



BIOPOLITICAL FANTASY

IN
CONTEMPORARY
AMERICAN
TELEVISION AND
FILM

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September 16, 2016

Building 1441, room 012 (Auditorium 1): 13:30-15:00

Biopolitics, the study of how the state manages the health and vitality of the national body, has made numerous contributions to a number of disciplines—but there has been surprisingly little work on biopolitics and cinema. We might say more generally that biopolitical theory fails to account for the need to mediate between political power and the life it wishes to manipulate at all. In this talk, however, I argue that media itself (especially, but not exclusively cinema and the moving image) mediates between the two. Biopolitical appeals are frequently made by offering a melodramatic scene that the state or private sector hopes will convince the subject, what

I call a *biopolitical fantasy*. These scenes are themselves often deliberately cinematic in character, and draw on well-known film genres. At the same time, of course, contemporary film and television also mine biopolitical fantasies for their melodramatic character, imagining dystopian worlds of surveillance (*Orphan Black*), body manipulation (*Mad Max: Fury Road*), torture (*Blindspot*), and more. Less frequently, they try to imagine responses to these biopolitical nightmares, solutions that range from the individual and exceptional hero (*The Hunger Games*) to suggestions that some form of collective solidarity may be called for (*Orphan Black*).