yes: 16 percent of PBS/NPR audience
- Does world opinion favor the U.S. invasion of Iraq?
  - Yes: 35 percent of Fox viewers
  - Yes: 5 percent of NPR/PBS audience[23]

The *horror genre* is well suited to present ideological themes dealing with social class. Filmmaker Guillermo del Toro declares, "Horror is the most interesting genre to portray the class struggle. Nothing else captures the 'otherness' of social outcasts as powerfully."[24] Thus, according to film critic David Edelstein, Gary Sherman's grotesque subway cannibal picture, *Raw Meat* (1972) is a portrait of an underclass kept out of sight by a cruel, authoritarian society.[25]

Reality shows such as *The Apprentice* focus on the ideology of consumer culture. The series conveys the following cumulative messages about the road to success in consumer culture.

All's Fair in Business. In the course of the series, the female contestants are encouraged to use their sexuality as a tool to get ahead. Media critic Alessandra Stanley observes:

> The supposedly unscripted business techniques that the contestants used to get ahead were not exactly edifying. The women, all young and attractive, traded shamelessly on their sex appeal, at one point calling themselves the Planet Hollywood Shooter Girls and coquettishly coaxing male customers to drink themselves senseless.[26]

Bend the Rules When It Is to Your Advantage. In the series, contestants are winnowed down, based on their ambition, drive, and willingness to suspend the rules. In one episode, Kwame, an African American, sat in front of a restaurant and sold autographed merchandise, allowing children to believe he was an NBA star. Stanley notes, "[Donald] Trump chided contestants for their ethical breaches but never punished them. Even in this sobered age of Tyco and Martha Stewart, the subliminal message of 'The Apprentice' is that it is better to break the rules than lose a deal."[27]

Genres and Social Commentary

At times, an ideological dialogue is carried on through popular genres. For instance, music videos have emerged as an arena for social commentary on the war in Iraq. Rap musicians like Eminem were among the first to voice their opposition to the war. In contrast, country musicians like Toby Keith performed songs such as "Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue" that expressed support for the war.

The sudden appearance of social criticism in a popular genre may also signal shifts in public sentiments. For instance, in 2003 Natalie Maines, lead singer of the Dixie Chicks, spoke out against the Iraq War. She was

widely branded as unpatriotic; in fact, Clear Channel Communications, which owns radio stations throughout the United States, refused to play their recordings and sponsored events in which tractors ran over Dixie Chicks CDs. But by the summer of 2005, Green Day's antiwar song, "Wake Me Up When September Ends," was the number one music video requested on MTV.[28] This shift is an indication of the decline in public confidence in the Iraq war policy.[29]

Sometimes, a popular genre can be an effective vehicle for social commentary precisely because it is *not* normally ideological. To illustrate, in January 2006, conservative Fox News commentator Bill O'Reilly appeared on *Late Night with David Letterman*. During the interview, Letterman took an uncharacteristically serious political stance. The talk show host declared, "See, I'm very concerned about people like yourself who don't have anything but endless sympathy for a woman like Cindy Sheehan [the antiwar protester who lost her son in the war]. Honest to Christ!" After O'Reilly replied that Sheehan had called the "terrorists" in the Iraq War "freedom fighters," Letterman responded, "I'm really not smart enough to debate this point by point with you. But I have the feeling that sixty percent of what you say is crap."

Because fans of Letterman know that the host does not normally engage in serious political discussions on his show, this exchange was a powerful political commentary that effectively discredited O'Reilly.

Parody

A parody is a presentation that is designed to ridicule or criticize the original presentation. Much of the humor in parody is based on the audience's familiarity with the formula of the genre being lampooned. For example, Comedy Central's *The Daily Show* is a parody of mainstream news broadcasts. The conventions of *The Daily Show* are identical to mainstream news programs, which convey the message that this is a legitimate news operation; an anchor sits behind a desk, a back projection screen provides visuals, and there is appropriate theme music. *The Colbert Report* is also a parody of mainstream cable news programs.

Ironically, because these satiric news programs are free of "objective" journalistic constraints, they are able to point out many of the absurdities and ironies of the day's events. For instance, in October 2005, *The Colbert Report* focused on the media attention given to the avian flu outbreak.

Figure 6.1   **Stephen Colbert**
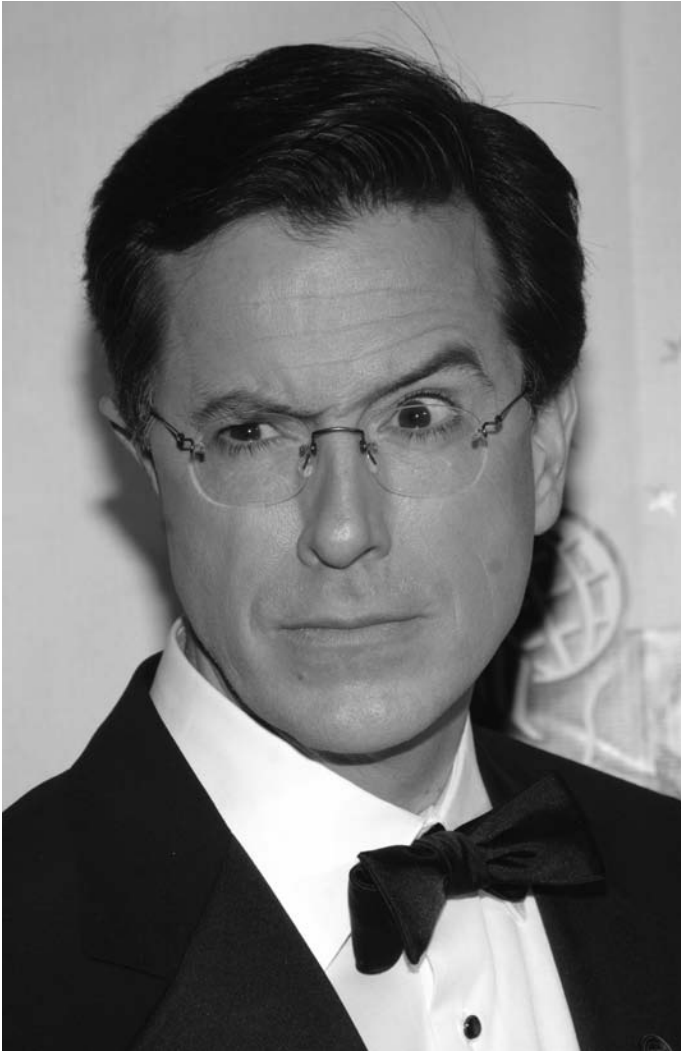
The Colbert Report is a parody of mainstream cable news programs. (Photo by Brad Barket/Getty)

Stephen Colbert presented a series of somber reports from CNN, C-Span, and NBC, followed by the following Fox News headline: "Bird is the word on the street. Why the avian flu could send stocks soaring." This juxtaposition made the point about the striking pro-business slant of Fox News. Colbert commented, "Every global pandemic has a silver lining.

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Remember, the Medici made their money investing in the bubonic plague. A lot of people did. Until the boil burst."

Ironically, this parody of broadcast news has become a credible news source among young people. According to a 2004 Pew Research Center study, 21 percent of people under thirty say that their principal source of news about the presidential campaign came from satirical sources like *The Daily Show*.[30] This reliance on these satiric news programs for information is an indictment of the U.S. news media.

Political satire genre has become so influential in Canada that news parody programs such as *The Royal Canadian Air Farce* often attract a larger audience than actual newscasts. Indeed, this genre has become so influential that during the 2006 Canadian federal election campaign, the political parties made an arrangement with Canada's main television networks that prohibited showing film clips of the candidates' debates on news parody programs. Roger Abbott, a writer and performer on *Air Farce* comments, "It speaks for the parties' great respect for the power of satirical shows that they would demand this."[31]

However, it must be noted that the manifest function of news parodies is not *information* but *entertainment.* Consequently, "anchors" like Jon Stewart or Stephen Colbert do not hesitate to distort the news if it will get a laugh.

In a strange turnabout, mainstream news outlets have begun incorporating news parody segments into their programming. During the 2004 Democratic and Republican political conventions, CNN host Larry King's coverage included segments featuring humorist Mo Rocca, playing the role of a wisecracking on-air correspondent. Rocca said that he considered his satirical bits to be a public service: "Television newscasts are so calcified and rigid, any departure from that is exhilarating. And five minutes of good satire is a lot more useful than an hour on J. Lo's baby shower."[32]

Allegories

An allegory is a story that is set in a distant time and place but parallels contemporary events. In countries with repressive governments that restrict freedom of expression, allegories provide an indirect way to discuss current events and issues. For instance, a popular Iranian television comic soap opera, *Barareh Nights,* is set about seventy years ago in the little village of Barareh but deals with contemporary issues such as corrupt

councilors, rigged elections, and vocal women's rights groups. In fact, one of the plotlines involves the town "enriching" its staple food, peas, in a clear parallel with Iran's disputed uranium enrichment program. Ahmad Eslami, a resident of Tehran, Iran, comments, "This show is just beautiful. The whole Islamic Republic is right here."[33] *Barareh Nights* is watched by 90 percent of people with access to a television, now most of Iran's 69 million people.[34]

Another fan of the show, who would only give the name of Khosro, can clearly explain the contemporary context of one of the subplots: "A little while ago they had the village elections. People were paying bribes and promising cash. Two of the candidates were clearly Rafsanjani [a former two-term president] and Karroubi [a former speaker of parliament]."[35]

But even in countries that allow freedom of speech, allegories enable the audience to see current events and issues in a fresh way. For instance, *V for Vendetta* (2005) is a futuristic film that takes place in Great Britain, which has become a fascist state. The story focuses on the efforts of one man to overthrow the corrupt dictator. According to journalist Michael Janusonisis, although the story takes place in a distant time and place, the film is actually a commentary about the current political climate in the United States.

> It's set in a near-future Britain which, through a government that manipulates the media and constantly issues terror alerts, has become a fascist state ruled by a powerful, uncompromising megalomaniac. But parallels to current events in the United States are obvious. . . .
>
> Yet it's the parody of current events that linger from V for Vendetta as it takes aim at a powerful government that's trying to hang onto its power by any means possible, even using the lap-dog British Television Network to foist its propaganda on a gullible—or so it believes—public. Go outside, the government warns, and you risk catching the avian flu. And if someone blows up the Old Bailey court, the TV spin is that this was an emergency demolition needed to remove a dangerous old building from the London landscape.
>
> Perhaps most controversial is that the film poses the question of whether terrorism is sometimes necessary when it comes time to battle repression or an unpopular ruler and whether it can be condoned in such instances. The repercussions of that question will echo down the corridors of history.[36]

Certain genres are particularly well suited for allegories. For instance, the futuristic setting of the science fiction genre furnishes perspective on

political and social issues and events. To illustrate, Steven Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* (2005) comments on the ongoing American war in Iraq. Frank Rich explains:

> In not terribly coded dialogue, the film makes clear that its Americans know very well how to distinguish a war of choice like that in Iraq from a war of necessity, like that prompted by Al Qaeda's attack on America. Tim Robbins —who else?—pops up to declare that when aliens occupy a country, the "occupations always fail." Even Tom Cruise's doltish teenage screen son is writing a school report on "the French occupation of Algeria."[37]

The horror genre has frequently been a vehicle for allegories, offering a concrete visualization of societal issues and forces. Author Maitland McDonagh observes, "The [horror] genre has the ability to address themes and ideas that the mainstream won't touch."[38] As an example, Bob Clark's film *Deathdream* (1972) is a comment on the damage of the Viet Nam War to the American psyche. Film critic David Edelstein explains:

> A variation on the classic O. Henry tale "The Monkey's Paw," the movie brings its dead young soldier (killed in the prologue) home as an angry, slowly festering zombie who sits in his room and rocks back and forth on a squeaky chair while his once overjoyed parents (John Marley and Lynn Carlin) cower below.[39]

Modes of Analysis

Point of View

The point of view of media programming is generally presented from the source of power and control. Production elements often furnish clues about the dominant point of view of the genre. In films and television programs, the camera is trained predominantly on the person (or persons) who are the primary characters. (For further discussion of production elements, see Chapter 7.)

For instance, the court TV genre is an entire channel devoted to on-going coverage of celebrities, such as Michael Jackson, Robert Blake, and O.J. Simpson. Programs typically consist of summaries of the day's events (accompanied by artist's renderings) and commentaries, from the point of view of the reporters. In addition, some channels devote a portion of their programming to this genre, such as CNBC's coverage

of the impeachment trial of President Bill Clinton. Finally, court stories are often incorporated into regular news programming, often serving as the lead story in the nightly news.

In these programs, the defendants are presumed guilty until (or even despite) being proven innocent. Court TV reporters Nancy Grace and Diane Dimond have been accused of bias against celebrity defendants such as Michael Jackson. For instance, on the day that Jackson was acquitted of charges of child sexual abuse in 2005, Ms. Grace declared, "Lady justice was kicked in the pants."[40]

Diane Dimond, who has covered pop superstar Michael Jackson's legal trials for over a decade, made the following revealing comments after the verdict:

> I defy any of these people who say I'm pro-prosecution to point out one program where I don't give both sides. I've never said he's a pedophile. I've never said he's guilty. I have said that it's inappropriate for a 46-year-old man to sleep with other people's children. He says it's innocent. My response is that society doesn't see it that way.[41]

Thus, within the context of the court TV genre, it is up to the jury to come to the "correct" verdict (as defined by the point of view of the reporters). Moreover, the point of view of these programs is critical of the American criminal justice system. The cumulative message is that, because the system puts the burden of proof on the prosecution, guilty people are allowed to go free.

In programming presented from the point of view of working-class people, these characters are portrayed as fools or villains. For instance, in each episode of *I Want to Be a Hilton* (NBC), contestants such as a plumber, a ranch hand, and a motor vehicle department clerk compete for a $200,000 prize (which the show calls a "trust fund") and a chance to enter society alongside Paris Hilton's mother, Kathy. The contestants are the butt of the humor, as they struggle to understand the subtle cues that enable insiders to negotiate their way in aristocratic society. Alessandra Stanley explains:

> The contestants' assignments are cafe society specific: learning how to select a wine at the "21" Club or eating escargot without gagging. When Jabe, a ranchman from Joshua, Texas, resists the dish, one of the guests at Mrs. Hilton's table says, "But they have snails in Texas." Jabe replies: "Yes, sir. We just don't eat 'em."[42]

Ultimately, the humor reinforces the message that these people remain hopelessly stuck in their lower-class malaise, dependent on the generosity of the aristocracy (in the form of the $200,000 gift). Thus, although the point of view of the series is ostensibly that of working people, the series actually reinforces the perspective of dominant culture.

In addition, a new subgenre of blue-collar TV sitcoms recently has emerged, including *Jesse, The King of Queens, My Name is Earl, Southie,* and *Trinity,* in which the primary characters are members of the working class. But once again, these characters are buffoons whose efforts to survive in mass culture are the source of ridicule.

Worldview

The worldview of a genre can provide considerable insight into its ideology. In some genric programming, the worldview is overtly political. As an example, *Ummah Defense I* is an action/adventure video game that conveys a pro-jihad message. In this game, it is 2114. In that year, the world has "finally united under the Banner of Islam," until there is a revolt by disbelievers. The player's goal is to seek out and destroy the disbelievers.[43]

However, every genre shapes its audience's interpretation of the world by framing the action within a particular worldview. For instance, in the cumulative worldview of quiz and game shows, happiness is equated with material acquisitions. There is always an easy solution to problems: come in first and win the grand prize. This worldview also places a high value on competition and achievement. (For further discussion of worldview, see Chapter 5.)

Function

Identifying the function, or purpose, of a genre is a very useful approach for detecting its ideology. Because the audience is generally focusing only on the manifest function, such as entertainment or information, they may be particularly susceptible to a latent ideology. Increasingly, the latent function behind the production of popular genres is *political persuasion.* To illustrate, reporter Neil MacFarquhar points out that the latent function of the Palestinian game show *The Mission* is to *persuade:*

> Quick. What is the name of the Palestinian village near what is now the Israeli city of Ramla that was destroyed in 1949 and replaced by a town called Yavne?

Too difficult? It's Yibna. Try another.

What structure built of gray sandstone in 1792 became the source of all oppressive decisions the world over?

This one should be easy: the White House.

If you answered both questions correctly, you might be prime fodder to compete on "The Mission," a game show running on Al Manar, the satellite television channel of Hezbollah, the militant Lebanese group.

Contestants from around the Arab world compete each Saturday night for cash and the chance to win a virtual trip to Jerusalem. To heighten the drama, points won by the finalists translate directly into steps toward the holy city that are flashed onto a map of the region.

The show is a novel way for Hezbollah to promote its theme—that all Arab efforts should be concentrated on reconquering land lost to Israel, especially Jerusalem.

"The Mission" follows a standard game show format, with contestants quizzed about history, literature, geography, science and the arts. But at least half the questions revolve around Palestinian or Islamic history, and at least one contestant is usually Palestinian.

"We wanted to put it into a form that would appeal to wider segment of the population," said Ibrahim Musawi, a spokesman for Manar and the director of its English news. "It is not in an ideological or a direct way, but in an entertaining way."

Some questions do focus on the men who carried out suicide operations. The martyr Amar Hamoud was nicknamed 'The Sword of All Martyrs?' —true or false? was one recent question. True. Mr. Abi Nassif, who never fails to address the subject of recapturing Jerusalem in his patter, went on to describe the man's exploits.[44]

Dr. Muhammad Abu Ghararah, one of the contestants of *The Mission,* emphasized the importance of this program in sustaining the Palestinian political movement:

These kinds of programs are very important, repeating the issue of the Palestinians, keeping it vivid in our minds, keeping it alive. It is like commercials. When there are so many commercials about a toothpaste, for example, when you go to the supermarket you spontaneously think about it and buy it. The same with Palestinians. We always have to remember the Palestinian cause, and that is what Manar does.[45]

In many popular genres—including children's programs—the latent function is political persuasion. In 2006, Hamas began producing *The Uncle Hazim Show,* which appears on the Hamas television station, Al

Aksa TV. The program features Uncle Hazim (Hazim Sharawi) romping with a cast of friendly bears, rabbits, and chickens—men dressed in animal costumes. At the same time, the program subtly imparts information about the disputed status of Jerusalem, Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails, and the Palestinian refugees' demand for a right to return to the lands they lost to Israel in the 1948 war. The political polemic is carefully incorporated into the format of the children's show. For instance, the show features egg-and-spoon races and eating apples on a string or tug of war, which Sharawi notes, show children that "the more you cooperate with others, the more you win."

> "Our television show will have a message, but without getting into the tanks, the guns, the killing and the blood," said Mr. Sharawi, sitting in the broadcast studio where he will produce his show. "I will show them our rights through the history, show them, 'This is Nablus, this is Gaza, this is Al Aksa mosque, which is with the Israelis and should be in our hands.'"[46]

(For further discussion of latent persuasive functions, see Chapters 2 and 8.)

The United States government has also used popular genres as a propaganda tool. In January 2004, it was discovered that the Bush administration had violated federal law by producing and distributing television news segments promoting its Medicare program, disguised as broadcast journalism segments. The Bush administration sent video news releases (VNRs) to local news stations throughout the United States. The video stories contained all of the formulaic elements of broadcast news stories, including a voiceover by a person who signed off, "In Washington, I'm Karen Ryan reporting." Investigation revealed that Karen Ryan is not a journalist but, instead, an employee of the public relations firm that the government hired to produce the VNRs. The Government Accountability Office, an investigative arm of Congress, has determined that these videos "constitute covert propaganda" because the government was not identified as the source of the materials and violated the prohibition on using taxpayer money for propaganda.[47] Thus, although the audience was expecting to receive an informative report about the Medicare program, they were instead presented with the Bush administration's "spin" about the program.

The cases cited above involve intent on the part of the media com-

municator. However, popular genres may also contain latent ideological functions that are not part of a grand design on the part of the media communicator. Nevertheless, these latent ideological functions reinforce cultural attitudes. For instance, one cumulative ideological function that underlies many popular genres is *social control*. As an example, one latent message of transplantation reality shows like *Wife Swap* is: be content with your social/economic position. These programs discourage individuals from moving up in social/economic class. TV critic Gail Pennington explains:

> Family swapping is the newest wrinkle in a growing genre of television that asks: What better way to learn something about ourselves than to step outside our comfort zone? . . . For viewers, both "Trading Spouses" and "Wife Swap" provide important reminders that we should appreciate what we have and that money doesn't buy happiness (although it may buy a hot tub), but also that cheap shoes and expensive ones may pinch just the same.[48]

In the Western market-driven media system, it is not uncommon for the original ideological function of a genre to be co-opted, replaced by a consumer ideology. As an example, in the early 1970s, rap music emerged in the Bronx as a grassroots art form of the African American and Puerto Rican communities. Rap music originally expressed a radical ideology. The lyrics were angry, decrying social inequities in America and defying the social order. The graphic language and violence were perceived as dangerous by the white, middle class.

Over time, however, the political function of rap music has been replaced by a consumer ideology. Although the music of artists like Dead Prez and Mos Def continues to convey political messages, they largely remain out of the media mainstream. Instead, rap music is now used in commercials to sell everything from potato chips to air fresheners.

Regardless of its particular political ideology, a latent ideology of Western news programming is always *profit*. For instance, in the fall of 2005, New York state district attorney Jeanine F. Pirro announced her intention to run as the Republican candidate against incumbent Democratic senator Hillary Rodham Clinton. Surprisingly, the *New York Post,* a conservative newspaper owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, was publicly critical of Ms. Pirro, reminding its readers that Ms. Pirro's husband had served prison time for tax fraud and, in addition,

had fathered a child out of wedlock. At the same time, the newspaper, which had relentlessly attacked both Clintons throughout their public lives, praised Senator Clinton for calling attention to the issue of violence in video games. But according to Democratic political consultant James Carville, the reason for this surprising turnaround was not *political* but *economic;* by withholding its criticism of Ms. Clinton, the newspaper was hoping that she would emerge as the 2008 Democratic presidential candidate, where her controversial profile would attract readers: "Fox News and *The Post* need Hillary to run for Senate and president. There is only one politician in America that gets people to watch television for or buy a newspaper, and that's her. No one else comes close."[49]

Formulaic Elements

Premise

Because the fundamental beliefs that define the premise of a genre are never questioned by its heroes and heroines, the audience willingly accepts a premise with ideological overtones. For example, the premise of police shows like *Homicide* and *NYPD Blue* assumes the following:

- We live in a dangerous world.
- Members of lower classes and African Americans are predators who pose a threat to the dominant culture.
- The protagonists know (without a trial) who is innocent and who is guilty.
- What is needed is a strong, undeterred authoritarian presence to remedy these problems.

Thus, in this turbulent world, the reactionary political ideology behind this premise, in which civil liberties are sacrificed in the name of law and order, looks like an appealing option.

Around the time of the 2004 U.S. presidential election, the reality series *American Candidate* premiered on Showtime Cable network. TV critic Gail Pennington describes the premise of the series as follows: "The series asks, what if any little boy or girl really could grow up to be president of the United States? What if you didn't need lots of money or the right connections? What if race and gender didn't matter?"[50]

The winner earned $200,000 and a chance to address the nation. In

this TV version of the 2004 election, the field consisted of a diverse group of candidates. Series creator R.J. Cutler explained, "We aimed to pick a group that represents America that is as diverse as this country. We define diversity in terms of age, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic background, geographical background, ideology and a number of other things."[51]

Some of these candidates were actually well qualified to win an actual presidential race. For instance, Keith Boykin, thirty-eight, was an author, lecturer, gay rights activist, and president of the National Black Justice Coalition. Boykin graduated from Dartmouth College and Harvard Law School and worked as special assistant to the president in the Clinton administration.

However, the latent message of the show was that, regardless of their qualifications, none of these candidates had a realistic chance to win an actual election for president of the United States. Thus far, the office of president of the United States has been the exclusive province of white males, who are either personally wealthy or have access to vast amounts of money to finance the expensive media campaigns. In "reality," candidates require a vast treasure chest of campaign donations—far more than the contestant's winnings—to afford to mount an effective political campaign. And if they did manage to attract campaign donations, this would doubtless influence the policies and programs that they would institute once they attained office. Idealism aside, campaign contributors expect candidates to support their special interests.

The *title* of genric programming can also provide clues about its ideology. For instance, the transplantation reality series *I Want to Be a Hilton* establishes the contestants as outsiders who aspire to climb the social ladder. Although the pronoun "I" in the title refers to the fourteen blue-collar contestants, it also applies to audience members who envy the upper-class lifestyle of the beautiful icon. Significantly, the question of *why* these contestants would want to become members of the upper class goes unanswered. It is just taken for granted that this would be their goal.

The title of the transplantation series *The Simple Life* also provides insight into the schism between social classes. Wealthy heiresses Paris Hilton and Nicole Ritchie leave their plush, upper-class existence and work in a succession of blue-collar jobs, such as farmers, hotel maids, and factory workers in a sausage-making facility. On the surface, "simple" has a positive connotation, suggesting that these blue-collar workers lead a

halcyon existence, spared the complications that plague the upper class. However, it is doubtful that people who are struggling to make ends meet would regard their lives as "simple." The word "simple" is also a condescending slap at the mentality of blue-collar workers, suggesting an intellectual inferiority. The inference is that, somehow, rich people are intrinsically superior and deserve the rewards of wealth.

The humor of *The Simple Life* is based on the premise that the women are delightfully unsuited for these menial jobs. In one episode, they fail to install computer chips properly in a plant. They end up goofing off, covering themselves in bubble wrap, and get in trouble. However, the joke is not that they are incompetent but, rather, that the tasks assigned to them are really not important or meaningful. Ultimately, however, the heiresses have the last laugh; they climb back up the social ladder when they are done, leaving the "simple life" behind.

Structure

The formulaic structure of a genre can furnish clues about its ideology. For instance, the structure of the action/adventure genre is essentially conservative. The conventional plot operates according to the formula of order/chaos/order. Initially, the world exists in a state of harmony. However, almost immediately some problem, such as a troublemaker or natural disaster, disrupts this initial tranquility. Most of the remainder of the plot focuses on the restoration of order, which is achieved at the conclusion of the program. Thus, this world is reactionary; it does not require change but changing *back* to the status quo.

The population of this world (and by extension, the audience) longs for some form of authoritarianism—either a more efficient law enforcement system or a protector who goes outside the system to punish wrongdoers. John Rash, senior vice president and director for broadcast negotiations at Campbell Mithun, said the arrival of a fourth *Law & Order* (NBC) underlined the strength of "cop culture as pop culture," because those series offer a special form of escapism: "control, a clean resolution in an untidy world, from crime to incarceration in 60 minutes."[52]

The structure of the gangster genre conveys mixed ideological messages, as reflected in the rise and fall of the hero. Films such as *The Public Enemy* (1931) and *The Roaring Twenties* (1939) spotlight the spectacular early success of a gangster, played by Jimmy Cagney. Even though this antihero is breaking the law, in many respects he epitomizes

the ideology the American Dream. Through hard work, initiative, and free enterprise he earns riches and, if not social standing, at least some form of notoriety within the culture.

However, at some point in the narrative, the gangster typically crosses a moral line and is punished for his violation of the social order. This stage of the plot sends the message that individuals must obey the law and conform to the system.

Despite their moralistic endings, the initial ascension stage of the narrative is often the most captivating and memorable part of the story. For instance, in Martin Scorsese's classic 1990 gangster film *Goodfellas,* Ray Liotta's performance as "rising" mobster Henry Hill is so mesmerizing that it overshadows the end of the film, which shows his demise. The cumulative message can be characterized as follows: "High rollers" like Ken Lay (CEO of Enron) and Dennis Kozlowski (CEO of Tyco) are celebrated—as long as they do not get caught.

Plot

Plot conflicts often serve as an arena for competing ideologies. Some plot conflicts are overtly political, as in the example of *Ummah Defense I* discussed earlier. In addition, plot conflicts often pit the conflicting ideologies of different groups against each other. The conclusion of programs with plot conflicts resolves these tensions and ambiguities. To illustrate, the primary conflict is between good and evil in the action/adventure genre. However, what constitutes good and evil may vary within this genre. For instance, in a genric program, the good/evil distinction may be defined by country of origin, ideology, race, gender, or class. (For further discussion, see Chapter 3.)

Characters

In popular genres, the stock heroes are generally members of the dominant class. In contrast, members of the working class or lower class appear in subordinate roles, reflecting their societal role. Indeed, lower-class characters are hardly visible, as they serve the heroes and heroines.

In many narratives, the triumph of good over evil is dependent on the characters' compliance with the values and goals of dominant culture. For instance, in the *Spiderman* films, the superhero stands for goodness, kindness, and fair play. In contrast, the villain of *Spiderman,* the Green

Goblin, is a cruel and sadistic villain. At the conclusion of *Spiderman,* the hero prevails, even though his sense of fair play puts him at a disadvantage against his ruthless adversary. In the final battle, the Green Goblin temporarily reverts back to his alter ego, Norman Osborn, and begs Spiderman to help him control his "mental problem." This is actually a ploy by the Green Goblin, and Spiderman narrowly avoids a hurtling spear that impales the Green Goblin fatally in the chest. Thus, in the action/adventure genre, as exemplified by this film, the victory of the hero is, in fact, a victory for the dominant culture that he represents.

Inter-genre Approach

An inter-genre approach can be employed to identify cumulative ideological messages that transcend genre. Tracing ideological messages that appear across genres can reveal the depth and breadth of a particular ideology. Examples of cumulative inter-genre messages include:

The Preeminence of "The System"

A number of genres absolve individuals of responsibility for their behavior. Environment reality shows like *Survivor* and *Big Brother* put people in positions in which they profit at the expense of others; the rules dictate that each week someone is eliminated. Significantly, the person who represents the system (in this case, the jovial MC) is completely removed from any personal accountability for what befalls the "losers." Journalist Virginia Heffernan observes:

> "Don't hate the player, hate the game" has become a refrain of reality shows, an imperative so categorical that it admits no response. Shouted from the window of a reality mansion, or out the window of a reality limousine, it means something like—and paraphrase is murder—"*Don't blame me because I'm better than you; it's the system that's unfair.*"[53]

In like fashion, the *system* reigns supreme in contemporary crime dramas. In the past, television crime dramas featured "lone wolf" detectives solving cases on their own. Indeed, in the Dirty Harry detective films (see chapter 2) Harry Callihan (Clint Eastwood) faced two adversaries: criminals and the bureaucrats who put procedural obstacles in his way.

But unlike the older generation of detective shows, contemporary

protagonists are nearly faceless members of investigative teams who rely on the system to uphold the law. Instead of being detectives who brave danger to nab the crooks, the "heroes" of *CSI* are forensic lab specialists who do their work in the lab. Webster University graduate student Charles Marino points out that the titles of these programs are an indication of this shift in emphasis. "Detective programs in the 1960s and 1970s were named after the individual cops, such as *Toma, Baretta, Kojak,* and, of course, *Dirty Harry*. However, contemporary shows like *CSI* are named after the bureaucracy."[54]

In addition, an inter-genre approach can furnish perspective into different dimensions of an ideology. Individual genres may focus on a particular aspect of a broader ideology. Thus, putting these ideologies together like a puzzle can disclose the broader ideology.

Consumer Ideology

Popular genres provide insight into aspects of consumer ideology. Game shows test the consumer skills of the contestants (and the audience at home). In *The Price Is Right,* America's highest-rated and longest-running game show, the winner is the contestant who can most accurately estimate the retail price of the goods on display. At the end of the program a winner emerges, having attained the "prizes" that come from smart shopping.

Quiz shows celebrate the value of materialism and the transformative nature of wealth. Commenting on the outbreak of quiz shows following the success of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire,* Frank Rich notes:

> The new quiz shows were a phenomenon waiting to happen; they're the giddiest manifestations yet of a culture that offers a pornography of wealth almost everywhere you look. . . . Further gilding the already gilded lily are the relentless commercials on "Millionaire" for E*Trade, which not only invites viewers to play the market but to enter a sweepstakes that will award a million to the entrant who correctly guesses the Dow Jones average at year's end.[55]

Music videos also contribute to the composite definition of the consumer ideology. *MTV Cribs* is a reality show that defines success through material acquisition. Each episode features celebrities providing personal tours of their opulent homes, complete with movie theaters and huge

walk-in closets stuffed with clothes. In one episode, Mariah Carey shows off her penthouse in New York. The motif of the penthouse is gold. At one point, she climbs into the hot tub to show how large it is. In another episode, Rap/Hip-Hop group B2K shows off their "denim room," which is entirely fashioned out of blue jeans that have been worn by celebrities. Programs that revolve around celebrities showing off their possessions as tangible evidence of their success generate feelings of awe and envy on the part of the audience.

Sitcoms and romantic comedies send cumulative messages about the central role of consumer culture in the lives of the characters. Sitcoms like *Friends* act as a buyer's guide—what the target audience should be owning and using. Episodes show the characters fashionably dressed, and the sets are well furnished. The plots show the characters consuming the goods. The commercials that accompany the shows present products that match the style of the programs.

This preoccupation with material culture also helps account for the public's fascination with voyeuristic reality shows. This subgenre gives the audience a glimpse of the lives of the wealthy, such as Paris Hilton and Donald Trump.

Lines of Inquiry

1. Genres possess distinctive ideological orientations that send messages about what life is and what life ought to be. Select a genre and examine its ideological underpinnings. How does this genre shape the content and the audience's expectations and understanding?
2. Conduct an ideological analysis of a genre (or subgenre). Select a sample of programs from a genre and identify the ideology characteristic of the genre.
   a. Who is the source of power and control in the genre?
3. Find a case study in which a genre serves as a platform for ideology.
   a. Provide background
   b. Describe each ideological perspective
   c. How does the genre serve as a platform for the conflict?
4. Some genres seem to accommodate particular ideologies. Select a genre and describe its characteristic ideology. Use specific programs, formulaic elements, etc., to support your contention.
5. Identify a program that can be interpreted as an allegory about current events.

    a. What current event is being "discussed" in the program?
    b. How does the genre lend itself to the allegorical presentation?
    c. Support your interpretation through the "text" (program).

6. *Worldview:* Examine a still photograph of an ad. What is the prevailing ideological worldview in the media presentation?
    a. What culture or cultures populate this world?
       1. What kinds of people populate this world?
       2. What is the ideology of this culture?
    b. What do we know about the people who populate this world?
       1. Are characters presented in a stereotypical manner?
       2. What does this stereotype tell us about the cultural attitudes toward this group?
    c. Does this world present an optimistic or pessimistic view of life?
       1. Are the characters in the presentation happy?
       2. Do the characters have a chance to be happy?
    d. Are people in control of their own destinies?
       1. Is there a supernatural presence in this world?
       2. Are the characters under the influence of other people?
    e. What does it mean to be a success in this world?
       1. How does a person succeed in this world?
       2. What kinds of behavior are rewarded in this world?
       3. What is "the good life?"

7. Examine the introduction of a sample of genric programs to identify ideology.
    a. In what ways does the *premise* furnish perspective into ideology?
    b. In what ways does the *title* serve as an indication of ideology?
       1. The title of the genre
       2. The title of genric programs

8. Examine a selection of programs belonging to a genre, focusing on social class.
    a. Who (which classes) appear on programs (e.g., number of laborers depicted on soap operas or the number of lower-class members that appear as contestants on game shows)?
    b. What roles do they play in the program?
    c. What is the relationship between social class and the following elements:
       1. Race
       2. Religion

  3. Country of origin
  4. Ethnicity
 d. What messages are conveyed with regard to social class? Be specific. Use analytical tools (such as word choice, plot, structure, oppositional analysis, production elements) to support your observations.

 What conclusions can you derive from this analysis?

9. In the chapter, it was stated that the science fiction genre often reflects the uncertainty posed by threats, or perceived threats, to the established system. Conduct an ideological analysis of a science fiction program (comic, video game, film, or television program): Who (or what) represents a threat to this initial order? Explain.
10. Conduct an ideological analysis of a selection of programming belonging to a genre. What belief system is operating in this genre? Use any of the following strategies in your analysis:
  a. Worldview
  b. Function
  c. Formulaic approach
    1. Premise
    2. Structure
    3. Plot
    4. Character
  d. Point of view
  e. Intergenre analysis
  f. Production elements

Genre Analysis: Ideological Approach • by Meredith Wurm

Fame, Fashion, Fortune and the "Fortunates":
Reality Television: Ideological Approach

Introduction

Just when you thought, "Good, that's done with," you flip the channel and what do you see? *Another* ad for *another* reality television show. Reality TV has become the most interesting thing to happen to television since the launch of MTV in the 1980s.[56] It began with *Real World* (MTV), but since then has emerged (and over overflowed) into celebrity lives,

redeeming celebrity lives, homemakers, personal makeovers, mommy switches, wife swaps, marrying a millionaire, being tricked to think you are marrying a millionaire, dating a Hooters girl, dating five girls at once, competing in dangerous stunts for money, competing to work for Donald Trump, becoming the next big pop star, becoming the next top model, or becoming a well-known name in America.

Reality television is a major cultural phenomenon and exploits the desires of average people.[57] Reality TV allows everyday people their chance at fortune, fashion, and fame. Everyday people can become celebrities, and celebrities can be made to look foolish. Reality TV allows the audience to participate and choose whom they want to stay on a show. We can watch the private lives of others without being seen. These shows make the audience laugh, cry, love, and hate. More important, reality television provides insight into the belief system or ideas that define the thinking and behaviors in our culture.

Analysis: The Beliefs

Celebrities: The "Fortunates." Our culture is obsessed with celebrities. We want to know about them, become like them, or be with them.[58] Shows such as *The Newlyweds, The Osbournes, Run's House,* and *Meet the Barkers* are great examples of our culture's fascination at knowing what celebrities do on their "down time."

The Newlyweds featured pop musicians Jessica Simpson and Nick Lacah as they embarked on their journey and life as a married couple. The audience was able to watch as the couple encountered relationship problems, bought their first house, celebrated the holidays, managed their careers, and adjusted to married life. *Run's House* and *The Osbournes* (both MTV) allow viewers to watch the absurd but luxurious lives celebrity families lead.

Although these shows provide a glimpse into the lives of our beloved stars, they also convey messages about fame, success, and status. All of the stars live in lavish houses, drive fancy cars, and have an abundance of designer clothes and a plethora of extra cash. Their fancy dinners, exotic trips, elaborate gifts, and material possessions are vital to the status of their life and in part define who they are. Audiences (whose lives are less than elaborate compared to these celebrities) are conveyed the message that "money can buy happiness" and in this culture, material possessions are portrayed as having an important, meaningful value.

Ironically, it is often the celebrities' children on these show who become so accustomed to the "high life" that when they do not get what they want, they throw fits, yell at their parents, and pout until they get their way.

To illustrate, on *The Osbournes*, Kelly (the seventeen-year-old daughter) took her parents' credit card out at night and lost it. Later, it turned up, but when she wanted to use it again and Ozzy said "no," she threw a fit until he finally agreed—basically as a way to shut her up.

On *Run's House,* when Angela (the seventeen-year-old daughter) was graduating from high school she wanted her father to throw her a party. However, she did not want just any party; she wanted one that tallied up to over $15,000. In this case Run (a former member of rap group Run DMC) did not give into his daughter's pleas, but he still threw her a party that was more in his price range—$8,000. As if an $8,000 party was not enough to show he was proud of her for graduating with honors, he opted to buy her a Mercedes, just to make sure she knew. Here, how much money you spend on someone is in relation to how much you love them.

Also the world depicted by reality celebrity children is one where the children have the authority and parents answer to them. For example, in *The Osbournes,* Jack (sixteen years old at the time) was constantly out drinking and drugging with his friends until the wee hours of the morning. When he would get caught sneaking in, Sharon would usually *try* to enforce some sort of discipline, but this never went far. Jack did not take the threats from his parents seriously and would be at it again the next night.

In one episode, Sharon and Ozzy tried to sit Kelly and Jack down to discuss their behavior problems and lack of respect for parental authority. The kids however yelled and screamed that they were being unfair, and ultimately had the last word. Their behavior never really changed, and Kelly and Jack still did as they pleased. Ironically, months later Jack ended up in rehab (and luckily, has cleaned up since then). The message conveyed here is that parents are not to be taken seriously, and it is the kids who have the power in this world.

Wealth and Status: If You've Got It, Flaunt It. As mentioned elsewhere in this book, when celebrities take on everyday tasks, they are portrayed as being "better off" than to do the things we would have to do. For example, on *Rich Girls* (MTV) Allie Hilfiger (daughter of fashion designer Tommy Hilfiger) realizes one day that she should try

to cook something on her own, instead of relying on their live-in maid. After poor attempts to make a burrito, she cries, curses, and calls daddy to complain that she cannot even cook for herself. In the end though she must not be too distraught over her failed burrito because she instead takes the "high road" and goes where she can get a burrito just how she wants it—a restaurant.

In another episode, Allie makes snide remarks about her friend Jamie attending college and claims she does not need college because "she's already in the fashion business." Yes, when your father does own Tommy Hilfiger you do have an advantage in the fashion industry. Allie's comments suggest the idea that education is not a valuable asset and has no importance in one's future. Though this may be true for Allie, the viewers usually do not have this "upper hand" (as she does). Her view suggests that hard work and education have no value or importance because wealth makes people superior.

Reality shows also reinforce the belief that who we are is not enough, and we must strive to be something bigger and better. For example, consider the name of several reality shows: *America's Next Top Model, American Idol, The Starlet, Nashville Star,* and *Made*. All of these titles reflect becoming something like a god or deity to be worshiped by the public. The values within these reality shows are not about who you are, but what you are. In this case, it is about being at the peak of our society's status mountain.

Appearance: Looks Are Everything. When in comes to reality, looks and appearance are everything. Reality TV is not about depth, but surfaces; not about invisible qualities, but visible attributes.[59] We are obsessed with our appearance and in today's world what we do not like, we can change with help from stylists, plastic surgeons, fashion experts, nutritionists, and trainers.

Shows such as *Extreme Makeover* or *I Want a Famous Face* give us the chance to change our physical features, and the whole world can watch as we do so. Sadly enough, one female believed that if she went "under the knife" and was reconstructed to look like Brooke Burke on *I Want a Famous Face* she would feel better about herself, and be more confident as a person. However, this was not the case. She was disappointed with the results of her surgery and turned to drugs and alcohol to cope. It was not until she received emotional help and guidance and became active in her youth group that she found the happiness and confidence

she longed for. Also, shows such as *What Not to Wear* or *Fashion Expert 911* show us how we should dress, and reinforce the idea that "looks are everything."

The value of appearance has also leaked over into other areas. For example, *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* and *Trading Spaces* transform your place into a palace. MTV's *Pimp My Ride* and the team at West Coast Customs take beat-up automobiles and within twenty-four hours produce a high rollin' decked out transportation device. Every episode of *Pimp My Ride* features a friend (of the person whose vehicle is being reconstructed) commenting on the reasons why this car needs to be fixed. In most cases it is because they are humiliated to be seen in the car.

For example, a girl claimed she was embarrassed to be seen with her friend because of the car's appearance. "It's not cool. People laugh at us when we drive by and it doesn't even seem to bother Maria sometimes. You REALLY need to fix her car up!" After Maria's car was "pimped" and she drove to her friend's house to show it off, her friend jumped up and down screaming how cool it looked. "Oh my God, now I'll go anywhere with you!" In this culture, it is apparent that not only must *you* look good, but anything associated with you must too.

Relationships: "Real" Romance. Reality television also gives the audience an idea on how love, romance, and relationships should operate. Shows like *The Bachelor, The Bachelorette,* and *Joe Millionaire* encourage seeing multiple partners at once and weeding out unsuitable candidates after only one minute of talking with them.

For example, on the first episode of *The Bachelor* (season four), Charlie O'Connell was introduced to the "ladies," and given only one minute alone with each before deciding which six to cut. Not surprising, the first six eliminated were (by society's standards) the "less attractive" of the group. With only a minute to make a decision though, once again, appearance matters.

These shows also promote the idea that women should do whatever it takes to get a man. Due to the one-minute time constraint, the girls felt the pressure rising to make sure Charlie noticed and remembered them. Thus, they started taking matters into their own hands. For example, one woman decided she would get his attention by stripping down into her lacy bra and underwear to show off her bikini model body and sit on his lap during their one-minute session. "He won't forget me now," she claimed. She was right; he didn't forget and admitted to enjoying

their "minute" very much, once again reinforcing the appeal of sex and appearance.

The Bachelor and *The Bachelorette* also make love appear as an easy conquest that can be decided upon within eight weeks. By the finale, each candidate is expected to know whether or not he/she wants to marry the Bachelor (Bachelorette) and to spend their life with that person. This storyline reinforces a fairy-tale idea that each of us has a specific some-one we are meant to be with. Meeting that special someone is a magical experience, and the two of you will live happily ever after. Ironically, many of these "reality romances" have fizzled after the show.

Interestingly enough though, *The Bachelor*'s Charlie O'Connell opted for a different approach to the show's usual format and changed certain aspects to make it more personal. For example, he stayed at his own apart-ment in New York, instead of being put up in a fancy, first-class hotel. Also, when he was down to his two final candidates, Sarah and Jen, he chose to spend two months apart from them, before making his last deci-sion on the final episode. He wanted to see which one he missed, could talk too, and have something with when the cameras were not around.

However, Charlie is the brother of actor Jerry O'Connell and he him-self has had opportunities in Hollywood. He is well-off and financially secure and does not need the fancy hotel to show his success and status, or portray the image of a distinguished man. Charlie was that already, and the show was able to use his upscale apartment and lifestyle to con-vey the message of the "all-American Prince Charming." One again, the virtue of wealth and status is enforced, and influences one's ability to "change the game."

Joe Millionaire presents the idea that it is okay to lie and pretend to be someone completely different than who you really are when it comes to finding love. Evan Marriot, aka Joe Millionaire, posed as a suave, upper-class millionaire heir when in reality he was a middle-class construction worker. The premise of the show was to see if Evan found someone he cared for, and revealed his true identity, would they still feel the same way (basically, without the millions of dollars). Not only does this reinforce the belief that women are gold diggers, but it gives the impression that middle-class men stand no chance of getting a girl in this league.

Power: Sit Down and Shut Up! Last, reality television furnishes perspec-tive into the beliefs of who controls the world and how we should respond to their control. Shows such as *Making the Band, America's Next Top Model,*

and *American Idol* use celebrity judges who decide who will become "the next big thing." Moreover, these shows convey the message that those "higher up" have the right to cut down those who are below them.

On UPN's hit show *America's Next Top Model,* Tyra Banks and her panel decide which young lady is not "couture" enough to make it as a high-fashion model. Each week as Tyra makes her cut, she either constructively criticizes these women on what they could have done better or (as in most cases) tears them to shreds. She openly exposes their every weakness and flaw, humiliating them, and then simply says, "Thank you, you're done here." Also, on *American Idol* Simon Cowell is known and praised for his unfiltered brutal truth, taking personal stabs at contestants he does not deem worthy of the title.

Ironically, when the contestants try to challenge these "upper hands" and question their power, the results are disastrous. On an episode of *America's Next Top Model,* Tyra Banks completely lost it when aspiring model Brandy laughed at the critique she was given. Tyra was irate and yelled at Brandy for laughing and disagreeing with their "professional judgment." She jumped from her seat and got right in Brandy's face, telling *her* how unprofessional and ungrateful *she* was being. Eventually Brandy broke down and cried, apologizing and begging for another chance. In the end, power prevailed over second chances, and Brandy was sent home.

Also, on MTV's *Making the Band,* Sean "Puffy" Combs spends the majority of time belittling the girls and making sure they know everything they do wrong. In return, the girls must respect his authority and opinion. These programs convey the message that power, money, and status allow one to treat people however one chooses, but in return those in charge *must* receive the utmost respect.

Conclusion. Fame, fashion, fortune, and the "fortunates" are the ideals that make up the worldview of reality television. Appearance, status, and well-renowned success reflect its values. Being the biggest, the boldest, and the best reinforces our culture's idea of who we should be. Those who fail to meet these standards are "cut," "fired," or told "don't call us, we'll call you." You are sent home, unable to make it in the unsacred, souless, materialistic world of reality TV.

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Production Elements

Overview

Production elements refer to the *style* and *quality* of a media presentation. Production elements are roughly analogous to grammar in print in that they influence:

- The way in which the audience receives the information
- The emphasis, or interpretation placed on the information by the media communicator
- The reaction of the audience to the information

Production elements can generate *affective responses,* or emotional reactions, in the audience. Although production elements generally escape our conscious attention, media communicators use production elements such as editing, color, lighting, and camera angle for dramatic purposes, so that the audience will experience the emotions of the characters on the screen. For instance, horror films are often characterized by abrupt cuts from one image to another, startling the audience and reinforcing the feelings of terror and disorientation in the audience.

For international audiences, media communicators use production elements to transcend language differences. Genres with strong visual elements translate easily from one country to another. For instance, the action/adventure genre enjoys widespread popularity, in part because the violence in the genre is a powerful form of nonverbal communication. Live musical performances and costume dramas also resonate with a global audience. In addition animated cartoons enjoy international popularity with children throughout the world.

Production elements convey cumulative messages about a genre. To illustrate, in quiz shows like *Jeopardy,* the pulsating lighting and color-

ful sets, along with the game paraphernalia (a giant roulette wheel and big board) combine with other production elements, such as the glamorous host and hostess and peppy music, to create messages about the glamour and excitement of game shows. Similarly, stylistic innovations can convey messages about the distinctiveness of a genric program. For instance, the absence of a laugh track in *Arrested Development* alters the way that viewers are accustomed to respond to the program. Moreover, the series has a documentary feel, due to the use of natural light (as opposed to a fully lit soundstage) and the use of one camera, rather than a multiple-camera format.

Production elements provide subtle commentary on the plot and the characters in genres. For instance, media critic Alessandra Stanley observes that music operates as a code in the wife swapping reality shows: "The shows have the same jaunty, mocking undertone (dueling banjo music when the family is poor and rural; Hitchcockian chords when an unwelcome surprise is imminent)."[1]

Production elements also send signals about the worldview of the genre. Journalist Caryn James points out that the use of music in the crime drama *Robbery Homicide Division* helped to create a dark, morally ambiguous world:

> [One] episode begins with an amazing four-minute sequence that takes place on a clear, sunny day in the parking lot of a shopping mall. A police car pulls in, shots are fired, pedestrians run and one of the officers looks in horror toward what is now the corpse of her partner sitting next to her. All this happens with virtually no words, just the sound of a hip-hop inflected song (DJ Shadow's "Blood on the Motorway"), as the camera becomes an active storyteller leading us through the bloody narrative that sets off Cole's investigation. The executive producers, Mr. Mann and Frank Spotnitz (a producer of "The X-Files"), have created a style that does not dominate substance so much as it makes a dark subject palatable.[2]

In the horror genre, the distinctive use of lighting underscores its focus on: "the dark side" of existence. As Webster University student Eric Burg points out, one of the stock characters in horror films is the "creature of the night":

> The creatures of the night appear after sunset, when the full moon rose into the black sky and man turned into beast. For instance, the Wolfman is a creature who is half man half wolf, who can only attack its prey when

there is a full moon. But during the day, this creature can function normally as a human. Another creature of the night is Count Dracula, who is also plagued with the curse of the night. During the daytime hours, Dracula has to sleep in a coffin in order to avoid his skin from being exposed to light which would result in his death.[3]

Changes in the distinctive appearance of a genre also can be indicative of shifts in the culture. On the heels of 9/11, crime programs such as *Robbery Homicide Division, Without a Trace,* and *Boomtown* began to present a dark worldview, reinforced through the use of color and lighting. Caryn James explains:

> The old "Dragnet" days of bright, orderly crime-solving have given way to a dark vision that is especially pertinent for our times, sending a message that would be terrifying if the new series weren't so entertaining. . . . Beneath that kinetic surface, a deep undercurrent reflects a threatening world where police are dirty, politicians are sleazy, personal lives are messy, and people go missing because of their own disturbing secrets in its vision of an ominous world and imperfect crime fighters. . . . Willfully or not, these crime shows tap into the social current in the guise of entertainment.
>
> Reversing the candy-colored palette [director Michael Mann] brought to "Miami Vice," here he creates a landscape of stark contrasts, as streetlights skew through the night sky or Cole sits in a glass-walled office while city lights glisten beautifully in the darkness below.[4]

The configuration of production elements in a genre creates its own distinctive *look* and *feel.* Genres are often distinguished by the predominant use of one or more of these production elements, both in terms of (1) how the production elements are applied, and (2) how much emphasis is placed on a particular production element.

When reality shows first made their appearance on television, media professionals were highly critical of the "amateur" production quality of the new genre. Alan Raymond, a co-director of an early version of reality programming— the twelve-part *American Family* series broadcast by PBS in 1973—provided this commentary about the new generation of reality shows: "Incredibly shoddy production elements. . . . How cheap this is; how amazing that it's become acceptable that people will watch it."[5]

However, the "look" of reality shows is hardly an accident or the result of incompetent production staffs. The hand-held cameras create a documentary feel that sends the message that these shows are real, spontaneous, and

avant garde. Jay Renfroe, an executive producer of reality shows like *The Surreal Life, Blind Date* and *The Fifth Wheel,* points out that "there are times when you want things that are very aesthetically pleasing, and there are times when you want it raw, and that rawness translates to intimacy."[6]

Indeed, media communicators sometimes borrow from the characteristic production style of one genre in hopes that the meaning will be transferred onto their presentation. For instance, the hand-held camera technique characteristic of reality shows are often used in television commercials. By using this style, the advertisers intend to convey the notion that the commercial message is genuine and honest.

Soap operas also possess their own readily identifiable production style. The distinctive production style of soap operas reinforces their central themes and concerns. Because the world of soap operas emphasizes relationships, camera shots concentrate on the human face rather than on sets. Close-up shots dramatize the characters' intense emotional reactions to events. Consequently, a formulaic shot sequence consists of (1) a revelation of some kind; (2) a close-up of the principal speaker; and (3) reaction shots of the other characters.

In addition, formulaic camera movements in soap operas provide a glimpse into the characters' internal states of consciousness. A characteristic sequence consists of the camera circling the characters as a plot element is revealed, followed by a shot that closes in on the face of a character who is affected by the event. This sequence creates the impression of entering the minds (and thoughts) of the characters, bringing the viewer closer to the hidden emotional secrets soap operas explores.

Another formulaic camera position is the eye-level camera angle, in which the audience looks at the action from the eye level of the other characters. This angle reinforces the illusion that the audience members are participating in the drama.

Parallel scenes establish thematic connections between characters and situations. Thus, the transition from one scene to another often features an identical shot selection (e.g., extreme close-ups), *vectors* (i.e., characters facing the same direction), or similar facial expressions on the characters in the two scenes.

Analysis: Production Elements

Production elements includes editing, color, lighting, shape, movement, angle, and music.

Editing

Editing refers to the selection and arrangement of information. Editing decisions send messages regarding the significance of content. Editing includes the following:

- Inclusion and omission of information
- Arrangement of information
- The sequence in which information is presented
- Temporal and spatial inferences (connections in time and space)

Reality shows rely heavily on editing, replacing formal scripts. First, all of the activities are captured on video; later, the editors construct a storyline by selecting dramatic moments from the raw footage. Thus, what is included and omitted from the narrative shapes the "reality" of the program. Tony DiSanto, an executive producer of *Laguna Beach,* explains, "These are the real kids. The things they're saying are unscripted; it's what goes on in their lives. What we chose to show or not show is where we are editorializing.[7]

These editing decisions can also raise ethical questions about how much "reality" to include in reality shows. During a 2005 episode of MTV's *Real World,* the camera focused on one of the characters, Danny, as he was notified over the phone that his mother had died. Cameras rolled in tight to catch Danny's emotional reaction, as he broke down and cried. "I should have been home," he sobbed.[8] Producer Jonathan Murray defended the decision to include this personal moment in the final production: "Real World has always had a knack for creating buzz somehow, and this season it seems to be Danny's mother's death. It's a story we could have never predicted."[9]

Editors often assemble footage that establish relationships, such as romances and rivalries. In addition, reality shows create heroes and villains by selecting the video footage that displays these qualities. Alessandra Stanley points out that "all reality shows edit selectively for effect; on 'The Apprentice,' the unpleasant Omarosa was turned into a corporate version of Glenn Close in 'Fatal Attraction.'"[10]

Indeed, Rob Baker and Amber Brkich of *Amazing Race,* who were depicted as "reality television's premiere villains" blamed the producers for editing them into evil, one-dimensional characters.[11]

In addition, information is sometimes taken out of context to add to

the drama of the series. As an example, in 2005, Jerry Gildehaus and his family appeared in *Town Haul* (The Learning Channel), a makeover reality show, in which several homes and businesses in a community are refurbished, and then it is shown how these changes affect the lives of the residents. One segment was set in the town of Washington, Missouri, where Gildehaus owns and operates the Corwin Café. In the episode, the editors inserted a voiceover from Gildehaus's wife, Oma, saying that "Washington's downtown wasn't what it used to be." When combined with the visuals of the rundown areas of the city, this remark sounded like a criticism of the community. As a result, after the episode aired, Gildehaus's business suffered; customers were offended by what they considered to be an insult to the town. However, Gildehaus contends that the producers took Oma's remarks out of context: "They filmed everything so many times. They did stuff out of sequence. I've just lost my faith about reality television being real."[12]

Color

Color is a visual element that has a powerful effect on audiences. In general, the affective nature of colors is as follows:

- Warm colors, like red, orange, and yellow, tend to make us feel happy, secure, positive, and intensely involved.
- Cool colors, like blue or violet, make us feel calm.
- Dead colors, like gray or black, make us feel sad, alone, or uncomfortable.

Color contrast may also evoke particular moods that convey messages. Warm colors and pleasing color contrasts generate a positive response in the audience. However, two contrasting colors (i.e., red and purple) are visually disturbing, producing a tension that is sensed by the audience.

However, the precise meaning associated with a particular color can depend on several factors. Primary colors contain degrees of saturation, or shades, which can evoke a range of emotions. Thus, while blue is generally thought of as a cool color, a light blue feels warm and enveloping. Further, the *cultural context* of a color can have an impact on its meaning. As an example, in the Indian Bollywood film *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001), director Karan Johar uses color as a code to convey meaning. The film is the story of two young people, Rahul Raichand and

Anjali Sharma, who are members of different castes and, therefore, are forbidden to marry. The use of color is a way to portray the different castes. For instance, in the film, the musical number "Shava Shava" is performed to simultaneously celebrate the birthday of Rahul (at the plush Raichand estate) and the birthday of Anjali's father (at a public square). In her analysis of the film, Webster University student Andrea Fisher explains:

> Color is a way that "Shava Shava" dramatizes the differences between Raul and Anjali's worlds. The Raichand estate's ballroom is white with columns and sparkling silver accents. . . . The women at the Raichand's party are all wearing pastel colors such as mint green, sky blue, and pink. Their outfits are more fashionable and trendy versions of Indian party clothes and most of them have sequins and rhinestones that are very noticeable during the song. The three Raichand men are wearing black suits, which display their positions of power and status. The other men at the party are wearing black or white, and many of them are wearing Western suits as well. . . . Anjali and her guests are wearing brightly colored, traditional Indian outfits in colors like turquoise and bright purple.
>
> The most effective use of color is during a part of the song where Rahul is imagining that Anjali is dancing at his party. He is wearing his Western suit, while she dances against the white background in a bright red traditional outfit. Incidentally, red is the color that brides wear on their wedding day in India.[13]

Lighting

Lighting can affect the mood of a presentation:

- A brightly lit photograph evokes feelings of security and happiness.
- A dark picture filled with shadows creates a mysterious atmosphere that arouses fear and apprehension.
- Dim lighting can also trigger a sense of powerlessness and loss of control.

Those aspects of a page or screen that are "in the light" are considered to be of prime importance. The quality of light—hard or soft—comments on the objects depicted in the picture; lighting can either flatter characters or produce a glare that accentuates their flaws.

In film noir, or "black film," lighting is the defining production element. The genre of film noir explores the darker side of human nature. Despite its name, film noir actually has its roots in literary naturalism,

in novels like Theodore Dreiser's *American Tragedy.* The film noir genre (so named because it was fully realized as a genre in films) tells the story of common "everyman" figures who are moved by circumstances to commit crimes. This genre presents a subjective world that explores the boundaries of good/evil, hero/villain, choice/fate, and the law/justice. Thus, the underlying question posed to the audience is: Could this happen to you?

In films like *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) and *Double Indemnity* (1944), the use of lighting truly captured the film noir worldview. In this world of moral relativism, it is difficult to differentiate hero from villain. For instance, in the film noir classic *The Maltese Falcon,* it is unclear through much of the movie whether detective Sam Spade was involved in the murder of his partner. Indeed, Spade plays on this ambiguity. In the final scene, as Spade turns in Brigid O'Shaugnessy, he remarks, "Don't be too sure I'm as crooked as I'm supposed to be. That sort of reputation might be good business, bringing high priced jobs and making it easier to deal with the enemy."

Film noir is also characterized by the metaphorical use of lighting. The genre is defined by its *lack* of illumination; it is sometimes difficult for the audience to make visual sense of what appears on screen. In the same vein, it is difficult for the characters (and the audience) to navigate their way through the moral ambiguities in the plot. Who are the heroes and villains? The heroes appear to be corrupt, and likeable characters are capable of heinous acts.

Lighting techniques also alter the psychological space in the films. Thematically, the narratives focus on people who are imprisoned by their own limits. The dim lighting reinforces the sense of isolation and alienation experienced by the characters. Their perception and judgments are shortsighted, governed by their impulses and desires. Characters are seemingly trapped by this lack of light. There is seemingly no escape from this undercurrent of despair that pervades the worldview of film noir.

Significantly, the use of lighting creates shadows that hide the characters' motives and intentions from the audience. In *The Maltese Falcon,* two cops pay a call on detective Sam Spade after the death of Spade's partner. As the lieutenant asks a series of questions about Spade's whereabouts, a shadow from the brim of his hat covers his eyes. At a certain point, he shifts his head, and the shadow of his intentions disappears, as he accuses Spade of murder.

At the same time, in film noir, light is often equated with understanding, enlightenment, and goodness. In *The Big Sleep* (1946), detective

Figure 7.1 **Use of Lighting in Film Noir**

This shot of Sam Spade (Humphrey Bogart) from *The Maltese Falcon* is an example of how the genre of film noir makes use of lighting for dramatic purposes. (Photo by Warner Bros./Getty)

Philip Marlowe sits in a dark room, pondering the confused maze of events he is being asked to clarify. Suddenly he sits up, the pieces of the puzzle finally coming together. At that moment a light from outside the window is illuminated, providing a visualization for his moment of recognition.

Shape

Shape refers to a geometric form such as a circle, square, triangle. The shape of objects convey messages.

- The circle is associated with endlessness, wholeness, and protection.
- A square is precise, consisting of horizontal and vertical directions.
- A triangle consists of radical angles. It is associated with motion, conflict, tension, and power.

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Webster University student Randy Roland examined the evolution of production values in the Batman superhero films and found that the shape of the Batman symbol in *Batman* (1989), directed by Tim Burton, and *Batman Begins* (2005), directed by Christopher Nolan, reflected different visions on the part of the directors:

> The bat symbol in Burton's film is rounded and curvy, whereas in Nolan's film, the symbol is sharp and angular. . . . Burton's curvy symbol suggests that the image of Batman being presented in this film is not one of fear but of protection, which is associated with circles.
>
> But in the 2005 Batman movie, the major theme is fear—perhaps influenced by Americans being in a constant state of fear of terrorists. In the movie, the major mob boss, Carmide Falcone, rules the city based on fear. In Bruce Wayne's case, fear drives him to do good. The Bat symbol is jagged and straight-edged and has elements of a square and a triangle. Triangles are associated with power, conflict, and motion. Squares are associated with fairness and solidarity. This symbol suggests that in this version, Batman embodies fairness and solidarity. He believes in justice and fights with power and determination.[14]

Movement

Because movement makes the world on screen appear so lifelike, people tend to assume that the events depicted are real and believe the messages that are conveyed in the programming.

The direction of movement conveys distinct messages:

- Movement directed toward the audience can either be friendly (e.g., an invitation or sign of intimacy), aggressive, or menacing.
- Movement directed away from the audience can signal either abandonment, retreat, avoidance, or resolution.
- Movement directed upward often is a positive sign (something going to heaven or, perhaps, outer space).
- Movement directed downward often is a negative sign (e.g., crashes or fights), or signals defeat.

Movement is a significant production element in several genres. The comedies of the era of silent films featured stars like Charlie Chaplin, Harold Lloyd, and the comedy team of Laurel and Hardy. Chaplin's ability to communicate nonverbally extended not just to humor but pathos as well; the character of the Little Tramp drew sympathetic responses from the audience.

Thanks in large measure to computer special effects, science fiction also relies heavily on the production element of movement. For instance, in *The Matrix* (1999), Neo's spiritual evolution is demonstrated through his ability to defy the laws of gravity that limit human beings. Neo discovers that he is able to dodge bullets and leap across vast expanses of space.

Movement is also a central production element in musicals. In the Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers's film *Top Hat,* dance plays a role in the narrative, moving the plot from one stage to the next. As the couple move together, they discover that they are in love.

Some forms of movements appear in a genre with such frequency that they acquire new meanings, independent of any individual presentation. An example is the "perp walk" in TV news reports, in which the television camera tracks a suspect walking into jail, surrounded by police officers. Journalist Ray Suarez notes:

> More than merely a visual cliché, the perp walk has helped to collapse the distinctions between suspect and criminal. My voice in countless narrations said all the right words—"accused" and "alleged" and "according to police"—but the pictures said "guilty," "guilty" and "guilty." The visuals became part of our nightly melodrama, our dispatches from the war zone, flashed to an increasingly suburban audience.[15]
>
> These staged events consistently involve particular groups, reinforcing cultural stereotypes. Suarez continues: "In my experience, the 'perps' trotted out for the press are mostly black or Latino, and usually poor—reinforcing the image that television has painted of crime. . . . White middle-class or wealthy suspects often have lawyers to stand between them and the humiliation of the walk."[16]

Angle

Angle refers to the level at which the camera is shooting in relation to the subject. The choice of angle can affect the audience's attitude toward the subject.

- A person filmed from a high angle looks small, weak, frightened, or vulnerable.
- A person filmed from a low angle appears larger, more important, and powerful.

Angle can also serve as an indication of the point of view of the presentation. For instance, *Rugrats* (Nickelodeon), a cartoon about a

group of infants, is drawn at the eye-level of the children, rather than looking "down" on them from an adult level. This angle sends a respectful message, that the program takes the Rugrats' interests and concerns seriously.

Music

Music can have a subtle, yet powerful influence on individuals, enhancing our moods or distracting us from our immediate concerns. Music can also serve as a narrative device, in several respects:

- *Eliciting an affective response:* Music can arousing feelings of excitement, tension, drama, or romance in the audience that can reinforce media messages.
- *Accentuating the visuals:* A film score works in conjunction with the visuals, to "punctuate" or emphasize the major points of the presentation.
- *Signaling a narrative shift:* Music can signal a transition between scenes.
- *Providing narrative continuity:* A tune, rhythm, or chord can provide thematic continuity or foreshadow an upcoming event.

Music is typically employed as a narrative device in soap operas. For instance, an emotional scene is often punctuated by a single plaintive organ note that underscores the drama of the moment and alerts the audience that something significant has occurred. In addition, musical transitions move the story from scene to scene.

Lines of Inquiry

1. Every genre has a distinctive "look." Select a sample of programs belonging to a genre and identify the production elements that make up the style of the genre.
2. Select a cross section of programs belonging to a genre and discuss the use of production elements.
   a. How do production elements contribute to the *worldview* of the genre?
   b. What do the production elements disclose about the premise of the genre?

3. Examine programs belonging to a cross section of genres. Compare/contrast how a *particular production element* is used in these genres (e.g., lighting in film noir and sitcoms). What messages are conveyed by the use of this production element?
4. Select a genre, focusing on how production elements establish the dominant point of view.
   a. What is the dominant point of view?
   b. How do the production elements reinforce this point of view?
   c. What does this point of view reveal about ideology (the dominant belief system) of the program?

Genre Analysis: Production Elements

The following two sections use production elements as a theoretical framework for the analysis of reality television.

Production Elements in Reality TV • by Kara Gibson

Introduction

Considered both annoying and addictive, reality programming is fast becoming a familiar staple of prime-time television. From *The Real World* to *Survivor* to *My Big Fat Obnoxious Fiancé* and *The Swan,* producers capture the interest of the American public and keep them coming back for more. The recent surge of reality shows is reason enough to question the reasons for their popularity.

Visual media, in general, rely on a voyeuristic public. People like to watch and the television program, film, magazine, or photograph makes money. However, anyone can lament being forced to watch someone's real-life home movies of a vacation to Florida or a birthday party. Though, is that not the main draw of reality TV, that it is real life? What makes a reality TV show more interesting? What draws viewers in and keeps them watching week after week?

With technological advances in digital video, editing, and audio equipment, capturing the human experience is easier and faster than ever before.[17] The hypothesis of this pilot study is that the production techniques common to fictional programming are used to package "reality" footage and that this is what attracts viewers.

To investigate this hypothesis, a random sample of four reality pro-

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grams (*The Apprentice, Survivor, Big Brother*, and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*) was chosen based on popularity. Three of the programs (*The Apprentice, Survivor,* and *Big Brother*) had competition-based themes, and the fourth (*Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*) was a makeover program. Contract-renewal (i.e., program renewed for more than one season) and press coverage of the public appeal of the programs are the criteria for popularity. The programs were monitored for the use and frequency of production techniques, including video and editing techniques, music, audio manipulation, and single-camera confessionals. A further study of these techniques would reveal their effects on television viewers and determine if a correlation between production techniques and popularity exists.

Literature Review

Though reality television is not quite a new phenomenon, with its official introduction in 1973 with the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) documentary television series *An American Family,* the emergence of digital technology has increased the frequency with which these programs emerge on prime-time television.

The new format for reality television combines documentary with game show and soap opera, inspiring such names as "docu-soap" and "non-fiction drama." The popularity of reality TV draws on the current tendency of news reports to be presented as entertainment, like that of the O.J. Simpson police chase in 1994 or the Clinton intern scandal in 1998. With technological advances and the Internet, the global population has unprecedented access to information. According to June Deery, reality TV, as a genre, offers a special access to reality, "making it possible for the audience to view the public and private activities of real people."[18]

Many viewers find it easy to identify with the cast members of these programs because they are not professional actors. However, according to Mary Beth Haralovich and Michael W. Trosset, although the situations in which the cast members may find themselves are prearranged by producers, the relationships that form and the actions of the cast are by and large unscripted.[19] One of the draws of reality programming is the manipulation of the beloved cast as entertainment, such as the predicaments of cast members on *Survivor* or *Fear Factor,* where contestants are required to perform incredible stunts or eat bugs and animal parts. Couples are encouraged to cheat on one another with other singles on

dating shows like *Temptation Island.* The public is invited to watch as tears are shed, emotions escalate, and nausea abounds. The appeal of the real becomes the appeal of manipulation.

Eric Towler, postproduction supervisor on Discovery Health channel's *The Residents,* notes that he receives hundreds of hours of footage that has to be edited into thirteen one-hour episodes: "The story department had to figure out how to piece things together to make the story work. Obviously, not everything you see is a linear day."[20] However, Ghen Maynard, alternative programming director of the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), says that "we don't piece together unrelated clips to add drama." According to Towler, editors keep collections of footage for each character, which they can use out of sequence to highlight aspects of the characters' personal "stories." CBS continually uses this technique on episodes of *Big Brother 5* to highlight the personality characteristics of the houseguests.

Digital technology makes it easier to capture "real life" and also provides many ways to manipulate these images. Editors often use color correction techniques to alter the appearance of footage and also apply imaging effects to scenes to denote "memory sequences." Editor Rick Frazier, who works on *Totally Outrageous Behavior,* which falls into the *America's Funniest Home Videos* genre of reality TV, says that "reality has to be tweaked and played with to make it work. [The editors] will do slow-downs, speed-ups, push-ins and play with the music to make the clips more interesting. If something plays out straight, it's boring." Producers of *Big Brother* offer a twenty-four-hour live video feed that can be accessed on the Internet that shows the unedited, live footage of the contestants, allowing viewers to see how editors "frame content" and "manipulate the portrayal of houseguests" on the polished prime-time episodes. Thus, showing unedited footage educates the "naïve" viewer who believes that everything he or she sees is true, when in actuality, any program is "influenced by the values of producers, directors, network executives" and editors.

With the addition of personal microphones that can be worn on the clothing, audio editors can control who and what the audience hears. This makes it possible to edit out profanity or add a "bleep" sound effect to cover profanity. Audio mixer John Pooley says of profanity editing, "Some bleep it. Others don't want to be distracted by a bleep so I drop it and fill it with ambiance. Others will bleep some of the profanity if it accentuates the story or drives the anger or comedy of the scene."

A popular shot used on reality TV shows is the "soliloquy" camera confessionals, in which a cast member is filmed alone talking about events and people on the show. In the first season of *Big Brother,* a shot of a cast member in "the diary room" included a view of the lens and the voice of the producer in the background, highlighting the "production" of the show. *The Real World,* a production of Music Television (MTV), also uses confessional shots but does not expose the production elements, creating a direct connection between cast member and viewer. *Big Brother* has since adopted the invisible crew method used by *The Real World.*

Eliminating the intermediary between cast and audience increases the voyeuristic appeal of reality television. Mark Andrejevic suggests that this is a "form of false control," the act of watching without being seen.[21] As discussed above, the viewer serves as a spectator only, but obviously has no real control over the images he/she sees. Deery likens the voyeuristic appeal of reality television to that of sexual voyeurism, in that the viewer is promised the "thrill of seeing something intimate and taboo and doing so remotely and without accountability."[22]

Figure 7.2 **Soliloquies**
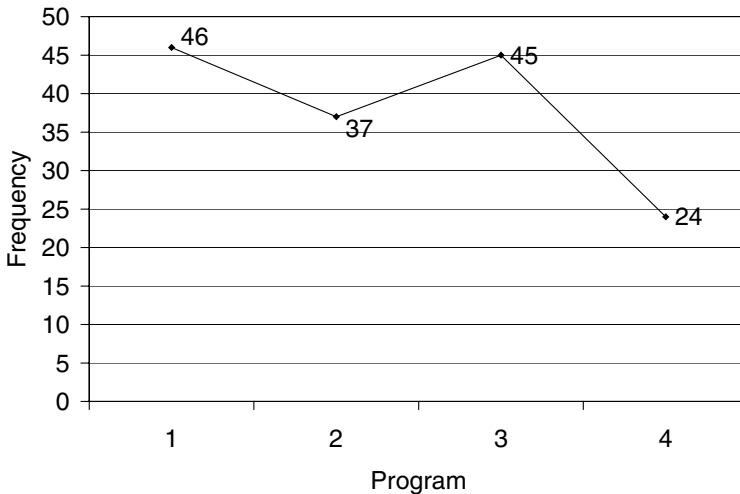
Competition-based shows had a higher frequency of single-camera confessions than the makeover program.

Figure 7.3 **Audio Manipulation**
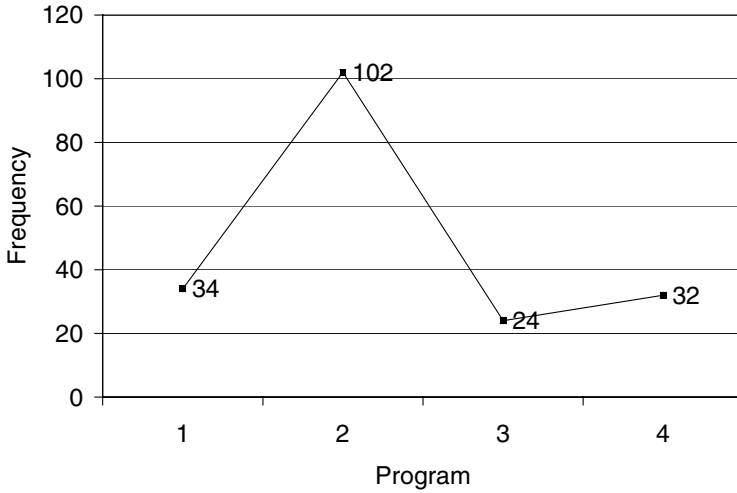
Program 2 had the highest incidence of audio manipulation, including muting and overlapping audio.

Figure 7.4 **Background Music**
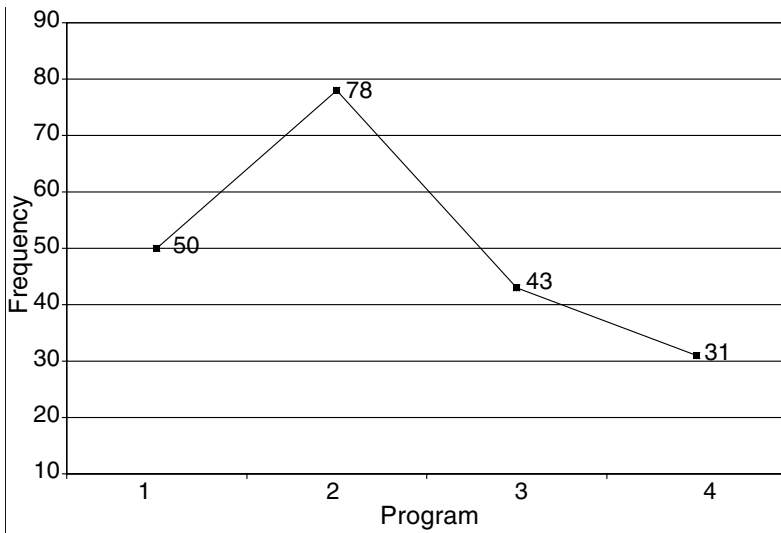
Program 2 had the highest incidence of background music.

Figure 7.5 **Video Effects**
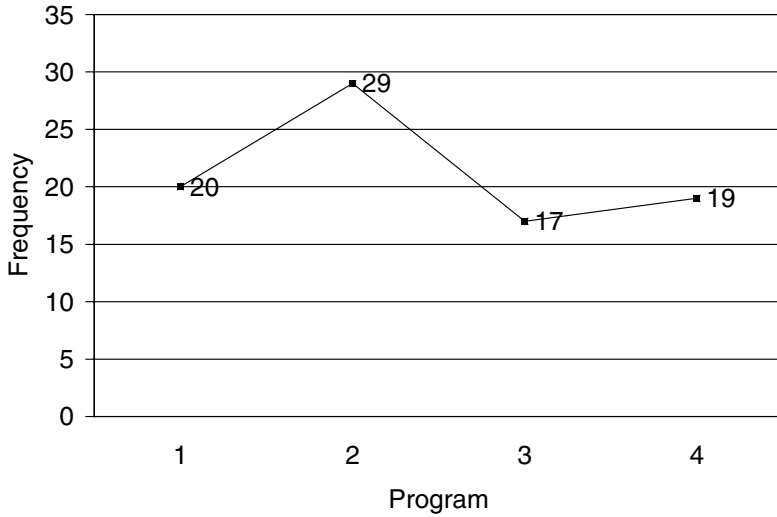
Program 2 had the most video effects, Program 3 had the fewest, and Programs 1 and 4 were the most similar in frequency.

Figure 7.6 **Editing Effects**
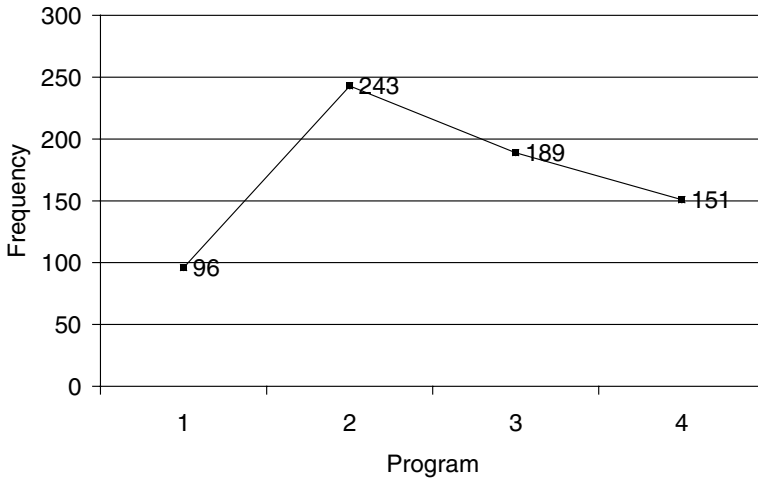
Program 1 had the fewest editing effects, including reaction shots and inter-cutting of images.

Data Analysis

Soliloquies. Shows that featured more than ten cast members or characters tended to have more single-camera confessionals. These shows also happened to be the competition-based shows. The soliloquies on these shows tended to appear in the middle of sequences, where the soliloquies on Program 4 tended to introduce segments.

Audio. The most common audio effect among all the programs was the muting and overlapping of audio. Program 2 (*Survivor*) tended to show many scenes with action muted but with an audio voiceover, while the other programs tended to limit muting to ends of sequences where it was used as a transition technique.

Music. Background music was used in all of the programs. Program 2 had music in the background for most of the on-screen action, while the other programs used music only during certain sequences and, again, for transitions.

Video. Program 4 (*Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*) used graphics frequently throughout the program. All programs used some form of animation and colorization in the opening credits/introduction of the program. Programs 2 and 3 (*Big Brother*) used infrared at least once. Programs 1 (*The Apprentice*), 2 and 3 used motion control, the slowing down or speeding up of images, at some point during the program.

Editing. Some editing was used in all of the programs. Program 2 had the most reaction shots of any of the programs. In all programs, the more that was happening in the episode, that is, the more cast members, competitions, and storylines, the more editing was used.

Conclusion

The techniques found in the study were often used in combination with other techniques. In *The Apprentice* (Program 1), a sequence involving cast members is shown with inter-cutting reaction shots of specific people. The original sound for this scene is muted and a voiceover of a soliloquy is the primary audio track. The video of the soliloquy, with the cast member's name and occupation as text at the bottom of the screen, is then inter-cut with the original sequence of close-ups and groups

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shots. Music is used as a secondary audio track and ties all of the shots together. In one two-minute sequence all of the production techniques are used and the audience receives a great deal of visual and auditory information about what is happening.

These fast-paced informational exchanges appeared in all of the programs. The use of this format in the four programs in the sample may be attributed to the fast-paced appearance of today's media in general. As discussed in the literature review, new technological advances, like the Internet, have increased the pace at which people receive information and perhaps this faster-paced television genre is performing so well due to new viewer expectations.

Though the frequency of techniques differed between shows, all of the programs seemed to follow a similar formula, a similar combination of production methods, to elicit a desired emotional response. The programs in the sample were all manipulated in some way (e.g., characters, images, or the audience itself), which, as discussed in the literature review, can be very appealing to an audience. One may assume that the popularity of these programs is based, to an extent, on this manipulation. For example, the study found that most obvious techniques used to manipulate a viewer's emotions were audio and music. In *Survivor* (Program 2), during the two important competitions between the teams that determined which team would have to vote off a member and which team would win blankets and matches, the editing was extremely fast and the audio clips were very specific. An audio clip of a team captain yelling was inserted over a shot of team members falling down, which magnifies the struggle of the players. The music was very fast-paced and "tribal," coinciding with the "outback jungle" theme of the show. The combined use of layered editing, specific audio, and the fast-paced music creates a heightened sense of drama and makes the viewer feel as anxious and rushed as those participating in the game.

Though my research proved the existence of production techniques in reality programming, the effects of these techniques on the viewing audience and the possible correlation between these two aspects require further study. Should a larger study be performed, a precise count should be made of the production techniques present in at least twenty hit reality programs. A random selection of audience members would be asked to comment on the most attractive sequences and programs and would be asked if they were enticed to watch the next episode of the program. Another interesting aspect to research would be a presentation of a highly

stylized program and a less stylized program to an audience, and a measure of the popularity of the two programs to determine if a correlation between production techniques and general popularity exists.

The difference between a home movie and a reality television show is production, or more specifically postproduction. Simply adding a flashy introduction, editing out boring scenes, and piecing together more interesting sequences transforms raw footage into a story with context that is visually interesting and entertaining. All media involves some production. However, the high incidence of audio and video techniques in these programs, which have gained widespread popularity under the guise of "reality" programming, is astonishing. The one pattern that exists throughout this study is that production techniques do exist and are used frequently to increase the watch-ability, and in turn the popularity, of reality television. Production techniques may not be the sole reason for the public's attraction to reality TV, but this study suggests that, without them, these shows would not be a part of the reality boom of the new millennium.

Kara Gibson graduated from Webster University in 2004.

Production Values and the Reality TV Genre • by Beverly Hacker

Overview

Reality shows, more than most other genres, are a product of their production elements. Without scripts or actors, production elements must be used to carry the narrative. The production values in reality shows are not subtle. Instead, they are often extreme, in an effort to heighten the reality on the screen. Reality shows use a construction of three repeating sections: voyeur, narration/video diary, and establishing transitions, each of which has its own defined and distinguishing production values. For purposes of this paper, three reality shows were analyzed: *The Apprentice* (NBC)*, Colonial House* (PBS), and *Real World* (MTV). Five elements were examined: lighting, color, music, framing, and editing. Each element will be examined in relation to the three sections.

Reality shows share many constructions with documentaries. In both, a large amount of footage is shot and it is up to the editor and director to weave the sounds and images into a program that incorporates a narrative

thread the audience can follow. In order to accomplish this, reality shows use a format that is common to documentaries. They repeatedly switch among three "points of view": *voyeur*—the hidden camera point of view that seems to observe every action while remaining unobtrusive; *narration/diary*—generally a first-person narrative with the subject speaking directly to the audience, though occasionally done as a third-person voiceover; *establishing transitions*—short transitional segments that indicate a change of location, time of day, mood, character, or subject. Each of these points of view uses a set of production elements that helps define its purpose and also distinguishes it from the other points of view.

Lighting

Voyeur. The lighting in the voyeur sections of reality shows is a primary element in setting mood. Scenes are dark and shadowy when the mood should be ominous, as when the subjects are not succeeding at their tasks, or when there is an overpowering force or person affecting the action. Scenes are bright when all is well and the action is moving along nicely. The boardroom of *The Apprentice* is dark when Trump is doing his "You're Fired" scene, but the same room is much brighter when the triumphant players are given their next task. When the family in *Colonial House* talks about defying the religious mandates of the colony, or battles the rain and mud, the house is dark. But when the same family is celebrating a birthday, the house is bright.

The lighting in the voyeur section tends to be direct and somewhat harsh, with very pronounced shadows. One of the defining looks of the voyeur section is that it is shot to make it appear to use only ambient lighting, but a closer look reveals that the ambient light is nearly always being supplemented with additional sources of light. This means that the lighting designer is purposely trying to re-create the look of ambient light by heightening the effects with direction and shadows. It also seems that the female subjects are often lit better than the men. This is particularly obvious in a boardroom scene of *The Apprentice* in which Donald Trump, Bill Rancic, and the two subjects being fired are all wearing black and lit very darkly (except for Trump's hair, white shirt, and red tie), but Carolyn was lit very well and very softly.

Narration/Video Diary. This section is meant to be an informal chat with the subject who tells the audience what is going on behind the scenes

in his or her own words. It appears to be the most informal setting, but is actually the most "produced," using standard three-point lighting, nearly eliminating shadows and putting the subject in the best possible light. An exception in the three shows examined here is that in most reality shows, the narration/diary section is actually combined into one section with a single style. In *Colonial House* there are actually two very different styles. The narration sections follow the same general production rules as other shows, but the video diary sections look much more like a documentary when a subject is given a camera on a tripod to talk to without the help of a lighting designer, camera operator, or sound designer. These segments are lit with ambient light and have very harsh shadows. They are also framed poorly and contain a good deal of ambient background sound. The overall feel of these segments is that the subject is really talking directly to the audience in the absence of any production help. In *Colonial House* this is evident in the scene with Michelle Rossi-Voorhees that starts with a narration and ends with a video diary.

Establishing Transitions. Unlike other types of programs, reality shows have to "go where the action is." While some reality shows are formatted so that the action takes place in a single location or in a few controlled locations, most use multiple public locations. Additionally, many shows have to follow multiple subjects or competing teams of subjects. For that reason it is important to have a standard transitional sequence that notifies the audience of the change in the action, establishes where the action is taking place, and connects it to the program as a whole. Many reality shows have borrowed the establishing transition from another genre, most notably crime/detective shows. The establishing transitions use a series of quick scenes of people, places, props, and signage that help the audience understand where the action is taking place and who is involved. In terms of lighting, many of these establishing transitions are done using exterior shots, quite often at night. They are nearly always very long or extreme long shots that use ambient light.

Color

Voyeur. The colors in the voyeur section of the reality shows are used to heighten the reality and emphasize the mood. Colors tend to be over-saturated, like the lush greenery and sweeping landscapes under the bluest of skies in *Colonial House* to the bright pinks, greens, and blues of the

group house in *Real World.* The colors help emphasize the location as well as the mood. The colors also tend to be very well coordinated. The locations, sets, props, and costumes of *The Apprentice* use rich, dark, warm colors to emphasize that the action is taking place in the lap of luxury and the highest levels of Manhattan's business and social community. The same elements of *Real World* use bright, in-your-face colors to show this is a group of twenty-somethings hanging out and having a good time. In *Colonial House* the colors help define the stark conditions of the colony and its residents.

Narration/Diary. The narrations and diaries of the three shows actually look very much alike in terms of color. They tend to be more natural. This gives the audience the feeling that these are just regular people talking to them, away from the extraordinary circumstances of being part of a program.

Establishing Transitions. Although the establishing transitions rely heavily on the ambient color of the scene, the editing of the scenes ties them together in terms of using those ambient colors to weave a coherent text within the transition.

Music

Voyeur. Music is used quite a bit in the voyeur portion of reality shows. It helps establish mood and foreshadows an upcoming scene or action. Music heightens the sense of urgency, touts success, amplifies failure, and directs anticipation.

Narration/Diary. Generally the music and voiceover from the voyeur section continues into the narrative section. If the music was foreshadowing an upcoming scene or action, the narration will discuss the subject's feelings about the same scene or action. The music often fades during the narration section.

Establishing Transitions. The music in the transition sequences is almost always upbeat, even jaunty, and punctuates the jump-cut editing of the transition scenes. The music helps to define the transitions as completely separate elements of the production that bridge between competing or conflicting action.

Framing/Editing

Voyeur. One of the defining features of reality shows is the liberal use of hand-held cameras, primarily during the voyeur sections. The audience perceives the jumpiness and quick response of the hand-held look to be an integral part of the "real-life" experience. The framing of this section tends to be a bit erratic, again in an effort to heighten the perception that we are watching real life as it unfolds. The editing tends to be clean jump cuts; very little smooth transitioning-like fades are dissolves. There are also a lot of reaction shots cut into the action. When one subject does something, it is not unusual to get reaction shots from two or more other subjects.

Narration/Diary. The narrations are shot and edited so that the subject is talking directly to the viewer. The subject is often framed so that the viewer is directed to the subject's eyes. When the subject is just talking about the action or helping move the narrative with background information, he or she tends to be shot in close-up or medium shots. When the subject is doing a more emotional diary, the shots are usually close-ups or extreme close-ups. There is generally no editing done during the narration/diary sections as they typically just run as shot.

Establishing Transitions. The transition sections contain multiple images that are selected to define the transitions in the action. The establishing transitions are often aerial or crane shots that show the scenes from above. They are nearly always long or extreme long shots that help the viewer establish where the action fits into the larger surroundings. Identifying signs, locations, people, and places are framed for emphasis. In *The Apprentice* the aerial shots of Manhattan often include an in-air shot of the Trump helicopter. The transitional montage at the beginning of *Real World* includes aerial footage of Austin along with a colorful "Welcome to Austin" billboard and then ends with a long exterior shot of the house where the subjects live. *Colonial House* transitions with shots of the large expanses of woods, ocean, and fields that surround the tiny colony and its handmade shelters.

Conclusion

Most genres on television rely on scriptwriters, actors, and directors to anchor the show, while the production elements are simply used to

enhance the look, sound, and mood. In many genres, the production elements are used to help the audience in its willing suspension of disbelief. In reality shows, the absence of scriptwriters, actors, and directors leaves the job of moving the narrative along to the production elements. The lighting, color, and music set the mood and heighten the reality. The framing and editing help the audience focus attention to the place that will help tell the story. In many reality programs, the story is told by using and repeating three distinctive sections within each show: voyeur, narration/diary, and establishing transitions. Each of these sections can be defined both by its purpose and by its production elements. While each subgenre of reality show uses these elements differently, they are present in some form in all of them and therefore they become defining elements of the genre.

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Industry Perspective

Overview

An industry approach to genre analysis focuses on the commercial considerations that go into the conceptualization, planning, scheduling, and presentation of generic programming. The ownership patterns of the media play a significant role in the production and distribution of the content conveyed through the channels of mass communication. In Western countries such as the United States, newspapers, magazines, radio stations, film studios, and television stations are privately owned—either by individuals or, increasingly, by large, multinational corporations. Under this market-driven system, the primary purpose, or function, is to generate the maximum possible profit.

In the United States most of the media programming is owned or controlled by nine multinational media conglomerates: AOL Time Warner, Disney, Vivendi, Viacom, Sony, the News Corporation, AT&T Broadband, General Electric, and Bertelsmann. These multinational media conglomerates rely upon popular genres to generate cash flow for the parent company. For instance, in 2004, the success of the reality show *American Idol* lead to a fourth-quarter surge by News Corporation, the parent of Fox Television. The company's fiscal fourth-quarter profit rose by 7.8 percent, boosted by stronger advertising sales at its TV networks and stations. Overall, operating profit for the quarter jumped 31 percent, to $747 million.[1]

In the face of competing media, which, in addition to the traditional media (print, photography, film, radio, and television), now include Internet blogs, podcasts, and cellphone transmissions, the pressures to attract and maintain an audience are fierce. Indeed, the very survival of a media outlet may depend upon the fortunes of a popular genre. Journalist Alex Kuczyanski provides the following example:

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UPN (cable network), which is owned by Viacom and Chris-Craft In-
dustries, was almost left for dead last year before it became the first
broadcast network to offer wrestling shows. Now it is starting to beat
some WB programs and has put a dent into the Fox network's Thursday
night male-oriented schedule.[2]

Indeed, the entire direction of a network can be changed due to industry
considerations. To illustrate, reporter Julie Salamon describes the A&E
cable network's shift of format from "elite art" to the reality genre:

> That channel, then called Arts & Entertainment, went on the air (in the
> 1980s) with the belief that bringing high culture to the masses could be
> profitable. Initially, it made surprising success of highbrow programming,
> building its reputation and audience with rarefied offerings of Russian
> ballet, Australian history, dramatized short stories, British mysteries and
> period dramas.
>
> In the last decade, however, ratings slipped. The network became
> A&E, dropping the arts from its name and its mission. It began relying
> on tatty crime shows. Even its successful "Biography" series felt tired. In
> a medium that prizes youth, its audience seemed ancient, with a median
> age approaching 60.
>
> Two years ago Nick Davatzes, president and chief executive of A&E
> Television Networks, called his executives to a retreat, to "wallow in the
> mud," as he described the exercise. From that wallowing emerged an
> overhaul in management and outlook, including the conclusion that reality
> television could not be ignored if the network wanted younger viewers.
>
> As a result, two new series went on the air . . . carrying the genre's
> stamp of up-close and personal vulgarity. "Airline" showed how South-
> west Airlines deals with its passengers, particularly those who are angry,
> smelly or overweight. "Family Plots" chronicled a family-run mortuary,
> with special emphasis on crudeness and emotional rawness as problems
> are solved. Ratings have been high.[3]

In like fashion, the Discovery Channel, which originally was commit-
ted to an educational mission, altered its format to attract a larger audi-
ence. Thus, its slogan, "Explore Your World," was changed to "Entertain
Your Brain."

Corporate executives think of media presentations simply as products,
like shoes or showerheads, to be manufactured and sold. Shari Ann Brill,
vice president and director of programming at Carat USA, incorporated
this mindset into her programming projections for the 2004 season: "As

in fashion, where they say brown is the new black. On TV reality is the new comedy, intended or otherwise."[4]

Producers are under tremendous pressure to keep abreast of popular trends. As an example, NBC was the only television network that had not developed its own reality series for the 2003–4 television season. As a result, the network lost its dominant position among younger adults, as the Fox Network, fueled by *Joe Millionaire* and *American Idol,* surged ahead. Consequently, in January 2004, NBC introduced *The Apprentice,* which became the number one new show among total viewers, as well as among the target group (adults between the ages of 18 and 49).

In a perfect world, industry concerns are subordinate to artistic considerations. In this ideal world, the media industry provides the necessary resources that enable the artists to fulfill their creative visions. In reality, however, industry considerations often drive artistic decisions.

In this market-driven media system, the primary goal is to maximize profit by producing programming as cheaply as possible. As an example, in May 2004, the 20th Century Fox television studio announced plans to establish Fox 21, a production unit designed to produce relatively inexpensive media programming. The studio immediately implemented a number of cost-cutting measures, including:

- Shooting dramas on 16 millimeter film rather than the usual 35 millimeter film;
- Hiring lesser-known actors;
- Offering writers a profit-participation deal rather than large, up-front script fees;
- Insisting on a seven-day shooting schedule (as opposed to eight days);
- Setting up a stage in a warehouse rather than inside an expensive sound stage on a Hollywood lot;
- Filming outside of Los Angeles and New York, in order to hire non-union crew.

Indeed, the president of 20th Century Fox Television, Dana Walden, declared that if it came down to letting a show die or giving in to pay more to land a big-name actor, "We'll have to decide to let the show die."[5]

This economic imperative has an impact on the content of genric programming. The evolution of broadcast news programs provides an excellent example. In the 1950s, television news divisions consistently

lost money; however, the news was considered to be a public service. Ted Koppel, former anchor of *Nightline,* explains:

> This, however, was in the days before deregulation, when the Federal Communications Commission was still perceived to have teeth, and its mandate that broadcasters operate in "the public interest, convenience and necessity" was enough to give each licensee pause.
>
> Network owners nurtured their news divisions, encouraged them to tackle serious issues, cultivated them as shields to be brandished before Congressional committees whenever questions were raised about the quality of entertainment programs and the vast sums earned by those programs. News divisions occasionally came under political pressures but rarely commercial ones. The expectation was that they would search out issues of importance, sift out the trivial and then tell the public what it needed to know.[6]

However, by the 1970s, news divisions were expected to break even. Thus, in an effort to attract a larger audience, news directors began hiring young, attractive reporters and included sensational stories in their broadcasts. This trend has continued, to the degree that today news programs are considered major sources of *profit* for television stations. According to Koppel, this profit imperative has compromised the quality of news programs, including the coverage of international issues:

> Washington news, for example, is covered with less and less enthusiasm and aggressiveness. The networks' foreign bureaus have, for some years now, been seen as too expensive to merit survival. Judged on the frequency with which their reports get airtime, they can no longer be deemed cost-effective. Most have either been closed or reduced in size to the point of irrelevance.
>
> Simply stated, no audience is perceived to be clamoring for foreign news, the exceptions being wars in their early months that involve American troops, acts of terrorism and, for a couple of weeks or so, natural disasters of truly epic proportions.
>
> You will still see foreign stories on the evening news broadcasts, but examine them carefully. They are either reported by one of a half-dozen or so remaining foreign correspondents who now cover the world for each network, or the anchor simply narrates a piece of videotape shot by some other news agency. For big events, an anchor might parachute in for a couple of days of high drama coverage. But the age of the foreign correspondent, who knew a country or region intimately, is long over.[7]

An industry perspective can help to account for the appearance and sustainability of a genre that might otherwise escape ready explanation. To illustrate, one of the major benefits of scheduling television quiz shows is that they require little capital to produce. Personnel expenses are negligible, as productions are not encumbered by the cost of paid actors or scriptwriters. In addition, the outlay for prizes is minimal. Indeed, during the 1935–36 season, the popular radio quiz program *Professor Quiz* offered a cash prize of only five dollars. Although the amount of cash prizes for quiz shows has certainly increased over the years, it still represents a small percentage of the financial return. Commenting on the 1999 hit *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire,* reporter Bill Carter notes, "Even with the promised million-dollar giveaways, its costs come in well under $1 million an episode (no contestant has yet won more than $500,000). That is one-tenth to one-twentieth the cost of the two mini-series—*Shake, Rattle and Roll* on CBS and *Leprechauns* on NBC—it trounced [in the ratings]."[8]

To be sure, the reality series has been an economic godsend for television. However, the reason that this genre first appeared on the air is that reality shows are relatively inexpensive to produce. To illustrate, the reality show series *Biggest Loser* costs NBC about $850,000 to produce. In contrast, a drama can cost as much as $3.2 million. Scripted comedy shows cost an average of $850,000 to $1.2 million to produce. Gary Newman, co-president of 20th Century Fox Television, declares, "No network is going to do 52 weeks a year of scripted programming, they simply couldn't afford it."[9] Indeed, the preponderance of reality shows has had a significant impact on employment patterns in Hollywood, resulting in a significant downturn in the demand for scriptwriters.

At times the profit strategy may be difficult to discern, in that the appearance of a genre may generate revenue elsewhere within a media conglomerate. For instance, in 2005, Warner Brothers established a new video game subsidiary, developing computer games based on its vast library of Hollywood films. The addition of this subsidiary enables Time Warner to use video games as a way to advertise its film division. As reporter Laura M. Holson explains, "More movies and games command shelf space at mega-retailers, and Warner Brothers sees that as an opportunity to breathe new life into old franchises."[10]

Industry considerations can also explain why genres that suffer from low ratings continue to appear in the media. For instance, golf matches —with the exception of major tournaments like the Masters or U.S.

Open—do not attract a particularly large audience. However, televised Professional Golfer's Association (PGA) matches attract a demographic group with the highest percentage of disposable income of any major sport. Consequently, in 2006, more than seventy hours of live television coverage will be devoted to PGA of America events.[11] The sponsors for these programs, such as General Motors, Hyatt Hotels and Resorts, Liberty Mutual Insurance Company, MasterCard, and Lincoln Continental, are high-end companies that find it lucrative to advertise to this audience base, which typically has a large discretionary income.

Media executives who are responsible for the bottom line do not hesitate to embrace genres if they fill the coffers of the company. When the reality genre first hit the television scene in 2000, many members of the media establishment were dismissive of the genre. However, after the success of shows such as *American Idol* and *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire,* executives began to reassess their original opinions. Gary Newman, the president of 20th Century Fox Television, which had steered clear of reality programs, had a change of heart after he saw the ratings for the studio's first entry, *The Simple Life*: "I said, 'The heck with it. If you can't beat 'em, join 'em.'"[12]

Industry considerations can also explain the inclusion of the *content* of genric programming. In 1991, Deidre Hall was added to the cast of the soap opera *Days of Our Lives,* playing the role of serial killer Dr. Marlena Evans. According to co-star Drake Hogestyn, Dr. Evans's serial-killing spree was actually a cost-cutting move by the producers, saving the cost associated with the salaries of nine or ten veteran actors.[13]

In addition, industry considerations can provide insight into the *structure* of popular genres. As an example, NBC executives initially discouraged producer Dick Woolf from developing the concept of *Law & Order,* the conventional wisdom being that an hour-long dramatic series would not be marketable in syndication. In response, Wolf created an ingenious framework for the series. The first half hour of each show focuses on the police tracking down the criminal, while the second half shows the courtroom trial of the suspect. With this structure, each program could be shown in its entirety or divided into two separate half-hour shows.

Advertising also has an impact on the structure of popular genres. When soap operas first appeared on radio and television, writers were forced to develop storytelling techniques that accommodated the fifteen-minute sequences between commercial breaks. These quarter-hour

dramatic units were suitable for broad action and vivid characters, rather than narrative complexity. The narrative structure consisted of a buildup to a climax at the end of the mid-segment, so that the viewer would be drawn back to the show after the commercial break. (For further discussion of formulaic structure, see Chapter 2.)

Conservative Sensibility

Because of the profit imperative, the media industry is very conservative in its approach to programming. Corporations like General Electric, which owns NBC, measure success on the basis of quarterly reports. As a result, the media industry often is forced into a *short-term planning* mode. President and C.E.O. of CBS Leslie Moonves explains: "Unfortunately you can't have the patience for [a program to build an audience] anymore. In your ideal world, where I have all the money in the world, and I don't have a corporation looking down on me, maybe I could be more patient."[14] For instance, in the early days of television, a series would be on the air for thirty-two weeks before a decision was reached on whether to renew it for the following year; today, programs may be cancelled after only two episodes.

Unfortunately, genres such as comedies are disadvantaged in that they require more time to develop. President of NBC Entertainment Jeff Zucker laments, "I don't believe that it's possible for a 'Cheers' or a 'Seinfeld,' both of which languished in their youth, to happen today. It's a shame. Comedies take time, and they have to find their voices and get their legs."[15]

The reality genre epitomizes the short-term thinking of the media industry. As discussed earlier, the reality genre requires relatively little capital to produce. In contrast, scripted genres such as dramas, action/adventure programs, and comedies almost always lose money on their initial screening. Consequently, studios must recoup their production costs through repeated screenings on the network, sales of DVDs, and syndication to domestic and international markets. However, reality shows, which make up an increasing percentage of the networks' schedules, have not been successful in attracting large audiences for reruns, largely because their winners have already been revealed. As a result, although reality shows do generate immediate earnings, they ultimately produce *less* overall revenue than scripted shows. CEO of Turner Broadcasting System Jamie Kellner explains, "Without the ability to repeat some

of the episode . . . for example, 'American Idol' [costs]—$800,000 to $850,000 an episode, [it is] actually more costly, in some cases, than an hour scripted series."[16]

Increasingly, media executives are unwilling to take risks, relying instead on genres that have a safe, recognizable formula. RKO's chairman Ted Hartley points out that "it's much harder these days to get anyone's attention. You only have about 10 seconds to grab them. And to get somebody to react positively to some new idea, some new title, takes a lot more than 10 seconds. So we all love starting with something that's already known."[17]

ABC's sitcom *Jake in Progress* is an interesting case study. Jake was initially envisioned as an innovative series that applied the structure of the dramatic series *24* to the sitcom genre. Each season would be devoted to a single day of a relationship, beginning with the first date. However, during the development of the project, this single-day concept was deemed to be too quirky and was scrapped. Television critic Gail Pennington observes, "The broadcast networks remain stuck in the same-old, same-old comedy mold. If the masses will still laugh at tired sitcom shtick, programmers shortsightedly ask themselves, why even try something different?"[18]

As production costs have increased, companies that produce video games have become less willing to take creative chances with the games. In the late 1990s, the average budget for a video game was approximately $3 million. But by 2004, Atari spent $20 million on its *Enter the Matrix* game—about one-third the average cost of producing a feature film.[19] As a result, production companies for computer games have struggled to make a profit—particularly small companies. Midway Games, which had huge hits in its *Mortal Kombat* and *SpyHunter* games, endured nineteen consecutive quarters of losses (as of the first quarter of 2005).[20] Evelyn Nussenbaum observes, "As a result of the changes, game publishers are less willing to take creative chances, people in the industry say. They make fewer games and rely more on movie tie-ins and what they consider sure-fire sequels."[21]

As a result of this profit imperative, the media industry increasingly relies on "bankable" genres. For instance, Hollywood currently is producing a preponderance of teen romances and action/adventure films, foregoing unusual projects that are considered too risky.

Increasingly, media executives look to genric programming with a proven track record elsewhere before they will risk putting them on the American market. For instance, before making its debut on American

television in 1999, *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* was a highly success-ful series in Britain. Its success spawned a series of reality shows on American television with European roots: *Big Brother* (Holland), *Survivor* (Sweden), *American Idol* (England), and *Trading Spaces* (adapted from *Changing Rooms* on England's BBC).

Derivative Programming

All too often, creative thinking "outside of the box" now consists of sim-ply finding variations on successful genres. This leads to the appearance of *hybrid media, spin-offs,* and *copycat programming.*

Hybrids

A hybrid is a derivative format formed by merging two (or more) success-ful genres. As an example, in his review of the 2003 TV season, Adam Sternbergh described the new shows as follows: "'Joe Millionaire' was basically 'The Bachelor,' plus lying. 'I'm A Celebrity: Get Me Out of Here' is essentially 'Survivor,' but with D-list notables such as Melissa 'daughter of Joan' Rivers."[22] According to professional wrestler Bret (Hit-man) Hart, the recent success of televised professional wrestling can be attributed to its fusion with another genre—soap operas. Wrestling "has finally become what it should have been all along, which is soap opera. Of course, it is one of the weirdest soap operas you'll ever see."[23]

In like fashion, the reality genre is the fusion of the documentary and soap opera. Lisa Levenson, the co-executive producer of *The Bachelor,* explains: "We wanted to shoot the show like a soap opera. The principal ingredient is developing characters that viewers can relate to, or watch and think, 'At least I am not as screwed up as that person.'"[24]

Like the soap opera, reality shows are *reflective,* in that a single event is followed by extensive dialogue that considers its implications. Whenever something happens, cast members are permitted to go to "confessional" —a room where they can confide to the camera how they feel about things that happen. For instance, in an episode of *Real World* (MTV), the cast worked for a sailing company. Two young women, Cameron and Robin, decided that they would purposely avoid working by jumping into the water. This decision was followed by a series of interviews, in which cast members discussed the possible motives for this act and its potential repercussions.

Figure 8.1 ***The Bachelorette***
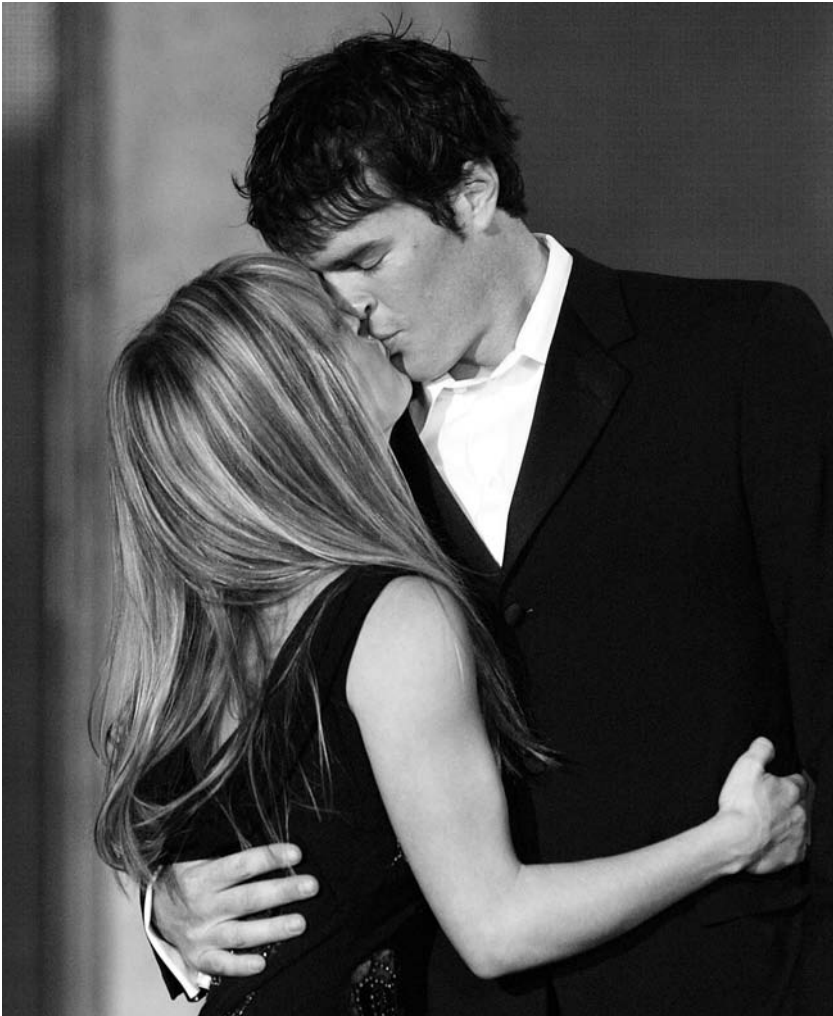
Trista Rehn and Ryan Sutter in *The Bachelorette*. Reality shows have borrowed themes, characters, and structure from the soap opera. (Photo by Kevin Winter/Getty)

As in soap operas, the melodrama surrounding a reality series can be dragged out interminably. For instance, during the finale of the 2003 season of *The Bachelorette,* Trista Rehn selected a mate from the pool of eligible men. But before viewers could see her final choice, they were subjected to a review of the season, including slow-motion ruminations about how difficult it was to make a choice, with flashbacks of the suitors

in various situations. Finally, at the end of the two-hour episode, she tells him (and the audience) of her choice.

Like soap operas, the key to reality shows is relationships. Linda Susman, editor of *Soap Opera Weekly,* declares, "'The Bachelorette' and 'Joe Millionaire' both ended with a triangle. What could be soapier than that?"[25]Indeed, the breakup of Aaron and Helene during the second season of *The Bachelor* attracted so much interest that ABC presented a special episode of *The Bachelor* on the breakup, which drew almost 14 million viewers.[26]

At the same time, soap operas are now incorporating elements of reality shows into their storylines. For instance, a subplot that ran throughout the 2004 season of *All My Children,* involved two characters starting a search for the "sexiest man in America" to promote their new line of cosmetics. During the spring break period, the actresses, followed by a camera, held the first auditions for real-life contestants in Panama City. Brian Scott Frons, president of ABC Daytime and a former producer of European reality shows, explains: "Prime-time reality shows absolutely give women a soap opera experience. And now we can take some of the authenticity and unpredictability of prime-time reality and put it into soap operas."[27]

Increasingly, elements of the reality genre are being incorporated into ad campaigns. For instance, in 2004, Levi Strauss & Company launched an advertising campaign, entitled "A Style for Every Story," featuring an assortment of "real" people wearing Levi's jeans: a rancher, an aircraft mechanic, and a surfer. Levi promoted a national contest to find real people to appear in an ad that ran in the September 2004 issues of some Time Inc. publications.

The latent function behind the infusion of formulaic elements in hybrid programming is to convey messages commonly associated with the popular genre. Thus, using the "reality" approach in ads is designed to send the messages of authenticity to the public. According to Neil Powell, whose advertising firm is responsible for advertising brands like Rheingold beer, consumers are weary of sales pitches, especially by celebrities whose lives are often detached from everyday lives. "Everyone knows that those people are being paid a ton of money to say great things about a brand. It's much more effective when it's sort of a regular Joe."[28]

Spin-offs

Another manifestation of this conservative sensibility is the *spin-off. A* spin-off refers to a new program that is based on an established series.

The premise of the spin-off follows an established character into a new setting. As an example, in 2004, the finale of the highly successful TV sitcom *Friends* led to the spin-off *Joey,* featuring one of the ensemble's cast members as he traveled to Hollywood to pursue his acting career. After the long run of the popular series *Friends,* the audience felt like they "knew" Joey and were interested in following him as he started a new phase of his life.

Spin-offs operate on the principle of *intertextuality,* in which characters (or the actors, who become identified with the characters) are imbued with a sense of verisimilitude as they move across genres. To illustrate, in the spin-off sitcom *Frasier* (1993–2004), the lead character occasionally referred to his earlier life on *Cheers* (1982–93)—his ex-wife, child, and the bar in Boston he used to frequent. In addition, characters from *Cheers,* including ex-wife Dr. Lilith Sternin-Crane (Bebe Neuwirth) and Sam Malone (Ted Danson) made guest appearances on *Frasier* throughout its network run, adding to the "reality" of the spin-off.

Copycat Programming

This rush to satisfy public interest also results in *copycat programming.* These shows are nearly identical to the original, with a minor variation. Fox was the leading copycat of reality shows, producing *Boot Camp,* a copycat editing of *Survivor* (CBS); *The Chamber,* a knockoff of *The Chair* (ABC); *The Swan*, a copycat of *Extreme Makeover*; *Trading Spouses: Meet Your New Mommy,* a carbon copy of *Wife Swap* (ABC); and *Nanny 911,* an imitation of *Super Nanny* (ABC).

Indeed, the networks' race to get their versions of a program on the air first has become worthy of its own reality series. For instance, in the summer in 2004 Fox aired *Trading Spouses* while ABC lagged behind, putting its version on its fall lineup. Fox benefited from its quick start, garnering impressive ratings over the summer. Stephen McPherson, the president of ABC Entertainment, declared, "It's pretty sad that unethical behavior can deny people their intellectual property. The only thing I underestimated was how unethical and desperate my competitors are."[29]

In 2004, NBC filed suit against Fox claiming that a Fox show about boxing, *The Next Great Champ,* was a pirated version of its show *The Contender*. The suit, filed in California Superior Court, was dismissed on the grounds that blocking its broadcast would constitute a violation of the First Amendment.

Industry Abuses

Industry pressures can easily lead to abuses involving popular genres. A famous example of industry corruption was the quiz show scandal in the mid-1950s. In 1955, the hottest program on television was *The $64,000 Question*. This high-stakes program, sponsored by Revlon, was a phenomenon, spawning imitators such as *The $64,000 Challenge*. For a while, these shows ran 1–2 in the ratings. One of the successful elements of these quiz shows was establishing "identifiable" contestants for the audience. In 1957, Charles Van Doren, a professor of English at Columbia University, won over $100,000 on the NBC game show *Twenty One*. Handsome, charming, and erudite, Van Doren became a national celebrity as he held forth as champion on the quiz show. Millions tuned in to see him ward off the weekly challenges to his title.

However, in 1959, the House of Representatives appointed a special oversight subcommittee to investigate the fixing of quiz shows. The subcommittee found that several of the producers and sponsors of these programs had provided answers to contestants—including Van Doren—prior to their appearances on *The $64,000 Question, The $64,000 Challenge,* and *Twenty One*. Many quiz shows were cancelled. The networks instituted stricter policies and surveillance procedures over all quiz programs and took program control away from advertisers such as Revlon.

In the 1950s, the House Oversight Subcommittee investigated the radio industry and found widespread instances of payola, a practice in which deejays accepted gifts from record companies in return for playing their records on their shows. Twenty-five deejays and program directors of top ten rock n' roll shows were caught in the scandal.

Given the big stakes involved in giving artists exposure, it is not surprising that payola has reemerged in the radio industry. In 2006, the Federal Communications Commission conducted an investigation into accusations of pay-for-play practices at four of the nation's biggest radio station owners: Clear Channel Communications, CBS Radio, Citadel Broadcasting, and Entercom Communications. The FCC's enforcement unit was looking into accusations that broadcasters violated the law by accepting cash or other compensation in exchange for airplay of specific songs without telling listeners.

Cyclical Nature of Genres

As with any product, once a genre attracts commercial interest, the industry reacts quickly to reap maximum profits. This has resulted in a

notable outcome: the cyclical nature of genres. TV Westerns provide a good example. Prior to 1956, no Western had ever appeared among the top fifteen rated television shows. But in 1956, *Gunsmoke* broke into the top ten rated programs, at number eight. By 1958, Westerns held nine of the fifteen slots (including the top four programs). However, by the 1962 season the popularity of the Western was on the decline; only one Western (*Gunsmoke*) remained on the top ten list. And with the cancellation of *Gunsmoke* in 1975, Westerns dropped out of the Nielsen's top ten chart entirely.

In the ebb and flow of this cycle, as one genre becomes popular, another typically goes into decline. For instance, at the same time that the reality genre was beginning to hit its saturation peak, situation comedies were on the wane. In the lineup for 2004–5, only thirteen of the thirty-five new series were situation comedies.[30] The evolution of genres generally follows the following cycle.

1. Inception Stage. In the initial stage, a genre that has been long dormant suddenly emerges on the media landscape. For instance, in 1999 ABC introduced a quiz show, *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire,* with host Regis Philbin. The show immediately took off, averaging 29 million viewers per night in its initial season.

2. Popularization. This stage occurs as media outlets move quickly to exploit the initial success of a genre. As the president of Fox Entertainment Group, Sandy Grushow, explains, the audience "has a huge appetite, and we've got a responsibility to satisfy that appetite."[31] In this spirit, ABC took advantage of the initial popularity of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* by scheduling the program four evenings a week. Other networks were quick to build on the sudden popularity of the game show genre. Consequently, while *Millionaire* was the only prime time network game show in 1999, one year later game shows appeared for eight hours each week on network television.

This same pattern can also be found in the reality genre. In 2000, *Big Brother* was the first reality show to hit the U.S. airwaves. By 2003, reality shows dominated the airwaves:

- During the week of February 17, 2003, seven reality shows were among the thirteen-highest rated shows. Forty million people watched *Joe Millionaire* (Fox).
- Reality programs won fifteen of eighteen half-hour time periods on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday nights, and finished second in the

other three time slots. *American Idol,* on the Fox network, led the way, drawing 25 million viewers two nights running and became the most watched nonsports shows in the network's history.

- In 2003, twelve of the top twenty television series were reality shows.
- By 2004, every network carried at least two hours' worth of reality programs, most appearing between 8 and 10 P.M., prime-time slots.
- In 2004, the four major broadcast networks (NBC, CBS, ABC, and Fox) introduced at least two dozen reality shows between June and September, normally a dormant season of summer reruns, more than doubling the number they broadcast last summer. NBC led the way, adding ten new reality series during the summer.[32]

3. Saturation Stage. By the saturation stage, the overexposure of a genre leads to what Jeff Robinov, production president of Warner Brothers, refers to as "genre fatigue."[33] As an example, during any given week in 2005, *Law & Order* was on the air for forty-four hours (including the network premiere of original and franchise programs, and reruns of the four franchise series on NBC, TNT, and USA networks).

As Dick Wolf, creator and executive producer of the successful crime drama franchise *Law & Order,* observes, " the natural question is, 'How many *Law & Orders* is too many *Law & Orders*?' My response is always the same: 'The audience will tell us.'"[34] At a certain point, the audience simply loses interest in the programming. Thus, by 2001, the overexposed game show *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* lost about half its audience from the previous year. In 2005, *Law & Order* (NBC), which has spawned two successful franchise properties (*Special Victims Unit* and *Criminal Intent*), may finally have reached its saturation point: a third series, *Trial by Jury,* was canceled after twelve episodes.

All of these forms of exposure—multiple airings, cross-media programming, merchandising, franchising, and pirated programs—accelerate the cycle and shorten the "generations" between the stages. As an example, during the initial cycle of TV quiz shows, the popular stage continued for approximately four years (1956–60) and was only interrupted by congressional investigations into the payola scandal. But in its second go-around, the popular stage of quiz shows lasted only *one* year (1999) before the market became oversaturated.

Indeed, the cycle has accelerated so quickly that the TV sitcom, which had been pronounced "dead" by critics in 2004, was already making a comeback in 2005. Led by *Everybody Hates Chris* (UPN), *My Name is Earl* (NBC), and *How I Met Your Mother* (CBS), sitcoms were making a significant dent in the top ten lists for the fall season. Gail Pennington observes, "Nobody is more surprised by this than the list-makers, pundits who had previously declared the sitcom as cold as a corpse on 'CSI.'"[35] The abbreviation of the cycle places more of a burden on television executives to come up with fresh ideas and introduce new genres into the programming cycle.

Revenue Streams

The media industry has discovered the following strategies to enhance their profits.

Syndication

After the original screening of a production, media corporations sell syndication rights to domestic and international markets. Consequently, hits like *Seinfeld* generate more than $3 billion per year in syndication sales for NBC and its parent company, General Electric.[36]

As mentioned earlier, the most profitable genres for syndication are scripted, while reality shows, with the outcome of the competitions already known, have attracted little interest. However, in 2005, two small cable networks began showing reality show reruns: OLN presented segments of *Survivor* and GNS picked up *The Amazing Race*. The executives of these two small cable networks were counting on the fact that reality show fans watched these programs for reasons other than plot. Consequently, OLN repackaged *Survivor* around relationships, highlighting romances, rivalries, and the "greatest villains." The success of this strategy is yet to be determined.

Sequels

The Hollywood film industry often relies on "bankable" *sequels* to successful movies. The development of sequels to successful programs can be a very lucrative strategy. Geoffrey Ammer, Columbia Picture's president of marketing, comments:

Table 8.1

Familiarity Breeds Receipts: A Look at Domestic Box Office Sales for Film Sequels

Original	Sales	Sequel	Sales
American Pie	$102 million (1999)	American Pie 2	$145 million (2001)
The Terminator	$38 million (1984)	Terminator 2: Judgment Day	$205 million (1991)
Lethal Weapon	$65 million (1987)	Lethal Weapon 2	$147 million (1989)

Source: Lyman, Rick. "Summer of the Spinoff," *New York Times,* April 17, 2002, p. E1.

> It used to be sequels, on average, earned about 65 percent of the gross of the original. Now, if you make a good one, you can earn even more than the original, sometimes much more. . . . Sometimes, you can do two or three times what you did on the original. So why not go in and mine that field? It's there. If you're not doing it, somebody else is.[37]

To illustrate, while the original *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* (1997) grossed $54 million in 1997, its sequel, *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me* (1999), generated $205 million. Similarly, *Rush Hour II* (2000) grossed $226 million, exceeding the $141 million of the original *Rush Hour* (1998).

Sequels have become such a part of mainstream Hollywood productions that in some cases film studios shoot both the original and sequel at the same time to save expenses. The sequel is then released at a later date. For instance, in 2006, Walt Disney filmed two sequels to its successful *Pirates of the Caribbean* together, thereby saving the considerable location expenses.

Prequels

Prequels focus on the action that took place *before* the original narrative. For instance, in *Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith* the audience learns about how Darth Vader originally became a villain. A prequel assumes that the audience is familiar with the original—the audience must rework the narrative so that they can understand how the prequel leads up to the beginning of the original.

Ancillary Products

Successful genric programming is often parlayed into a line of secondary products. For instance, to capitalize on the success of the tween show *Zoey 101,* Nickelodeon introduced a *Zoey 101* apparel line. The highly successful Harry Potter books have led to extensive merchandising as well; anyone looking for a Harry Potter teacup or pillowcase will not be disappointed.

Franchises

The media industry repackages its successful genres as *franchises.* A franchise property refers to programming based on an established series. Successful franchises can be extremely lucrative. In 2004, the premiere of *CSI: New York* (the second spin-off of the successful *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* franchise) attracted 23.1 million viewers.[38] (For further discussion of franchises, see Chapter 3.)

Advertising

The advertising revenue garnered by the media industry is enormous. The breakdown of advertising revenue by media type in 2005 was as follows:

- Newspapers: $46.6 billion
- Broadcast TV: $46.2 billion
- Cable TV: $21.5 billion
- Radio: $19.5 billion
- Magazines: $12.2 billion.[39]

Advertisers wield an extraordinary influence on the shows they sponsor. To illustrate, variety programs broadcasted on radio in the 1930s were named after the sponsor rather than the star of the shows, reflecting the preeminence of the advertisers:

- *The Kraft Music Hall* (starring Bing Crosby)
- *The Pepsodent Program* (starring Bob Hope)
- *The Lucky Strike Program* (starring Jack Benny)

The same style of billing occurred in the early days of television—and not just to entertainment programs. For instance, the NBC evening news show, anchored by John Cameron Swayze, was titled the *Camel News Caravan*.

Radio soap operas were actually owned and produced by a sponsor and its advertising agency, who made arrangements with a radio network to broadcast the program. In fact, two serials, *As the World Turns* and *Guiding Light,* continue to be produced and distributed by Procter & Gamble Productions.

The music video genre is actually a thinly disguised advertising vehicle. The videos are promotional pieces produced by record companies and sent to music video channels in hopes that they will be played. Similarly, in game shows like *The Price is Right,* the prizes have all been donated to the program, in exchange for a commercial plug on the show. Thus, in this celebration of consumer culture, not only is the program sponsored, but the game itself is an advertisement.

The reality genre lends itself to the advertising practice of *product placement,* in which companies pay a fee to have their products appear in a program—as background or even as a part of the narrative. Because the shows are rooted in "reality," the participants are shown using products during the course of the show—all of which involve a fee for this exposure. In 2006, NBC's reality boxing show *The Contender* led the field in product placements, with 7,502 appearances or mentions of commercial products—more than twice as many placements as the next most placement-filled series, *The Apprentice,* also on NBC. Reporter Alex Midlin explains, "Contestants on 'The Contender' drank Gatorade in every episode, carted supplies around in a Toyota truck and ran through what a host of the show described as a 'Toyota traffic jam.' Each appearance of a product counts toward the total."[40]

Advertising can have an influence on the content of a genre. Producers are careful to present content that is unlikely to offend potential customers. Further, advertisers prefer to buy commercial time in shows that accentuate the positive, to help put viewers in an upbeat, consuming mood.

In contrast, premium cable television channels are free of the industry considerations that constrain broadcast networks. HBO and Showtime have developed an alternative to advertising, requiring a monthly payment by subscribers that absorbs costs normally assumed by advertisers. As

a result, producers Susan Beavers, the creator of *Oh Baby,* comments, "I just feel I have the opportunity to write my show with a focus and a viewpoint, without trying to appeal to everyone in the world."[41]

Tom Fontana producer of *Oz* (Showtime) argues that a program without commercials empowers writers and producers with creative freedom: "When you don't have to bring people back from a commercial, you don't have to manufacture an 'out.' You can make your episode at a length and with a rhythm that's true to the story you want to tell."[42]

The dramatic series *Six Feet Under* (HBO) dealt with a range of controversial topics, including a subplot involving David Fisher's efforts to come to terms with his homosexuality. The series depicted affectionate physical contact between David (Michael C. Hall) and his lover, Keith Charles (Mathew St. Patrick), as well as more passionate moments, that would not appear on network shows that depict gay characters, such as *Will and Grace* (NBC). In contrast, HBO is a subscription-based cable network that is not dependent on the whims of a general audience and, therefore, could take creative risks. Indeed, Nate Fisher (Peter Krause), one of the protagonists, died with three episodes left in the show's fifth and final season (2005). Losing one of the major characters in midstream is a daring development that would not likely occur on broadcast television, since it could diminish the size of the audience, who tune in to see the major characters. However, the very unexpectedness of this development added to its dramatic impact.

In addition to direct forms of advertising, several indirect forms of advertising have an impact on genres. For instance, game shows often utilize "official sponsors" as sources of advertising revenue. In exchange for being included in the credits, the sponsoring company donates products to the program, to be given away as prizes. In game shows such as *The Price is Right* the products are given away as prizes. When the contestant wins a prize, the product is given a brief "description" that further promotes it.

Reality shows also utilize "official sponsors" as a source of revenue. For instance, in *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* (ABC), Sears is the official sponsor of the show, donating the materials that are used in the refurbishing project. In addition to the sponsor being mentioned in the credits, viewers can see how the materials contribute to the success of the project. Other vendors also donate goods and services in exchange for mention in the credits and on ABC's website. The network would not release precise figures, but a spokeswoman said that these donated materials would easily cost hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Lines of Inquiry

1. Select a sample of programs from a genre and conduct an industry analysis.
   a. In what ways do industry considerations account for a genre being presented in the media?
   b. In what ways do industry considerations affect the content, style, and structure of a genre?
2. Examine a programming trend over a brief period (e.g., three years).
   a. Identify genres with respect to the cycle described in the chapter.
   b. Examine new shows, genres, and subgenres. In what ways do they reflect the conservative nature of the media industry?
3. How does advertising influence the appearance, style, and content of a genre?
4. Conduct an analysis of the current most popular films, based on the box office attendance records for the previous weekend.
   a. What are the total number of genres in the top ten?
   b. Of the top ten films, which genres are the most popular?
   c. Identify the number of sequels.
   d. Are there any surprises?
      1. Genres that do not appear in the top ten
      2. Genres that do appear in the top ten
   e. How many films feature "bankable" stars (e.g., Tom Hanks, Nicole Kidman, Johnny Depp)?
   f. How many of the top ten films were produced by the mega-media corporations (e.g., Paramount Studios, owned by Disney Studios)?

What does this analysis reveal with respect to the impact of the industry on genres?

5. Compare top ten film box office lists over an extended period (e.g., the past year or two years). What patterns can you identify with regard to:
   a. The cycle of genres
   b. The conservative nature of the film industry
   c. Other observations

What does this analysis reveal with respect to the impact of the industry on genres?

6. Examine the weekly TV Nielsen ratings of the top 100 shows of the current television season. What trends can you identify?
   a. What are the most popular genres?
      1. Number of programs appearing in the top 100?
      2. Number of programs appearing in the top 10?
   b. Which genres appear the fewest times on the list?
   c. Spin-offs
      1. Number of programs appearing in the top 100?
      2. Number of programs appearing in the top 10?
   d. Franchise brands (e.g., *CSI*)
      1. Number of programs appearing in the top 100?
      2. Number of programs appearing in the top 10?
   e. How many shows appear more than once (e.g., *American Idol* shown on Tuesdays and Thursdays)?
   f. How many programs that are pirated shows appear on the list?

What does this analysis reveal with respect to the impact of the industry on genres?

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Mythic Approach

Overview

Myths are stories that attempt to provide explanations about some of the enduring mysteries of human existence. Classics scholar Gilbert Highet explains:

> The central answer is that myths are permanent. [Myths] deal with the greatest of all problems, the problems which do not change because men and women do not change. They deal with love; with war; with sin; with tyranny; with courage; with fate; and all in some way or other deal with the relation of man to those divine powers which are sometimes to be cruel, and sometimes, alas, to be just.[1]

Myths touch on timeless dilemmas or temptations facing human beings. Consequently, similar mythic tales recur throughout many cultures. Thus, Native American myths address the same essential issues of life as are found in Greek mythology. Henry A. Murray observes, "From psychoanalysts—Freud, Rank, Jung, and many others—we have learnt that numerous themes commonly represented nowadays in the dreams, fantasies, story compositions, play enactions, and art forms of children are essentially similar to the themes of widely known primitive myths."[2]

Popular genres satisfy our innate hunger to see mythic issues acted out by characters on-screen. Critic Alessandra Stanley explains:

> Breakthrough shows present an eternal truth (or deadly sin) in a new, slightly titillating configuration. . . . In 1999, "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire" put greed into a prime-time game show format. Lust came out of the closet in shows like "Temptation Island," while dating competitions like "The Bachelor" married the primal Cinderella myth to today's obsession with speed dating and Internet hookups. . . . [In 2003], the It show was

"The Apprentice," Donald Trump's reality series. The premise was deceptively simple: "Survivor" relocated to the Manhattan rat race. Certainly, both take-my-wife reality shows blend a classic human failing—grass-is-greener envy—with the (2004) TV obsession with makeovers and house trades. (The playful hint of adultery doesn't hurt, either, particularly at a time when Newsweek puts "The New Infidelity" on its cover.)[3]

Even though the formula of genres is predictable, the audience enjoys seeing these stories played out as an expression of myth. Psychologist Rollo May explains, "Westerns [films] illustrate the love for repetition that Freud mentions; we seem to have an endless appetite for seeing the same theme over and over again as an authentic myth."[4]

Many action/adventure video games are rooted in myth, as a way to add to the drama and excitement of the presentation. Indeed, Charles Herold, describes *God of War* (Sony) as a video game "of mythic proportions."[5] The hero of *God of War* is named Kratos, which is also the name of a demi-god in Greek mythology. Kratos, which translates as "power" or "strength," is a huge presence in the game—bigger than life. According to Herold, Kratos "does everything big. . . . He can hurl monstrous creatures to the ground, can impale demon warriors on their own swords and can grab harpies and tear off their wings."[6]

Don Miller, a graduate student at Webster University, identified the mythic functions of *God of War*:

> One of its primary functions is to inspire awe. The game transports its players into an alternate universe where superhuman strength and the ability to wipe out enemies becomes [sic] not only possible but a reality. There also seems to be an "instruction" component here related to the displays of excessive violence as a solution to problems.
>
> In addition, "gamers" may feel that by assuming the role of Kratos, they can achieve the illusion of restoring some sense of order in their own lives. That is, they are able to control much of the action and determine the outcome of the game, where they may not be able to assume control of the chaos of their own lives.[7]

Some genres are particularly well suited for the transmission of particular mythic areas and concerns. Ancient myths that celebrate the exploits of gods and heroes such as Zeus, Hercules, and Sampson, are, in effect, early examples of the action/adventure genre. The science fiction genre considers eternal questions about the role of human beings in the universe. And the horror genre provides explanations for those phenomena that exceed the limits of human control and explanation.

Myths tell stories that explain the stages of life that make up the journey from birth to death. Thus, myths follow the maturation of the individual, from dependency through adulthood, though maturity, and then to the exit. Bill Moyers observes, "We all need to understand death and to cope with death, and we all need help in our passages from birth to life and then to death. We need for life to signify, to touch the eternal, to understand the mysterious, to find out who we are."[8]

In like fashion, many popular genres focus on the different stages of life common to human beings: birth, adolescence, adulthood, and old age. To illustrate, the horror genre taps into the infancy stage of development. Films like *The Blair Witch Project* put individuals in touch with their "inner" child, who remains fearful of forces that lurk in the dark. Peter Olafson recalls:

> When I was growing up outside Boston, I thought a monster lived in our attic. Thirty-some years later and 3,000 miles away, that monster has been brought back to life by *Blair Witch Volume 1: Rustin Parr*. In so doing, it raises a useful question about explicit and implicit threats within games. Namely: How many monsters are too many?
>
> Our attic had room for only one. . . .
>
> My fears reached a summit one night when, with my family out for the evening, the bulb winked out as I rummaged in the playroom closet.
>
> The darkness was almost total, but I seemed to see a region of denser darkness at the mouth of the cave. Then the darkness moved. I went down the attic stairs in two long jumps.
>
> At the bottom, I turned around. There was nothing there—just empty stairs leading up to an office and a playroom.
>
> My parents, returning, wondered why every light in the house had been turned on.
>
> Last year's hit independent thriller *The Blair Witch Project* thrives on this same faceless, timeless fear.[9]

Genric programs provide a visualization of this universal experience. Even though few individuals have been possessed by Satan like Regan in *The Exorcist* (1973), the audience can relate to the feelings of terror and uncertainty experienced by her as they sort through the chaos within their own lives.

The genre of the teen drama focuses on the theme of the adolescent's assertion of independence, which is characteristic of the adolescent stage of development. Thus, in the popular teen drama *O.C.,* the protagonists, Marissa, Ryan, Seth, and Summer, face the same issues of identity as appear in the Greek myth of Oedipus. Rollo May notes:

Oedipus was an archaic Greek tale, which in Homer's narration took on the proportions of a myth and through the pen of Sophocles became the myth of the hero who seeks his own reality, a pursuit which in our day is known as the search for identity. The man who cries, 'I must find out who I am!' as does Oedipus, and then revolts against his own reality, stands not only for the Greeks but for all of us in our ambivalent struggle to find our identity. Hence Freud uses the myth of Oedipus as central in his contemporaneous psychology. Like most of the ancient Hebrew and Greek myths, this narration of the triangular struggle in the family becomes true in different ways for people of all cultures, since everyone is born of a father and mother and must in some way revolt against them—which is the definition of a classic like Oedipus.[10]

Because myths tap into collective human experience, watching this genre enables audience members of all ages to re-experience their own adolescence, including such experiences as rebellion against authority, rejection, and the general angst associated with this stage of life.

Although classic myths traditionally focus on men, contemporary genres now feature women as well. For instance, *Whale Rider* (2002) is a film that tells the story of a young girl's quest to be accepted as the new chief of a patriarchal tribe in New Zealand. (For further discussion of the youth genre, see Chapter 4.)

Mythic Premise

In some genres, the premise of its programs is rooted in myth. For instance, the action/adventure video game *Shadow of the Colossus* (Sony) relies upon a mythic premise. Charles Herold explains:

Shadow begins as a man rides into a temple on horseback and lays a dead woman on an altar. He asks the spirit of the temple to bring the woman back to life, and the spirit agrees on one condition: the man must first kill the 16 colossi that live nearby.[11]

Mythic Themes

A theme is an abstract concept or observation that is manifested through the actions of the plot. Mythic themes raise issues pertaining to the human condition, as well as human beings' relationship to the universe. Mythic scholar Joseph Campbell explains, "Themes that have supported

human life, built civilizations, and informed religions over the millennia, have to do with deep inner problems, inner mysteries, inner thresholds of passage, and if you don't know what the guide-signs are along the way, you have to work it out yourself."[12] Many of these elemental themes are raised within the framework of popular genres. For instance, reality shows dramatize the mythic themes of betrayal, personal transformation, success, and failure. Alan Wurtzel, the president for research at NBC, observes that "for many viewers, reality is just a fresh way of telling a familiar story."[13]

In the Western genre, mythic themes revolve around a series of conflicts:

Man (Woman) Versus Nature

The conflict involving the hero in confrontation with the wilderness requires the imposition of order on a state of primitive chaos—including his own nature. John Cawelti explains that Westerns are "a common, shared fantasy" that enables the audience to "re-enact and temporarily (vicariously) resolve widely shared psychic conflicts."[14]

Man (Woman) Versus Man

Western villains are considered as a force rather than individuals. For instance, in Western films and television programs, Indians attack the wagon train in waves. Evil is an absolute force that appears in opposition to the good cowboy hero. There is no integration of good and evil—no rationality or motivation, but merely an existence of chaotic energy to be contained and controlled by the hero.

Man (Woman) Versus Civilization

Other Western themes revolve around the encroachment of civilization on the wilderness. The town reflects a somewhat ambiguous view of the values of civilization, an ambiguity that is invariably resolved in favor of social progress, but not without some reluctance and sense of loss.

Beyond a simple retelling of mythic themes, generic programming often explores different dimensions of these themes. For instance, in classic horror films like *Dracula* (1931 original), *Frankenstein* (1931 original), and *The Exorcist* (1973), absolute evil appears as an external agent, in the form

Table 9.1

Mythic Themes
Some genres are particularly well suited for particular mythic themes.

Genre	Themes
Quiz shows	Greed
	Free will vs. fate
	Good fortune
The gangster genre	The conflict between good and evil egocentric satisfaction vs. societal restraints
	The price of loyalty and betrayal appearance vs. reality
	The hubris of human greatness/power
	The limits of narcissism and greed
	Temptation vs. control
The horror genre	Good and evil
	Appearance/reality. What appears to be order is chaos, lying dormant
	The vanity of human greatness/power
	Moral decay
	The influence of the past on the present
	The loss of control

of a vampire, monster, or devil. However, the genre of film noir considers a number of questions about the nature of evil:

- What is the origin of evil?
- Is evil absolute?
- What motives or conditions lead to evil behavior?
- Why are human beings attracted to evil?
- What are the targets of evil?
- Is evil ever justified? If so, when?

As an example, *Double Indemnity* (1944), a film noir classic, presents a worldview in which all human beings are capable of evil. Walter Burns (Fred MacMurray) is an Everyman—an average guy who works as an insurance salesman. But after meeting Phyllis Dietrichson (Barbara Stanwyck), Burns is overwhelmed by passion and greed. The two team up to murder Phyllis's husband, making it look like an accident so that they

can collect "double indemnity" on Dietrichson's life insurance policy. Reflecting on the scheme, Walter at first blames Phyllis for seducing him into this heinous act. But then Walter admits that this was something that he had been capable of all along:

> [This was] tied up with something I'd been thinking about for years, since long before I ran into Phyllis Dietrichson. . . . And then one night you get to thinking how you could crook the house yourself. I fought it, only I didn't fight it hard enough.

Thus, the difference between thinking of committing a crime and actually acting on this impulse is merely a matter of *degree*. What determines whether a person is ethical is his/her ability to resist these temptations.

Alfred Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* (1951) considers the complex issue of good and evil as aspects of the *self*: the good in evil and the evil in good. In this story, two strangers meet on a train. Col Needham provides the following plot summary:

> Psychotic mother's boy Bruno Anthony meets famous tennis professional Guy Haines on a train. Guy wants to move into a career in politics and has been dating a senator's daughter while awaiting a divorce from his wife. Bruno wants to kill his father, but knows he will be caught because he has a motive. Bruno dreams up a crazy scheme whereby he and Guy exchange murders. Guy takes this as a joke, but Bruno is serious and takes things into his own hands.[15]

This Hitchcock film offers a penetrating look into the mythic theme of the divided self. Guy Haines is a clean-cut, upper-class tennis player—the classic film hero. On the other hand, Bruno is the embodiment of evil: a psychopath, he is driven by impulse, laughing at one moment and flying into a rage the next. But surprisingly, the "evil" Bruno is, in some respects, a more engaging character than the "good" Guy, who is passive and indecisive. Psychologist Carl Jung recognized evil as a necessary part of the psyche, "one of the pairs of opposites that provides psychic life with its energy."[16] Thus, many of the most attractive aspects of human personality are manifestations of "evil" impulses: energy, focus, and passion. Indeed, this "evil" side of self is vital for survival. For instance, infants will cry and even take food from others to sustain themselves.

Although Guy takes no direct role in the killing of his wife, he fails

to assert himself enough to make it clear to Bruno that he is opposed to the idea. Thus, while Guy admits to thinking about murdering his wife, Bruno simply acts on this impulse. At the conclusion of the film, Bruno is arrested for the murder of Guy's wife—the conventional ending for a murder mystery. This happy ending is based on the notion of a clear separation of good and evil. With this restoration of order, it is inferred that Guy will marry the senator's daughter and perhaps run for office himself someday. However, the issue of Guy's moral complicity in the crime is never resolved, which undermines the film's formulaic "happy" ending.

This duality of good and evil in humans is also found in more current films such as *Batman Begins* (2005) and *Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith* (2005). Caryn James observes that "the conflicts [in these films] are not simply about good guys and bad guys, or even good versus evil, always the elements of broadly framed fantasies. With spiritual overtones, and an emphasis on an eternal struggle between equally matched forces of darkness and light."[17]

Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994) presents a worldview in which evil has become normalized. In the film, Vincent (John Travolta) and Jules (Samuel L. Jackson) are likeable fellows who are just doing their jobs as hit men. Early in the film, the two men sit in a car, having a conversation about Vince's experiences in Amsterdam. In a conversational style, Vince discusses the "little differences" between living in the United States and Holland. He notes that the McDonald's Quarter Pounder with Cheese is called "Cheese Royale" in Amsterdam, since the Dutch operate on the metric system of measurement. The two men then begin gossiping about a "co-worker" who had given the boss' wife a foot massage and then had been pushed out of a window. They enter an apartment and stop at a doorway. Jules checks his watch; they are early. The two men then walk down the hall and finish their conversation. They then return, enter the apartment, and proceed to slaughter everyone inside. Thus, normalcy has been redefined; everyone in the film is evil.

Genre and the Transmission of Cultural Myth

Cultural myths are stories that tell a culture about itself. These sets of beliefs may or may not be true, but nevertheless reveal how inhabitants of a country see themselves, as well as how they are seen by others. Cultural myths play a fundamental role in an individual's socialization

by telling stories that promote the prevailing standards of success and failure within the culture. Whether or not a cultural myth is true, it often assumes *a mythic reality* over time, as it is told and retold in popular genres. The appeal of many genres can be tied to the reinforcement of cultural myths. To illustrate, author Mark Bennett discusses how 1950s sitcoms influenced his own upbringing.

> TV families looked so supportive. I didn't have a lot of nurturing, so I thought of TV as a safe place. The Cleavers' Mayfield wasn't just safe, it seemed perfect to a lonely Tennessee kid who never felt like he fit in. We didn't have nice crossing Guards with white gloves directing brand-new gleaming cars. There was no Eddie or Lumpy. That was what I wanted. Those were the friends I wanted.[18]

Many cultural myths revolve around the following aspects of a cultural experience.

Historical Period

Some cultural myths focus on particular historical periods. For instance, the Western genre perpetuates the *Myth of the American Frontier.* This myth chronicles the settling of the American West. The Western myth is also rooted in a particular time—between 1865 (the end of the American Civil War) and 1890—even though significant events certainly occurred before and after this artificial time frame.

The plots of the Western genre revolve around the following stages in the development of the American frontier by Western Europeans:

- Native American tribes
- The first wave of pioneers
    Frontiersmen (hunters and trappers) in the wilderness
    Early towns
- The building of the railroad
- Law and order
    Outlaws
    Gunmen
    Imposition of justice
    The lawman (marshal or sheriff)
    Cavalry

- Law contending with encroachment of civilization
  - Cowboys and cattle kings versus homesteaders (farmers and ranchers)
  - Civilizing the Western frontier
  - The end of the gunfighter

Novels, magazines, radio, film, and television have recounted the major events in the settling of this mythic West, including the Alamo, the Pony Express, Custer's Last Stand, and the development of cattle towns like Dodge City and Tombstone. The Western genre also tells of the exploits of heroes like Wild Bill Hickok, Bat Masterson, and Wyatt Earp, as well as bad men like Billy the Kid and Jim Ringo.

Cultural myths may evolve as a result of surrounding events and conditions. For instance, after World War II, the cowboy hero of Saturday morning television programs reflected the conservative sensibility of the times. Instead of the isolated, ruthless hero of prewar Westerns, the cowboy of the 1950s was a bastion of morality. George N. Fenin and William K. Everson describe Western actor Gene Autry's *Ten Commandments of the Cowboy,* which illustrates the Sunday school didacticism of the postwar Western:

> Under this code, the cowboy becomes a sort of adult Boy Scout. He must not take unfair advantage, even when facing an enemy. He must never go back on his word, or on the trust confided in him. He must always tell the truth, be gentle with children, elderly people, and animals. He must not advocate or possess racially or religiously intolerant ideas. Moreover, he must help people in distress, be a good worker, keep himself clean in thought, speech, action, and personal habits. He must respect women, parents, and his nation's laws. He must neither drink nor smoke. And finally, the cowboy is a patriot.[19]

Mystical Places

Other cultural myths involve an idealized location that represents an idyllic lifestyle. For instance, in the popular reality show *Laguna Beach: The Real Orange County* (MTV), Laguna Beach is a world of privilege, youth, and glamour. According to reporter Laura Bly, teenage fans embrace the series "as a voyeuristic glimpse into an out-of-reach world."[20] Many residents of Laguna Beach complain that this depiction

is a distortion of reality. Resident Howard Hills asserts that "the MTV show has hijacked our identity, and people are beginning to feel violated. It has become a metaphor for everything we don't want to be."[21] Though perhaps overexaggerated, the cultural myth is based on some reality. For instance, the city is strikingly homogeneous (it is 92 percent white) and wealthy (the median household income is over $85,000 a year, nearly twice the national figure).[22] Another resident, Debi Cortez, observes, "I've had arguments with people who say it makes us look like a bunch of spoiled white people. Well, have you looked at the demographics of Laguna? We may not think we're privileged, but we are."[23]

Another aspect of the cultural myth of *Laguna Beach* is the bohemian lifestyle of the residents. A typical episode shows scenes of casual sex and drinking. Again, though some residents dispute the validity of this behavior, local resident Dora Wexell, mother of a recent graduate of Laguna Beach High School, asserts, "It's pretty hard to be a parent at Laguna Beach High School and watch that show. But if it's new information, you're not living in reality."[24]

Idealized Times

The "retro" sitcom sub-genre consists of stories of a simpler age. Sitcoms like *That '70s Show* present a worldview that is characterized by its constancy, as noted in the lyrics of the opening theme song:

> Hanging out down the street
> The same old thing we did last week.
> Not a thing to do but talk to you
> We're all alright! We're all alright.

As playwright Edward Albee observed, "The characters are outrageous stereotypes and yet sweet and believable at the same time, and, oddly, the expected always surprises us."[25] The cultural references to *Star Wars* characters, streaking, and polyester leisurewear overlook the turbulence of the 1970s—the disastrous end of the Viet Nam War, a president resigning in disgrace, Cold War tensions, an oil shortage, and an international hostage crisis. But for members of today's audience, whose world is defined by fear and stress, this romanticized view of the past is reassuring.

Figure 9.1 **Beauty and the Beach**

The appeal of many genres can be tied to the transmission of cultural myths. Many cultural myths revolve around mystical places that represent an idyllic lifestyle. For instance, popular reality shows like *Laguna Beach: The Real Orange County* (MTV) present a mythic world of privilege, youth, and glamour. (Photo by Frank Micelotta/Getty)

Cultural Beliefs

Some cultural myths lend credence to systems of beliefs within a culture. For instance, the genre of the romantic comedy reinforces the cultural myth of the *All-sufficiency of Love.* According to this cultural myth, romantic love is a mysterious, mystical force that leads to loss of control. Thus, while romantic love is dangerous, it is essential for survival. For every person, there is one (and only one) perfect match. Indeed, a person's identity is totally dependent upon that partner (as opposed to being self-reliant). Within this context, it is easy to understand the sense of urgency involved in finding romance. The end of a relationship has ramifications beyond the loss of one's partner; one loses one's identity, one's self-esteem, and one's reason for living.

Sometimes, however, genres expose cultural myths as an illusion. In a 2004 episode of the teen drama *South Beach,* the only concrete conversa-

tion about the Romantic Ideal comes from Arlene, a twenty-one-year-old student and model, who discusses her "14-year plan."

> By the time I'm 35, I want a big, big house, all kind of sports cars. I'll just have companies that are being run by certain people. And have a lot of investments that are kind of working for it. I'll be able to spend time with my kids and spend time with my husband and travel everywhere and not have to worry about my boss and my vacation time and the kind of things that most people are worried about.[26]

In this a materialistic scenario, the man fits into her life like any other commodity. Indeed, Arlene's only comment about the man in her life is, "If I'm making 500,000 a year, and he's making 80, that causes a lot of problems."[27]

Inter-genre Analysis

Some cultural myths transcend individual genres, reflecting their pervasive nature throughout a culture. For instance, the cultural myth of the *American Dream* can be found across genres, including game shows, reality programs, and romantic comedies. The premise of the American Dream is that everyone has a chance for success. In 1840, Alexis de Tocqueville wrote, "At any moment a servant may become a master."[28]

Unfortunately, this American cultural myth flies in the face of the realities of today's economy. According to U.S. Census Bureau reports on household income in 2005, nearly half the total income—49.7 percent —went to the top 20 percent of households and just 3.6 percent to the bottom 20 percent. On the other hand, the richest 5 percent of U.S. households—those making over $145,500—took in 21.9 percent of all income, well above the 17.5 percent share recorded in 1967.[29] According to Princeton economist Alan B. Krueger, "Recent trends in income distribution have made upward mobility less likely" than it was even twenty years ago.[30] However, the prospect of upward mobility becomes less remote when the myth is reinforced repeatedly across popular genres. Every time a person wins the national Powerball lottery, the ceremony presenting the lucky recipient with an oversized check is shown on television over and over. But at the same time, a cumulative message in programs that celebrate the American Dream is that those who fail to "make it" have only themselves to blame and somehow deserve their fate.

Makeover shows follow in the tradition of TV programs from the 1950s such as *Queen for a Day* and *Strike It Rich*. Each week *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* (ABC) makes people's dreams come true by renovating the house of a family that (like the audience) faces hardships and deserves to be rewarded. One episode featured a young quadriplegic man in Ventura, California, who received a home elevator, so that he no longer had to live in the basement of his three-story house. In another episode, the home of a six-year-old boy with a rare brittle-bone disease was completely renovated with soft cork floors and curved corners, to make the space more livable for him.

Lines of Inquiry

1. Select a sample of genric programs. What do these programs reveal with respect to myths about the role of human beings in the universe?
2. Examine a sample of programs from a genre, focusing on mythic analysis.
   a. What mythic themes appear in this genre?
   b. Describe the hero/heroines in these programs. Do they share any qualities of the mythic hero/heroine? Explain.

   Select a sample of programs from a genre not discussed in the chapter. What mythic issues/concerns does the genre address?

3. Mythic themes
   a. Trace mythic themes that appear in a particular genre.
   b. Examine nuances of a mythic theme as it appears in a genre.
4. Identify cultural myths that appear in genric programs.
   a. Are certain cultural myths tied to particular genres?
   b. Describe the cultural myths.
   c. What do these myths tell us about the culture?
5. Identify the following cultural myths found in genres.
   a. A historical period
   b. Mystical places
   c. Idealized times
   d. Cultural beliefs
6. Conduct an intra-genre line of mythic inquiry. Trace a mythic element that appear across genres.
   a. Mythic hero
   b. Mythic theme
   c. Mythic premise

What does this analysis reveal with regard to the nature of these myths?

Genre Analysis: Mythic Approach

Galaxy Quest *Teaches Us Why We Should "Never Give Up, Never Surrender" Our Cultural Myths* • by Debra Finkel

The 1999 film *Galaxy Quest* hilariously satirizes and yet ultimately supports the modern sci-fi-based mythology that infuses the immensely popular *Star Trek/Star Wars* genre. By examining the mythology that is dissected, spoofed but still honored in this Dean Parisot–directed film, it is possible to better understand the values, concerns, and preoccupations of the culture that is so evident among the "Trekkies" as well as the legions of less overt sci-fi fans in the United States today.

The Film's Plot Reflects Mythic Themes

The story begins at a convention for fans of *Galaxy Quest,* an out-of-production cult TV program à la *Star Trek*. The series' stars are aging, out-of-work actors who make a living by cashing in on their earlier celebrity via guest appearances at fan conventions and promotional events.

The action begins as actor Jason Nesmith, who portrays TV *Galaxy Quest* star Commander Peter Quincy Taggart in the *Star Trek* Captain Kirk tradition, is late once again for his appearance, ticking off the other members of the cast. The other actors and their TV *Galaxy Quest* roles include Alexander Dane (alias the Spock-like Dr. Lazarus), Gwen De-Marco (Lt. Tawny Madison, whose basic functions on the TV series are to repeat the computer and wear figure-revealing costumes), Fred Kwan (Tech Sgt. Chen), and Guy Fleegman (who appeared only once on the series as an extra referred to as "Crewman Guy").

Nesmith is embarrassed when the group expresses anger at him, and mortified when he later overhears a couple of the convention goers deride him as a has-been loser. As Nesmith and his fellow performers approach rock bottom, the plot takes a huge twist. The Thermians—a humble group of endearing, technologically advanced aliens from the planet Thermia—approach Jason and beg him to help them fight the immensely evil, lobster-headed Sarris, who is attempting to wipe out their entire civilization.

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As it turns out, the naïve Thermians idolize the TV *Galaxy Quest* show's "transmissions" and believe that they are "historical documents" recording the crew's actual heroic missions. Naturally, the Thermians have created a real, fully functional spaceship modeled on the show's *Protector,* with the idea of enlisting Nesmith to take command and save them from Sarris. When Nesmith jumps at the chance and asks the rest of the crew to join him, the film's main plot takes off. (Hence the film's tagline: "The show has been cancelled . . . but the adventure is just beginning.")

The main plot is clearly an expression of two familiar mythic themes: "imminent annihilation" and "death and resurrection" (rebirth/regeneration). An impending catastrophe (Sarris's evil plan) brings the downtrodden, bickering cast together to defend the Thermians. The actors' ultimately successful efforts turn a bunch of has-been performers into the brave and bold starship crew that they had portrayed on their aptly named spaceship (*Protector*). In fact, the characters each embrace their respective roles: The Commander risks his life to battle the Rock Monster and Sarris; Tech Sgt. Chen bravely "digitizes" (beams up) the Commander, thus saving his life; and Dr. Lazarus for the first time willingly utters his character's signature (and hackneyed) line—"By Grabthar's hammer, you will be avenged"—and actually finds the courage to follow through with this vow in defense of the Thermians. Hitting home the regeneration theme, the film ends with the actual rebirth of the *Galaxy Quest* TV series with an older and much wiser cast, including the once-sniveling Crewman Guy, who has earned himself a regular part in the show as the security chief.

The plot also incorporates a mythic "quest" theme, as befits the film's name. When the Commander willingly goes on board the real spaceship *Protector* to help the Thermians, he also embarks on a quest to give his life meaning beyond that of an out-of-work actor. In fact, his willingness to jump at this chance for a real adventure is reminiscent of an adolescent search for identity.

One other important subplot of the film reflects the "quest" ideal—the story of the brilliant but dorky teen fan Brandon Wheeger. At the convention, the beleaguered Nesmith nastily insists to Wheeger that none of the show is true. Later, Nesmith accidentally switches his real Thermian-produced transmitter for Wheeger's fake one, setting the stage for Nesmith to call on Wheeger for help during the film's climax. When Nesmith contradicts his earlier statements and says "it's all real," Wheeger responds, "Oh my God, I knew it. I knew it! I knew it!" and proceeds to help Nesmith win his struggle against Sarris. Wheeger's reactions and

involvement in the adventure fulfill his own search for his identity—all his dreams of the space adventures come to fruition and give him a chance to be heroic in his own right.

Galaxy Quest *Reveals Mythic Archetypes*

Galaxy Quest also offers a virtual myriad of mythic archetypes:

- *The Hero as warrior*: Nesmith is overmatched physically by the Rock Monster and Sarris, but wins through courage, quick-wittedness, and resourcefulness—a true David and Goliath reference.
- *The Villain as usurper*: Sarris externalizes our desire to seize power by force; he also shows himself to be a shapeshifter in the tradition of mythological witches and wizards when he infiltrates the bridge during the final scenes.
- *The Savior*: The Thermians believe that Nesmith is their savior; however, in truth, they are his.
- *The Mentor*: Nesmith becomes a mentor to Wheeger; at a pivotal moment, the mentor expresses a revelation ("it's all real") that allows the young hero to act.
- *The Divine Child*: Wheeger is immature but pure in his devotion to the cultural myths represented by TV *Galaxy Quest*. His devotion is what enables him to help Nesmith by safely guiding him through the bowels of the *Protector* to locate the legendary weapon—the Omega 13.

Mythic Symbols and Motifs Abound in Galaxy Quest

Other notable mythic aspects of *Galaxy Quest* include the following:

- Ancient myths divided the universe into cosmic spheres of hell, earth and heaven; proximity to these conveys a symbolic association. In *Galaxy Quest* the skies/outer space are obviously associated with the characters' experiencing their individual epiphanies and finding themselves.
- The aliens are personified, much like mythic gods and creatures. There is a hilarious scene in which the Thermians forget to adopt their human forms and inadvertently terrorize the newly arrived human crew. Their alien forms allow them enough distance to comment

on human issues and concerns—such as the ultimate truths behind the "historical documents."

- The mythic frontier of the Old West has become "Space—The Final Frontier." Just as the Starship *Enterprise* explores the universe on *Star Trek,* so does the *Protector*. The frontier is a continuing mythic element in American culture, where people can seek adventure and "boldly go where no man [or woman] has gone before."
- Life aboard the fictional "starship" is an extension of America's small-town myth. Like a small town or suburb, the starship is defined by its community, order, permanence, sanity, and efficiency. All the crew's needs are met within its confines; it serves as an anchor for exploration.

Conclusion

On the TV *Galaxy Quest* series, Commander Taggart's signature line is: "Never give up. Never surrender." Indeed, a message of the film is that none of us should give up our high ideals and mythic values—whether or not they are perceived by others as "geeky" or "dorky." These ideals and values reflect our continuing need to view America as a place where boldness, bravery, and resourcefulness give strength to heroes and where good can ultimately defeat evil. Americans worry about the Sarrises of the universe; our cultural myths help us remain confident that we can ultimately prevail.

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The Andy Griffith Show *as Cultural Myth* • by Barb Koch

It is a quiet day in Mayberry, North Carolina. Opie is off to school. Aunt Bee is busy baking pies and Floyd is just opening the barbershop. Barney, the town deputy sheriff, is cruising into town, when he comes across a pickup truck and a couple of men on the side of road just outside the town. They have set up a stand and are selling produce on the roadside. Barney tells them they cannot set up shop; they do not have a license to sell and besides, the shops in town would lose business. Barney, in his typical manner is waving his arms and the two men take him for a fool and ignore him. Barney's ego is deflated, as people seem to think he is a goof and never pay attention to him, even though he has a badge. Andy,

the sheriff, decides to fix the problem in his own practical way and give a boost to Barney as well. He wanders by the truck and tells the men that they better move on along because they may think Barney is a fool, but watch out if he loses his temper! If Barney coughs once then straightens the collar of his shirt, that is a sign he is ready to get tough and no one wants to see Barney in that state. The next day, Barney sees the men with their roadside stand set up, he gets out of the car, coughs once, straightens his collar, the men see this, get frightened and leave before Barney can do any damage. However, the men later stop at a gas station and find out Barney is not really as tough as the sheriff and Barney had led them to believe after all. Everyone has a good laugh, and the next day, the men set up shop again.

Meanwhile, back at the office, Andy tells Barney he is going down to tell the men to move their shop someplace else. But Barney insists he should do the job. Barney goes back to the men, tells them all he needs is the power of the badge and to move on or they will be arrested. It finally sinks in that they are not wanted, and they drive off. The shopkeepers are happy and peace is once again restored to the city of Mayberry.

The Andy Griffith Show, which ran from 1960 to 1968, still appears on cable television across America. The show's enduring popularity can be attributed to the appeal of the cultural *Myth of Small Town America.*

Mayberry is a mythic place, imagined by Griffith, producers Sheldon Leonard and Aaron Ruben, and the show's writers. Although *The Andy Griffith Show* premiered in October 1960, it seems more in tune with the 1950s as the community, the values, and even the props, such as the old-style telephone, reflect earlier times. The series seemed far removed from much of the tumult of the 1960s, Watkin says. "It was at a point where America was really in turmoil. *The Andy Griffith Show* and Mayberry represented in some sense this kind of idealized view of what America was."[31]

The serenity of Mayberry was uninfluenced by hard news. The characters rarely watched television; instead they sat on the front porch and talked or sang. Mayberry was somewhat like the eye of a hurricane, a quiet world while the rest of America was dealing with issues like unemployment, the quest for civil rights, voter registration, the uneasiness of nuclear war and a looming war in Vietnam. In contrast, Mayberry offered a simple life with easily solved problems. Thus, in the episode cited above, the problem created by the men (who were, significantly, strangers), was resolved within the half hour.

At the same time, Mayberry was a place with clearcut values. Barney had to face his responsibilities, even though it was unpleasant (and could better have been handled by Andy). Ultimately, Barney (and the small town values he represented) prevailed.

The show had a strong message of accepting people, such as Barney, despite their frailties. Griffith says, "Characters, not jokes, made it such a good series."[32] There was the father-son relationship of Andy and Opie, deputy Barney Fife playing off straight-man Andy, and the personification of Southern hospitality, Aunt Bee.

However, another element that stands out is the absence of black characters in the Southern town. Griffith says he regrets the lack of representation: "We tried in every way to get that to happen, but we were unable to do it."[33]

The stereotypical nuclear family may not have existed in the sheriff's house, but the father-son relationship was reinforced in the show and Aunt Bee was the homemaker. The dominant reading of the show also reinforces the status quo, as viewers want to identify with the Mayberrians. Andy is a heroic figure in the show, the man with common sense who handles problems in the simplest way to get the best results. As Don Rodney Vaughan notes, "The simplicity of Mayberry was portrayed during an era of anything but simple times."[34] It may not have reflected reality, but since its syndication Mayberry has never been off the air.

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