

LIT 120AS.01 (Summer 2010)
MTuTh 3:30-5:35 PM
Location: Social Sciences 107

Instructor: Gerry Canavan
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Office Hours: by appointment

WATCHING TELEVISION

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND TRAJECTORY

According to a study from Nielsen Media Research, as of 2006 the average American home had more television sets than people. Over 98% of American households have at least one TV, and Americans watch an average of almost five hours per day, not only in their homes but also in their workplaces, restaurants, schools, stadiums, and even in their cars. Television has become so omnipresent that it is now almost invisible; watching TV is understood as a default state, synonymous somehow with doing nothing at all. This course will consider what it is to watch television, both as consumer and as cultural critic. We will begin with critical theories about television viewing, contrasting Theodor Adorno's deep suspicion of television as a medium of passive stupefaction against Marshall McLuhan's utopian vision of a "global village" retribalized by shared televisual experience. In the second half of the course we will turn to a sustained study of such key genres of television viewing as soap opera, sitcom, science fiction, police procedural, cable news, reality, and sport, analyzing how the unique properties of the medium have been used at various historical moments to achieve specific aesthetic, political, and economic effects in diverse audiences. In addition to selected theoretical and critical readings, the course will include academic consideration of such programs as *The Twilight Zone*, *I Love Lucy*, *St. Elsewhere*, *Sesame Street*, *Star Trek*, *The Simpsons*, *The Sopranos*, *The Daily Show*, and *Lost*. We will also consider international television productions from nations such as France and Japan.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify and understand various formal characteristics of television programming
- Apply techniques of media analysis to television
- Demonstrate understanding of the cultural and historical contexts in which various modes of television programming have been produced
- Use media study to develop skills for careful reading and clear writing
- Read and discuss television on the levels of both form and content

REQUIRED TEXTS

Rather than individual textbooks, this course will use a coursepack available for download at blackboard.duke.edu. Most of our television watching will take place during class time, though at several points in the semester you will be asked to watch particular TV programs at home.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- short daily responses (due by 1 PM on Monday, Tuesdays, and Thursdays)
- one in-class presentation on a television genre of your choosing
- one take-home midterm
- one five-minute in-class presentation outlining the main claims of your final paper
- one 8-10 page final paper on a topic approved in advance
- class participation

GRADING

Grades will follow the following rubric:

* To earn a **C**, you must clearly restate the meaning or project of a text in your own terms. A **C** essay may volunteer an original argument, but will likely lack evidence or analysis of its sources. **C** essays are clearly written, though they might display some grammatical weakness.

* To earn a **B**, you must begin to raise important questions about the text under consideration and to use those questions to drive your own interpretive agenda. A **B** essay typically advances an original argument and provides solid analysis of the text(s) under consideration. **B** essays are clear, concise, and free of grammatical errors.

* To earn an **A**, you must construct an essay that does more than simply comment on the work of others; you must forward, counter, or transform what they have to say. An **A** essay advances an original argument that builds toward a climax and makes a persuasive case for its own significance. **A** essays are clearly written, and often eloquent.

* A **D** means that you have not written in clear prose or that you seem to have deeply misunderstood the text. An **F** means that you did not fully or seriously engage the assignment.

Your final grade in the course will be determined as follows:

- 20% Midterm
- 30% Final Paper
- 20% Presentations
- 30% Class Participation, Blackboard Responses, and Attendance

Detailed descriptions of all assignments will be distributed in class in advance of the due date.

FORMAT OF WRITTEN WORK

Written work must be typed in twelve-point font, double-spaced with one-inch margins, saved in a format Microsoft Word can open. I expect you to *edit* and *proofread* all written work, even blog posts and first drafts. Drafts that contain excessive typos or grammar mistakes may be returned to the author for correction before I offer comments.

Please give each piece of writing an original title, and include your name, assignment, and due date in a header on the first page. Insert page numbers if your work spans more than one page.

All written work should be submitted via Blackboard's Digital Dropbox **by 3:30 PM the day it is due**. Late work will be penalized a half-grade if it is in by class time and a full grade thereafter. Except in unusual circumstances, work will not be accepted by email.

ATTENDANCE

Class discussion is an essential component of this seminar. It is important that you come to class every day having read the required material and prepared to discuss it.

Attendance in this class is mandatory. You should plan on attending every class. **You are allowed two unexcused absences over the course of the summer semester. After that, your class participation will drop by a third for each additional unexcused absence.** Upon the fifth unexcused absence, you will receive a failing grade for the course.

Please talk to me (in advance if possible) if you find you will need to miss class.

BLACKBOARD

This course will make extensive use of the Blackboard site at <http://blackboard.duke.edu>. In addition to being a place where you can find electronic copies of the syllabus and other course handouts, Blackboard also features an online forum where we can continue our discussion after class is over.

The Blackboard discussion forums are an excellent place for people who may feel inhibited by regular class discussion to share their opinions with the class. I will be reading the discussion forum regularly and I recommend you do the same. **You should write a short post—a paragraph is fine—about one of the current discussion topics in the forum by 1 PM before every class.** (Additional posts will be looked upon favorably when I calculate your final grade.)

On the day you are scheduled to be the discussion leader on a given genre, you must make an introductory post in the forum by 9 PM the night *before* class.

CONFERENCES

Although conferences are not required in this course, I am very happy to meet with you individually to discuss either graded work or work in progress. See or email me to set up a time.

EMAIL

Students in this class are required to check their Duke email account at least once a day, in case there are any last-minute announcements or disruptions.

LAPTOP POLICY

Because of the length and formal characteristics of some of the material we will discuss, in-class use of laptops will be allowed and encouraged when such works are under discussion. However,

students *must* refrain from other computer uses, including email, instant messaging, Facebook, and so on. I reserve the right to ban individual laptops if this becomes a problem.

HONOR CODE

Students are expected to abide by the terms of the student code of academic conduct, available in your undergraduate bulletin or online at <http://www.integrity.duke.edu>. I urge you all to examine this material and consult me with any questions you may have about plagiarism or academic integrity *before* it becomes an issue.

Ignorance of what constitutes plagiarism is not an acceptable excuse for plagiarism. **Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade for the course.**

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS

Students with learning or other disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in this class should visit <http://www.aas.duke.edu/trinity/t-reqs/ld.html> to learn about Duke's policies concerning academic accommodations. If you anticipate a need for accommodations due to disability, please contact me as early in the semester as possible. All communication about disabilities will be kept confidential.

WRITING STUDIO

All students in this course are strongly encouraged to visit the Writing Studio, with locations at Perkins, Lilly, and the Art Building on East Campus, at any stage of the writing process. You may also make use of the Writing Studio's e-tutor program. Please visit the Writing Studio's website at <http://uwp.duke.edu/wstudio/> to find out how to schedule an appointment and to access the studio's online resources.

RESPECT

This classroom is a community. It is crucial that we treat each other with the appropriate level of courtesy and respect. No one should be made to feel unwelcome here.

Failure to treat other students with the respect they deserve will **severely** negatively impact your class participation grade.

PRELIMINARY SCHEDULE

Any changes to this schedule will be announced in class as they become necessary.

DATE	ASSIGNMENTS AND RESPONSES DUE BY 1 PM
W May 19	FIRST DAY OF CLASS Introduction to the course Bernard McGrane, “Zen Sociology: The Un-TV Experiment” (handout) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Law and Order: SVU</i> rerun • <i>Seinfeld</i> rerun • <i>NBC Nightly News</i> 5/18/10
Th May 20	Television Theory Clips: <i>The Big Bang Theory</i>, <i>Arrested Development</i>, and <i>The Sopranos 1.1</i> John Ellis, “Broadcast TV as Sound and Image” (Bb) Stuart Hall, “Encoding, Decoding” (Bb)
M May 24	Ways of Watching <i>Lost</i> series finale (at home, 5/23) Ron Lembo, “A Typology of Television Use” (Bb) Lynn Spigel, “Television in the Family Circle” (Bb) Guy Debord, excerpts from <i>The Society of the Spectacle</i> (Bb) <i>Economist</i> , “The Lazy Medium: How People Really Watch Television” (Web)
T May 25	Debates about TV Theodor Adorno, “How to Look at Television” (Bb) Marshall McLuhan, excerpts from <i>The Gutenberg Galaxy</i> and <i>Understanding Media</i> (Bb)
Th May 27	Audiences, Fans, Participants <i>American Idol</i> season finale (at home, 5/26) Dale Peck, “Production Values” (Web) Henry Jenkins, “Get a Life” (Bb) Will Brooker, excerpts from <i>Batman Unmasked</i> (Bb)
M May 31	MEMORAL DAY—NO CLASS
T June 1	‘Sophisticated’ Audiences: Television Style Jim Collins, “Television and Postmodernism” (Bb) David Foster Wallace, “E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction” (Bb) Steven Johnson, “Television,” <i>Everything Bad Is Good for You</i> (Bb)
Th June 3	Advertising <i>Mad Men</i> 2.3, “The Benefactor” (in-class viewing) John Corner, “Adworlds” (Bb) Raymond Williams, “Advertising: The Magic System” (Bb) Jean Baudrillard, “Absolute Advertising, Ground-Zero Advertising” (Bb) Chuck Klosterman, “It Will Shock You How Much It Never Happened” (Bb)

	<i>Midterm assigned</i>
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GENRE STUDY	
<i>specific shows and readings to be announced</i>	
<i>M June 7</i>	<i>Midterm Due</i> GENRE TBA
<i>T June 8</i>	GENRE TBA
<i>Th June 10</i>	GENRE TBA
<i>M June 14</i>	GENRE TBA
<i>T June 15</i>	GENRE TBA
<i>Th June 17</i>	GENRE TBA
<i>M June 21</i>	International Television and U.S. Television Overseas Timothy J. Havens, “The Greatest Show on Earth: The Cosby Show and the Ascent of U.S. Sitcoms in the Global Television Marketplace” (Bb) Gary R. Edgerton, “Tune in Locally, Watch Globally: The Future of Television in the Age of the Internet” (Bb) Fredric Jameson, “Globalization and Political Strategy” (Web)
<i>T June 22</i>	TV Against TV <i>Dollhouse</i> 1.6, “Man on the Street” (in-class viewing) Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (Bb) Jack Patrick Rodgers, “ <i>Dollhouse</i> : A Post Mortem” (Web)
<i>Th June 24</i>	WRITING DAY—NO CLASS
<i>M June 28</i>	<i>Final Paper Mini-Presentations</i> LAST DAY OF CLASS
<i>Th July 1</i>	FINAL PAPERS DUE