



The Sopranos (Spin Offs)

Dana Polan

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“In its original run on HBO, *The Sopranos* mattered, and it matters still,” Dana Polan asserts early in this analysis of the hit show, in which he sets out to clarify the impact and importance of the series in both its cultural and media-industry contexts. A renowned film and TV scholar, Polan combines a close and extended reading of the show itself—and of select episodes and scenes—with broader attention to the social landscape with which it is in dialogue. For Polan, *The Sopranos* is a work of playful irony that complicates simplistic attempts to grasp its meanings and values. The show seductively beckons the viewer into an amoral universe, hinting at ways to make sense of its ethically complicated situations, only to challenge the viewer’s complacent grasp of things. It deftly exploits the interplay between art culture and popular culture by mixing elements of art cinema—meandering plots, narrative breaks, and an uncertain progression—with the allure of a soap opera, delving into its characters’ sex lives, mob rivalries, and parent–child conflicts.

A show about corrupt figures who parasitically try to squeeze illicit profit from the system, *The Sopranos* itself seems a target of attempts to glom on to its fame as a successful TV series: attempts by media executives, marketers, critics and writers, and even presidential candidates. “Everyone wants a piece of *Sopranos* action,” says Polan, and he traces the marketing of the series across both official and unauthorized media platforms, including cookbooks, games, DVDs, and the kitschy *Sopranos* bus tour. Critiquing previous books on *The Sopranos*, Polan suggests that in their quest to find deep meaning, many of the authors missed the show’s ironic and comedic side.

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