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Television and U.S. Culture

10 weeks/2 hours

Kill your Television. TV is furniture, film and theatre are art. Yet, television is a popular form of entertainment with writing, performance, and production values that can rival the so-called “higher” arts. When television began, it brought programming into the home on 8-in black-and-white tv sets. Today, television travels on personal devices smaller than those early tv sets.

In this seminar, we will take a walk through the history of US television, examining each topic within its cultural context. The story of US television is one of technology and social movements. Television formats develop and change; some are sustained over decades.

Screenings: US television programs are vast in number. The seminar will not have outside screenings. We will show clips from programs in class. Seminar students are invited, on their own, to seek out tv shows via the internet and streaming services. With the “personal television history” that we each bring to the course, each topic will evoke memories for many of us.

As we go through the course, I invite seminar students to consider their own “personal television history” – when did tv come into your home; was it a ‘window on the world’; did it separate and/or bring the family together; did you do homework with the tv on; what shows appealed to you; what events did tv make possible for you to share; did you learn about gender race and ethnicity from tv; about global politics and culture; and any other ideas that you may have. I am interested in hearing your “personal television histories” but only if you want to share.

Week 1: TV and Entertainment Arts, Window on the World

Radio – War of the Worlds

Vaudeo – Milton Berle, Sid Caesar

Ethnic warmedy – I Remember Mama

Slapstick performance - I Love Lucy

Window on the World – Jackie Kennedy Tour of White House

Desjardins, Mary. “Lucy and Desi: Sexuality, Ethnicity, and TV’s First Family.” *Television, History, and American Culture: Feminist Critical Essays*, Mary Beth Haralovich and Lauren Rabinovitz, ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 56-74.

Fuller-Seeley, Kathryn H. "Learning to Live with Television: Technology, Gender, and American's Early TV Audiences," *The Columbia History of American Television*, Gary R. Edgerton, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 91-110 and 438-42.

Murray, Susan. "Ethnic Masculinity and Early Television's Vaudeo Star." *Cinema Journal* 43:1 (Fall 2002), 97-119.

Week 2: TV in the Home and the Home on TV

TV set design & gendered dystopia

Domestic family comedy

Fantastic family comedy

Haralovich, Mary Beth. "Sitcoms and Suburbs: Positioning the 1950s Homemaker." *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 11, no. 2 (1989), 61-83. Web.

Spigel, Lynn. "From Domestic Space to Outer Space: The 1960s Fantastic Family Sitcom." *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 107-40.

Week 3: Experimental TV & Anthology Drama to Series TV New York to Los Angeles

Anthology drama – New York City

Experimental tv – Ernie Kovacs, Nam Jun Paik

Electronic Elsewhere – Twilight Zone, Outer Limits

Cochran, David. "Another Dimension: Rod Serling, Consensus Liberalism, and *The Twilight Zone*," *America Noir: Underground Writers and Filmmakers of the Postwar Era* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2000), 194-213 and 255-59.

Spigel, Lynn. "Silent TV: Ernie Kovacs and the Noise of Mass Culture," *TV By Design: Modern Art and the Rise of Network Television* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 178-212.

Week 4: Vast Wasteland & Violence

Quiz Show Scandal

The Untouchables

Violence & TV Ratings

Boddy, William. "The Seven Dwarfs and the Money Grubbers," in *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (1990), 98-116.

Minow, Newton. "A Vaster Wasteland." *The Atlantic* (April 2011), 50-52. Web.

Vahimagi, Tise. "ABC TV and Television Violence," *The Untouchables* (London: British Film Institute, 2008), 82-86.

Week 5: Cable TV, Quality TV, R-Rated TV, Showrunner as Auteur

Subscription TV to Cable TV
Quality drama and comedy – MTM productions
R-Rated TV – NYPD Blue

Caldwell, John. "Industrial Auteur Theory (Above the Line/Creative)." *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 197-231 and 406-412.

Feuer, Jane. "The MTM Style," Jane Feuer, Paul Kerr and Tise Vahimagi, ed., *MTM 'Quality Television'* (London: BFI Publishing, 1984), 32-60.

Week 6: Unruly Women

Emma Peel, Roseanne, Murphy Brown, Maude
Stand-Up Women – Tina Fey, Wanda Sykes, and more

Rowe, Kathleen Karlyn. "Roseanne: Unruly Woman as Domestic Goddess," *Screen*, 31:4 (Winter 1990), 408-19.

Willett, Cynthia, Julie Willett and Yael D. Sherman, "The Serious Erotic Politics of Feminist Laughter." *Social Research* 79:1 (Spring 2012), 217-246.

Week 7: Primetime Soaps – then and now

Dynasty, Dallas, Mad Men, This is Us, etc.

Ang, Ien. "(Not) Coming to Terms with *Dallas*," *Global Television*, Cynthia Schneider and Brian Willis, ed. (Cambridge: Wedge Press and MIT Press, 1988), 68-77.

Haralovich, Mary Beth. "Women on the Verge of the Second Wave," *Mad Men: Dream Come True TV*, edited by Gary Edgerton (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 159-76.

Week 8: Relevance TV & Geo-Politics

Smothers Brothers
HBO Late Night Comedy
I Spy
Mod Squad

Bodroghkozy, Aniko. "Negotiating the Mod: How the Mod Squad Played the Ideological Balancing Act in Prime Time," *Groove Tube: Sixties Television and the Youth Rebellion* (Duke University Press, 2001), 164-98, 291-94.

Bodroghkozy, Aniko. "The *Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* and the Youth Rebellion," *The Revolution Wasn't Televised: Sixties Television and Social Conflict*, Michael Curtin and Lynn Spigel, ed. (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 200-219.

Haralovich, Mary Beth. "*I Spy's 'Living Postcards': The Geo-Politics of Civil Rights*," *Television, History and American Culture: Feminist Critical Essays*, edited by Mary Beth Haralovich and Lauren Rabinovitz (Duke University Press, 1999), 98-119.

Week 9: Vast Narrative, World-Building & Invested Viewing

Examples: *Lost* (the primogenitor), *Westworld*, *Battlestar Galactica*, *Watchman*, *Walking Dead*, *Star Trek: Discovery*, *Picard*, *Penny Dreadful*, *Money Heist*, and on

Coulthard, Lisa, "Familiarity Breeds Desire: Seriality and the Television Title Sequence." *FlowTV* (2 July 2010). Web.

Lavery, David. "Lost and Long-Term Television Narrative." Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin, ed., *Third Person: Authoring and Exploring Vast Narratives* (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2009), 313-322.

Subramanian, Janani. "R.I.P, F.N.L." *FlowTV* (25 February 2011). Web.

Week 10: Crime Drama & Procedural Logic

Examples: *The Wire*, *CSI*, *Law & Order*, *Vera*, *Inspector Morse*, *Endeavor*, and more

Aladjew, Terry K. "What Eyes Must See: The loved one lost; proof; the villain caught," in *The Culture of Vengeance and the Fate of American Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 108-109.

Mittel, Jason. "All in the Game: *The Wire*, Serial Storytelling, and Procedural Logic," Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin, ed., *Third Person: Authoring and Exploring Vast Narratives* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009), 429-38

Thomas, Lyn. "In Love with Inspector Morse: Feminist Subculture and Quality Television." *Feminist Review* 51 (Autumn 1995), 1-25.