

Smith, G. (2010). "It's just a movie": Why you should analyze film and television. In What media classes really want to discuss: A student guide (chapter 1). Retrieved from: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/templeuniv-ebooks/detail.action?docID=557321>.

### Synopsis:

Smith argued that all media texts are “highly scrutinized, carefully constructed” (p. 1) works created by collective labor. He noted that medi makers (including directors, camera operators, actors, etc.) imbue a text with conscious and unconscious messages and bias, all of which reflect the cultural norms of the moment in which the text was created. He argued that because of this fact, audiences must carefully attend to the details of a text. He noted that medi makers expect and count on audiences to “read into” a text; however, this process does not just entail audience understanding of basic facts within the text, it also includes a range of audience interpretations. He argued that while certain parts of a text are indisputable, audiences must be open to these many interpretations, all of which can be valid as long as there is textual support. He explained that this process of analysis should not be limited to highbrow or “important” artwork; we should instead understand that all media, even pop culture media, is worth analyzing. He also noted that the process of analysis should not hinder audience enjoyment of a text but rather it should inspire a deeper pleasure in and understanding of the work.

### Key Concepts:

- **Italian Neorealism:** A filmmaking movement that, “used real locations in war-torn Italy (instead of tightly controlled sets); available lighting (instead of nuanced theatrical light); nonprofessional actors (alongside trained professionals); and a looser, more episodic way of telling stories (instead of tightly controlled plotting).” (p. 3)
- **The sender-message-receiver model:** A model of communication that “includes awareness that the channel/medium affects the overall communication; that there is “noise” on that channel that can interfere with the message; and that the receiver/audiences can communicate “feedback” to give the sender a sense of whether the message is getting through” (p. 4)
- **Reading Into:** the process of audience interpretation of “rules or conventions that have been established by previous members of the genre” (p. 7) as well as audiences interpreting unintended messages in a text (p. 6).

### Key Quotes

- “Hollywood films and network television shows are some of the most highly scrutinized, carefully constructed, least random works imaginable” (p. 1-2).
- “One of the first traps that the budding critic should avoid is thinking that a film or TV program can be understood as having a single message which we either “get” or not.” (p. 5)
- “If we consider [the striking range of audience] interpretations to be somehow less valid than the medi maker’s, then we lose much of the complexity of how media work, make meaning, and give pleasure in our society.” (p. 6)

### Essential Question:

- How do cultural norms influence the production and analysis of pop culture texts?