Textual Analysis, Discourse & Identity
Unpacking TV Texts for Social Meanings
Television Authorship

- Who is the author of a TV program?
- Auteur Theory: Romantic notion of the artist does not suit TV's corporate and collaborative structures.
- Producer/Showrunner has more control than Director in TV Production.
- KEY: Television's corporate/collaborative nature do not necessarily make it mediocre. Equating personal genius or breaking conventions with aesthetic quality is an outmoded concept that tells us little about TV.
Style and Stylistics

- "Cinematic Look": Good TV does not necessarily look cinematic or have an auteur.

- Four Categories of TV Stylistics: 1) descriptive, 2) evaluative (aesthetic), 3) analytic, 4) historical.

- Descriptive: methods by which style is described.

- Evaluative: attempts to interpret stylistic descriptions. What are the functions of a program's style? Style can symbolize, decorate, persuade, hail, and differentiate.

- Analytical: attempts to interpret stylistic descriptions.

- Historical: attempts to disentangle the varied histories of TV’s technology, economics, and aesthetic conventions to account for the medium’s style at particular points in time.
Genres provide a common language for both producers and consumers of TV programs.

Genres can be seen as modern-day rituals that reinforce particular values and social beliefs.

Texts can be grouped into genres by theory or history.

Genres can be defined by audience response, stylistic schema, and/or subject matter.

TV Texts of a particular genre often rely on the similar narrative functions, binary oppositions, and ideological outlooks.

Mythic Analysis: sees genres as contemporary myths & stories shared by large segments of a culture.

Ideological Analysis: provide examples of how belief systems pervade culture at a particular time.
Semiotics

- Study of how meanings are signified and interpreted.
- Signifier (sign) & Signified (idea, concept)
- 1) Indexical Sign: the signifier is caused by the signified.
- 2) Iconic Sign: signifier resembles the signified.
- 3) Symbolic Sign: signified and signifier are only linked through cultural convention and shared social knowledge.
- Text (combines several signs) & System (rules govern use of signs). In systems, meaning arises through opposition.
- Syntagmatic (linear, chronological) & Paradigmatic (associative) Structures: the organization of signs. Codes are rules that enforce meanings within textual structures.
Ideological Criticism & Cultural Studies

- **Marxism**: history is the struggle among classes to control the means of production (labor, goods, industry). Marx saw ideologies as belief systems controlled by economics: the ruling class’s ideology is based on their advantageous position. Proletariats are forced to accept this ideology because the bourgeoisie control society’s base (infrastructure), and thus its superstructure (ideologies).

- “Ideology” Today is different from Marx’s ideas in 2 Ways: 1) a society’s ideology consists of many conflicting sets of meanings (discourses) struggling with one another. John Fiske defines Discourses as “a language or system of representation that has developed socially in order to make and circulate a coherent set of meanings about an important topic area.” 2) Individuals accept, reject, or negotiate ideology.

Ideological Criticism & Cultural Studies

- Concern for Context, as well as Text:
  - How are these discourses produced?
  - Which discourses are privileged over others?
  - Which social and economic interests are served by these discourses?
  - How do the discourses of the text relate to the discourses of TV's producers and consumers?

- Ethnographic Approaches, Fan Studies: Participatory Culture, User-Generated Content, Social Networking, Collective Intelligence.
Discourse of the Industry I: Production Studies

- Production Studies: Interested in the culture of the workers involved in creating the text. What is the social culture of media production?

- Blends interviews, analysis of corporate economic structure, participant observation of workers, and textual interpretation.

- Asserts that economics undergirds everything within the TV industry.
Discourse of the Industry II: Political Economy

- Political Economists: research how broader global economic pressures shape the production of television.
- TNCs: Transnational Corporations
- Extreme Horizontal Integration: a few conglomerates own nearly all U.S. media.

Important Questions:
- Who owns the networks and the production studios?
- What connections are there among TV channels, networks, etc.?
- How do media companies generate revenue and how is it allocated?
- How are industries/companies impacted by government, deregulation?
Discourse of the Industry II: Political Economy

- Focus on Four Aspects of Global Economy and Impact on TV:
  - Spread of Transnational Corporations and Consolidation of Media Ownership.
  - Globalization and Cultural Imperialism.
  - TV as public sphere.
  - Technological Change & Affect on Economics (the internet, for instance).
Discourse & Identity I: Gender

- Ideological Critics/Resistance Theory: assumes that U.S. culture as it appears on TV is middle-class, male-dominated, white and heterosexual, and that this needs to change. Thus these critics aim to provide perspectives from the margins, rejecting hegemony. These perspectives are defined by class, gender, sexual orientation, and race/ethnicity.

- Feminism & TV: Intersect in 1960s with awareness of sexual politics (power relationships between men and women) & second-wave feminism.

- Study of Stereotypes & “Image of Women” studies have moved to more complex considerations that account for how TV texts emphasize meanings related to gender.

- Oppositional Discourses in TV
  - Patriarchal Discourses no longer monolithic & uncontested.
  - How does the text “position” the viewer? How do discourses of gender impact the viewer?
Discourse & Identity I: Gender

- **Gender Identity**: describes society’s discourse-based ideas of what it means to be a man or woman. This school of thought holds that identity factors like gender are constructed and performed, not dictated by biology.

- **Postfeminism**: mistaken belief that men and women have achieved equality and that feminism is no longer necessary.

- **3rd Wave Feminism**:
  - Playful embrace of popular culture, exuberant expression of sexual identity & desire, rejection of feminine/feminist binary, and individualistic understanding of choice.
  - Celebrates aspects of women’s experience previously ignored or condemned.
  - Awareness of blurred boundaries between gender identities and intersection of race and gender.
Discourse & Identity II: Queer Theory

- Study of the discourse surrounding lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identities and their representation in our culture.
- 1990s Appearance of more LGBT characters.
- Similar to Feminism in shared concern with how identity is built and concern for society’s power structures, as well as the assertion that gender is an ideological construct.
- TV has often cast LGBT people as outside of “normal” to maintain an environment in which they may be treated unfairly. “Queer” recaptures and reclaims a word used to malign LGBT people.
- Concerned with how queer culture is absorbed/assimilated into mainstream/straight culture. Has also transcended the study of stereotypes.
- “Madonna Phenomenon”
Discourse & Identity III: Race & Ethnicity

- Has similarly transcended examinations of stereotypes to focus instead on discourses (sets of meanings) associated with racial and ethnic cultures. How do discourses construct identities?
  - What meanings are associated with being _____?
  - How do language and imagery build those meanings?
  - What is the politics of essentialism (racial categories based on cultural signifiers)?
  - How are identity categories transgressed and blended?
- Racial Formation Approach: signifiers become racialized or raced.
- Three principal discourses on African Americans in TV: 1) Assimilationist (invisibility), 2) Pluralist (separate but equal), and 3) Multiculturalist. These discourses help us analyzing social and political meanings associated with images and how TV encourages us to understand them.
Dave Chappelle
Dave Chappelle: Image Analysis