

British Situation Comedy and “The Culture of the New Capitalism”

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Abstract

This study examines British television situation comedy over the last fifteen years and analyses the genre as part of a discourse about the nature of modernity. In this period globalisation, technology and the rapid reassessment of formerly established social structures have created new modes of everyday existence that represent significant changes to people's lives. The thesis argues that contemporary sitcoms address these shifts in social understanding and anxieties about contemporary British life. A wide range of texts are discussed, four in particular detail; *Peep Show*, *Love Soup*, *Saxondale* and *Home Time*; which explicitly try to form a dialogue with their audience about living in modernity.

The thesis largely takes a methodological approach from Television Studies, referencing scholars from the discipline, in particular John Ellis's concepts of "working through" and employing a significant amount of textual analysis. Chapter two looks at the context of television in this changing world and chapter three analyses how sitcom as a genre has redefined its forms. Chapter four identifies the importance of 'tone' in comedy and analyses how modernity demands new modes of address for comedy to meet the expectations of its audience. The study demonstrates how texts balance new approaches with continuities drawn from the existing sitcom tradition.

In order to interrogate the nature of social change and its effects, chapter one engages with the work of a number of social theorists. In particular it analyses the recent writings of Richard Sennett and Zygmunt Bauman, who identify contemporary life as "the culture of the new capitalism" and "liquid modernity" respectively. They consider how such change might affect how individuals feel about themselves and their place in society. Throughout, the thesis demonstrates how this work might be applied to the study of sitcom and combines social theory with a detailed analysis of this television form in transformation, arguing that sitcom remains a resonant site for audiences to participate in a productive discourse about how we live today.

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