

2020SP-SPCM-341: Evaluating Contemporary Television

Kit Hughes, PhD

Office hours: T/H 1-2 and by appointment.

Description

When television was first introduced to the American public, it was mandated to serve “**the public interest.**” What does this phrase mean? What publics are envisioned by this phrase? Does television still (or has it ever) served the public interest? What does television that serves the public interest look like? How would it be organized industrially? What kinds of programs would it result in? Is this the kind of TV we have today?

To consider these questions, this course explores how television is made, used, and studied in the post-network era. We will focus in particular on how industrial, regulatory, technological, and cultural conditions shape television programming, how audiences are constructed, and how people understand television as a cultural for(u)m.

Objectives

Students will

- analyze how varied institutions, as well as cultural, technological, and economic conditions, impact programming practices
- evaluate television programming as a complex form of cultural production with its own set of formal rules and aesthetics
- explore and critically compare alternatives to the American commercial system
- examine the social, political, and cultural power of television—as an industry and as a major originator of art, information, and entertainment at local and national scales.

Required Materials

- Readings and screenings posted to Canvas.
- Access to *Watchmen* (2019) (HBOMax, rent, buy)
- Web camera for zoom discussions (it’s OK if you have to use your phone, but you should frame yourself thoughtfully, avoid camera motion, and minimize background interference).

Expectations of work are equivalent to federal credit hour definition of 2 hours of outside work for each contact hour. (**Translation: you should budget at least 6 hours for at-home work per week in this class.**)

Assignments

PARTICIPATION (12%)

Your participation grade will reflect the extent to which you fulfill the following requirements:

- 1) You attend scheduled class sessions. Students may miss up to two class sessions without documentation for illness, family issues, or other reasonable issues; after this, you must contact **student case management** to provide documentation recognized by the university for hardship accommodations. Slides/lectures will not be posted online; you will need to take notes during our remote lectures, just as if we were F2F in the classroom.

- 2) You turn your web camera on during class discussion and activities. You do not need to keep your camera on while I'm presenting slides and lecturing. Note that a *functional* web camera is part of your required materials for this class.
- 3) You participate actively in class discussion and activities. This means not only listening thoughtfully and treating your peers with respect, but also contributing your own thoughts and suggestions.

HOMEWORK (18%)

You will have 6 short homework assignments/worksheets due over the course of the semester. Each is worth 3% of your final grade.

MIDTERM NARRATIVE ANALYSIS (25%)

You will select a program (that we don't watch in this class) and analyze a scene in detail to describe how the show encodes cultural meaning.

SEASON 1 EXAM (15%) & FINAL EXAM (30%)

Exams will cover content from lectures, screenings, discussion, and readings. Question types *may* include multiple-choice, short answer, matching, fill-in-the-blank, essay, and some other form of Q not yet invented. **There are no make-ups for exams.** The final exam covers seasons 3 & 4 only.

Grading Policies

LATE WORK

Exams: may not be taken early or late, no exceptions. If you miss the 36-hour test period for the Season 1 Exam or do not virtually attend the final, you will receive a zero.

Homework and Midterm: lose 10% of your grade every 24-hour period one of these assignments is late.

You elected to take a course in a remote modality. Technical difficulties” or time zone confusion do not excuse late work.

Grading Scale

A: 93+ | A-: 90-92.9 | B+: 87-89.9 | B: 83-86.9 | B-: 80-82.9 | C+: 77-79.9 | C: 70-76.9 | D: 60-69.9 | F:<60

Policies

COMMUNICATION: While this is an online course, I am not a robot (last I checked. Honestly, though, who knows these days...bleep bloop). I do not read my **work** email after 5:00 pm or on the weekends. I will, however, do my very best to respond to all workweek emails within **24 hours**. Likewise, please check your email for key course announcements at least once per 24 hour period during the workweek for key announcements relating to the class.

OFFICE HOURS: 1-2 Tuesday, Thursday and by appointment. I do not have on-campus office hours this semester. Send a quick email (either during or before my office hours) to let me know you want to chat and I can give you a call or send a zoom link. **Past struggling students have told me that coming to office hours was the single most helpful thing they did all semester.**

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: This course adheres to the CSU Academic Integrity Policy found in the CSU General Catalog and in the Student Conduct Code. If I confirm that you have plagiarized or cheated (for example, copy/pasting test answers from the internet), you will receive a zero for the assignment and you may face harsher penalties depending on the severity of the case.

ACCESSIBILITY: Please let me know **in the first week** of class if you require accommodations for a learning disability. This is especially important if you need extra time on exams. Visit Resources for Disabled Students (<http://rds.colostate.edu/home>) for more information on how to register a disability with CSU and the academic accommodations available to you.

PREFERRED ADDRESS: I use she/her/hers and Professor K. Plain old "professor" is also a classic; feel free to use in email or discussion.

SLIDES WILL NOT BE POSTED ONLINE. This is a **pedagogical strategy** to encourage engagement during class. If you miss anything, ask me to slow down **DURING CLASS**.

Resources

Student Case Management

[Student case management](#) is available to help students with extenuating life circumstances and connect them with resources. In some cases, after you and I discuss your situation, I may request [verifiable documentation for class absences](#) from the SCM office if you request considerations for absences or missed coursework.

Undocumented Student Support

Any CSU student who faces challenges or hardships due to their legal status in the United States and believes that it may impact their academic performance in this course is encouraged to visit [Student Support Services for Undocumented, DACA & ASSET](#) for resources and support. Additionally, only if you feel comfortable, please notify your professor so they may pass along any additional resources they may possess.

Food Insecurity

Any CSU student (along with faculty and staff) who is experiencing food insecurity can receive support from the [Rams Against Hunger](#) program. Services include a food pantry, a meal-swipe program, pocket pantries, and in-person assistance with navigating federal aid eligibility. The RAH page includes numerous resources as well as county, state and federal programs which are described and linked.

Title IX/Interpersonal Violence

For the full statement regarding role and responsibilities about reporting harassment, sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and the retaliation policy please go to: [Title IX – Sexual Assault, Sexual Violence, Sexual Harassment](#).

If you feel that your rights have been compromised at CSU, several resources are available to assist:

- Student Resolution Center, 200 Lory Student Center, 491-7165
- Office of Equal Opportunity, 101 Student Services, 491-5836
- A note about interpersonal violence: If you or someone you know has experienced sexual assault, relationship violence and/or stalking, know that you are not alone. As instructors,

we are required by law to notify university officials about disclosures related to interpersonal violence. Confidential victim advocates are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to provide support related to the emotional, physical, physiological and legal aftermath of interpersonal violence. Contact the Victim Assistance Team at: 970-492-4242.

Mental Health and Wellness

CSU is a community that cares. You are not alone. CSU Health Network Counseling Services has trained professionals who can help. Your student fees provide access to a wide range of support services.

Call Counseling Services at (970) 491-6053, and they will work together with you to find out which services are right for you.

Visit <https://health.colostate.edu/about-counseling-services> to learn more and <https://health.colostate.edu/mental-health-resources/> for additional student mental health and well-being resources.

If you are concerned about a friend or peer, use **Tell Someone** by calling (970) 491-1350 or visiting <https://supportandsafety.colostate.edu/tell-someone/> to share your concerns with a professional who can discreetly connect the distressed individual with the proper resources. Rams Take Care of Rams. Reach out and ask for help if you or someone you know is having a difficult time.

SCHEDULE

*Reading and assignments due before class starts on the dates listed. Most readings found on Canvas → Files → Readings → Season 1/2/3/4 or Pilot. Other readings available via hyperlink or library, as noted.

PILOT HOW AND WHY TO STUDY TV

1/18: Introduction

1/20: How and why to talk about television

- Shawn Shimpach, “Realty Reality: HGTV and the Subprime Crisis” (515-526).
- Watch (W): *House Hunters*: <https://www.hgtv.com/shows/house-hunters/house-hunters-full-episodes-videos> EPISODE: “Her own place in Winston-Salem”
- **Homework 1**: 10 shows to know me

1/25: How and why to talk about television, cont.

- Shawn Shimpach, “Realty Reality: HGTV and the Subprime Crisis” (526-542)
- **Homework 2**: completed Realty Reality reading guide

SEASON ONE HOW DOES TELEVISION IMAGINE ITS PUBLICS?

1/27: Regulation: who gets the good stuff?

- Allison Perlman, “Public Interests,” 1-7, 13-18
- Amanda Lotz *The Television Will be Revolutionized* (TWR) “Introduction,” 3-10

- W: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zMqQmz1q0bI> (The characters of *Mad Men* watch the moon landing)

2/1: **Periodizing television: 3 eras**

- Lotz, 21-34, 46-49

2/3: **Who is television for?**

- Lotz, 207-226

2/8: **Avoiding risk – in the network era**

- R: Gitlin, “Triumph of the Synthetic”

2/10: **The rise of cable: services, civics, and ownership**

- R: John McMurria, “Urban ‘Alienation,’ ‘Maximum Feasible Participation,’ and the ‘Quest for Community,’” 117-127.

2/13: Watch Superbowl halftime show, live or recorded

2/15: continued

- McMurria, “New York City Public Access Cable TV and the FCC,” 127-136.
- Explore the website <https://www.fcpublicmedia.org/>, watch some content of your own choosing.
- Watch “A River of Stories” (about 6 mins): <https://reflect-fcpublicmedia.cablecast.tv/CablecastPublicSite/show/589?channel=1>
- **Homework 3:** Halftime show response

2/17: continued

- McMurria, 3 case studies: “The Racial Politics of Cable Television Los Angeles,” “Institutional Barriers to Black Ownership in Dayton, Ohio” and “Celebrating Black Culture and Cable Ownership in Gary, Indiana” (one file: 152-169)

2/22: **Watching TV online**

- Lotz, *Portals*, Chapter 1, section “How Does Nonlinear Curation Differ from Linear Scheduling?”
- “Netflix’s Grand, Daring, Maybe Crazy Plan to Conquer the World” *Wired* (3.27.16): <https://www.wired.com/2016/03/netflixs-grand-maybe-crazy-plan-conquer-world/>

SEASON TWO

HOW CAN TEXTS ADDRESS PUBLIC ISSUES?

2/24: **Mise-en-scene**

- R: Jeremy Butler, *Television: Visual Storytelling and Screen Culture* (henceforth *TV*), 185-86, 199-219.
- W: *Watchmen* E1 (HBOMax or buy/rent)

3/1: **Cinematography**

- R: *TV*, 220-255
- W: *Watchmen* E2

- W: *Watchmen* E3

3/3: **Editing**

- R: *TV*, 257-280
- W: *Watchmen* E4

3/8: **Sound**

- R: *TV*, 282-305
- W: *Watchmen* E5
- W: *Watchmen* E6
- **Homework 4:** editing worksheet

3/10: **Edge**

- R: Curtin, "On Edge"
- W: *Watchmen* E7

[SPRING BREAK]

3/22: **Representation**

- R: H. Gray, "The politics of representation in network TV"
- Danielle Seid, "Television is Burning,"
<https://www.flowjournal.org/2019/09/television-is-burning/>
- W: *Watchmen* E8

3/24: continued

- R: Emily Nussbaum, "The Incendiary Aims of HBO's *Watchmen*" *The New Yorker* (12.9.19):
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/12/09/the-incendiary-aims-of-hbos-watchmen>
- W: *Watchmen* E9

3/25: MIDTERM SCENE ANALYSIS DUE

**SEASON THREE
OTHER PUBLICS? OTHER INTERESTS?**

3/29: **Noncommercial and public broadcasting**

- Allison Perlman, "Television Up in the Air: The Midwest Program on Airborne Television, 1959-1971" *Critical Studies in Media Communication* (2010)

3/31: **No in-person Zoom:** (Professor K at Society of Cinema and Media Studies Conference).

- Laurie Ouellette, *Viewers like you*, "Introduction"
- Watch: standing in the Gap: <https://www.pbs.org/video/standing-gap-far-northeast-denver/>
- Watch: recorded lecture
- **Homework 5:** Standing in the Gap screening guide (due at 11:59pm 3/31)

4/5: **Studying television in (public) Space**

- R: Anna McCarthy, “Introduction”

4/7: continued

- R: Anna McCarthy, “Chapter 4”

4/12: **Television, Labor, and Institutional Technologies**

- R: Hughes, *Television at Work*, Chapter 5, 164-179

4/14: cont.

- R: Hughes, *Television at Work*, Chapter 5, 193-206

SEASON FOUR

PUBLIC INTEREST FOR THE PEOPLE: Workers, Consumers, Us

4/19: **What the media industry is like for workers**

- Christopherson, “Labor: The Effects of Media Concentration on the Film and TV Workforce”

4/21: Cont.: contemporary case studies #PayUpHollywood, SMPTE strike, etc. (readings subject to change depending on contemporary events)

- “Hollywood Assistants are Fed Up and No Longer Afraid to Say So”
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/10/business/metoo-hollywood-assistants.html>
- “The Business” <https://www.kcrw.com/culture/shows/the-business/with-payuphollywood-assistants-speak-out/why-assistants-are-telling-hollywood-its-time-to-pay-up>

4/26: **What the media industry is like for the environment**

- Richard Maxwell and Toby Miller, *Greening the media*. “Workers”

4/28: continued

- *Greening the media*. “Consumers”

5/3: **What is the value of television?**

- R: Newman and Levine, “Introduction” 6-13, and “Another Golden Age,” 14-18, 30-37
- **Homework 6:** personal sustainability plan

5/5: continued

- R: Hartley, “Television as Transmodern Teaching”
- W: *Screening TBD*

5/9: FINAL EXAM: 6:20-8:20pm

Important information for students:

Masks are required inside university buildings. You must also meet university vaccine or exemption requirements.

All students are expected and required to report to the COVID Reporter

(<https://covid.colostate.edu/reporter/>) when:

- You suspect you have symptoms of COVID, regardless of whether or not you are vaccinated and even if your symptoms are mild
- You have tested positive for COVID through a non-CSU testing site, such as home test or test at a pharmacy
- You believe you may have been exposed to COVID go to the COVID Reporter and follow the guidance under “I believe I have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19.” This guidance will depend upon your individual circumstances

You will not be penalized in any way for reporting symptoms or concerns.

Do not ask me as your instructor to report for you. It is your responsibility to report through the COVID Reporter promptly.

As your instructor I may not ask you about vaccination status or if you have COVID but you may freely volunteer to send me information from a public health official - if you have been asked to isolate or quarantine.

When you complete the COVID Reporter, the CSU Public Health office is notified. Once notified, that office will contact you and, depending upon each situation, will conduct contact tracing, initiate any necessary public health requirements and notify you if you need to take any steps.

If you do not have internet access to fill out the online COVID-19 Reporter, please call (970) 491-4600.

For the latest information about the University’s COVID resources and information, including FAQs about the spring semester, please visit the **CSU COVID-19 site** <https://covid.colostate.edu/>.