Leveraging Abundance in the 21st Century Media Classroom
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The question as posed can be defined as how we deal with a shift from a position of relative scarcity to one of abundance.

Television (as a subset of broadcast media) entered into this world under a condition of scarcity. Television was from its earliest days ephemeral, mostly transmitted live. Even the programming that was recorded and preserved on film remained relatively scarce in terms of its availability to the viewing public. Even the way the medium functioned as a means of communication was shaped by scarcity – strict regulations on language and subject matter were predicated on responsibility to the limited (i.e. scarce) and publicly owned electromagnetic spectrum. Finally, it was difficult and prohibitively expensive to produce, making it the purview of a relatively select few. The introduction of video tape and home recording technologies alleviated this condition slightly, but only for those – such as teachers – who wished to have more lasting access to select programs. All of these examples have made teaching television at least partially a matter of granting access rather than engaging in exchange.

The digital revolution has (mostly) changed all of this. Instead of granting access, teaching television is now a matter of harnessing abundance. Thanks to cable and satellite proliferation, there is more programming now than ever. And almost everything that is produced is available for retrieval. Additionally, production capacity has opened widely thanks to relatively cheap cameras (even on smartphones) and increasingly inexpensive editing tools that allow strict amateurs to achieve alarmingly sophisticated and polished results. All of this necessarily shifts the way we teach about television from a range of perspectives: aesthetics, narrative structure, industry, regulation, consumption, etc. For example, the simple fact that entire seasons of series are available on DVD and sites like Netflix and Hulu or HBO Go, makes it possible now to teach courses on those series as stand-alone narratives. Courses on *The Wire* or *Breaking Bad* allow us to address in finer detail aspects of creative authority, series/serial structure, audiences, cultural politics. The fact that series like these are increasingly produced for non-broadcast networks allows us to address the vagaries of media regulation and the impact of these regulatory structures on storytelling style. The same fact also allows us to engage deeply in the shifting industrial structures that encourage more varied and dispersed (global) production strategies. Finally, the redistribution of content via social media sites like Facebook and YouTube allows us to engage differently with questions of consumption, especially the question of how we become aware of programs and how we interact with them in new ways.

So what are some of the strategies we might consider for the 21st century classroom? First, expand the classroom. Because of the array of distribution outlets for watching programming as well as web-based teaching tools it is now quite simple to require increased viewing and "discussion" outside of the

traditional classroom setting. Additionally, it's also much easier to bring others *into* the classroom via programs like Skype. Social media sites like Facebook have done so much for media scholars in terms of sharing materials and simply staying connected with one another that it is useful to share those connections with our students. Teaching a colleague's article or book is only enhanced by having that colleague "visit" your class. This opportunity was once scarce; it is now abundantly possible. Finally, where we once acted as the primary providers of examples for our students to study, it is now possible for them to share their own examples in class. Of course, expanding the classroom in these ways carries with it extra burdens for instructors to harness the amount of information and technology available, but the possibilities that these present is at least exciting.

A second strategy for embracing abundance is to include production into the critical classroom. In our current context, there isn't much excuse for us not be at least proficient in basic production techniques. It's true that the abundance of software choices and file formats can make the amateur editor's head swim, but the payoff for asking students to engage with critical ideas outside of the confines of the traditional research paper can be well worth the effort. These kinds of assignments can take a range of forms from long-form research-based projects to short explanatory pieces. These projects can be as traditional or experimental as we wish, depending on the nature of lesson at hand. Production assignments allow us to demystify the process by which media are made and require students to think differently than they've been trained to think through traditional channels. Our criticism courses needn't become production courses, but neither should they ignore production – either as a subject of criticism or a way to get at critical ideas.

The new abundance is both exhilarating and daunting. It is my hope that we as media educators find new and useful ways to harness that abundance and make scarcity of critical insight from our students a thing of the past.