SPECIAL TOPICS in FILM and DIGITAL MEDIA:
KNOWING TELEVISION

FILM 80S SPRING 2009
M/W 3:30-5:30 Oakes 105
Professor Amelie Hastie
E-mail: ahastie@ucsc.edu Office: Communications 109
Office Hours: Tuesdays 2-4 and by appointment
Teaching Assistants: Rob Trumbull and Miki Foster

REQUIRED TEXTS (available at the Bay Tree Bookstore):
- Course Packet
- A fresh notebook to use as a journal
- Weekly television screenings, including viewings on your own time

COURSE DESCRIPTION
For better or worse, US broadcast television is a cultural form that is not commonly associated
with knowledge. This course will take what might seem a radical counter-position to such
assumptions – looking at the ways television teaches us what it is and even trains us in potential
critical practices for investigating it. By considering its formal structure, its textual definitions,
and the means through which we see it, we will map out how it is that we come to know
television.

COURSE FORMAT AND REQUIREMENTS
Structure of course meetings: Each meeting will integrate a lecture, screenings, and some
participation. Lectures will offer some explication of the readings with an emphasis on how the
arguments of each help us understand the multivalent ways we know television and television
knows itself. Screenings will include discrete texts (such as one-two episodes of a particular
television series), recorded segments of television (such as thirty minutes of programming that
includes commercials as well as narrative fragments), and programming from on-line resources.
These examples will be provided to give you a sense of how television produces a critical
practice of viewing and how it narrates the production and processes of knowing. While
participating in a large-lecture class can be daunting, I encourage you to try to speak; please be
prepared with an understanding of (or a coherent question about) the readings as well as the
screenings.

Readings: While much of our analysis will be lodged within the discipline of television studies,
the readings are provided to offer both an introduction to the discipline and a more precise
focus on what constitutes television (that is, what it is as an object of knowledge) and what
forms of understanding it produces (how it teaches us to know it and ourselves). As the readings
will provide the basis for lectures, discussions, class screenings, and assignments, please
complete them by the Monday of each week. Come to class prepared with a summary of each author’s argument and a statement regarding its relevance to the overall course topic and the week’s focus.

**Assignments**

**Essay 1:** Your first essay will provide a brief explication of two theoretical texts in relation to one class screening.

**Essay 2:** The second essay assignment will ask you develop an argument about ways in which television trains us to investigate and interrogate its structure and texts. You will integrate critical readings from the second half of the course with an analysis of particular examples.

**Final Exam:** The class will collectively develop a study guide for the exam that identifies key terms and ideas from the entire course. The exam will be cumulative, based on lectures, readings, and class screenings.

**Journals:** You are required to keep a viewing and reading journal for this course. Please use a notebook of your choice that is separate from that in which you keep your lecture notes. Document your responses, as formally or informally as you wish, to television watching (in and out of class) and course readings. You will not turn in these journals (therefore you will have as much liberty as you need in writing in them), but you will draw on them for your assigned papers and exams.

*No late papers will be accepted. All assignments must be completed in order to pass the course.*

*Any act of plagiarism will be met with a failing grade in the course.*

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**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**UNIT 1: DEFINING TELEVISION**

**Week One**

**March 30-April 1**

**What Is Television?**

**Reading:**

- Nick Browne, “The Political Economy of the Television (Super) Text”
- John Ellis, “Broadcast TV as Cultural Form”
- Michel Foucault, “The Formation of Objects”
**WEEK TWO**

**April 6-8**

**LIVE FROM NEW YORK: TELEVISION ADDRESSES ITS AUDIENCE**

**Reading:** Jane Feuer, “The Concept of Live Television: Ontology as Ideology”
Emile Benveniste, “The Nature of Pronouns” and “Subjectivity in Language”
John Ellis, “Television: Live Witness Realized”

**Rec:** Robert Stam, “Television News and Its Spectator”

**WEEK THREE**

**April 13-15**

**WATCHING TV FLOW**

**Reading:** Lynne Joyrich, “Guided by TV”
Mimi White, “Crossing Wavelengths: The Diegetic and Referential Imaginary of American Commercial Television”
Tania Modleski, “The Rhythms of Reception: Daytime Television and Women’s Work”

**Rec:** John Fiske, “Intertextuality”

**UNIT 2: INTERPRETING TELEVISION**

**WEEK FOUR**

**April 20-22**

**INVESTIGATION: WATCHING THE DETECTIVE**

**Reading:** Jason Mittell, “Television Genres as Cultural Categories”
Plato, “Theatetus”

**Assignment:** Essay #1 due Wednesday

**WEEK FIVE**

**April 27-29**

**INTERPRETATION: “WORKING THROUGH”**

**Reading:** John Ellis, “Working Through: Television in the Age of Uncertainty”
Sigmund Freud, “Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through”
Jane Feuer, “HBO and the Concept of Quality TV”

**Rec:** Dana Polan, “Cable Watching: HBO, The Sopranos, and Discourses of Distinction”

**WEEK SIX**

**May 4-6**

**HISTORICIZATION: HISTORY CHANNELS**

**Reading:** Steve Anderson, “Loafing in the Garden of Knowledge”
John Caldwell, “Prime-time Fiction Theorizes the Docu-Real”
Lynne Joyrich, “The Epistemology of the Console”
WEEK SEVEN
May 11-13
EDUCATION: TELEVISION AND DISCIPLINE
Reading: Laurie Ouellette, “‘Take Responsibility for Yourself’: Judge Judy and the Neoliberal Citizen”
Laura Hubbard and Kathryn Mathers, “Surviving American Empire in Africa: The Anthropology of Reality Television”

UNIT 3: KNOWING TELEVISION ANEW
WEEK EIGHT
May 18-20
KNOWING AUDIENCES
Reading: John Fiske, “Moments of Television; Neither the Text nor the Audience”
Sara Gwenillian-Jones, “The Sex Lives of Cult Television Characters”
Assignment: Essay #2 due Wednesday

WEEK NINE
May 27
ACCESSING KNOWLEDGE
Reading: Henry Jenkins, “The Cultural Logic of Media Convergence”
William Urricchio, “Television’s Next Generation: Technology/Interface Culture/Flow”
Tara McPherson, “Reload: Liveness, Mobility, and the Web”

WEEK TEN
June 1-3
SEEING THINGS
Reading: Heidi Cooley, “It’s All About the Fit: The Hand, the Mobile Screenic Device, and Tactile Vision”
Max Dawson, “Little Players, Big Shows: Format, Narration, and Style on Television’s New Smaller Screens”
Lisa Parks, “Where the Cable Ends: Television beyond Fringe Areas”

Final Exam
MONDAY JUNE 8, 12-3PM