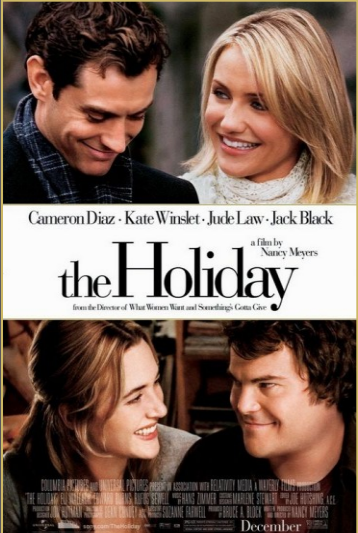
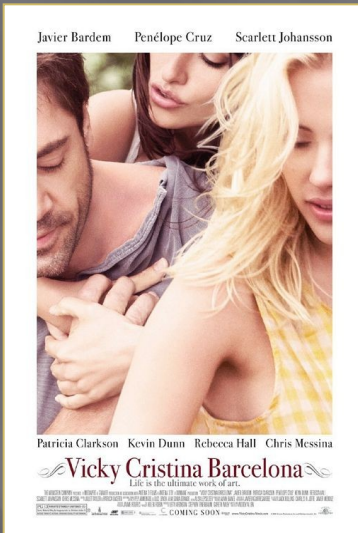
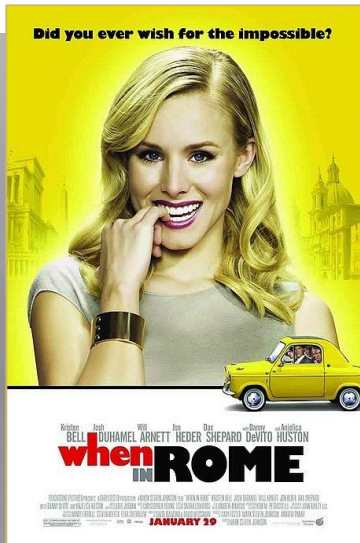


# COMFORT VIEWING

## Session Five Tourist Movies

Department of Film & Audiovisual Culture,  
Masaryk University  
Dr. Richard Nowell

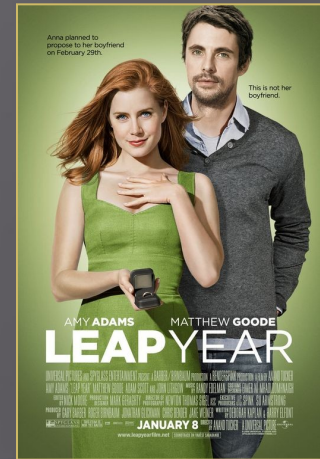
# Tourist Movies



# Targeted Learning Outcomes

To develop a sound understanding of:

1. Tourist movies and repatriation.
2. Tourist movies as Comfort Viewing.
3. Tourist movies as a vacation substitute.



# **Comfort Viewing & Genre(s)**

As well as industry and cultural history, and character-types, the Comfort Viewing Mode helps enrich understandings of media formats

Formats are industry equivalents of genres; ever-expanding clusters of conventions professionals draw from in order to shape their media texts

With content also drawn from elsewhere, formats are “open structures” offering professionals and viewers a balance of familiarity and novelty

Seen this way a format is a building block that can be combined with others, especially those that are modes (ways of presenting material)

Recognizing a format is combined with a mode like Comfort Viewing promises to expand or alter our understandings of individual formats

# Comfort Viewing as A Wing of Media Formats

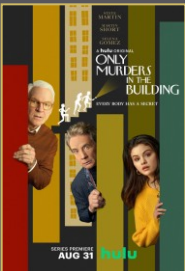
As we have seen, the Comfort Viewing Mode has been combined with other formats, from sci-fi and sitcoms to musicals (and more)

This range of comfort viewing reminds us media industries know varied consumer taste creates profitably large taste-communities

Even those using polarizing genres like horror, real crime, and porn employ the CVM, often by branding output as female-friendly

But the CVM has typically been paired with formats renowned for using uplifting content to inspire similar responses in their viewers

Tales of folks pursuing better lives through travel represent one of the most enduring, high-profile, lucrative formats to use the CVM



# **Negra on Tourist Movies**

Negra furnishes us with the most insightful understanding of tourist movies, derived from an analysis of female-oriented examples of the 90s

She argues that these films are distinguished by their narrative structure and audience address, which helps us understand how they use the CVM

- 1. What problems facing American women does Negra suggest tourist movies address?**
- 2. What solutions do 1990s tourist films offer their primary female audience?**
- 3. How does the Comfort Viewing Mode help us better to understand these films?**

# The Dynamics of Tourist Movies

Negra shows us how Hollywood tourist movies of the 1990s were tailored to be highly relevant to certain American women



She suggests they invited straight, white, middle-class women in their 30s to consider the negative impact of major social shifts



This is not to say every viewer was experiencing them, but they were likely aware of, worried by, or one day burdened by them



She argues that the films offer a fantasy of Europe which invites viewers to imagine a way of life free from such stressors



She argues they draw on a then-new idea of immersive tourism, where travelers experience (fantasies of) everyday life overseas



# Negra's Problem-Solution Model

## Raise issues facing white middle-class US women:

1. Rootlessness due to economic migration
2. Loss of community (see above, and competition)
3. Pressure to choose between a career and a family
4. Body issues and a troubled relationships to food
5. Whiteness as lacking in cultural authenticity

## Posit Tourism as a fantasy solution to these issues:

1. & 2. Presented as rooted and community-centered
3. Slower pace makes family and career possible
4. "Nature boy" re-harmonizes American woman with food, making her happier in her own skin
5. Whiteness enriched by old-world cultural heritage





# The Tourist Format as Comfort Viewing

Negra's problem-solution model helps us to better understand how and why tourist movies use the Comfort Viewing Mode

They pursue positive viewer sentiments, by raising and offering solutions to real-world problems relevant to targeted audiences

They show travelers experiencing uplift through connections with the spaces, inhabitants, and customs of a foreign territory

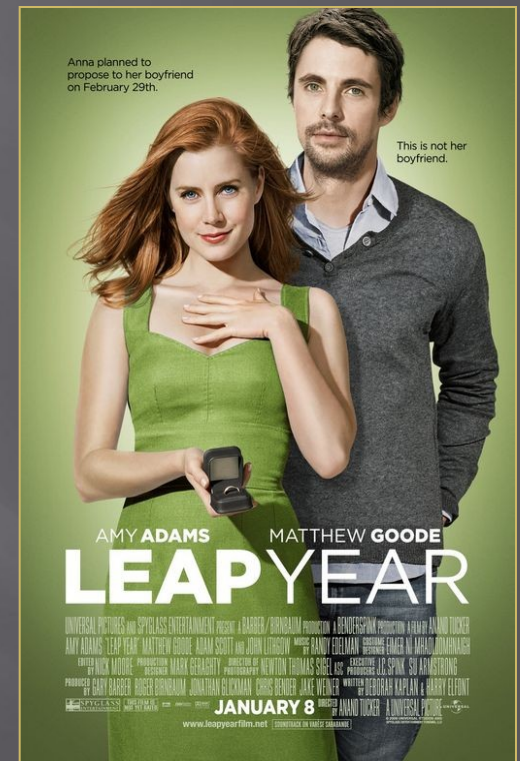
These are invariably presented as detached from the modern world; as rooted in the past (nostalgia) and authentic (sincerity)

Tourist movies also project familiarity, by exposing viewers to time-honored content derived from earlier examples of the genre



# *Leap Year* (2010)

1. What problems is the protagonist facing?
2. What solutions does the film offer to these problems?
3. What does this film say about the role tourist media might play for actual viewers?



# **A Tourist Film by the numbers ...**

Echoing *Sex & the City*, this film amplifies the fantasy dimensions of the tourist film to a modern-day fairy-tale

In Boston, the heroine's emphasis on socio-economic status barely conceals her alienation, trauma, and sadness

Here, her life is cast as inauthentic; food, real estate, partnership, identity, and community are merely resources

Her priorities are reset by a nature boy associated with cooking, homeliness, romance, village life, and integrity

Ultimately, it suggests relocation to Europe can serve as a tonic with a possibility for real therapeutic rejuvenation



# ... But be Careful What You Wish for

But this quite generic promotion of tourist film values also directly addresses real-world criticism of the genre

The film pointedly suggests the unpalatable alternative of departing from the genre's romantic fantasy formula

Such dark scenarios represent alternatives for those who, like Declan, reject its romantic premise as “poo”

The film invokes horror and tragedy, hinting at gang rape, insularity, backwardness, suicide, and butchery

Foreclosing such alternatives thus represents a defense against criticism of the film's comforting ambitions



# **Treating Negra's Model Flexibly**

Negra's model fails to account for many of her own examples (beyond *Notting Hill* that is), let alone other tourist movies

Her model needs to be treated loosely, especially when applied to films containing different types of protagonist and aimed at different viewers.

**One way around this, is to ask a series of more general questions:**

1. What problems does the protagonist experience at home?
2. What solution do they expect abroad to provide to these problems?
3. To what extent does abroad fulfil these expectations?
4. In the final reckoning, which comes out better – home or away?

Such adaptations help us understand the dynamics of all tourist movies...



# **Screening II:** ***The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (2013)**

1. What problems is the protagonist facing?
2. What solutions does the film offer to these problems?
3. What does this film say about the role tourist media might play for actual viewers?



# A Tourist Movie of the Mind

This film promotes the act of comfort viewing, including tourist movies like itself, as a superior alternative to actual tourism

Its concerns a bereaved, lonely, mistreated man whose alienation from his modern city life has left him with little-to-no self-esteem

Struggling with such pressures, he seeks uplift from movie-like daydreams in which he transforms into a dynamic go-getter

Retreating from everyday life into **familiar** media scenarios enrich him through **connection**, **sincerity**, **nostalgia**, and **uplift**

In spite of his very real personal and professional defeats, cinematic tourism increases Walter's self-esteem and confidence





# **“Staycationing” with Tourist Media**

*The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* is not alone as a tourist film that promotes the benefits of comfort viewing like itself over actual travel

Apart from income derived from themed resorts, the media industries do not benefit directly from consumers investing in international travel

One could argue tourism is a direct competitor to the media industries in the fight for consumers' leisure time and expendable income

The cost of international travel, especially intercontinental travel, requires a reduction in other leisure expenses like media consumption

It is ultimately in the media industries interests to cast tourist media as preferable to tourism, by undermining the appeal of actual tourism

## **In Sum**

As well as industry and cultural history, and character-types, the Comfort Viewing Mode helps us develop our understandings of formats

Formats are clusters of conventions industry professionals draw from to balance familiarity and novelty, and manage creative and economic risks

As a lens through which content is presented and potentially understood, the Comfort Viewing Mode has been combined with myriad formats

Understandings of Tourist films derive from female-oriented examples wherein an American woman finds happiness by relocating overseas

The CVM expands understandings of this format to include those aimed at other viewers, and the promotion of tourist film viewing over travel

# **Next Time...**

The Comfort Viewing Mode also enriches understandings of media politics, including a format routinely dismissed as right-wing hate

Topic: Geriaction

Readings: Frame, Geriaction Vigilante Cinema.

Home Screenings: *Nobody* (2021),  
*Top Gun: Maverick* (2022)

[Preparatory Questions on MS TEAMS and in the Syllabus]

Meeting: Thursday 14 December