

RHMS 475: Television and American Culture | Spring 2019

Meeting times: TTH 1:50-3:20pm

Location: JHRR 258

.

Melanie Kohnen

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Office Hours: TTH 12:30-1:30pm, and by appointment.

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Course Overview:

Television and American Culture examines the historical development of television as both a cultural product and industry. Throughout the class, we connect the development of the American TV industry to the development of TV programs, especially regarding the representation of race, gender, and sexuality. The first weeks of the class are devoted to an overview of television's fundamental characteristics, including the organizational structures of the TV industry and television form, specifically style, narrative, and genre. The second half of the class focuses on TV post-2000, with an emphasis on the shift toward on-demand streaming TV. We discuss the radical changes in the production, distribution, and consumption of TV and how those changes influence everything from style and narrative to cultural representation.

In addition, you will become familiar with the methodology of videographic criticism—that is, with the creation of video essays that carry out a scholarly analysis of television by re-editing television footage. You will learn about different styles of videographic criticism, watch examples by scholars and RHMS students, and produce your own videos.

Course Goals:

1. Understand the structure of American television as cultural form and industry
2. Understand the aesthetic and industrial conditions that shape the production, distribution, and reception of American TV
3. Produce an independent research project about American television
4. Understand and apply videographic criticism, i.e. the critical analysis of moving images through the use of moving images in the form of a video essay

Required texts:

Jason Mittell, *Television and American Culture*. Oxford University Press, 2009.

Assignment Overview

Screening Journal (200 points)

You will keep a paper journal throughout the semester in which you record your reactions to our screenings. We will take time after each screening to write down initial thoughts and questions; you will use these thoughts to prepare for discussing the screenings in the Thursday

class meeting. I will collect your journals at random points of the semester.

Research Project (600 points)

An original research project on a topic of your choice related to American television. You are welcome to present this project in the form of a traditional academic essay or in the form of a video essay. You will learn how to edit videos in Adobe Premiere during the first few weeks of class. You will develop your project in several stages, including a proposal, vid, literature review, draft, final version, and presentations (one during our class and one for Senior Presentations).

Videographic Exercises (Pass/Fail)

During the first month of class, you will complete exercises that introduce you to the craft of video editing. You will receive a new exercise each week. If you fail to complete these exercises, I will deduct 25 points from your participation grade as you won't be able to participate in our workshops without completing these exercises.

Participation (100 points)

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.

In addition to taking part in class discussions, you can also meaningfully participate in class by sending me links to interesting popular and academic articles relevant to our course and by coming to office hours to discuss assignments or to chat about topics related to our course.

Week 1

01/22 Introduction and Overview

- Mittell, Jason. "Why Television?" In: *Television and American Culture*, 1-15.

Screening: *The Good Place*

01/24

Introduction to videographic criticism

Examples:

- [What is Neorealism?](#) by Kogonada
- [Sound in Hanna-Barbera](#) by Patrick Sullivan

- [Of Love and Longing](#) by Allain Daigle
- [\[in\]transition](#), the academic journal dedicated to video essays, to get a first insight into what kinds of video essays scholars produce.

Further reading:

- Anderson, Sam. [The Ultimate Sitcom](#) (profile of *The Good Place*). *New York Times Magazine*, October 2018.

Week 2: Foundations: The TV Industry

01/29

Exercise I due before class.

- Mittell, Exchanging Programming, 17-54.
- Key ideas: deficit financing, ownership of programs, showrunner, networks, affiliates, scheduling, flow, cable channels vs. network TV, syndication, station groups, the cable system/MSOs, vertical and horizontal integration, concentration in the 80s/90s; the final section, "From Pitch to Hit", is interesting, but we should return to it later.

Screening:

NBC's "must-see TV" line-up, 02/11/99 (for more context, see [1998-1999 TV schedule](#)):

- Friends, "The One Where Everybody Finds Out"
- Frasier, "Three Valentines"
- E.R., "The Storm, part 1"

01/31

Videographic Criticism II

Week 3: Foundations: TV Style

02/05

Exercise II due before class.

Videographic Criticism III

- Mittell, Making Meaning (TV Style), 161-172; 176-183; 195-202; rest of the chapter is recommended.
- In-class discussion: Tom and Lorenzo's Mad Style: [Peggy Olsen s3](#), [Joan Holloway s3](#), [Betty Draper s3](#)

Screening:

- Exercises
- *Mad Men*, "The Grownups" (S3, E12)
- *Damages*, "Get Me a Lawyer"

02/07

- Butler, Jeremy. "Mad Men: Visual Style." In: Ethan Thompson and Jason Mittell (eds). *How to Watch Television*. NYU Press, 2013: 38-47.

Friday midnight: Exercise III due

Week 4 Foundations: Narrative & Genre

02/12

- Mittell, "The Form of Television Narrative," 213-234.
- Key terms: agency, story, plot, diegesis, narration, restricted and subjective narration, fourth wall, story time, plot time, narrative order, three-act structure, episodic series, serial narrative, episodic serial, A/B/C/ plots; teaser

Screening:

- *Lost* pilot
- *Buffy*, "Hush" (S4 E10)

02/14

- Mittell, "Television Genres" and "Formal Analysis in Action," 234-267
- *Lost* in the style of *24*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MKcKtjrL5bc>
- Overview of the *Lost* Alternate Reality Game: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6phwqrqIGwE>

02/16: Thesis Proposal due

Week 5 Changes in Programming

Individual proposal feedback meetings

02/19

- Lotz, Amanda. "Television Storytelling Possibilities at the Beginning of the Post-Network Era." In: *Television Will Be Revolutionized*, 2nd edition. 2014: 233-263.
- Lotz, Amanda. "Game of Thrones Introduces the Global Blockbuster." In: *We Now Disrupt This Broadcast: How Cable Transformed Television and the Internet Revolutionized It All*. MIT Press, 2018.

Screening:

Veronica Mars pilot

Video Essays:

- Everything Comes Full Circle: Beginnings and Endings in *Carol*: <https://vimeo.com/296765823>
- It's About Friendship: <https://vimeo.com/214522232>

02/21

Mittell, Jason. "Beginnings." In: *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. NYU Press.

- Clips from TV shows mentioned in this chapter are available at the [Complex TV website](#).

Week 6: Audiences

02/26

- Mittell, "The Audience Exchange," 72-85; "Not Just Watching: The Cultural Practices of Television," 367-381
- Warner, Kristen. "ABC's Scandal and Black Women's Fandom." In: Elana Levine (ed). *Cupcakes, Pinterest, and Ladyporn: Feminized Popular Culture in the Early Twenty-First Century*. U of Illinois Press, 2015: 32-51.

Screening: Vid show

02/28

Class visit by Professor Kristen Warner

- Warner, Kristen. "(Black Female) Fans Strike Back: The Emergence of the Iris West Defense Squad." In: Suzanne Scott and Melissa Click (eds). *The Routledge Companion to Media Fandom*. Routledge, 2018: 253-261.

Today, 7:00-8:30pm: Required attendance at Kristen Warner's talk, "Don't Just Do Representation: #AskforMore," Smith Hall (PNW Race, Rhetoric, and Media Symposium).

Week 7 Changes in Industry

03/05

Skype conversation with Louisa Stein, vidder and Associate Professor of Film and Media Culture, Middlebury College

Vids we will discuss:

- City of Roses: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-RI2Yrjh14>
- Look What You Made Me
Do: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oqmYe9dCmjl&t=21s>

Readings:

- Lotz, Amanda. Chapters 20, 22, 23, 27, 28. In: *We Now Disrupt This Broadcast*.
- Johnson, Derek. "CBS All Access." In: [From Networks to Netflix](#). Routledge, 2018.

Screening:

- *The Good Wife*, "Nine Hours" (CBS, 2010)
- *The Good Fight*, "Day 450" (*The Good Wife* spin-off, CBS All Access, 2018)

03/07

- Nygaard, Taylor ; Lagerwey, Jorie. [Broadcasting Quality: Re-centering Feminist Discourse with The Good Wife](#). *Television & New Media*, February 2017, Vol.18(2), pp.105-113.

Sunday: Project intro vid due

Week 8

03/12

- Newman, Michael and Elana Levine. "Not a Soap Opera." in: *Legitimizing TV: Media Convergence and Cultural Status*. Routledge, 2012.

Screening:

- Students' project vids

03/14 – No class--Melanie attends the Society for Cinema and Media Studies conference in Seattle

Week 9 Netflix

03/19

- Lotz, Amanda. Ch. 21 in *We Now Disrupt This Broadcast*, 117-125.
- Jenner, Mareike. "'Quality', 'Popular', and the Netflix Brand." In: *Netflix and the Re-Invention of Television*. Palgrave-Macmillan, 2018: 139-161.
- Recommended: Ball, Matthew. [Netflix Misunderstandings](#), part 1-4. 2018.

Screening:

- *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*, S1 E1 and E2
- *One Day at a Time*, S3 E1, opening of S3 E2, and S3 E10

03/21

Netflix discussion, cont.

- VanArendonk, Kathryn. [Why Netflix's One Day at a Time Cancellation Feels Like a Betrayal](#). *Vulture*, 2019.
- Andreeva, Nellie. [Feeling the Churn: Why Netflix Cancels Shows and Why They Can't Move to New Homes](#). *Deadline*, 2019.

03/22

Lit review due

Week 10: Spring Break

TV Studies Deep Dives: Topics are determined by students' thesis topics; readings include classic and contemporary works in Television Studies. Students lead discussions on articles related to their research projects.

Week 11: TV Studies Deep Dive I

04/02

- Lotz and Gray, "Why Television Studies? Why Now?"
- Planning discussion for the next three weeks
- In-class viewing: The Follow-Shot,
<http://mediacommons.org/intransition/2018/03/08/chained-camera>

04/04

Week 12: TV Studies Deep Dive II

Individual check-in meetings with me/half-drafts due

04/09

Screening:

04/11

Week 13: TV Studies Deep Dive III

04/16

Screening:

04/18

Week 14

Complete Video Essay drafts due this week

04/23

Final project work

Screening: Video Essay drafts

04/25

Capstone presentation rehearsal

Week 15

04/30

Capstone presentation rehearsal

05/01: Capstone Presentations, 5-9pm

05/02

Capstone presentation rehearsal

Capstone Presentations: 4-8pm

May 6: Final Video essay and Project Statement due

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.

Late assignments are graded down half a letter grade. I do not accept assignments that are more than 24 hours late.

Assignment	Due Date	Points
Videographic Exercises	See reading schedule	Pass/Fail
Participation	Ongoing	100
Screening Journal	Ongoing	200
Thesis Proposal	02/16	200
Project Vid	03/10	100
Lit Review	03/22	100
Project Draft	04/22	100
Project Presentation	Week 14	Pass/Fail
Final Project	05/06	200
Total		1000