Letter from the chair

Dear all,

Welcome to the spectator@mcm+ (french, german, arts-semiotics, literature and society, semiotics+), mcm's first newsletter! This academic year has been eventful—so hectic that we thought this newsletter would remain forever a sign without a referent.

This fall, we hosted a dynamic young group of Chinese documentary filmmakers and helped sponsor a colloquium on South and North Korean cinema; the graduate students organized an insightful and provocative conference on “Terror and the Inhuman.” This spring, we’re hosting an international interdisciplinary conference, “Habits of Living: Networked Affects, Glocal Effects,” an MCM graduate conference, “New Perspectives on MCM,” and visits by Meir Wigoder from Tel Aviv University and Nibal Thawabeth from Birzeit University. This spring’s Henkle lecture will be given by Lisa Lowe, Professor of English and American Studies at Tufts University, whose groundbreaking work on the cultural politics of colonialism and immigration resonates strongly with Roger Henkle’s vision of Literature and Society. As well, we continue to support the annual French Film Festival, and the Cinémathèque and Magic Lantern film series. The DUG, as you’ll see, has been especially active, organizing public film screenings and workshops designed to bring together current students and alums. All these events have been generously supported by the Malcolm S. Forbes Center for the Study of Culture and Media Studies, amongst other sources. Please join us this spring at one of these events!

This year, the MCM faculty was strengthened by the addition of two new faculty: Ariella Azoulay, whose formulation of photography as a social contract has transformed our understanding of photographic archives, and Joshua Neves, whose work on the logic of the fake in postsocialist China promises to change the ways we think about forgery and piracy—Neves has already received a Salomon Award from Brown for his research. In addition, Gertrude Koch, one of the most pre-eminent film scholars in the world, is teaching graduate courses for us this spring and next. We hope to be announcing even more hires soon.

The faculty as a whole continues to thrive and to impress us with their intellectual energy and adventurousness. As well as organizing all the aforementioned events, they have been developing innovative team-taught courses that bring together theory and practice, narrative and sound. Their publications continue to renew the fields of cinema, television and new media studies; their work is exhibited globally and to great critical acclaim.

And of course, our alums continue to amaze: new books, films, media productions, installations, and architectural wonders! Your work inspires both our current students and your former teachers. Please do keep us informed about your work and send us your “stories of mcm.” We collected quite a few during mcm+@50 and we want to feature them on our website.

Lastly, this newsletter, and none of these events, would have been possible without the exceptional work of Liza Hebert and Susan McNeil—I’m very proud to announce that they have received a Bear Day Award in recognition for their unparalleled service to our department. I would also like to thank Emma Janaskie for her help editing and organizing this newsletter; and Valerie Gates and Barry Friedman of Boston-area design firm, Gates Studio, for graciously helping us put this newsletter together—without their help, none of this would have been possible!

Sincerely and hopefully again sometime next year, whkc.
Events

Past Events

**Film Theory and National Publics in Divided Korea**
September 26 & October 1, 2012
Sponsored by The Cogut Center for the Humanities, the Departments of East Asian Studies and Modern Culture and Media, and The Watson Institute
This fall, Brown hosted a special screening and colloquium that focused on film theory in North and South Korea, Film Theory and National Publics in Divided Korea
Event poster

**Contemporary Independent Chinese Cinema**
October 3, 17–18, 2012; October 28-29, 2012
Organized by Joshua Neves, Assistant Professor, MCM. Campus visit of 5 independent Chinese film directors with film screenings, Q&A sessions, class visits.

**Terror and the Inhuman**
October 25–27, 2012
Organized by MCM graduate students. Three-day conference with six panels and opening and closing keynote speakers.
Terror and the Inhuman

**MCM Graduate Student Conference “New Perspectives on Modern Culture and Media”**
February 23, 2013
The “New Perspectives on Modern Culture and Media” conference series features current research by MCM graduate students in the areas of media, theory, and culture.

Upcoming Events

**Habits of Living**
March 21–23, 2013
This international conference is an inquiry into the networked conditions of our times: how they produce ways, conditions, and habits of life and living, how they spread local actions globally at Brown University, March 21-23, 2013. Speakers include: Ariella Azoulay, Elizabeth Bernstein, Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, Jonah Brucker-Cohen, Gabriella Coleman, Kelly Dobson, Didier Fassin, Kara Keeling, Laura Kurgan, Ganaelle Langlois, Colin Milburn, Nicholas Mirzoeff, Katherine Moriwaki, Elias Muhanna, Lisa Parks, Raqs Media Collective (Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula and Shuddhabrata Sengupta), Nishant Shah, Ravi Sundaram, Tiziana Terranova, Nigel Thrift, + YOU! Join us for panels, unconference sessions and workshops.

**The Roger B. Henkle Memorial Lecture**
April 4, 2013
Guest Speaker: Lisa Lowe, Professor, European and American Studies, Department of English, Tufts University

**Residency of Professor Meir Wigoder, Sapir University and Tel Aviv University, Israel**
April 1–6, 2013
Photographer and media theorist Meir Wigoder is a leading voice on the representation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in photography, films, and the media. While at Brown, he will lecture on the art of Waffa Bilal whose exhibition “The Ashes Series” is opening at the university’s David Winton Bell Gallery that week.

**Residency of Nibal Thawabteh, Birzeit University, Palestine**
April 16–23, 2013
Organized by Profs. Lynne Joyrich and Philip Rosen. Ms. Thawabteh is head of the Palestinian Media Development Center at Birzeit University, Ramallah. In conjunction with the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, she will conduct a seminar on Palestinian media and politics.

French Film Festival
February 21–March 3, 2013
Eleven day film festival organized jointly by MCM and French Studies. Features 34 screenings of 17 films. This year, the brilliant selection includes Les Adieux à la reine (Farewell, My Queen), Les bien-aimés (Beloved), La delicatessen (Delicacy), Holy Motors, Polisse, Vous n'avez encore rien vu! (You ain't seen nothing yet), and more.
French Film Festival
Events

Habits of Living: Networked Affects, Glocal Effects

A mobile, international and interdisciplinary inquiry into the networked conditions of our times. Starting last fall in a workshop in Bangalore, and coming to Brown this spring in the form of an international conference (before heading next to Oslo and Luneburg), this project examines how networks produce ways, conditions and habits of life and living.

Why Habits of Living?
To many, the new defines new media: what matters is the latest gadget, the newest app, the most recent viral video. To call something new, however, is to guarantee that it will one day be old, and so it seems we are always catching up, always trying to innovate at the bleeding edge of obsolescence. Often, so exhausted by this effort, we seek to get off the grid entirely, dreaming of a space and time protected from the new. But, is the “new” really what matters most about new media?

This project wagers that what’s most fascinating and important about new media is the ways in which it lingers, the ways that it moves from the hot new gadget that we desire to the everyday smartphone that organizes our lives. That is, what matters is how it structures our habits of living. Habits are central to this project because habits are “man-made nature”: they are automatic, seemingly instinctual and at times uncontrollable actions that are learned and historical. Habits link individuals to society through repeated actions that also tie a person’s inner state to their outward appearance (a habit is traditionally a type of clothing). To focus on habits is thus to move new media and the study of networks more generally away from catastrophic events to the profound effects of the everyday temporalities of life.
Habits of Living: Schedule of Events

Thursday, March 21

1-5 pm
SCRAPYARD CHALLENGE: How to Build Circuits from Trash
RISD CIT Building, 169 Weybosset Street
Limited to 15 participants. Sign up instructions [here](#).

7:30-9:15 pm
KEYNOTE: “The Taste of Nowhere”
Raqs Media Collective—one of the most important collectives working in the fields of contemporary art + new media (based in New Delhi)
MARTINOS AUDITORIUM, Granoff Center

Friday, March 22

9-10:20 am
AFFECT + DEBT: THE ONTOLOGY OF NETWORKS?
Nishant Shah (Center for Internet and Society, Bangalore) and Nicholas Mirzoeff (MCC, NYU)

10:30-11:50 am
SEX + CAPITALISM + HUMANITARIANISM = DO NO EVIL?
Elizabeth Bernstein (Sociology, Columbia) and Didier Fassin (School of Social Sciences, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton), moderator: Sherine Hamdy (Anthropology, Brown)

1-2:20 pm
>>>UNCONFERENCES—IT’S ALL ABOUT YOU<<<
BEWARE OF CARE
Kalindi Vora (Ethnic Studies, UC San Diego) and Kelly Dobson (D+M, RISD), moderator: Deborah Weinstein (Gender and Sexuality Studies, Brown)

4-5:20 pm
ARCHIVING THE REVOLUTION
Ariella Azoulay (MCM, Comparative Literature, Brown) and Elias Muhanna (Comparative Literature, Brown), moderator: Lynne Joyrich (MCM, Brown)

Saturday, March 23

9-10:20 am
LIKING/FEAR, AFTER NEW MEDIA
Tiziana Terranova (Sociology of Communications, Università degli Studi di Napoli ‘L’Orientale’) and Ravi Sundaram (SARAI), moderator: Joshua Neves (MCM, Brown)

10:30-11:50 am
MAPPING INCARCERATION, IMAGINING ANOTHER FUTURE
Kara Keeling (Critical Studies and African American Studies, University of Southern California) and Laura Kurgan (Architecture, Columbia), moderator: Rebecca Schneider (TAPS, Brown)
Habits of Living: Schedule of Events, cont.

Saturday, March 23, cont.

1:00-2:20 pm  >>>UNCONFERENCES—IT’S ALL ABOUT YOU<<<

2:30-3:50 pm  THINKING INFRASTRUCTURE
Lisa Parks (Film and Media, UC Santa Barbara) and Ganaele Langlois (Communication, University of Ontario Institute of Technology), moderator: Warren Sack (Film and Media, UC Santa Cruz)

4:00-5:20 pm  APHORISMS AND SCI FI REALISM: ANONYMOUS + NANOTECH
Gabriella Coleman (Art History and Communications, McGill) and Colin Milburn (English, UC Davis), moderator: Andrew Lison (MCM, Brown)
Graduate Student Conferences

The conference series serves several functions, including increasing awareness of our graduate students’ scholarly work among the Brown community at large and permitting our students to have an impact on discussions occurring within the university in a context that is more far-reaching than that provided by a graduate seminar. The series also assists students in the process of professionalization by creating a forum in which to receive essential criticism and feedback of students’ scholarship as it progresses through the stages of revision and development. Receptions following the conferences provide a further opportunity for engagement between students, peers, and faculty.

MCM is also hosting a graduate student conference, “New Perspectives on Modern Culture and Media,” on Saturday, February 23rd. The schedule is as follows:

- Aniruddha Maitra, “Cosmopolitanism and Gender in the Commons”
- Hunter Hargraves, “The Addictive Gaze in Reality Television”
- Jeremy Powell, “Elemental Destinations: Irigaray and Van Sant”
- Seth Watter, “Flipping a Coin, Smoking a Cigarette: Of Cinema and Gesture”
- Matt Noble-Olson, “The Late Work of Cinematic Excess”
- Kenny Berger, “Anxiety, Power, and the Pacified Eye: Re-Envisioning Anti-Spectacular Film”
- Mauro Resmini, “Death Every Night: Genre and Cinematic Ontology in ‘The Prestige’”

The next graduate student conference will take place at the end of the semester.
Independent Cinema from China

In October MCM in partnership with the Bell Gallery and the Department of East Asian Studies screened several recent Chinese documentaries and fiction films, including visits by the films’ directors. The October screenings began with Zhang Zhanbo’s 2009 documentary Falling from the Sky on October 3rd. The screening was held in conjunction with Professor Joshua Neves’ “Outside Media” seminar and the Bell Gallery’s current exhibition My Dad is Li Gang!, which features the work of Shanghai based artist Jin Shan. The installation and documentary focus on development through the prism of China’s growing space program. Zhang’s film, for instance, examines life in the footprint of the Xichang Satellite launch center—an area routinely assaulted by falling debris from country’s increasingly ambitious national and commercial satellite industry.

In mid-October, MCM also welcomed documentary filmmaker and curator Wu Wenguang’s “Folk Memory Project” to Brown. Wu is widely regarded as the father of China’s New Documentary Movement and continues to both make films and support community/amateur filmmaking and archiving in China. The event was organized by Professor Neves and featured four documentaries examining inter-generational memory. In particular, Wu’s project supports young filmmakers, often recent college graduates, to return to their family villages and create audiovisual records of China’s past: the “three years famine,” the Cultural Revolution, and other traumas that are largely missing from official historiography. The films were screened as part of a lunch-workshop in MCM, an evening double feature in Sidney Frank Hall, and a visit to Professor Lingzhen Wang’s “China Through the Lens” course. The films included: Wu Wenguang’s Treatment (2010), Zhang Menqi’s Self-Portrait with Three Women (2010), Zou Xueping’s Satiated Village (2011) and Luo Bing’s Luo Village: Me and Ren Dingqi (2011).

Liu Jiayin is a critically acclaimed, award winning female director from Beijing Film Academy, PR China. Her films represent a radical, experimental cinema practiced by a younger generation of filmmakers in contemporary urban China. As a female director, her films also foreground intimate familial relationships, the quotidian life, and the common struggle to survive in China’s market-based society. During her visit to Brown, October 28–31, we organized: a public double-feature, screening Oxhide and Oxhide II on October 28, a meeting between Director Liu and students interested in Chinese cinema and filmmaking at Brown and RISD on October 30, and a public lecture titled “My Motivation in Filmmaking” on October 31.

Her films blur documentary and fiction, casting Liu and her parents in scripted versions of their own lives in a small Beijing apartment. Critic Shelley Kraicer called Liu’s Oxhide “The most important Chinese film of the past several years and one of the most astonishing recent films from any country.” Her talk touched upon many topics, including contemporary Chinese society, the Chinese film industry, personal anecdotes, and the aesthetic style and experimental features of her films, providing invaluable insights into the historical, political, and personal significance of her work. Brown students arrived at her talk ready with enthusiastic questions; we held an extended Q&A session. Director Liu’s visit was highly successful despite Hurricane Sandy!
This fall, Brown hosted a special screening and colloquium that focused on film theory in North and South Korea, to explore film culture on the Korean peninsula and to consider how the Korean context allows scholars to address the role of cinema and other popular media in the forms and practices of national identity formation. On September 26th, two classic post-war films from opposing sides of the DMZ screened at the Granoff Center: *Mist* (1967), by prolific South Korean director, Kim Soo-yong, and *The Flower Girl* (1972), produced by former North Korean leader, Kim Jong-il. The latter film, in particular, holds a special position in North Korean film history as a foundational work that was based on a revolutionary opera authored by Kim Il-Sung, Kim Jong-Il's father and the inaugural dictator and revolutionary hero of the DPRK (North Korea). *The Flower Girl* was not only an exemplary North Korean film from the standpoint of state ideology, but it was also an early “blockbuster,” screening widely across China and the Soviet Bloc. Thus, it is an important example of both *popular* and *populist* media. South Korean film scholars Moonim Baek (Yonsei University) and Sunah Kim (Dankook University) joined Travis Workman (University of Minnesota) and Steven Chung (Princeton University), to discuss the relationship between North and South Korean film aesthetics and scholarly and state film discourse. Professors Baek and Chung focused on the writing of colonial period intellectuals who argued for cinema as a space of resistance to Japanese cultural hegemony, linking the principles of colonial period filmmaking to the explosion of film production in late 1950s and 60s, the era of the establishment of the South Korean republic. Professors Kim and Workman addressed Kim Jong-Il's official state film theory text, *Film Art* (1973), which codified the aesthetics and ideology of the film adaptations of revolutionary melodramas like *The Flower Girl* into a manual of state-cinema. At a time of growing questions about the pitfalls and potentials of using popular media to incite political action—on the Korean peninsula and elsewhere in the world—the colloquium demonstrated that in both the ROK (South Korea) and the DPRK (North Korea), and throughout colonial Joseon (the former name of the Korean peninsula), cinema's symbolic effects and material economies have been irrevocably intertwined. The colloquium demonstrated the work of theorizing the relationship between cinema and its production of national publics, expanding our conception of Korean cinema beyond its material substrate, film.
Terror and the Inhuman

In October MCM hosted the “Terror and the Inhuman” conference, a three-day event that explored the critical intersections of these two concepts across media, theory, and cultural politics. The conference brought together scholars from across the humanities to investigate the possibilities and the limitations of the category of “the human,” and to address increasingly complex technologies and representations of state and extra-state terror.

Two path-breaking keynote speakers provided invaluable points of entry into these issues. Jared Sexton’s (UC Irvine) riveting talk, “Unbearable Blackness,” examined the afterlife of racial slavery and the profound challenge blackness presents to political and theoretical conceptions of violence, life, and death. Adriana Cavarero (University of Verona) looked at the horrors of contemporary violence against the defenseless, provocatively arguing for a new ethics based on human vulnerability. In addition to the keynotes and a curated Magic Lantern show, the conference featured six exciting panels with papers on topics ranging from the reenactment of state murder in the films of Thomas Edison and statelessness in Moby Dick to the terrors of the U.S. prison industrial complex and the affective economy of media piracy. The conference was a rousing success, inciting crucial interdisciplinary conversations and provoking new lines of inquiry to engage the persistent problems of exclusion and exception, antagonism and decoloniality, the inhuman and the inhumane.
Ongoing Film Screening Series

The MCM Cinémathèque Film Series

The MCM Cinémathèque Film Series showcases the diverse collection of 16mm films from MCM's archive; the films are presented in their original celluloid using higher end projection equipment. The films represent a collection spanning the globe with many nations. Many genres are encompassed in the film holdings. An ever-rarer opportunity to see films in the way originally intend to be projected and seen.

Magic Lantern

The Magic Lantern screening series was established in 2004 by Providence residents Ben Russell and Carrie Collier, and is currently co-organized by Colleen Doyle, Josh Guilford, and Seth Watter. Magic Lantern was created in response to the lack of screening opportunities for experimental film and video work on the East Coast. We seek to produce curated programs of films, videos, and new media art, and to explore alternative modes of filmic exhibition, including screenings of long-form cinema and multimedia performances. The local and international media artists represented in our screenings are critically lauded and recognized, and their works have been shown at such varying places as the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Biennial, the Rotterdam Film Festival, and so on. We are supported by grants from the Malcolm S. Forbes Center for Culture and Media Studies at Brown University and the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation.
Faculty News

Upcoming Faculty Talks

Ariella Azoulay

“Declaring the first occupy movement”
Occupations Workshop
March 28–29, 2013
Franklin Humanities Institute, Duke University

“When the Body Politic Ceases to be an idea”
“Imagined Networks, Affective Connections”
April 12, 2013
Brown University

“Nationless State”
Edward Said Memorial Conference—“In the time not yet”
April 15–17, 2013
Universiteit Utrecht

“Revolution: A language learnt in the body and written in pictures”
Crossing the Boundaries
2013
Binghamton University

2013 Helen Pond McIntyre Lecture at the
Barnard Center for Research on Women
October 2013
Barnard College

October 3, 2013
Virginia Commonwealth University

January 8, 2014
Peter Morris Lecture, York University

March 2014
The Gerald LeBoff Lecture, NYU

Tony Cokes

“Pop, Terror, Critique (Remix)—More Notes on
Exhibition Process”
March 4, 2013
University of Chicago, Visual Arts Program

Joshua Neves

“Video Theory,”
Video Vortex 9: Re:Assemblies Conference
February 28–March 2, 2013
Leuphana University

“Faking Globalization”
MFA Lecture Series
April 2, 2013
Boston University

Roundtable Respondent, “Media Fields: Access/
Trespass Conference”
April 4–5, 2013
UC Santa Barbara


**Upcoming Faculty Talks, cont.**

“For the City Yet to Come,”
New Media Workshop
April 22, 2013
Penn State University

Panelist, “Interface Intimacies”
Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Society
July 3–5, 2013
National University of Singapore

**Philip Rosen**

“Time for the State: Punctual Violence and Cinema
The Reni Celeste Lecture
April 11, 2013
Yale University

“Between Classical and Postclassical Film Theory: Metz and the Question of Cinematic Specificity”
“The Semiological Paradigm and Christian Metz’s ‘Cinematographic’ Thought,” international symposium on the 20th anniversary of the death of Christian Metz
June 12–14, 2013
University of Zurich

“National Cinemas and Global Concepts”
Keynote address, International conference on “Circulations of/in Cinema”
June 17–19, 2013
University of Toulouse
Faculty Works

ARIELLA AZOULAY

Civil Alliance, Palestine 1947-1948
A film by Ariella Azoulay

Jews and Palestinians gather around a map of Mandatory Palestine to report a civil race against the clock taking place in Palestine until the founding of the State of Israel in May 1948. Intense civil activity was happening throughout the country, mainly in urgent encounters, some short and spontaneous, others planned and carefully laid out in detail - in which participants raised demands, sought compromises, set rules, formulated agreements, made promises, asked for forgiveness, made efforts to reconcile and compensate - and did everything possible not to let violence take over their lives. They did their utmost to halt the violence that national and military forces were intent on igniting and negotiated with each other in order to create mutual civil alliances. This film is based upon civil/historical/visual research.

ANTHONY COKES
http://www.redcat.org/exhibition/tony-cokes

Retro (Pop, Terror, Critique), Tony Cokes’ first solo exhibition in Los Angeles, brings together over 45 videos and text animations from the past 15 years. Taking the form of a new multichannel installation conceived for REDCAT by the artist, the exhibition offers a survey of Cokes’ recent output, while subjecting his own artistic practice to the looping processes of use and reuse. The repurposing of existing works to this end furthers the repetition of images, sounds and texts that has been characteristic of the artist’s work since his acclaimed Black Celebration (1988), which pairs newsreel footage of uprisings in urban black neighborhoods in the 1960s with textual commentary and popular music references from the 1980s.

“Pop Manifestos” (1997–present), “The Evil Series” (2001–present) and “Art Critique Series” (2008–present) are brought together for the first time in a series of eight programs that rotate each week of the installation’s eight-week run at REDCAT. Cokes’ extensive project maps a set of ongoing and concurrent interests that treat the discourses of cultural studies, media theory and art criticism as readymade systems of reference.
Faculty Works, cont.

LYNNE JOYRICH

Magic Lantern show

The TV Show
Curated by Lynne Joyrich
6 February 2013, Cable Car Cinema & Cafe
Providence, RI

We all spend lots of time with it...but what is TV? A dream machine for producing pleasure or a Pandora’s Box for releasing terror? A signal that grabs our attention or noise that drives us to distraction? A containment environment that envelops us, determining our thoughts and affects for its own economic ends, or a funhouse in which we play, manipulating its programmatic flow according to our own desires and aims? This show considers television in all of these ways—and more—as it explores TV as an industry, a consumer good (or “bad”), a collection of stories with their own forms and formats, and an object that generates viewer love and/or hate. Including work by video artists and media activists from across TV history who have addressed television, as well as some bits from television itself and fanvids from fellow television viewers, “The TV Show” not only examines televisual commodification and control but, importantly, also celebrates the creativity that television can yield—in its texts, in critical commentary, and in our own re-viewings and re-visionings.

Featuring:
• Nam June Paik and Jud Yalkut, Videotape Study No. 3 (1967-69)
• Martha Rosler, Semiotics of the Kitchen (1975)
• Todd Haynes, Dottie Gets Spanked (1993)
• Dara Birnbaum, Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman (1978-79)
• Frances Negrón-Muntaner, Puerto Rican ID (1995)
• Jason Simon, excerpt from Production Notes: Fast Food For Thought (1987)
• Jason Vosu, Anthrax (2002)
• Anne McGuire, All Smiles and Sadnesses (1999)
• Lana Lin, Taiwan Video Club (1999)
• Bill Viola, excerpts from Reverse Television—Portraits of Viewers (1983-84)
• and more exciting, surprise pieces!

JOSHUA NEVES

Asian Video Cultures is a collection of essays that Joshua Neves is editing with Bhaskar Sarkar (UC Santa Barbara). They plan to hold a workshop related to the collection in October 2013 at Brown. The aim of the workshop is bring together participants, as well as members of the Brown community, to collaboratively sharpen the volume’s intervention and for research presentations/discussions. The workshop also aims to clear a space for future collaborations at Brown related to inner-Asian cultural studies and global media theory. In addition to those involved in the book project, they plan to include a number of scholars at Brown and from the area as roundtable discussants, moderators, etc.

About the collection:
This project centers on video as a cultural form and practice across Asia, paying close attention to regional experiences that exceed the foci of North-Atlantic media, cultural, and urban studies, among other disciplines. Extending existing notions of Asia, this research seeks out comparisons and convergences that are not implicit to routine boundaries and imaginations: East Asia, the
Faculty Works, cont.

Pacific Rim, the Indian subcontinent, the former Soviet bloc, etc. Two assumptions guide this work. First, it wagers that “inter-Asia,” as a material and analytic frame, reveals significant and overlapping social, economic, and political experience—from postcolonial and postsocialist to shared encounters with urban transformation, export economies, neoliberal structures like the WTO, the proliferation of media, and struggles over national and regional identities. Secondly, it takes video to be an integral aspect in giving shape to, and circulating, residual and emergent inter-Asian configurations. As such, it builds on numerous valuable studies of Asian media and popular culture, and charts the sub- and supranational exchanges that suggest shifting networks of meaning and practice in the region. This collaborative research asks: How do video flows forge new inter-Asian convergences? And how have such phenomena been taken up by critical cultural scholars in distinct, but often interconnected, locations?

LESLIE THORNTON

Leslie Thornton’s iconic film/video serial Peggy and Fred in Hell was the subject of a major essay in the 50th Anniversary Issue of Artforum (9-2012). The project was cited as, “a paradigm-shifting work in the media arts” by critic Ed Halter. He writes: “…Peggy and Fred jettisons any notion of technological or social progress in favor of a collapsing of the future and the past into a dystopian, postindustrial present; it explores the convergence of human consciousness with electronic systems; and it raids a variety of genres for its formal devices.” Halter aligns the emergence of Peggy and Fred in Hell (1984-2013), with William Gibson’s Neuromancer (1984), and Bruce Sterling’s Schismatrix (1985).

Increasingly Thornton’s work has been taken up in the art world context. She is represented by Winkleman Gallery in New York and Elisabeth de Brabant Gallery in Shanghai. The film Peggy and Fred in Hell: The Prologue (1984), was featured at the Moving Image Fair in London in early fall, and at SEVEN, during the Miami Basel Art Fair in December. Other works have shown recently in the LUX/ICA Biennial of Moving Images (London,) in the 2012 Armory Show, and she had a one-person show of her Binocular Series this past summer at Elisabeth de Brabant Gallery. Forthcoming events include a one-person show at Winkleman Gallery in Chelsea in May where she will premier her latest video installation, LUNA, and she is the featured artist at the Courtisane Festival in Gent, Belgium (April).

Thornton has returned to her feature length film project, The Great Invisible, with a trip to Algeria this past summer for research and photography. A number of Brown alumni have contributed to this project, including Pete Zuccarini as cinematographer, and Robin Hessman and Cynthia Hopkins as actors. During her sabbatical last year Thornton began a new series of videos, the SONGS Cycle, and What I Learned of China From the Sky, both of which deal with urban infrastructures, labor, and recreation (entertainment) in burgeoning new capitalist societies. Her current project, the video...
Faculty Works, cont.

triptych LUNA, takes up the question of how we address history with something as fragmentary and minute as cinema; and what occurs and is at stake in today’s digital absorption of “the world.”

The latest interview with Thornton is available at http://bombsite.com/issues/1000/articles/6853.

New Videos and Installations

LUNA (video triptych, premiere at Winkleman Gallery, NYC, May 3, 2013)

FOLD (final episode of Peggy and Fred in Hell, 4 minutes, digital video)*

Binoculars (continuation of series, including 8 new HD video loops)

SONGS One Two Three (14 minutes, color, HD video)

Interviews

“’Of Necessity I become an instrument.’: An Interview with Leslie Thornton” by Miriam Bale July 12, 2012, The L Magazine

Interview, A GHOST OF YOUR OWN INTIMACY by Feliz Lucia Molina October 15, 2012, BOMBLOG
New Faculty

SPOTLIGHT FEATURE
Greetings from our newest faculty member, Joshua Neves. Message from Ariella Azoulay forthcoming in next newsletter.

JOSHUA NEVES
Assistant Professor, Department of Modern Culture and Media

Greetings! I am very excited to be joining the Brown community as Assistant Professor of Modern Culture & Media.

One of my first media encounters was pretending to make movies with a fake plastic camera as a child. Little did I know then that my hodgepodge camcorder could serve as a prototype for the many technologies with which we currently live. Unfortunately, none of those early works could be preserved. But they do capture a long-term interest in thinking about how we experience the world through a wide range of media forms.

In terms of my professional formation, I received my PhD from the University of California, Santa Barbara in 2011 and spent the following academic year as a postdoctoral fellow at the Jackman Humanities Institute, University of Toronto. I have taught courses on piracy, documentary and social change, media and urbanism, and a range of topics in film and TV history and theory. My current research and teaching interests are in media and globalization, theories of development and politics, contemporary Chinese film and TV, and the ethnography media practices—that is, using media to do media studies.

I have long been a cinephile (and TVphile), but beyond movies and TV shows, it was really thinking about history and theory that initially brought me to media studies as a graduate student. I still remember the thrill of reading Saussure, Benjamin, Barthes, and Foucault for the first time as an undergraduate. These thinkers made me realize the power of ideas as well as the vital role of audiovisual cultures in shaping our worlds and worldviews. I can think of no better place to explore theories of media, culture and history than MCM.

This year I will be teaching four courses in MCM. Last semester, I taught “Introduction of Modern Culture & Media” with Professor Lynne Joyrich, as well as a seminar entitled “Outside Media.” Outside Media explored the role of media technologies outside the traditional space of the home and theater, and asked students to do site-specific research and construct theories of everyday media architectures. This semester, I am teaching two courses: “Digital Media” and “Video Theory.” Wendy Chun and I are co-teaching Digital Media, an introductory course which focuses on the theory, history, politics and aesthetics of digital media by moving from video games to alternative art installations, and from cyberpunk fiction and films to social media sites. Finally, Video Theory is a senior seminar that seeks to unpack—and to theorize—the complex histories and functions of video, including sound and image reproduction, broadcasting, video art, documentary, gaming, digital culture, and the internet.
New Faculty, cont.

ARIELLA AZOULAY
Assistant Professor of Modern Culture and Media and Comparative Literature

Ariella Azoulay joined Brown in Spring 2013 as an Assistant Professor of Modern Culture and Media and of Comparative Literature, and is looking forward to exploring her new city and country. She is teaching one course in MCM about photography and human rights, focusing mainly on the decade between the end of the Second World War and 1955. Her Comparative Literature course focuses on revolutions from the eighteenth century onward, including the French, American, and Santo Domingo revolutions, including writers Olympe de Gouges, Hannah Arendt, and C.L.R. James.

An expert in visual culture and photography, Ariella Azoulay focuses her research on how history is told through visual media—photographs, film, drawings, and other visual elements—and how these provide a level of detail and context not provided solely by the written word. She comes to Brown from a rich career of teaching, writing, and curating in Tel Aviv.

Azoulay has spent most of her academic career studying photography and political theory. She uses historical and contemporary photographs as sources for narrating the civil history of zones of conflict and political regimes. “In photographs one can see many things that are not documented in texts,” Azoulay says. “They provide a record of an encounter between various participants that always surpasses the intentions of the participants. Through the photographic image I seek to reconstruct the event of photography and the condition of its production.” The Israeli–Palestinian conflict has been her primary case study.

Recently her research has concentrated on the concept of revolution and its unfolding, from the eighteenth century to the present. Historical images have allowed Azoulay the means to go beyond the ideological framework in which the history of Palestine–Israel is conceived as a century-old conflict between two national entities. She has looked at it in the context of colonialism and its legacy of partitions that contributed immensely to the creation of conflicts rather than their resolution. “My own work over the last few years has been to use images to revise political concepts—that of citizenship and sovereignty first and foremost—in order to understand Palestine in the larger global context of revolution, colonial legacy, imperialism, and of what is left over after imperialism,” Azoulay says.

Also in recent years, Azoulay has produced several documentary films that address different aspects of the history of Israel and Palestine. Her latest documentary, Civil Alliances - 47-48, is based on archival documents that she found in Israel. These documents catalog, according to Azoulay, “Intense civil activity throughout the country during 1947–1948 when Palestinians and Jews sought compromises, set rules, formulated agreements, and did everything possible not to let violence take over their lives. In the film, Jews and Palestinians gather around a map of Palestine from the ’40s to report a civil race against the clock until the founding of the State of Israel in May 1948.”
New Faculty, cont.

Azoulay holds a Licence in Cinema and Literature and an M.A. in semiotics from the Université Paris VIII. She earned a D.E.A from the École des hautes études en sciences sociales in Paris, and a Ph.D. from the Cohn Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Ideas at Tel-Aviv University.

GERTRUD KOCH
Visiting Professor, Department of Modern Culture and Media

Koch has written books on Herbert Marcuse and Siegfried Kracauer, feminist film theory, and on the representation of Jewish history. She has edited numerous volumes on aesthetics, perception and film theory. She is also a co-editor and board member of the journals Babylon, Frauen und Film, October, Constellations, and Philosophy & Social Criticism.

Gertrud Koch teaches cinema studies at the Free University in Berlin where she is also the director of a research center on aesthetic experience www.sfb626.de. She has taught at many international universities and was a research fellow at the Getty Center, as well as at Brown University’s Cogut Center for Humanities in 2011.

Gertrud Koch is a Visiting Professor in MCM for two years. This semester she is teaching a graduate level seminar on Animation which focuses on the notion of animation as a general concept. In Spring 2014, she will teach another graduate level seminar.
Graduate Students

True to form, the graduate students in MCM have been keeping busy presenting at conferences across the nation and globe, conducting archival research, and planning exciting conferences. We are thrilled to welcome Beth Capper, Lakshmi Padmanabhan, and Mikhail Skoptsov to the PhD program, as well as Julian Park, who is starting an MA in the department. Other accomplishments of note include: Maggie Hennefeld, a fifth-year PhD student, was an invited guest at the University of Pennsylvania Cinema Studies Department’s Colloquium, giving a lecture entitled “Slapstick Comediennes and Transitional Cinema: National Differences between Body and Medium”; and Ani Maitra, a sixth-year PhD student, is the recipient of a Five College Predoctoral Fellowship. The graduate students put on a conference in October, “Terror and the Inhuman”, which brought together over twenty-five scholars from across the nation. We will also be presenting our own original research at two conferences in the spring.
Hello from the MCM Department Undergraduate Group! In case we didn’t exist when you were an MCM’er (or semiotician, or whatever you want to call yourself), we will let you know what we are all about. Our goals are threefold: raising awareness about MCM around campus, fostering a community among concentrators, and connecting with alumni. We have a lot of exciting upcoming events in the works.

We are planning a concentration dinner for current and prospective concentrators to interact with each other and with professors in a casual setting. A fun project we’re working on is a film screening (potentially produced by a Brown alumnus) with a discussion following by an MCM professor to give students who may be confused about MCM a little taste of what the department is all about. Because many students are working on theses right now, we are considering having small sessions for students to bounce ideas off each other and commiserate about the thesis experience. And in the spring, our goal is to organize an MCM Degree Days series of events, where current students can talk about their internship experiences, alumni can come to give insight into how MCM (and other humanities concentrations) can get you jobs in the real world, and students can bring questions about resumes, cover letters, and networking in these industries. For this project, we’re looking to get any and all alumni involved during the spring semester. If you are interested, please let the DUG know; you can contact us via mcmdug@brown.edu. We will be reaching out to graduates in the upcoming months. If you’d like to suggest any other ideas to us, please don’t hesitate to let us know!
Alumni Happenings

Joshua Pablo Rosenstock (Art-Semiotics ’96) is the guest editor of the Fall 2012 edition of Media-N, the journal of the New Media Caucus of the College Art Association, for a volume entitled “Found, Sampled, Stolen: Strategies of Appropriation in New Media.” Josh is currently an Associate Professor of Art and Associate Director of the Interactive Media & Game Development program at Worcester Polytechnic Institute.

Karl Schoonover (GS ’04)

Karl Schoonover’s book, Brutal Vision: The Neorealist Body in Postwar Italian Cinema, was published by The University of Minnesota Press in March of this year. The book challenges the orthodoxy that Italian neorealism is “a specifically domestic response to wartime atrocities” by arguing that neorealist films—including such classics as Rome, Open City; Paisan; Shoeshine; and Bicycle Thieves—should be understood less as national products and more as complex agents of a postwar reorganization of global politics.

Karl is assistant professor of film and television studies at the University of Warwick. He coedited the anthology Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories.

Sam Benjamin Stern (Art-Semiotics ’99)

Sam Benjamin Stern’s book, American Gangbang: A Love Story, a humorous memoir of his three-year adventure as a director in the adult film industry, was published by Simon and Schuster in 2011.

As part of the book’s promotion, Sam writes that he “created a multimedia lecture, ‘A Brief History of Porn,’ which used non-explicit clips from adult films from 1960–2010 to explore questions of narrativity, authorship, post-feminism, and collective consciousness.” The lecture was given at USC (http://cinema.usc.edu/events/event.cfm?id=12170) and Brown, among other institutions.

Currently he is co-authoring a book about Ratt, the 1980’s glam band, with Stephen Pearcy, forthcoming in 2013.

Sam’s tumblr: http://sambenjamin.tumblr.com/

Deirdre Fishel (Semiotics ’84)

Deirdre Fishel has just finished the video and is in development on the interactive website, The Boy Game (www.theboygame.org), which she
Alumni Happenings, cont.

writes “tackles bullying among boys at its core: the culture of toughness and silence boys live by. Rather than vilify bullies, The Boy Game looks to unpack the complex dynamics that lead some boys to bully and the vast majority to stand watching in silent conflict.” Michael Kimmel, Pulitzer Prize-nominated author of Manhood In America says, “if the conversation about bullying is going to advance this is the project that will help us advance it.” The video is available through New Day Films. The interactive website is being developed by Dierdre’s Mind’s Eye Productions (mindseyeprods.com) in partnership with Men Can Stop Rape, Boys To Men, and A Call To Men. Dierdre is on the faculty of the Department of Media Studies and Film at The New School.

Jim Lobley (Semiotics ’85)

Jim Lobley (Semiotics ’85), along with his partner Kirsten Oxboel, designed what they consider to be “the first modern pre-fab outdoor shower,” and have launched a new business called Oborain. They were featured in the September 21st, 2012 Home & Garden section (online) of The New York Times. Their shower was also mentioned in a piece in Custom Home, and was debuted this past June at Dwell magazine’s Dwell on Design Trade show in Los Angeles.

Bridget Stokes (Art Semiotics ’04)

Bridget Stokes’ (Art Semiotics ’04) first feature film, Herman & Shelly is now available digitally. She is currently in post-production on a feature she produced titled The Volunteer starring Aunjanue Ellis, Scott Wolf, Hill Harper, Mary-Beth Hurt, Ebon Moss-Bachrach, Eisa Davis, and Noah Gray-Cabey.

Of his Semiotics concentration, Jim writes: “While I’ve had to explain semiotics many, many times over the years, I’ve come to appreciate the diversity of its applications. For a long time, I felt like I didn’t really fit the Brown mold, or that I’d failed to live up to the brand. What I’ve come to realize, though, is that what Brown seems to do is instill in us creatives the confidence, and the ability to take some hair brain, outside the fold idea and make a go of it. I appreciate that now in a way that I haven’t for years.”
Alumni Happenings, cont.

Diana Oberlander (Art Semiotics ‘96)

Diana Oberlander (Art Semiotics ‘96) is the founder of NOMAD-CHIC.COM, an online shop-able magazine that curates daily content on travel, art, fashion, lifestyle goods and services, and design from various parts of the world.

Facebook:
http://www.facebook.com/NOMADdashCHIC
https://www.rebelmouse.com/NOMADCHIC/

Twitter: Nomaddashchic
https://twitter.com/NOMADdashCHIC

Pinterest:
http://pinterest.com/nomaddashchic/

Tumblr:
http://nomad-chic.tumblr.com/
http://nomad-chic-retina.tumblr.com/
Conversations

In response to the enthusiasm generated by mcm@50, MCM is launching a series of interviews between current students and alums. As an undergraduate student caught in the thick of paper due dates and project deadlines, it’s sometimes difficult to tell the forest from the trees: How will what I’m learning now help me in five years time? In conference panels and unconference sessions, stories about how MCM persists (or not) in the life of our alums opened up new avenues for thinking through MCM’s mission. Our graduates have done excellent and inspiring work in academia, new media, and cinema, and we wanted to put them in touch with current students not only so that they might share how their experiences in MCM have shaped their careers, but to also keep them in the know about the work our wonderful current undergraduates are pursuing at their alma mater.

Adam Davis is a senior concentrating in MCM, Track 1, and is currently working on an honors thesis with Lynne Joyrich about “competitive domesticity” on real estate/design television. After graduation he is interested in pursuing a career in either television or online media.

Emma Janaskie is a senior concentrating in MCM, Track 1. Currently, she is writing an honors thesis with Ellen Rooney on feminist theories of embodiment and abjection. After she graduates she is interested in pursuing a career in new media consulting, writing, and editing.

Leah Michaels is a senior concentrating in MCM, Track 1. She is interested in cult television programs, video game studies, and genre-crossing media. She is looking to pursue a career in television as a producer and/or a writer.

Annie Macdonald is a senior concentrating in MCM, Track 1. Her academic focus is on fair use, film production and the movement of affect and limbs. She currently is on staff at the College Hill Independent as a photography and X page editor, as well as a member of the design team. She is looking to pursue work in documentary production, editing, and/or publishing.
Adam Davis: Why did you decide to join the MCM department (or art/semiotics—what was it called when you were at Brown?) Where there any specific classes, professors, or activities that led you to the department?

Alex Galloway: MCM was the weirdest thing in town, so of course I was curious. I think I had found a copy of Baudrillard’s “Selected Writings” in high school, and so by the time I got to Brown I had some inkling that I wanted to learn more about critical theory. For a short time as a freshman I considered a philosophy concentration, but analytic philosophy was not my cup of tea. MCM was a good way to study continental philosophy and critical theory. So it was a natural fit. In retrospect I can see how special MCM was; it’s rare to have that kind of curriculum taught at the undergraduate level.

AD: What was your favorite MCM class? Favorite professor?

AG: Impossible to choose! I learned most of what I know from Ellen Rooney, Philip Rosen, and Neil Lazarus (now at Warwick University). I also took a few courses from Michael Silverman and Elizabeth Weed that affected me a great deal. My single favorite class was probably a course that Ellen and Neil co-taught on Marx’s Capital. I teach an undergraduate Marx course today at NYU that is in some distant way a derivation of that course. It was fun to teach it last fall and have the Occupy movement spring up all around us, as if on cue.

AD: How has studying in the MCM department affected you in your career? As a media scholar, it would seem that you’ve been highly affected by your experience in MCM—how do you view that trajectory?

AG: Indeed in many ways I’m the exception, since I never left MCM, at least not intellectually. If I were to pick one thing, it might be the way in which MCM always stressed the relation between theory and practice. The coupling is fraught with complication, to be sure, but it was important for me to hear at a young age that theory must always return to practice and practice fortified by theory. That’s something I’ve carried with me, as I learned how to program in the late 1990s, and later engaged in a parallel practice that involved both writing and software production.

AD: What kinds of projects are you currently working on? I know your new book, The Interface Effect, just came out. What was it like working on that project?

AG: The new book is essentially about allegory. The approach is very much indebted to the MCM curriculum, as well as my mentor in graduate
Interview with Alex Galloway, cont.

school, Fredric Jameson. In simplest terms, the book aims to take Jameson’s critical methodology, particularly from a book like “Signatures of the Visible,” and migrate it into digital media. The goal is not simply to show that digital media can be read allegorically, but to show that they, in a certain sense, demand their own allegorical reading.

AD: Which theorists that you read at Brown have been most influential in your work?
AG: Curiously, the figure who has perhaps influenced me most, Gilles Deleuze, was entirely absent from my experience at Brown. I don’t think I read a single word of Deleuze in four years of MCM. Although I’d bet the situation is different now. In fact it might say more about the American reception of Deleuze, since he was translated and read a bit later. What I learned at Brown that most influenced me would probably be Marx and the twentieth-century Marxist tradition. MCM was, and I’m sure still is, extremely strong in that area. Marx is so central to the critical tradition that anyone interested in critique will naturally gravitate to that literature. After Marx, MCM was an excellent chance for me to study semiotics, poststructuralism, and cultural studies. That tradition might be in recession at the moment, but in many ways poststructuralism represents the high-water mark of intellectual work in the twentieth century, and so it was invaluable to imbibe such material at Brown in such a rich scholarly environment.
Interview with Michelle Higa, Art Semiotics ‘04
By Emma Janaskie, MCM Senior, Track 1

Emma Janaskie: At the MCM@50 Conference, you mentioned that you didn’t have a lot of production experience before leaving Brown. How, maybe, did MCM’s more theoretical approaches prepare you for your very production-oriented career now?

Michelle Higa: Oh yeah, I think I cracked that joke that I never took film or video at MCM, which is pretty ironic. I did take an animation class my final semester with Roger Mayer, which was pretty influential. And I did take production in the Photoshop and interactive classes, which was the first wave of those types of course at Brown. But what was really important as I went into working on commercials and short films was that we had a lot of training in storytelling. And so myself, Jesse Casey, and Chris Smith [both Brown alumni] were partners at Mixtape Club; we were very grounded in character development, storytelling: Why is this important? Is this clear? The tools themselves that we were using—whether it was stop motion animation or computer-based, or if it was film or video—didn’t matter because those were things to learn on the way, but being able to communicate to other people was something that was important that we learned at Brown that I think is harder to pick up, in a way, than whatever software you’re using.

EJ: Did you work closely with any professors while you were at Brown?

MH: I worked really closely with Roger Mayer, who retired. He was really formative for myself, Chris Smith, and a bunch of other students. I don’t come from a sound or music background, even though I work with a lot of people who do. It didn’t click with me the way that visual stuff did. Professor Mayer helped me realize how much you can communicate through sound design and the soundtrack. That’s something I wouldn’t have come to on my own. Roger was also really good at getting us to think about anything we listened to. There’s almost always something you can take away from a piece. I also worked pretty closely with Wendy Chun and Rachel Stevens. They were both important for getting me to think about digital media.
Interview with Michelle Higa, cont.

EJ: Do you have any memorable moments in Art Semiotics? How, if at all, did those specific experiences help you figure out what you wanted to do once you graduated?

MH: One of the most important experiences was the art grant proposal process at Brown, and the fact that there’s money available for you to do your project. I think that’s something that, as a professional artist or someone building their own business, you have to know. You have to know how to put together your plan and show it to other people. You need to explain your vision to other people so they can help fund you. That’s something on the practical end of things that you don’t talk about when you’re concerned with media theory, but I think it’s really important to be able to communicate what your vision is. When we put together the Chaise DVD, we met with all the department heads and got their feedback and managed to receive funding for that project—that was very formative. So after graduation, when we had an idea to put together a business or publish something or put together a gallery show, it was all something we had done once before and were familiar with.

I’m also still in contact with people from Brown ten years later, all the time. We’re showing each other what we’re doing and giving each other feedback, and I think that was the most important aspect of going to Brown. The people I met who were inspiring to be around were also challenging each other and helping each other grow.

EJ: What would you say is the most challenging part of your work?

MH: I think when you’re working professionally in a commercial setting, the type of art you make for yourself is in the same medium as what you do professionally, and it becomes harder and harder to set aside time to do your own personal artwork. I think that’s always a challenge. And I think that as long as you stay in the field of trying to navigate how big you want to grow your company, it means that you don’t get to touch the things you get to make on a day-to-day basis. I’m moving more to a managerial position in which I’m putting together teams and coordinating with the client. Coming from the background that I do, where I physically build everything, transitioning into that director role is a learning experience that happens as you get older. I love what I do, I feel like everyday I go to work and I’m surrounded by people I have fun with and we make things we’re proud of, so I feel blessed about that. But I also know that all through my twenties, I was working 70, 80 hours a week, and it’s just not sustainable. So you have to start to think: well, if I want to do this for the rest of my life, how do I grow the company, or how do I figure out how to be able to do this and have a family? It’s just something that you get the hang of as you grow older.

EJ: What projects are you working on now and where do you think they’ll lead you?

MH: The project I showed at MCM@50 is up now in the Sacramento Airport, it’s a permanent installation. I’m also working on graphics for another installation in Boston. I can’t say a whole lot about that, but it’s another very large, interactive installation, and it’s animation triggered by people walking onto custom glass. And I just completed all the in-store graphics for Coach. They just opened this great store within a store in Macy’s Herald Square. There are a lot of screens and reflective metal there, something like fifty [digital display] panels. I worked on about six and a half minutes of content for the store, and I worked closely with Coach to try to make something memorable that works on all these screens that they’ve installed in the store. So that was a pretty large-scale project, getting everything synchronized for that many screens. But I don’t think I can tell you much more than that!
Leah Michaels: Can you tell me about the experiences that you had in MCM?

Jessica Levin: My work in MCM as a Modern Culture and Media concentrator (‘96) was focused on film production and theory, theories of subjectivity and narrative (specifically on cities and memory), genre film, gender, and technology as areas in which to make provocative media. I had come to Brown looking for a cutting-edge place for self-directed work, and MCM was a great place for that, with such luminary professors and mentors as Michael Silverman, Mary Anne Doane, Nancy Armstrong, Roger Mayer, Duncan Smith, Tony Cokes and Brian Goldberg.

LM: What are some of your most memorable moments in MCM?

JL: My first really formative film theory class was Michael Silverman’s seminar on Film & The Uncanny. It spoke directly, in a theoretical way, to concepts which preoccupied me in the films/videos I was making then and over 15 years later, I continue to pursue projects which reflect a haunted and destabilized way of looking at history and subjectivity.

Later, I T.A.’ed a course on American Independent Film with Michael Silverman. I had taken a year’s leave from Brown to work in New York in film production where I encountered many of the films and filmmakers who dominated the ’90 independent film scene (Todd Haynes, Tom Kalin, Mary Harron, Lodge Kerrigan, Cindy Sherman, Chris Munch—many of those films were produced by MCM alum Christine Vachon.) It was great to return to Brown to look at these films in an academic context full of smart students and to invite some of these directors as guest speakers. Besides being engaged in an exciting contemporary film “movement,” we were tracking the influence of deconstruction, gender/queer theory, etc. on hot films of the moment.

I also did various Independent Studies and Group Independent Study Projects (GISPs—not sure if they still exist.) Those were amazing ways to pursue topics of individual interest under the guidance of our best professors. I did a GISP with Michael Silverman on Eastern European Cinema, and then another on Walter Benjamin and Cities. I also helped form a video collective as a GISP under Tony Cokes, which was (at least for me) partly intended as a send-up of video art practice, although we ended up making a couple of serious pieces.

This will make me sound ancient, but Brian Goldberg did a great class called Discourse Networks (following Kittler and Deleuze/Guattari) about technology, in which we used HTML 2.0 and had a pipe dream of someday utilizing video on the web as an alternative distribution channel.
Interview with Jessica Levin, cont.

LM: Can you tell me any memories/anything that stood out in your mind about being an MCM concentrator that influenced your work today? Similarly, how did MCM influence your career choices?

JL: MCM enabled students with original ideas to pursue and refine them in a rigorous, critical-artistic environment rarely seen in other institutions, and I think it attracted some brilliant, unconventional people. I went into the program knowing I wanted to make films, but the department emphasized the importance of critical thinking, resisting conformist practice, pushing boundaries. The independent projects and GISP's I did in MCM were great practice for producing film/TV—with cultivating original ideas, political critique, and creative work group dynamics.

LM: What projects are you currently working on and what are their trajectories?

JL: I've been a co-producer on David Simon's HBO drama series 'TREME' for 3 seasons since the show's pilot. The show looks at the unique American city of New Orleans in the aftermath of its near-death experience (Hurricane Katrina), and argues for its traditions of cultural resistance against a backdrop of federal neglect and internal corruption. Right now I find cable TV the best place to be working, especially in a diminished market for arthouse cinema. At the moment, I'm developing an international drama series with a British-Asian team for the Asian cable TV market, as well as developing independent feature films. I'm also currently fascinated by the American industry's penchant for remakes of hit foreign TV shows—again, especially in light of shrinking audiences for foreign theatrical cinema.

LM: You worked on Mildred Pierce with Todd Haynes, another Brown MCM/semiotics grad. Did you talk about that at all with him, or did it affect you working with him on the series?

JL: I had been a disciple of Todd's films since my first year at Brown, but I came to work on 'Mildred' through HBO. Understanding some of the conceptual and aesthetic underpinnings of Todd's approach to that project was certainly rewarding (Fassbinder isn't a touchstone for too many directors working in TV!) and helpful in partaking in Todd's overall creative mission on the project. It was a great homecoming to screen a 'Mildred' episode last year at the "MCM @50 unconference," which was the first time I'd been back to visit Brown since the late '90s.

In addition to Todd Haynes, I've been fortunate to work with some other independent filmmakers whose work intersects with critical concepts studied in MCM. I produced Julia Loktev's 'Day Night Day Night', about a would-be female suicide bomber in Times Square, which questions formal notions of character subjectivity in a kind of "anti-action" movie. Alex Rivera's 'Sleep Dealer' is an independent sci-fi film about virtual Mexican migrant labor (a Marxist "Matrix" of sorts). I got to work on Charlie Kaufman's directing debut 'Synecdoche, New York', which deconstructs notions of the (male) self and narrative in a never-ending hall of mirrors inside New York City.

LM: What are your favorite films and TV shows?


Films: 'The Wizard of Oz'. Films by Polanski, Kieslowski, Fassbinder, David Lynch, Todd Haynes, David Cronenberg, Guy Maddin, Bela Tarr, Andrea Arnold, Tsai Ming Liang, Wong Kar Wai, Lucrecia Martel, Claire Denis, Lars Von Trier, Guillermo del Toro. Sadly, there are too few female directors on that list—which remains an industry-wide problem.
Anne Macdonald: What did the department look like before you graduated in 1995?
Brad Simpson: It was making the transition from semiotics to MCM so I believe I started as a semiotics major and ended as an MCM major. The department had just moved from their condemned building on George Street to the Malcolm S. Forbes Center, which caused a lot of jokes about the idea of this über-capitalist name on the poststructuralist department.

AM: What were your main interests?
BS: Part of the reason I came to Brown is because I’d seen Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story. I’d been set on going to film school before that and I thought what Todd Haynes did in the movie was genius and decided I wanted to go to a place that produces a filmmaker like this. And I read that he went to Brown and majored in semiotics so I just decided that was where I wanted to go. I came here even though I didn’t really know what semiotics meant but I knew that what he did in that movie—which was to have both the joy and pleasure of narrative but also have a critique of narrative at the same time within one piece—was really interesting to me in a way I couldn’t articulate at that point of my life.

AM: He graduated about a decade prior right?
BS: Yes, he had been well out of college by the time I came here. Actually, when I was a student here Christine Vachon and Todd Haynes, whom I both ended up working with, were both starting to take the forefront of the independent film scene in New York in the 1990s. They were the big shining stars for undergrads.

AM: Did you write a thesis?
BS: All I can really remember is that it involved some sort of phrase with a double meaning in parenthesis. I was really trying to examine the text and context of new queer cinema and look at the methods and means of production, as well as the cultural impact of films like Go Fish, Paris is Burning and works by Todd Haynes.

AM: How did you end up meeting Todd Haynes?
BS: After Brown I was in New York and trying to work in film production and I knew I wanted to be a producer. I didn’t know there was this whole other system of becoming a producer where you go to Los Angeles and become an assistant in an agency and work your way up that way—I just thought I’d work on movies. I was working as a PA on all these bad indie features with no money that were never released and I finally figured I need to go work for people who make the movies I like. I showed up at Christine’s office one day and they put me to work and it was chaos. They were involved in tons of stuff and the basic bargain was I got paid to be a PA during production and when I wasn’t in production I wasn’t paid, I just helped them out. She was in the middle of trying to put together financing for Todd Hayne’s movie Velvet Goldmine and I was just there at the right time and the right moment. She took me to London to be on set for that and I got this whole immersive experience working with Todd.
Interview with Brad Simpson, cont.

AM: Did you bond over the Brown connect?
BS: I guess—the thing is you do all this theory and you do all this production at Brown and it’s great but you get out to the real world and you have this wonderful liberal arts underpinning and you walk into a production office and nobody’s talking about Foucault. They’re talking about the budget and are we going to get the money. And, weirdly, the idea of what you’re doing and what you’re interested in, obviously has its foundation in your undergraduate education, but that’s sort of the given. And so you know I’ve shared an aesthetic and taste with them that came from the same place, but we didn’t talk about that. We talked about “Oh god, we’re supposed to start production and the financing just dropped out.” But it’s interesting that this weird leftist anti-capitalist department has produced all these people who are right at the center of culture. You know, there are a lot of people working on the margin but there’s a whole group of people who are making a big impact in the media.

AM: How did you see MCM in contrast to the other departments at Brown?
BS: I wasn’t necessarily aware of any tensions between departments. I just took the classes I was interested in. Utilizing the lack of core curriculum I took Comparative Literature, Sexuality and Society, English, City Politics, Biomedical Ethics… and these classes often had overlap with my MCM, production, and RISD classes. I wanted to get a well-rounded liberal arts education, but at the core I was focused on filmmaking, identity, and I was obsessed with Fredric Jameson. I tended to gravitate towards academic theorists who were interested in contexts in addition to texts—Jameson, Foucault—who were somehow rooted in a historical tradition. Honestly structuralist and poststructuralist theory touched everything... it was like an infection.

AM: How do you see those underpinnings play out in the work you gravitated towards after school?
BS: As a film producer, you are always talking about narrative and story, and MCM’s approach of introducing you to different ideas about narrative and how narrative works actually gives you this set of real skills when you’re talking about movies. It really gives you a language. You obviously don’t talk to filmmakers in high literary theory but you’re taking apart how things work in a certain way as a producer and that’s what you’re doing when you’re studying MCM.

AM: What are you working on now?
BS: In the last year I officially partnered with Nina Jacobson, who is another Brown semiotics graduate, and we produced a series of children’s films together called The Diary of a Wimpy Kid. Our company makes The Hunger Games movies, so we are in production on the second film. We just auctioned a novel called Where'd You Go, Bernadette and we did a deal with FX to move to television.

AM: Oh exciting! What is that going to look like?
BS: Well, it’s actually a new deal. The opportunities for storytelling in film have really narrowed; studios are making fewer and fewer movies, and what they are willing to do in those films is getting more and more narrow. Whereas, right now, we are sort of in the middle of the golden age of TV. That might collapse when the system of viewing by network collapses, but we’re not there yet. Right now there is just amazing storytelling happening on TV and we were jealous, we were creatively jealous, and FX had approached us about working together and they obviously do great shows. Their brand is sort of literary pulp, where they do genre shows with epic themes.
Interview with Brad Simpson, cont.

AM: What's your involvement been with Egger's 826LA?
BS: 826LA is an educational charity that is founded by Dave Eggers. The centers help augment and supplement English programs, writing programs in the public schools. We try to offer access to individual attention and creative writing to kids who otherwise wouldn't get it. That goes from helping them with their homework to helping them with their college essays. We go into the schools and work with English teachers, we teach kids bookmaking, we have centers in economically challenged areas where kids drop in after school and get tutoring help. It's a great charity. I'm just on the board—it's what I raise money for.

AM: Going back a bit... what was your experience after connecting with Killer Films in New York?
BS: I worked for Christine Vachon for eight great years helping her make a ton of amazing independent cinema. And then I moved to L.A. and ran Leonardo DiCaprio's company called Appian Way. Then I was an independent producer. I have a zombie movie coming out called World War Z with Brad Pitt—it's sort of global chaos zombies—and now it's Nina and I.

AM: What is the reality of producing, especially since moving away from independent films?
BS: I think the thing when you’re a producer and you’re not doing independent films is that you’re not actually cutting the muffins at Kraft services yourself and you have more creature comforts. But I think that my definition of producer is somebody who is looking out for the movie and who is on the side of the movie, not necessarily the side of the filmmaker or studio. Their job is to nurture, develop, protect and push through what is best for the film and to balance the needs of the financiers, studio, filmmakers, and actors. As producers we find the stories, find the storytellers, and find the financing—we’re involved on every level. Nina and I are involved in development, on-set and post-production. I think a real producer does all those things.

AM: Where do you find to be the biggest conflict of interest?
BS: One of the biggest things you’re facing is that you’re supposed to push a movie forward at every moment and there are times when you have a movie that you’re pushing forward and you question whether the movie is ready. You’re never supposed to say “no” when someone’s ready to make a movie and you’re never supposed to be the one who’s saying “Wait, I think we need to take a little bit longer with this script.” There have been occasions when the studio is more sure that the movie is ready then we are as producers. That's more difficult.

AM: What else were you engaged with on campus outside of class?
BS: I was really a leftist activist. I was involved with getting military recruiting off campus because of the DADT policy. I was involved in the campaigning for need-blind admission which was a huge thing the entire time I was here. It was a bigger priority under Ruth Simmons but it wasn’t a priority under Vartan Gregorian. It was really contentious. I mean, my freshman year there was an occupation, which I didn’t participate in, of the admissions office and students were arrested. I was involved in a campaign to try to change work study rules so that work study wasn’t displacing local Providence workers from jobs at Brown and so that students weren’t doing jobs that were supposed to be going towards their academic work. But I really spent a lot of my time at the Coffee Exchange just having really intense conversations with people; a lot of college was spent that way and I loved that.
Fables of MCM

Bob Scholes

For me the Brown Semiotics Program began before I came to Brown, when Tzvetan Todorov invited me to a conference in Europe, because he thought well of my book, *The Nature of Narrative*. Preparing for that adventure I started reading up on structuralism—except that there wasn’t any really good book to read. That situation led me to start writing the book I needed to read (which is not an ideal situation). I was still working on that book when I left the University of Iowa and came to Brown in 1970. One reason why I made that move was because I wanted to teach undergraduates like those at Brown—and I was not disappointed.

When I got here, I found that there was no regular instruction in film, though courses were taught occasionally by Keith Waldrop or a visiting professor. After persuading the English Department to hire someone to teach film, I went to the Brown Film Society and invited some of those students to help in the job search and with the interviews of candidates, which they did. As a result of this Michael Silverman joined the Brown faculty. Meanwhile, my work on structuralism led me to semiotics. I had joined the Semiotic Society of America, later becoming president of that organization. And, as I remember, when Michael joined our faculty, he and I together started a concentration in semiotics within the English department, which combined film studies, theory, and modern literature. A few years later Roger Henkle and some others started a program in Modern Literature and Society, combining studies in history and literature. After I became Chair of English I talked with Michael and Roger about the possibility of combining these two concentrations into a new department. We went to the administration and they agreed to support this proposal.

We went ahead with this, and I resigned from the chairmanship of English to avoid a conflict of interest, but some people in the English Department felt betrayed by this move and never forgave me or my colleagues for making this move. As it happened, we, too, were betrayed—by the administration, who declined to establish the Department of Modern Culture and Media we had proposed, but allowed us to become a program, which meant that we could not make regular faculty appointments but had to work through departments, like English. As you might guess, this was not always pleasant.

But we succeeded in adding people in various ways, with Michael, Roger, and I taking the lead at first. We were agreed that all students should study theory, including those who wished to emphasize production. And this continued when Roger Mayer joined us and helped establish the Art/Semiotics track in MCM. And we loved the courses we taught and the sort of students who came to study with us. At one point Michael Silverman and I went to New York to visit one of those former students, Tim Forbes, who agreed to endow our center in the name of his father. (We hope more of our former students will follow this splendid example.) In the early days, we were housed in the dreadful Adams House at the bottom of George Street. When Vartan Gregorian became President of Brown, we invited him to inspect our quarters. When he came down there, Roger Henkle put a hard hat on his head to protect him from debris and make him aware of how decrepit our building was. He agreed to get us out of there, and we eventually moved uphill to a better building.
As our faculty grew stronger, with people like Duncan Smith, Mary Ann Doane, Ellen Rooney, and Phil Rosen joining us, we kept seeking departmental status. It was a long struggle, because certain members of the English department, in particular, had the ear of the administration and opposed our efforts vigorously. Finally, fifteen years ago, the Brown faculty voted to allow us to become a department—and the Provost rejected their recommendation. I remember vividly sitting outside Vartan Gregorian’s office early in the morning, with Mary Ann Doane, to appeal this decision. When we saw him I asked him if he agreed with the Provost’s decision, and he said “No.” The rest, as they say, is history. And history has a way of repeating itself. When Ruth Simmons became president, we invited her to inspect our building, showing her how our production courses were struggling in their present quarters. She apologized and said she would do something about that. Which she did, adding the Thayer Street building to our George Street home.

The final administrative struggle was over adding a graduate program to our offerings. This, too, met with opposition but we finally achieved that, too, and our PhD program is now one of the strongest in the humanities at Brown. For me, however, the undergraduate courses I was able to teach in this department were the real reward. Courses like “Picasso and Joyce” would not fit in any normal department’s offerings. But I taught it twice. (I never repeated a course if I got it right the first time, you understand.) And many of us team-taught the introductory courses, learning from each other and from our students as well. And there were other courses—in Foucault, Derrida, Barthes, and Textuality—that were a pleasure to teach in MCM. Those of us who taught in MCM kept learning from the courses we taught and from our interactions with colleagues and students. Many of my courses led to books that I wrote, like Textual Power, Semiotics and Interpretation, and Protocols of Reading. This profession as a whole does not take teaching seriously and seldom rewards it, which is why I remember Vartan Gregorian’s words to Michael Silverman after Tim Forbes came through with his large contribution: “Teach more students like this,” he said, or words to that effect. But MCM has always taken teaching seriously, and continues to do so. There is nothing quite like this anywhere else.

My final response to our long struggles with the English Department is a book that will be published later this year, called English After the Fall—From Literature to Textuality, in which I argue for moving all of English studies in the direction of MCM. I know it works. The students who have gone through this department and its predecessors are all the evidence needed to demonstrate that.
And the fable continues... Bob Scholes continues his intricate and provoking work digitizing rare journals from the Modernist era. Recently, the Modernist Journals Project was mentioned in the US Senate. United States Senator Tom Coburn, of Oklahoma, recently released his annual report detailing what he perceives as wasteful federal spending. One of the examples he cites is the Modernist Journals Project. Senator Coburn says that, in 2012, the Modernist Journals Project (MJP), a joint venture administered by Brown University and the University of Tulsa, was awarded $270,000 in federal funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). The Senator is wrong about this. The NEH spent $132,000, and the universities of Tulsa and Brown spent $134,000 on this particular grant. The Senator also mentions other grants for the MJP over nine years, totaling a bit over $600,000 which he says came from NEH. But Tulsa and Brown also paid almost half of those funds as cost sharing.

Senator Coburn claims that certain works like the once-popular McClure’s magazine will be among the magazines digitized, though much of it is already available for free online at Google Books. This is simply not true. Google has digitized some material, but it is taken mainly from printed compilations of these magazines which, in fact, do not have most of the advertising pages, making them less useful for scholarly research. These full magazines with all their pages are extremely difficult to find, and the Google versions lack 50% of the contents. Many of the magazines digitized by the MJP over the four grants given by the NEH, are in fact very rare, and the few more popular magazines included in the MJP are also hard to find, because the libraries who bound them omitted the advertising.

In regards to the MJP, the Librarian of Brown University, Harriette Hemmasi, explains that:

The review process for NEH grants is highly competitive and involves the careful evaluation and comparison by at least several scholars in the field.

The MJP serves two fundamentally different functions than other digitization projects, such as Google:

(a) MJP supports a cover-to-cover digital reproduction, meaning that only those journal issues for which all original pages have been retained (especially advertisements) are included. In the past, most libraries discarded “non-essential” pages, such as advertisements, before binding the issues and these “defective” issues have been used for other digitization projects such as Google. With the increasing interest in cultural and interdisciplinary studies, these advertisements are central to current research and teaching, as well as interesting/valuable to the public.

(b) The MJP is not just a digitization project. It is a scholarly environment in which knowledgeable faculty and grad students provide essays and other intellectual commentary on the materials included.

The Site Manager of the MJP, Mark Gaipa, has provided analytic notes covering the last single year of the MJP, which helps to explain why the MJP is important to scholars around the world:

- 97,934 visits to the site, or an average of 268 visits each day
- 60,257 unique visitors, or an average of 165 unique visitors each day
- 60% of users were new visitors (with 59,319 visits) while 40% were returning visitors (with 38,615 visits)
The Modernist Journals Project, cont.

- Overall, 417,309 page views, with an average of 4.26 pages per visit
- People from 158 nations and all six populated continents visited the MJP, with 46.5% of visits coming from the U.S., 21.5% from the United Kingdom, and 4.5% from Canada, with Brazil, Australia, France, Germany, Italy, India, and Spain together (and in that order) amounting to 11% of usage.
- In the U.S., people from every state visited the MJP, with the top three states being New York (5,580 visits), California (4,487 visits) and Pennsylvania (2,571 visits), and the bottom three Hawaii (75 visits), South Dakota (28 visits), and Alaska (27 visits).
- Top journals visited: Crisis (1,534 visits), Little Review (1,109 visits), Blast (997 visits), New Age (685 visits), Egoist (568), and Freewoman (370).
- Top non-journal content page visited: how to teach a magazine (480 visits).
- Top referral sites: Wikipedia, facebook, twitter, artcyclopedia

Stepping back from these factual errors in the report, it’s important to understand that magazine and periodical studies constitute a vibrant and expanding area of teaching and research. At least three academic journals are devoted to the subject (including the Journal of Periodical Studies) and the MJP’s unique resources have been singled out in a number of national media outlets like The New Yorker and The New York Times. In addition, the MJP is considered one of the leading digital humanities projects in modern literary studies. This means not only that it is creating new fields of teaching and research around magazines, but that it is also building collaborative relationships between academic disciplines and between institutions. In addition to the Brown-TU partnership, for example, the MJP is also directly involved in partnerships with the University of Victoria, Loyola University, and Princeton University among others.

Finally, Professor Sean Latham of the MJP in Tulsa, added another reason why the MJP is an important resource:

Robert Scholes,
Research Professor of Modern Culture & Media,
Brown University

Credits

MCM would like to extend a special thanks to the following individuals for their time and dedication to the newsletter: Wendy Chun, Liza Hebert, Emma Janaskie, Linda Liu, Susan McNeil, Barry Friedman (Semiotics ’85). We’d like to extend a very special thank you to the designers Valerie Gates (Art-Semiotics ‘88) and Barry Friedman (Semiotics ‘85) of the Boston-area design firm Gates Studio.