CTCS 499: Contemporary Animated Television
SCB 104, Spring 2016. Tuesdays 2-4:50 PM (lecture) and Thursdays 2-4:20 PM (screening)*
*Attendance is optional in the screening section, but the screenings themselves are mandatory.

Prof. George Carstocea
Provost’s Mentored Teaching Fellow
carstoce@usc.edu
CTCS 499
Contemporary Animated TV
Draft Syllabus

Units: 4
Spring 2016
Lecture/discussion section: 2-4:50 PM, Tuesdays
Screening section:* 2-4:20 PM, Thursdays

*attendance in the screening section is optional, but if you skip it, you are required to watch the assigned episodes before the next week’s meeting.

Location: SCB104
Instructor: George Carstocea
Office: TBA
Office Hours: TBA (after consultation with enrolled students)

Contact Email: carstoce@usc.edu

(if possible, please include the course number, CTCS 499, in the subject line of your email)
Contemporary Animated TV

They're henchmen, you don't explain to them. They do your bidding.
When you say jump, they say, "what shark?"  
-The Monarch, Venture Bros.

Course Description

This class, like the field it covers, is a hybrid. You will be asked to seriously consider animated television from a variety of perspectives, including TV-theory based approaches, reflections on comedy by its practitioners, as well as academic and philosophical theories of humor. Our inquiry into the state of contemporary TV animation will start from a core selection of shows aired on [adult swim], the adult animation channel that airs at nights on Cartoon Network, and that has functioned as a laboratory for some of the experimental tendencies that are making their way into more mainstream television. We will contextualize this knowledge with productions from other venues, both as precursors to the contemporary trends (The Simpsons and Futurama on FOX, Home Movies on UPN, Dexter’s Laboratory and The Powerpuff Girls on Cartoon Network) and as more mainstream products that emerged from the same milieu (Archer on FX and Bob’s Burgers on FOX, both of which are created and led by former [adult swim] showrunners. After the midterm, we will move into issues of content, representation, and the cutting edge of contemporary animation on the web, as well as the medium’s applicability in a wide range of contexts from data visualization to instruction and simulation, while also keeping track of the authorial and aesthetic issues we discussed in the first half of the semester.

This course has two weekly sections: a three-hour lecture/discussion meeting, and a two-hour screening. In the screening, we will watch the week’s assigned episodes, and I am glad to stay behind and chat with you after the screening if you have any immediate questions. Attendance is only mandatory for the lecture/discussion section. However, if you decide not to attend the official screening, you will be responsible for watching the assigned episodes on your own (see below under “Course Notes” and “Attendance Policy” for more info on this).

We will begin every lecture/discussion meeting with a short screening of a historical cartoon that deals with similar formal and/or thematic issues as the week’s main screened TV episodes. These shorts will be drawn from the historical period commonly known as the Golden Age of Hollywood animation – the classical and postclassical shorts spanning from the 1930s to the late 1950s that were exhibited alongside feature films and subsequently provided the template for televised animation (and were themselves broadcast in televised syndication for decades to come). Works by Warner Bros. Animation (Looney Tunes / Merrie Melodies), Disney, Fleischer Studios, MGM, and UPA will dominate this roster. Fair warning: some of these short films, very much a product of their times, contain antiquated social attitudes, as well as stereotypical and politically charged imagery pertaining to race, ethnicity, gendered behavior, and political options. While we will spend a lot of our time investigating issues of form and production, I want to also encourage you to grapple actively with the sociocultural circumstances that historically defined the content of these works.

While I have decided to focus on American TV animation in order to narrow what would otherwise become an unwieldy field of study, I also want to encourage you to explore the wealth of animated TV currently produced and broadcast across the globe. If any such international shows catch your eye, you will have an opportunity to write about them in the final paper, which asks you to compare a show we screened in class with another animated program of your choice.

A note on “spoilers:” If you believe that spoilers exist, this may not be the class for you. We will only watch limited selections from the assigned shows, which means that we will jump around through seasons, and I will have to fill you in on plot information that you’re missing. Furthermore, in our lectures and discussions I will frequently contextualize the episodes we viewed, and might provide salient story points for clarification/deeper analysis. Hopefully this will not push you away from the class. Plot and story continuity is only a small part of the aesthetic impulse behind these shows, and, once you gain a structural
understanding of storytelling, you may even notice that most structured narratives are quite predictable anyway.

**Learning Objectives**

By the end of this class, you should have a solid understanding of the current state of TV animation, ranging from aesthetic concerns to production and industrial practices, as well as recurring themes and their cultural correlatives. You will be able to situate this knowledge in the context of the historical development of the medium of animation as a whole. Furthermore, you will hone your writing and research skills for the graded course projects, and amass a basic toolkit for the study of the moving images, including semiotic, structuralist, and other contemporary theoretical outlooks.

**Prerequisite(s): None**

**Recommended Preparation:** CTCS 190 (Introduction to Film) and/or CTCS 191 (Introduction to Television) or equivalent

**Course Notes**

This course requires you to watch approximately two hours of content every week. The course includes a regularly scheduled screening session, which will show the TV episodes assigned for that week. Attendance to this section is not mandatory; however, if you decide not to show up, you are required to watch the week’s screenings on your own time. I reserve the right to administer pop-quizzes and ensure that everyone is doing the required viewing.

Our class meetings will be based on a combination of lecture and discussion. To get the most out of both lectures and discussions, you must do all of the reading assignments on time.

This is a reading and viewing-intensive course. The reading, at times dense theoretical work, cannot be skimmed or speed-read. You must set aside sufficient time, space, and energy for reading and possibly re-reading what are often difficult materials. I will briefly introduce next week’s readings in every class session to give you a heads-up as to the complexity level and the amount of time you need to put into that particular week’s work, and distribute worksheets to help you make the most of the assigned material, but you are responsible for doing at least 6 hours of homework (including the weekly screenings) a week. If that sounds like more than you can manage, please try to look for another class.

You should obviously also be prepared to complete at least 2 hours of active screening time each week. You can find a basic worksheet template for taking notes at the end of this syllabus. I strongly suggest you use it or a similar system to keep track of your viewing. Hopefully, its standardized format should help you see structural similarities and differences between the shows we watch, and therefore give you a good idea of the general principles of humor, as well as the specific voice of each of the shows/creators we are considering this semester.

Note that this is a relatively under-researched field, so your close attention to texts and your class contributions are essential for the success of the course. This is exciting: think of yourselves as trailblazers, exploring the best and most surreal works that contemporary animation has to offer.

Lively and thoughtful participation is essential to the success of the class. Come to class prepared to talk about the readings and screenings, as I will often call on students at random to contribute to our discussion.

Much of the required material for this class will be posted to Blackboard. I will also post other optional course resources to this page – helper handouts for your papers, online style and grammar guides, and interesting contemporary animated content. Please monitor this page closely, and sign up for push notifications if you use the Blackboard smartphone app.
Attendance Policy

Regular attendance is mandatory in the lecture/discussion section. Attendance will be monitored at the beginning of class. Anyone who is not present at the time when attendance is taken will be marked as absent for the day. This mark will not be changed to “late,” if the student shows up a few minutes after the taking of attendance by the instructor. This needs to be taken into consideration by anyone whose scheduling conflicts may not permit them to get to class on time. You are allowed a maximum of two unexcused absences over the course of the semester. Each further unexcused absence beyond the two allowed ones will lower your final grade by 1/3 of a letter grade.

Excused absences are instances of a student having to miss class because of higher circumstances outside the student’s control that can and, by any means, must be properly documented.

Attendance is not required in the screening section. However, if you don’t attend, you are responsible for viewing the week’s selected episodes before next week’s lecture on your own time. I will pop-quiz you to ensure that you have viewed the required episodes at least four times over the course of the semester, and your pop-quiz grade average will make up 15% of the final grade for the course.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials


All other readings will be posted on the course Blackboard website.

Description and Assessment of Assignments

You will write two papers, for a total of 15-20 pages, for this course.

The first paper (6-8 pages)
Your midterm essay will require you to write an in-depth episode analysis of an episode of TV drawn from the shows screened in the first six weeks of the semester. You can use any episode you want, as long as it is not one of the episodes of that show we screened in class. Your paper, although it can be grounded in issues of content analysis or parameters of industrial production, must also take into account the formal and aesthetic qualities specific to the medium of animation. You will have a mandatory meeting with me during office hours a few weeks before the paper is due to discuss your ideas for a thesis and possible argumentative strategies. You have to submit a hard copy of this assignment by the beginning of lecture on the due date, and also submit it online through TurnItIn on Blackboard by 11:59 PM the same night. The grade for this paper will make up 25% of your final grade. More details are included in the assignment prompt, which will be handed out in class and posted on Blackboard.

The second paper (8-12 pages)
Your final essay will require you to conduct research outside of the class readings, and you will give a short (6-8 minute) presentation on your selected topic in class during one of the last three weeks of the semester. This essay should compare the aesthetics, content, and/or industrial production contexts of two contemporary animated shows – one that we screened in class, and one of your choice. Again, you will have to meet with me one-on-one (as soon as possible after the term break) to discuss possible argumentative and research trajectories. You have to submit a hard copy of this assignment by the beginning of lecture on the due date,
and also submit it online through TurnItIn on Blackboard by 11:59 PM the same night. Your 6-8 minute presentation on your research project will be scheduled during one of the last three weeks of the semester, and account for 10% of your final grade. Combined with the 35% grade weight for the paper itself, this research assignment will therefore make up 45% of your final grade.

**Pop-Quizzes**

As I mentioned above, I reserve the right to pop quiz you regarding the week’s screening content at the beginning of lecture. There will be at least 5 pop-quizzes administered at random dates over the course of the semester (and more if I notice that you are not keeping up with the required screenings). Your average grade from these quizzes will make up 15% of your final grade.

**Extra Credit Assignments**

There will be no extra credit assignments in this class. However, because I will run the lecture as a combined lecture/discussion section, I may assign you in-class group exercises and/or solo worksheets, or short exercises to complete on Blackboard. If these assignments are collected at the end of class or submitted through Blackboard, your performance on them will be computed as part of your in-class participation grade (which accounts for 15% of final grade).

**Grading Breakdown**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>% of final grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Midterm paper</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Paper + Presentation</td>
<td>35% + 10% = 45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pop-quizzes on weekly screening content</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of In-Class Participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Assignment Submission Policy**

Your midterm and final papers are due in hard copy on the respective assigned due dates, at the beginning of class. You must also submit your papers through TurnItIn on Blackboard by 11:59PM the same night. Failure to meet either of these deadlines **by even a few minutes** will result in a 1/3 letter grade penalty, and you will similarly lose 1/3 of a letter grade for every two days that your work is late.

Pop quizzes will be administered randomly at the beginning of lecture. If you miss the beginning of the quiz and are not excused for the day due to a medical or family emergency, you will not only be marked absent for the day, but also get 0 points on that particular quiz, which will eventually factor into your final grade as discussed above.

**Policy on Personal Electronic Devices**

You are allowed and even encouraged to use digital devices for note-taking in the lecture section. Please note, however, that you will be asked to leave class immediately and marked absent for the week if you use your device for ANY OTHER purpose than note-taking during class time. I will also not allow you to use your cell/smartphone for any personal reason during class, but might ask you to use them in conjunction with web apps for class purposes. These rules might seem a bit draconian, but I want us to get the most of our time together in class, and distracting behavior (even something as small as an open Facebook or Twitter page on a visible screen) affects everyone around you.

**A note on extensions**

There will be no extensions granted for any work due in this class, with the exception of serious medical/family circumstances out of the student’s control, which have to be properly documented. Any late work will incur a 1/3 of a letter grade penalty for every 48 hours that it is late beyond the deadline.
Course Schedule

WEEK I - TV Theory Primer and Introduction to Animation History

Lecture: Brief History of Animation and its practices of production. Introduction to TV theoretical methodologies. Semiotics and Structuralism.

In-Class Screenings:
  - Georges Melies – A Trip to the Moon (1902) 9 min
  - J. Stuart Blackton – The Enchanted Drawing (1900) 2 min
  - J. Stuart Blackton – Humorous Phases of Funny Faces (1906) 3 min
  - Emile Cohl – Fantasmagorie (1908) 1 min
  - Winsor McCay – Gertie the Dinosaur (1914) 12 min
  - Dave Fleischer – Snow White (Betty Boop short), 1933, 7 min

View for next week: 3 episodes of The Simpsons (TBD) and 3 episodes of Futurama (TBD)

Read for next week:
  - Maureen Furniss, Chapter 1 (“Introduction to Animation Studies”) and Chapter 2 (“Foundations of Studio Practices”, p. 3-28
  - Ellen Seiter, “Semiotics, Structuralism, and Television” (from ChannelsofDiscourse,Reassembled)

WEEK II – TV Theory Primer Cont’d, Broadcast Animation of the 1990s


In-Class Screening: Isadore “Friz” Freleng – You Ought to Be in Pictures (Warner Bros, 1940, 9 min)

View for next week: Dexter’s Laboratory (3 episodes TBD)
  - The Powerpuff Girls (2 episodes TBD)
  - My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic – “The Best Night Ever”

Read for next week:
WEEK III – Cartoon Network in the 1990s


In-Class Screening: Tex Avery, “Red Hot Riding Hood” (MGM, 1943, 7 minutes)
Genndy Tartakovsky/Sony Studios – Popeye CGI proof-of-concept reel

View for next week: Space Ghost: Coast to Coast (3 10-minute episodes TBD)
Harvey Birdman: Attorney at Law (2 10-minute episodes TBD)
Sealab 2021 (4 10-minute episodes TBD)

Read for next week: Maureen Furniss, Chapter 7, “Full and Limited Animation” and Chapter 11 “Animation Audiences”


WEEK IV – The Emergence of Adult Swim


In-Class Screening: John Hubley – Rooty Toot Toot (UPA, 1951, 7 minutes)
Selected clips from the original Hanna-Barbera shows Space Ghost and Sealab 2020, whose visual assets were remixed to create Space Ghost: Coast to Coast and Sealab 2021

View for next week: The Venture Bros. (6 episodes):
S1E1: Dia de los Dangerous
S1E13: Return to Spider-Skull Island
S2E1: Powerless in the Face of Death
S2E4: Escape to the House of Mummies, Part 2
S2E12-13: Showdown at Cremation Creek (2-part season finale)

Read for next week:


John Caldwell, “Industrial Auteur Theory” (from Production Culture)

WEEK V – The Venture Bros. - Space Age Parody

Lecture: The Venture Bros. and the physical and ideological relics of the Space Age. Adventure cartoons and their worldview. Worldbuilding, animation, and satire.

In-Class Screening: One episode of Jonny Quest (Hanna-Barbera, 1964-65, originally ran on ABC)

View for next week: Archer (6 episodes):
S1E1: Pilot (Mole Hunt)
S1E2: Training Day
S2E10: Dial M For Mother
S3E12: White Nights
S3E12-13: Space Race, parts 1 and 2
S5E1: White Elephant
WEEK V cont’d
Read for next week:

Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik, “Gags, jokes, wisecracks, and comic events,” in Popular Film and Television Comedy, Routledge, 1990 (p. 43-62)

Michael Z. Newman, “From Beats to Arcs: Toward a Poetics of Television Narrative.” The Velvet Light Trap, Fall 2006

WEEK VI – Archer – Reframing Cold War Ideology
Lecture: Archer and the migration of talent from [adult swim] to other venues. Spy thriller pastiche and Cold War satire. Auteur animation and intertextual texture.

In-Class Screening: Chuck Jones – Hell-Bent for Election (FDR 2-reel campaign film, UFP, 1944, 14 min.)

Adam Reed and Matt Thompson - Frisky Dingo ([adult swim], first 2 episodes, 10 minutes each)

View for next week: Rick and Morty (6 episodes TBD)

Read for next week:

Paul Wells: “‘Smarter than the Average Art Form:’ Animation in the Television Era”, in Prime Time Animation: Television Animation and American Culture, Routledge, 2003

Selections from Sigmund Freud, Humor and The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious

WEEK VII – Format Parody and The Freedom of Cable

In-Class Screening: Chuck Jones – “Duck Amuck” (Warner Bros., 1953, 7 minutes)

Selected clips from Dan Harmon’s NBC live-action show “Community”

View for next week: Bob’s Burgers (6 episodes):
  Human Flesh (2 versions: aired 20-minute pilot and unaired 13-minute test pilot)
  Mother Daughter Laser Razor
  OT: The Outside Toilet
  Topsy
  Bad Tina
  The Frond Files

Read for next week:


Optional reading:
WEEK VIII – Moving into the Mainstream: from Cable to Broadcast. MIDTERM PAPER DUE

Lecture: Bob’s Burgers and cable aesthetics on broadcast television. The animated family sitcom. The changing American family.

In-Class Screening: Robert Cannon – “Gerald McBoing-Boing” (UPA, 1950, 7 minutes)

View for next week: The Boondocks (3 episodes TBD) and South Park (3 episodes TBD)

Read for next week:


Supplemental reading on the week’s topic (you can either read this now, or wait until next week when you have a light reading load to catch up):


Furniss, Ch. 10, “Institutional Regulators” and ch. 12 “Issues of Representation”

WEEK IX - Issues of Representation

Lecture: Race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and difference in political TV animation. South Park as equal-opportunity offender. The Boondocks, comic culture, and interpretive communities. Killer Mike and [adult swim]’s relation to the Atlanta rap music scene. Historical issues of ethnic and racial representation and banned cartoons.

In-Class Screening: Bob Clampett - Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs (Warner Bros., 1943, 7 minutes)
Killer Mike – “Reagan” music video (4 min.)

View for next week: Adventure Time (4 or 5 episodes, 12 minutes each TBD)
Clone High (first 3 episodes)

Read for next week:
Jason Mittell,“TelevisionGenresasCulturalCategories”(fromGenreandTelevision)

Finish last week’s reading if you haven’t already.

WEEK X - Genre and Animation


In-Class Screening: Ted Parmelee – “The Tell-tale Heart” (UPA, 1953, 7 minutes)

View for next week: Monkey Dust (2 episodes TBD)
Superjail! (2 episodes TBD)
Off the Air (1 episode TBD)
WEEK X Cont'd

Read for next week:

Furniss, Chapter 13, “Considering Form in Abstract Animation” and Chapter 3, “Alternatives in Animation Production”

“Oskar Fischinger: Artist of the Century” by William Moritz
http://www.iotacenter.org/visualmusic/articles/moritz/fischartist

Lev Manovich, “Compositing: From Image Streams to Modular Media” in The Language of New Media

WEEK XI - Abstract and Avant-Garde TV

Lecture: Abstract Animation and Avant-Garde Art. The integration of independent artists into Hollywood production structures. The impact of the National Film Board of Canada and Norman McLaren on independent art animation. [adult swim]’s *Off the Air* and the curation of contemporary animation. Compositing and the integrity of the original. International and transnational conceptions and practices with regard to high-art animation.

In-Class Screening: Oskar Fischinger – Motion Painting No. 1
Oskar Fischinger – Bach Toccata and Fugue in D Minor sequence from Walt Disney’s Fantasia (uncredited)
Norman McLaren – Begone, Dull Care
Norman McLaren – Hen Hop

View for next week: BoJack Horseman, first 6 episodes

Read for next week:

More readings on new voices in animation TBD

WEEK XII - Emerging Voices in Animation: The Netflix Newcomer

Lecture: BoJack Horseman and Netflix’s entry into original animated programming. New media audiences and venues. Career trajectories of young animators.

Special invited guest: Ryan Gillis, MFA.

Ryan Gillis earned his MFA in the Animation and Digital Arts program at USC last year (2014). His thesis film has been selected for screening at both the Sundance and South by Southwest festivals in 2015. He has graciously agreed to offer his time to discuss the week’s topic as well as any other questions students might have about the art and industry of animation from the perspective of a young professional.

In-Class Screening: Ryan Gillis, “Palm Rot” (2014, Official Selection - Sundance and SxSW 2015)

View for next week: Adventure Time, “A Glitch is A Glitch”
Charlie the Unicorn
Teen Girl Squad / Homestar Runner
JibJab short TBD
Chris Milk/Aaron Koblin – The Wilderness Downtown (HTML5 Tech Demo and interactive music video for The Arcade Fire)
Run the Jewels (El-P and Killer Mike) – Run the Jewels music video
WEEK XII cont’d
Read for next week:

Furniss, Chapter 9, “Animation and Digital Media” (p. 173-198)


WEEK XIII – Web Animation and Interactive Paradigms

In-Class Screening: Immersive animation – Leviathan Demo from USC WorldBuilding Media Lab and Intel Labs

View for next week: Samurai Jack (3 episodes TBD)
Selected clips of VFX from Hollywood films and broadcast television

Read for next week:


WEEK XIV – Labor and Contemporary Industry; Student Presentations on Final Projects

In-Class Screening: VFX and post-production reels from a variety of films (The Grand Budapest Hotel, Guardians of the Galaxy, etc.)

View for next week: Nothing (Focus on your final paper)

Read for next week: Nothing (Focus on your final paper)

WEEK XV – Student Presentations on Final Paper Projects Continue. FINAL PAPER DUE
Final Lecture: Takeaways for a New Media Future

In-Class Screening: Clips of the shows covered in the class thus far, integrated in the lecture.
Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

**Plagiarism** - presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words - is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards and Appropriate Sanctions*, accessible here: [https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/files/2015/09/SCampus-Final-093015_v6.pdf](https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/files/2015/09/SCampus-Final-093015_v6.pdf). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See the university policies on scientific misconduct: [http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct](http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct).

**Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment** are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* ([http://equity.usc.edu/](http://equity.usc.edu/)) or to the *Department of Public Safety* via either of these forms: [http://dps.usc.edu/contact/report/](http://dps.usc.edu/contact/report/) or [http://web-app.usc.edu/web/dps/silentWitness/](http://web-app.usc.edu/web/dps/silentWitness/). The *Center for Women and Men* ([http://engemannshc.usc.edu/cwm/](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/cwm/)) provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage ([http://sarc.usc.edu/](http://sarc.usc.edu/)) describes reporting options and other resources.

**Help with scholarly writing** is provided by a number of USC's schools. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* ([http://ali.usc.edu](http://ali.usc.edu)), which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students.

**Help arranging accommodation for students with disabilities** is provided by the *Office of Disability Services and Programs* ([http://dsp.usc.edu](http://dsp.usc.edu)).

**Emergency information** will be posted at [http://emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu). If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, this website will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

**Course Exam, Project and Paper Retention Policy**
It is the responsibility of all students in Critical Studies courses to retrieve all papers, projects, assignments and/or exams within one academic year of completion of a course. These records may be essential in resolving grade disputes and incompletes as well as assist in verifying that course requirements have been met. The Critical Studies Division will dispose of all records from the previous academic year in May of the current academic year. No exceptions. Please be in contact with your TAs about collecting these documents while you are taking the course.