

**New York University | Department of Media, Culture, and Communication**  
**Television: History and Form, Spring 2015**

Tue 12:30 - 3:00pm | 25 W4, C-8

Instructor: Melanie Kohnen

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Office: East Building, 239 Greene St., Room 723

Office hours: Tuesday 3:30-5pm and by appointment

**Course Description:**

An exploration of American television as a medium of information, conveyor, and creator of culture and a form of aesthetic expression. The course examines the historical development of television as both a cultural product and industry.

The majority of the class is devoted to a decade-by-decade overview of television's development from its radio origins to digital convergence. Every week includes a screening of a TV program from the decade under discussion plus additional clips. The final weeks highlight specific formal, aesthetic, and industrial aspects of television, including style, narrative, genre, and post-network TV. Screenings during the final weeks place historical developments into a conversation with contemporary programming.

**Required Texts:**

- Hilmes, Michele. *Only Connect: A Cultural History of Broadcasting in the United States*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition.
- Mittell, Jason. *Television and American Culture*. Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Selections from Ethan Thompson and Jason Mittell (eds). *How to Watch Television* will be available as e-book via the library.

**Assignments and Requirements:**

TV Archive Project

You will use the rich collection of TV programs at the Paley Center for Media to carry out a research project on television from the 1950s to the 1990s. You will select one TV program from these decades and write an analytical essay about the content and the program's historical and industrial significance.

Showrunners vs. Executives

Split into groups, you will either design a new TV show or a new TV network/distribution platform. At the end of the semester, showrunners will pitch their new show to the executives.

Participation:

In-class discussions are an important aspect of this course. Consequently, your participation is crucial to the overall success of the class. You are expected to keep up with the readings and come to class prepared for discussion. This means you should not only have completed the readings, but be ready to discuss and engage the reading's major arguments. During class discussions, I will frequently ask you to suggest passages that we should examine in more detail; you should be able to identify these passages

quickly by either underlining, marking the page, or taking notes in advance of class.

Good participation means contributing thoughtful comments and questions that refer to readings, screenings, and core concepts during our class discussion. The quality of your remarks is at least as important as the quantity of your remarks.

Occasionally, I will ask you to complete brief written responses to the screenings. These responses will also count toward your participation grade.

### **Assignment Schedule**

If not specified otherwise, all assignments are due at 11:59PM on the due date.

Extensions are only available in the case of dire personal circumstances, and you must contact me at least 24 hours before the deadline. If you don't contact me 24hrs before the deadline and don't submit an assignment, you will not receive any points.

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Due Date</b>	<b>Points</b>
Participation	Ongoing	100
TV Archive Project Proposal	02/27/15	100
TV Archive check-in	Week of 03/09	100
TV Archive Final Draft	04/02/15	200
Showrunners vs Executives Draft	04/28/15	100
Showrunners vs Executives Pitches	05/05/15	200
Showrunners vs Executives Final Draft	05/07/15	200
Total		1,000

### **Grade Breakdown:**

1,000 points = 100%

A = 94-100

A- = 90-93

B+ = 87-89

B = 84-86

B- = 80-83

C+ = 77-79

C = 74-76

C- = 70-73

D+ = 65-69

### **Overall Evaluation Criteria:**

A= Excellent

This work is comprehensive and detailed, integrating themes and concepts from discussions, lectures and readings. Writing is clear, analytical and organized. Arguments offer innovative insights, specific examples and concisely evaluate evidence. Students who earn this grade for participation are consistently prepared for class, synthesize course materials effectively, and contribute insightfully.

**B=Good**

This work is complete and accurate, offering insights at general level of understanding. Writing is clear, uses examples properly, but leans toward broad analysis rather than innovative perspectives. Classroom participation is consistent and thoughtful.

**C=Average**

This work is correct but is largely descriptive, lacking analysis. Writing is vague, tangential, and/or features significant grammar and spelling mistakes. Arguments are unorganized, without specific examples or analysis, and features misunderstandings of key concepts/theories. Classroom participation is inarticulate, superficial, and/or infrequent.

**D= Unsatisfactory**

This work is incomplete, and evidences little understanding of the readings or discussions. Arguments demonstrate inattention to detail, misunderstand course material, and overlook significant themes. Classroom participation is spotty, unprepared, and off-topic.

**F=Failed**

This grade indicates a failure to participate and/or incomplete assignments

## **Course Policies:**

### **A Note on Laptops and Cell Phone Usage**

You are encouraged to bring an internet-enabled device to every class--many of our readings are available in digital formats, after all. It is your responsibility to monitor your use of the internet, texting, etc. in class. You should be mindful of where your attention is during class time (hint: it should be focused on the discussion that's happening among the people in the room). You should feel free to look up information online that is relevant to in-class activities and share this information with the class.

I will ask you to put away your laptops etc. during certain screenings to make sure your entire focus in on the TV program we are watching together.

Please also consult the [Laptop Facts PDF](#). This hand-out was put together by former MCC student Ben Zweig.

### **Absences**

Attendance is mandatory. You are allowed two unexcused absences during the semester (if your unexcused absences exceed that limit, you put yourself at risk of failing the course). All other absences must be for valid, non-academic reasons, such as medical emergencies (confirmed by a doctor's note) or religious holidays.

If you miss class, it is your responsibility to catch up on the work we have done during

class. Also note that showing up more than ten minutes late to class automatically translates into an unexcused absence for that class meeting.

### **Academic Honesty and Plagiarism**

Academic integrity is the guiding principle for all that you do, from taking exams to making oral presentations to writing term papers. It requires that you recognize and acknowledge information derived from others and take credit only for ideas and work that are yours.

You violate the principle of academic integrity when you

- cheat on an exam,
- submit the same work for two different courses without prior permission from your professors,
- receive help on a takehome examination that calls for independent work, or
- plagiarize.

Plagiarism is failure to properly assign authorship to a paper, a document, an oral presentation, a musical score, and/or other materials that are not your original work.

You plagiarize when, *without proper attribution*, you do any of the following:

- copy verbatim from a book, an article, or other media;
- download documents from the Internet;
- purchase documents;
- report from others' oral work;
- paraphrase or restate someone else's facts, analysis, and/or conclusions; or
- copy directly from a classmate or allow a classmate to copy from you.

Please consult Steinhardt's policy for more information:

[http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic\\_integrity](http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity)

### **Student Resources:**

Students with physical or learning disabilities are required to register with the [Moses Center for Students with Disabilities](#), 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor, (212-998-4980) and are required to present a letter from the Center to the instructor at the start of the semester in order to be considered for appropriate accommodation.

## Reading Schedule

Please note that the reading schedule is subject to change based on our progress and shared interests.

Unless otherwise noted, screenings take place during class.

### 01/27 Week 1: Radio

Guest Speaker: Shawn VanCour

Listening: The Mercury Theatre on Air, "The War of the Worlds"

- Hilmes, Ch. 1, "Making History"
- Hilmes, Ch. 4: "The Network Age," 65-92.
- Hilmes, Ch. 5: "Programming: Popular Radio", 102-133.

### 02/03 Week 2: Radio and The 1950s

*Watch at home:* *Father Knows Best*, season 2, ep. 30: [Betty, Girl Engineer](#) (link goes to Hulu)

*In-class screening:* *I Love Lucy*, "Ricky's Life Story"

- Hilmes, Ch. 7, "TV's Golden Age" to end of chapter, 179-205.
- Banks, Miranda J. "I Love Lucy: The Writer-Producer." In: Ethan Thompson and Jason Mittell (eds). *How to Watch Television*. NYU Press, 2013: 244-251.

### 02/10 Week 3: The 1960s

Screening: *I Dream of Jeannie*, "The Americanization of Jeannie"; *Bewitched*, "Which Witch is Which?"

- Hilmes, Ch. 8, "The Classic Network System Emerges" 215-229; 241-245.
- Hilmes, Ch. 9 "The Classic Network System", 246-252; 256-end of chapter.
- Spigel, Lynn. "From Domestic Space to Outer Space: The 1960s Fantastic Family Sitcom." In: *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs*. Duke, 2001: 107-141. (PDF)

### 02/17 Week 4: The 1970s

Field Trip to [The Paley Center for Media](#). Meet in front of the Paley Center (25 West 52 Street) at 12:50pm (our workshop starts at 1pm).

### 02/24 Week 5: The 1980s

Screening: *Miami Vice*, "Milk Run"; Hill Street Blues clips

- Hilmes, Ch. 10, "Rising Discontent", 290-320; Ch. 11, "The Big Change", 328-329.
- Zoglin, Richard and Denise Worrell. "Hot Cops, Cool Shows." *Time*, September 16, 1985. (PDF)
- Deggans, Eric. [Let's Be Careful Out There: The Legacy of Hill Street Blues](#). NPR, May 2014. (read this both to learn more about the show and to think about how television history is actively constructed)
- Review Hilmes, Ch. 9, p. 256-261; 264-268, especially the PTAR and Fin-Syn regulations.

02/27 at midnight: [Archive Project Proposal due](#)

### 03/03 Week 6: The 1990s

Screening: *Ellen*, "The Puppy Episode," plus other clips

- Hilmes, Ch. 11, "The Big Change", 346-369.

- Walters, Suzanna. "The Love that Dares to Speak Its Name: The Explosion of Gay Visibility." In: *All the Rage: The Story of Gay Visibility in America*. University of Chicago Press, 2001: 3-30. (PDF)

### 03/10 Week 7: The 2000s

#### TV Archive Project Check-in

- Hilmes, Ch. 12, "Entering the Digital Era", 388-398; 402-408
- Holt, Jennifer. "Conclusion: 1996 and Beyond." In: [Empires of Entertainment: Media Industries and the Politics of Deregulation](#): 165-179.

### 03/17: Spring Break

### 03/24 Week 8: Style

Screening: *Mad Men*, "Maidenform"

- Mittell, Jason. "The Elements of Television Style." In: *Television and American Culture*, 176-212.
- Butler, Jeremy. "*Mad Men*: Visual Style." In: *How to Watch Television*: 38-47.
- Rosenheck, Mabel. "Swing Skirts and Swinging Singles: *Mad Men*, Fashion, and Cultural Memory." In: Goodland, Lauren M.E., Lilya Kaganosvky, and Robert A. Rushing (eds). *Mad Men, Mad World: Sex, Politics, Style, and the 1960s*. Duke, 2013: 161-181. (PDF)

### 03/31 Week 9: Narrative and Genre

Screening: *Lost*, Pilot

- Mittell, Jason. "The Form of Television Narrative." In: *Television and American Culture*. 213-254.
- Mittell, "Formal Analysis in Action: The Case of *Lost*." *Television and American Culture*, 258-267.

### 04/02: Archive Project Due

### 04/07 Week 10: Reconsidering Diversity?

In-class Screening: *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*; *Veep*

Watch at home before class & be ready to discuss:

*Blackish*, [Martin Luther Skiing Day](#) (S1 E12); *Fresh Off the Boat*, [Phillip Goldstein](#) (S1 E8); *Jane the Virgin*, [Quick Cut of Episode 1-10](#) (each quick cut is 3min); *Whatever This Is*, [Westchester \[about the show\]](#); *Transparent*, [Pilot](#) (if the link doesn't work, search Amazon for "Transparent." The episode is free—you don't need a Prime subscription.) You should of course feel free to watch any show on this list in addition to your own assignment.

- Mittel, Jason. Ch. 8, "Representing Identity," *Television and American Culture*, 314-351.
- In class: Showrunners vs Executives Brainstorming

### 04/14 Week 11 Industry and/vs. The Audience

Screening: *Supernatural*, "The Real Ghostbusters"

- Mittell, Jason. "Not Just Watching: The Cultural Practices of Television." In: *Television and American Culture*: 367-381.
- Wood, Megan and Linda Baughman. "Glee Fandom and Twitter: Something New, Or More of the Same Old Thing?" *Communication Studies* 63:3 (July 2012): 328-

344.

- Chu, Arthur. [How Battlestar Galactica, Game of Thrones, and FanFiction Conquered Pop Culture](#). *The Daily Beast*, May 2014.

#### **04/21 Week 12: Television beyond Television?**

**Screening: Excerpts from** [Creators who are reinventing television for the digital future](#), a panel at Transforming Hollywood 5 (2014).

- Holmes, Linda. [A Few Caveats About the New World of Television](#). NPR, January 2015.
- Lotz, Amanda. Excerpts from [Television Will Be Revolutionized](#). 2nd ed. NYU Press, 2014:
  - Ch. 1, p. 27-34 [def. of post-network TV]
  - Ch. 5, p. 173-178 [the varied economic models of TV]
  - Ch. 4, p. 109-112 [on original programming for the web]
- Showrunners: read all of Chapter 7 (on creating programming)
- Executives: read all of Chapter 4 (on distribution)

#### **04/28 Week 13: Connected Viewing**

Connected Viewing Workshop

[Showrunners vs Executives Draft Meetings](#)

#### **05/05 Week 14**

[Showrunners vs Executives Pitches](#)