From Broadcasting to Podcasting: Television and New Media

Class: TTH 9:55-11:10 a.m.  Professor Bob Rehak (brehak1)
Kohlbeg 228  Office: LPAC 205
Screening: W 7-10 p.m. (LPAC Cinema)  Hours: T 12-3 p.m. & by appt.

From its start, television has been a transient and unstable medium, as much for the speed of its technological change as for the process of its cultural transformation, for its ephemeral present, and for its mundane everydayness. While this has always been television’s fate, the present day’s convergent technologies, economies, and textual networks have not only subverted many of the assumptions that have until now driven the logics of television but have also transformed the medium’s context and cultural place.

– William Uricchio

Broadcast yourself.™

– www.youtube.com

Overview

This course provides an overview of the commercial, technological, and aesthetic dimensions of television, using this “transient and unstable” medium as a springboard for larger discussions about cultural responses to media succession. At its birth, television disrupted and reworked the media around it (film, radio, telephone), just as TV itself now faces profound redefinition by videogames, cell phones, iPods, YouTube, and TiVo. Amid all this excitement, our challenge is to separate the revolutionary from the evolutionary, arriving at a comprehensive picture of how the contemporary mediascape – with its promises of total information access, on-demand entertainment, and emancipatory participation in content creation – both extends and breaks with tradition.

Our goals, by the end of the term, will be to (A) map the historical paths by which television has grown from a radically “new” medium to an everyday part of our social and ideological fabric; (B) explore the ways in which TV, as industry and entertainment form, incorporates and responds to emerging technologies, new media genres, and globalization; (C) analyze recurrent tropes in the cultural imagining of media, such as interactivity, “liveness,” and tensions between mass and individual, fiction and reality; and finally (D) reflect critically on our own media practices – how we use media for pleasure and knowledge, and how media in turn shape us as consumers and citizens, as gendered and raced individuals.

Format

Class meetings will blend short lectures and group discussion based on readings and screenings of television and online material. Students will be responsible for generating concepts and questions for discussion through the writing and reading of personal blogs and podcasts. In addition, each student will commit to tracking one “channel” of media content throughout the term – a TV series, blog, podcast, webcomic, etc. – as a way of reflecting on form and content as well as on his/her own affective and interpretative responses. The course will conclude with team presentations designed by students working together to select research topics that crystallize emergent themes from the semester.

This & all course documents can be downloaded from “Syllabus” section on Blackboard
Texts


Other readings marked (X) will be distributed through Blackboard. Please complete all readings by the start of class on Tuesday, and bring books/readings with you to class.

Policies

Attendance at class meetings and screenings is expected. More than three absences will result in penalty.

No late work will be accepted.

Assignments

10% Midterm project
20% Podcasts (two 5-6 minute podcasts by end of term)
30% Blog contributions (weekly)
40% Final project – components:
   10% Summary of ideas discussed in blogs/podcasts & identification of 2-3 potential interests for presentations (Week 8)
   5% 1-page proposal for team project (Week 10)
   20% Presentation of final projects (Week 14)
   5% 1-page reflection paper (Week 14)

Exploring Media Outside Class

In addition to time spent doing readings and preparing projects, you should budget 2-3 hours a week for exploring the mediascape (defined for this course as electronic, noncinematic broadcast or narrowcast media). This activity should be focused – take notes and think actively about what you are seeing, hearing, learning, thinking, and responding to. Wherever possible, draw connections between your experiences and course material. All of it is fodder for the blog, podcasts, small-group and collective conversations in class. In addition to online and broadcast content, I have put several DVD sets of television series on reserve in McCabe; consult Blackboard for a list of holdings.

Blogging

Individual blogs for each student have been set up on Blackboard. During the first half of the semester, your blog will be a space for journaling about your own media habits: not just what you are watching and listening to, but the experience of doing so. Bring in the readings as much as possible, using your own experiences to comment on or complicate what the authors
are saying. While your blog won’t be viewable outside of Swarthmore, keep in mind that it will be read by your classmates; use good judgment about content. Keep up with each others’ blogs, and contribute freely. Each week, you are expected to post at least twice to your own blog and at least once to someone else’s (more is encouraged!).

Your first blog assignment, due by noon on Jan 29, is to write an auto-ethnography of your media viewing habits. How would you characterize yourself as a media consumer? From what sources do you get your information and entertainment, and in what temporal, physical, and social contexts do you do so? What’s your sense of the current mediascape? In this as in all assignments for the class, I want you to be honest and expansive, imaginative and rigorous. Express your true self, but show me that you are able to reflect with some critical distance on the more intuitive and automatic aspects of your engagement with media.

Podcasting

During Week 2, I will pass around a signup sheet; students will commit to doing two podcasts (a reading response and a short research project) throughout the course of the term. These podcasts should be completed and posted well before class (by Monday noon at the latest) Listen to each week’s podcasts on your own time, and come in ready to discuss them.

The podcasts are targeted assignments with some requirements in terms of structure and content. For more information, see the podcasting guidelines at the end of this syllabus.

You will get written feedback on both podcasts.

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**Calendar**

Note: Schedule of viewings/readings subject to change

(TATV) = Television After TV; (TOTB) = Thinking Outside the Box; (X) = Blackboard

**Week 1 (Jan 23-25) – Course Introduction**

Readings: Syllabus, podcasting & blogging handouts

Thursday: In-class tutorial by Liz Evans (eevans1) on authoring podcasts and blogs

✔ First blog posting due by noon on Monday, Jan 29

**UNIT I: QUESTIONS OF FORM**

**Week 2 (Jan 30-Feb 1) – Convergence and Other Models of Media Change**

Readings:

- Henry Jenkins, “Worshipping at the Altar of Convergence” (X)
- Jostein Gripsrud, “Broadcast Television: The Chances of Its Survival in a Digital Age” (TATV)
- Jeffrey Sconce, Introduction to *Haunted Media* (X)
Recc: John Caldwell, “Convergence Television: Aggregating Form and Repurposing Content in the Culture of Conglomeration” (TATV)

Screening: *McLuhan’s Wake* (Kevin McMahon, 2002), 94 min.

✔ Podcast signup

**Week 3 (Feb 6-8) – Flow & Narration**

Readings: Raymond Williams, “Programming as Sequence or Flow” (X)
William Uricchio, “Television’s Next Generation: Technology/Interface Culture/Flow” (TATV)
John Ellis, “Broadcast TV Narration” (X)

Screening: Episodes of *American Idol* & *24*

**Week 4 (Feb 13-15) – Genre**

Readings: Christopher Anderson, “Television Networks and the Uses of Drama” (TOTB)
Richard Butsch, “Five Decades and Three Hundred Sitcoms about Class and Gender” (TOTB)
Ellen Seiter and Mary Jeanne Wilson, “Soap Opera Survival Tactics” (TOTB)
Jeffrey P. Jones, “Cable’s Impact on the Talk Show” (TOTB)

Recc: Jason Mittell, “A Cultural Approach to Television Genre Theory” (TOTB)

Screening: Examples of genre

**UNIT II: INDUSTRIES AND AUDIENCES**

**Week 5 (Feb 20-22) – Evolution, Competition, Adaptation**

Readings: Erik Barnouw, excerpt from *Tube of Plenty* (X)
Al Auster, “HBO’s Approach to Generic Transformation” (TOTB)
Henry Jenkins, “Spoiling *Survivor*: The Anatomy of a Knowledge Community” (X)

Screening: Historical TV

**Week 6 (Feb 27-Mar 1) – Advertising and Resistance**

Readings: Anna McCarthy, “The Rhythms of the Reception Area: Crisis, Capitalism, and the Waiting Room TV” (TATV)
William Boddy, “Interactive Television and Advertising Form in Contemporary U.S. Television” (TATV)
Screening: *The Persuaders* (view online at http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/persuaders/)

**Week 7 (Mar 6-8) – It’s All About You: Personalized Media**

Readings:
- Lisa Parks, “Flexible Microcasting: Gender, Generation, and Television-Internet Convergence” (TATV)
- Gary R. Edgerton and Kyle Nicholas, “I Want My Niche TV: Genre as A Networking Strategy in the Digital Era” (TOTB)
- *Time*, “2006 Person of the Year: You.” (X)

Screening: *The Truman Show* (Peter Weir, 1998), 103 min.

☑ Midterm project

**Spring Break**

**UNIT III: SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS**

**Week 8 (Mar 20-22) – Remaking Community**

Reading:
- Danah Boyd, “Friends, Friendsters, and Top 8: Writing Community into Being on Social Network Sites” (X)
- Fred Scharmen, “‘You Must Be Logged In to Do That!’: MySpace and Control” (X)

☑ Due in class, Mar 22: Discussion overview & potential projects

**Week 9 (Mar 27-29) – Screen Citizens: News and Politics**

Readings:
- Anna Everett, “Double Click: The Million Woman March on Television and the Internet” (TATV)
- Henry Jenkins, “Photoshop for Democracy: The New Relationship between Politics and Popular Culture” (X)

Recc: John Hartley, “From Republic of Letters to Television Republic?” (TATV)

Screening: *Good Night and Good Luck* (George Clooney, 2005), 93 min.

**Week 10 (Apr 3-5) – Globalization**

Reading:
- Curtin, Michael. “Media Capitals: Cultural Geographies of Global TV” (TATV)
- Timothy Havens, “Globalization and the Generic Transformation of Telenovelas” (TOTB)
Shanti Kumar, “Innovation, Imitation, and Hybridity in Indian Television” (TOTB)


☑ Due in class, April 3: 1-page proposal for team project

**UNIT IV: IDEOLOGIES OF MEDIA**

**Week 11 (Apr 10-12) – Identity and Difference**

Readings: Herman Gray, “The Politics of Representation on Network Television” (X)
Michael Marriott, “The Color of Mayhem” (X)

Screening: Episodes of *Naked City, All in the Family, The Cosby Show*, demo of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*

**Week 12 (Apr 17-19) – Talking Truth: “Reality” Media**

Readings: Ron Simon, “The Changing Definition of Reality Television” (TOTB)
Henry Jenkins, “Buying into *American Idol*: How We Are Being Sold on Reality Television” (X)

Screening: Episodes of *The Tonight Show, An American Family, The Real World, The Jerry Springer Show*

**Week 13 (Apr 24-26) – Games without Frontiers: Hoaxes & The Fantastic**

Readings: Jeffrey Sconce, “What If?: Charting Television’s New Textual Boundaries” (TATV)
Rhonda Wilcox, “Unreal TV” (TOTB)

Screening: Episodes of *The X-Files, The Outer Limits; Ghost Watch* (Lesley Manning, 1992), 91 min.

**Week 14 (May 1-3) – Course Wrapup**

Presentation of Final Projects

☑ Due in class, May 3: Reflection paper