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MART 450.02M: Topics in Film - Media Studies

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SPRING 2014

MAR 450: TOPICS IN FILM & MEDIA

Appointment Viewing: The State of the Art of Serialized Television.

Faculty: Associate Professor Andrew Smith

Teaching Assistant: Erin Hale

Class Time: Thurs 2:40-3:30

Room: 227 McGill

Office: 232 McGill

Phone: 396-5052

Office Hours:

Wed 12:30am-2:30

Or by appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is a course on **serialized television**, the form of visual story-telling we interact with the most; the form that is a more current, adaptive, and reflective gauge of our contemporary culture than feature films can be; the form that has entered a **‘new golden age’ or ‘renaissance’**— a high-quality level of content, particularly on “premium” channels, but also on network and “basic” cable, and on new, are-they-even-TV? forms— such as Netflix, Hulu, YouTube....

Media critics have made a case that **the best serialized TV dramas** (THE SOPRANOS, MAD MEN, BREAKING BAD, THE WIRE...) are **the modern equivalent to the great novels of the Victorian age**. Novels by Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, Anthony Trollope, etc., were originally serialized in London newspapers and magazines, and consumed by readers every Sunday, exactly like the “appointment viewing” habits of today’s discretionary television viewers. Mass popular culture reaching an apogee, something approaching high art.

Not to get too lofty, too reverent. Television is still television, home to 24-hour programming, lowest-common-denominator guilty pleasures and passive viewers. It is also home to **many of our best comic talents**, both in terms of actors, writers/creators and all-the-aboves (from Larry David to Lena Dunham). **Serialized Comedy (and “dramedy”) series** will be a part of our study.

I envision this class as an open and dynamic series of informed conversations, presentations, and papers about shows, creators, channels, and the essentially ever-changing nature of the media itself. **We will focus on recent & relevant scripted series**—those broad reflecting pools that engage us on a weekly basis in the trials and tribulations of our favorite characters. People get fanatic—obsessed—with their favorite TV serials, in a way that is not reproducible in films. Binge-watching is a new phenomenon.

In the ever-mutating landscape of television, **DVR** and **VOD**, not to mention your phone and **other web-delivery devices** have dramatically altered the way in which we consume shows, advertisements, interactive elements. The conversation is no longer about *did you catch that episode last night*, but: *what show are you following?* Keeping in mind that everyone’s viewing habits are different, you get to help create the content and terms of discussion. What series are exciting, confounding, curious, infatuating to you? HOW do you get your “fix”?

As an occasional professional writer in this form, I would like to **focus on the broad canvasses offered to serial writers**, who get to allow their characters to live with their audiences literally for years, as opposed to, say, the two hours of feature films. We will examine the outlines, scripts, and multi-year overviews necessary to successfully pitch, and maintain, a series.

GOALS AND ASSIGNMENTS: The goal of this class is to engage in in-depth study and discussion of current “state of the art” television serials; this study will include critical papers, creative projects, and analytical readings and presentations. The commitment of this class will be TO WATCH several hours (or whole seasons) of various series. To present to class your ideas in discussions and presentations, and TO WRITE COGENTLY about what you see.

WRITING REQUIREMENT 1—TERM PAPER (40%)

Each student will research a given area (show, genre, channel, trend) of scripted television and write a research paper based in the area. This paper must be delivered in a manner that meets the following criteria:

- The paper must pursue a sophisticated line of academic inquiry by asking that requires research from varied sources. We will spend time in the Library learning specific and relevant research resources and techniques.
- You must find, evaluate, analyze and synthesize information from **diverse** source material effectively. Diverse is in bold to remind you that the Internet is a convenient source, but not the only one.
- You must identify the audience for whom your paper is written and adopt the appropriate voice. In the case of this class, the target audience would be the professional journals related to the entertainment industry.
- Work in multiple drafts so as to refine your thinking and presentation. You will be required to submit the following forms of the paper:
 - You will be able to use correct diction & sentence structure;
 - It should have sound judgments unified by a clear message;
 - It needs to have evidence or reasons supporting all judgments;
 - transitions that connect a series of ideas and evidence;
 - correct spelling and punctuation.

You will be expected to meet the following deadlines in the development of your paper.

- o Week 4 Basic Outline/Presentation of preliminary sources
- o Week 5 Feedback Returned
- o Week 9 Rough Draft/Presentation of final sources
- o Week 11 Feedback Returned
- o Week 15 Completed Final Draft
- You will follow the conventions of citation, documentation and formal presentation as outlined *Sources*, online address: <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~sources/index.html>

WRITING REQUIREMENT 2— REFLECTIONS/ONLINE BLOG (20%)

Every other week you will post a topic related to either your term paper or other research you are undertaking as part of your collaborative project. This will be written in prose, but it is intended as an informal, journal-like tool for reflection and exploration. You will receive feedback bi-weekly regarding your work in this format.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS (20%)

In addition to attending all screenings and discussing all readings, **each student will give a presentation on a particular series** (or related subject). These presentations should bring to the table a level of research and context (critical / commercial reception; influence; interviews, commentary, etc.) that goes beyond three *google* clicks. Tell us things that we ourselves could not find out in half an hour on the Internet. Yes, this once again means: using the library.

COLLABORATIVE PROJECT (20%)

As part of a group of approximately five students you will pitch and work on a “pilot” project. These pitches will follow industry outline structures and perimeters, and will be presented as well as submitted in paper form. From the pitches, **the class will select several ideas to “go to pilot.”** Although we will not actually write or shoot full pilot episodes, **we will write a TRAILER and/or a “TEASER” (first scene)** for the selected shows.

CLASS SCHEDULE:

WEEKS ONE through EIGHT: *THE FIX* (DRAMA)

January 30: Course introduction. “My personal relationship with Television.”

Feb 6: LIBRARY RESOURCES/ LIBRARY FIELD TRIP

Screening: Episode(s) of THE SOPRANOS

February 13: Discussion: THE SOPRANOS

Reading: David Remnick essay on The Sopranos

February 20: Discussion: THE WIRE

Screening: Episodes 1 & 2 of season Four of THE WIRE

Reading: Articles on David Simon, co-creator of THE WIRE

**February 27: Discussion: (TBA/ CLASS CHOOSES SUBJECT)
(guest lecturer)**

March 5: Discussion: MAD MEN

Screening: Pilot episode of MAD MEN

Reading: Mad Men Pilot script, "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" by Matthew Weiner

March 12: Discussion: FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS

Screening: Episodes of FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS

Reading: TBD

March 19: (CLASS CHOOSES SUBJECT)

ALSO: DEADWOOD, BREAKING BAD, LOST, THE WALKING DEAD, BOARDWALK EMPIRE, GAME OF THRONES, DOWNTON ABBEY, SHERLOCK, TOP OF THE LAKE, THE KILLING, SIX FEET UNDER, DR. WHO, 24, HOMELAND....

WEEKS NINE through TWELVE: SCHADENFREUDE (COMEDY & DRAMEDY)

schadenfreude \SHOD-n-froy-duh\, noun:
misfortunes of others.

A malicious satisfaction

March 26: ORANGE IS THE NEW BLACK

April 2: NO CLASS—SPRING BREAK

April 9: CLASS CHOOSES SUBJECT/ PITCH SESSION

April 16: CLASS CHOOSES SUBJECT/ PITCH SESSION

WEEKS ELEVEN through FOURTEEN: NEW VIEWERS, NEW MODELS

April 23: HOUSE OF CARDS (Netflix/Hulu)

April 30: Future Vision. (What's next?) (YouTube)

WEEK FIFTEEN: "SPOILERS"

May 5: How shows *end*—final episodes, etc. / PITCHES TO EXECUTIVE

FINALS WEEK: Research Papers due.

*******CONGRATULATIONS ON A GREAT SEMESTER!*******