



2018 CONFERENCE - SEMINAR TOPIC SUMMARIES

Adult Film History: Methods and Methodologies

Peter Alilunas, University of Oregon

Lynn Comella, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Since the 1989 publication of Linda Williams's groundbreaking book, *Hardcore: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible,"* the academic study of pornography has emerged as a robust, interdisciplinary field of inquiry. Today, there's a growing list of books and edited collections on the subject, a dedicated academic journal, *Porn Studies*, and stand-alone scholarly interest groups, such as the SCMS Adult Film History Interest Group, all of which point to the maturation of a field. While scholars generally agree that pornography is a subject worthy of inquiry, less attention has been given to how researchers might approach that subject. This seminar seeks to address this gap by creating an opportunity for participants to think critically about and discuss methodological questions related to adult film historiography. What kinds of methods lend themselves to deepening our understanding of adult film's historical, cultural, and economic organization? What does the archive reveal, what does it obscure, and what might other approaches (e.g., interviews, ethnographies, surveys, etc.) help bring to light about adult film history and its significance as a media and cultural industry? What unique challenges does the study of pornography bring -- and how, as a field, do we convert them into opportunities? This seminar will explore these and other critical topics at a moment as Pornography Studies becomes ever more visible as a field. This seminar will be a true working group to think about and discuss these methodological questions. To that end, it will draw from the position papers for the seminar, which will broadly ask participants to both reflect on the challenges of studying the topic and offer insights, solutions, and methodological successes -- all of which will form the basis of the discussion during the seminar itself.



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Archives in the Digital Era: Bridging Theory and Practice for Saving and Studying Media

Jeremy Morris, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Eric Hoyt, University of Wisconsin-Madison

In 2015, Rick Prelinger lamented that “the archive” had been over-theorized, while actual archives and their operations remain under-theorized and under-funded. Prelinger called upon scholars to engage more closely with archival workflows (i.e. digitizing videotapes, entering an object’s metadata, etc.), while also encouraging archivists to join theoretical conversations that move beyond a discourse of “excessive practicality.” Accordingly, this seminar seeks to push cinema and media studies toward greater integration of archival theory and practice, extending the mission of SCMS’s Media Archives Committee.

This seminar arrives as more researchers are digitizing historical materials, curating media artifacts, and trying to make the fruits of their labors accessible to other researchers. They are collaborating with archivists and librarians to make important media objects available online through projects like the Media History Digital Library, Radio Preservation Task Force, PodcastRE, and Media Ecology Project. When copyright restrictions or a lack of extant copies prevents sharing the entire work, scholars find workaround solutions by building valuable catalogs, like the Amateur Movie Database and the Canadian, Education, Sponsored & Industrial Film Archive.

In this seminar, each participant will share a brief paper detailing the particular archive (or archival tool) they are familiar with and offer their thoughts on the value and challenges of archives as research tools. After spending the first portion of the seminar discussing threads between the papers, the group will break into smaller working groups. The ultimate goal will be to produce a set of recommendations and best practices for scholars building digital collections and evaluating one another’s digitization and curatorial work. We will also discuss the feasibility of linking data across the various existing media archive projects. We hope this seminar encourages more scholars to collaborate with archivists and librarians toward the shared goals of studying, saving, and sharing our media heritage.



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Creative Critical Writing Seminar

Holly Willis, University of Southern California

In 2014, Claudia Rankine's extraordinary book *Citizen: An American Lyric* was the first to be named a finalist in both the poetry and criticism categories for the National Book Critics Circle Award. This genre-crossing project is emblematic of an emerging genre of critical writing that hovers between poetry and prose to create vital, often thrilling reading experiences deeply attentive to language, rhythm and structure while questioning issues of identity, power, race and class within our current neoliberal culture. Inspired by this book, the Creative Critical Writing Seminar is designed to explore emerging forms of critical writing within the broader genre of critical nonfiction through readings and writing prompts, followed by the in-person seminar experience at SCMS 2018.

While writing constitutes one of the main activities we engage in as scholars, we devote very little attention to it as a practice and craft. I hope to address this gap by attending to a selection of creative writing practices that deviate from the tried and true conventions of scholarly writing. Designed as a space for exploration and invention, as well as a political intervention that suggests that we ignore the form that our arguments take at our peril, the seminar will be devoted to uncovering techniques for writing about – or alongside, next to, or near – film, video, still images, sound, and other media forms.

The seminar arises within a broader cultural context of the expansion of essayistic in overlapping genres variously dubbed creative nonfiction, the hybrid essay, the fourth genre, the lyric essay, and poetic or vernacular criticism. Seminar participants will investigate several examples of creative critical writing within the history of cinema studies, as well as three craft essays that explain specific techniques, and then write a short experimental essay to workshop collaboratively in the seminar.



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Crippling the Screen: Cripface and Intersectionality

James Deaville, Carleton University

Kristen Loutensock, University of Wisconsin, Madison

Disability in its various forms is a ubiquitous cinematic feature, and yet its very familiarity and pervasiveness have caused film audiences and scholars alike to fail to notice its manifestations (Longmore 2003: 131-2). This seminar proposes to explore one of the most disturbing issues in the cinematic representation of disability, cripface, a practice whereby an able-bodied actor depicts a character with a disability (Siebers 2008: 114; Ellis 2013: 250-1). From Lon Chaney Sr.'s Quasimodo to Colin Firth's George VI, cripface metaphorizes the experience of people with disabilities, constructing either inspirational narratives of overcoming or eugenically informed tales of horror. In cripface, characters are reducible to their disability yet do not threaten the audience because we know the actors are not disabled, so they can carry out their metaphorical functions with impunity. Studying these practices of screen representation and their intersectional implications enables us not only to identify cripface, but to understand and ultimately subvert its culturally constructed narratives of disability.

This seminar intends to open a dialogue by having participants discuss in small groups a series of pre-distributed questions about cripface on screen with regard to genre and intersectionality. Then participants will gather to spontaneously respond to one or more clips that illustrate the discussion questions.

To date, SCMS has not engaged in any concerted way with issues of disability in screen media, despite broad recognition of the need for such engagement (including among Board members) and the contributions of individual panels to the discourse around disability, such as Chicago sessions C20 and K9. Yet as Douglas Baynton argues, "disability has functioned for all such [minority] groups as a sign of and justification for inferiority" (Baynton 2001: 34). Thus studying cripface in screen media affords crucial opportunities for intersectional explorations into questions of gender, race, and class (among others).



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The Crisis of Academic Labor and the Future of Film and Media Studies

Jamie Rogers, University of California, Irvine

Christopher Robé, Florida Atlantic University

In its efforts to encourage excellence in film and media studies scholarship and pedagogy, SCMS must also assess the working conditions that allow for or foreclose such work to flourish. Throughout the last forty years, U.S. higher education has been at the forefront of a neoliberal paradigm shift where low-salaries, minimal benefits, contingent labor, and gradual divestment from state resources has increasingly become its modus operandi. The 2008 economic recession has provided the most recent alibi for further neoliberal attacks on higher education, as can be seen with various pushes to strip public employee unions, many of which represent faculty, lecturers, and graduate students, of the right to collectively bargain and with multiple states drastically cutting higher education budgets while ratcheting up tuition and student fees, essentially jettisoning the notion of affordable, quality education.

By attacking tenure, long-term contracts, and the right to collectively bargain, corporatization of higher education has increasingly placed faculty free speech under fire, undermining the autonomy of scholars to pursue independent research and innovative teaching through precarious working conditions and lack of institutional support, especially for women and people of color. This seminar will draw together film and media studies faculty from all levels (graduate students, non-tenured faculty, adjuncts, tenure-track and tenured faculty), many of whom are union organizers or engaged in faculty governance, to address not only how their specific working conditions impact their ability to conduct research and teaching (or simply survive), but also the ways in which they have collectively organized to provide alternatives to the corporate tendencies in higher education. Participants will read each other's papers and synthesize links between them in advance to generate core themes and questions that will be discussed during the seminar, with an aim toward facilitating long-term project collaborations.



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Critical Ethnic Studies and Cinema and Media Studies: A Conversation

Beenash Jafri, University of California, Davis

This seminar will place critical ethnic studies into conversation with cinema and media studies. In particular, the seminar will ask how modes of analysis being developed within critical ethnic studies scholarship might support the emergence of a more politically engaged cinema and media studies. While frameworks such as genre, authorship, spectatorship and aesthetics have been essential as methodologies for interpreting film and other media forms, they have not always prioritized a systematic critique of power and violence. Furthermore, studies of the representational politics of film/media have often examined stereotypical portrayals of particular racialized groups without always attending to the overarching systems of power—such as capitalism, colonialism, anti-blackness and heteropatriarchy—framing these representations. By contrast, critical ethnic studies, which seeks to disrupt traditional formulations of race and ethnic studies that silo off Black/African American, Asian American, Native American/Indigenous and Latinx American/Chicanx studies from one another, is a scholarly project invested in moving towards *anti-disciplinary* interventions which foreground questions of power, violence and resistance. This seminar will invite participants to bring the anti-disciplinary frameworks of critical ethnic studies to cinema and media studies scholarship.

The seminar invites participants to reflect in their position papers on two central questions: what might be gained (or lost) in their own scholarship through an engagement with critical ethnic studies? And, how might an engagement with critical ethnic studies reframe our understanding of cinema and media studies? In the seminar itself, participants will work in small groups to work towards developing a provisional “Introduction to Cinema and Media Studies” syllabus that brings critical ethnic studies frameworks to bear on the formulation of cinema and media studies. Our collective work on this syllabus will serve as a point of departure for future conversations on this issue.



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Generating Cultural Resources: Film Festivals and Public Programming at Colleges and Universities

Charles Musser, Yale University

Patricia Zimmermann, Ithaca College

This seminar proposes to bring together college and university faculty who work on film festivals and related forms of public programming. We want to foster conceptual and practical exchanges on the forms, functions, roles, and impacts of this type of work. These kinds of festivals enable academics to open up public spheres for discussion of film culture beyond their classrooms and create spaces to explore and encourage new directions in film and media practice. Film festivals and other programming forms often operate as hinges between scholarly research, public engagement, and service while fostering greater awareness of, and dialogue about, developments in local, national, and international film culture. On the local level, festivals can encourage interactions among different parts of the university and between the university and diverse local communities. They often address issues of particular and urgent importance to their local communities.

The developing field of film festival studies has analyzed the economics, social and cultural functions, administration, curatorial work, and political significance of high profile film festivals such as Cannes and Sundance. However, it has yet to focus on the function and specific value of festival exhibition practices in more modest settings such as festivals housed at, or associated with, academic institutions and situated in local communities.

We will ask participants to share websites of their festivals and programming in advance with short papers discussing their histories, missions, strategies, and challenges. We plan to run the seminar as a colloquium to create further dialogue about little-known practices of programming on campuses to begin to create a network across institutions. We have identified at least ten faculty who engage in this kind of work that to date has been invisible in our field, a shadow activity which puts theory into practice, and practice back into theory.



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Genre Studies Methodology for Film, Television, and New Media: Development Since Altman's Semantic/Syntactic/Pragmatic Approach

Grant Wiedenfeld, Sam Houston State University

Annie Berke, Hollins University

Well over a dozen panels at the 2017 SCMS conference centered on genre, with topics ranging from television and film to new media and theory. Genre is evidently a fundamental concept for our diverse field. However, even as our field expands, no common method like what has developed in Rhetorical Genre Study and no clear methodological debate have materialized. Some studies continue to take categories for granted, bracketing off theoretical issues, which is surprising, given the decades of intense reflection that culminated in Rick Altman's seminal 1999 study *Film/Genre*. He delves into the concept's deep history and extends his semantic/syntactic approach to account for pragmatics; in particular, the different uses of genre by audiences, critics, industry producers, and exhibitors. Altman advises research on the discourses of these different users, with self-consciousness of the critic's own uses. John Frow and Jason Mittell agree that genres are social institutions that structure knowledge and culture, and Amanda Ann Klein demonstrates genre pragmatics in several film cycles. Yet genre study as a whole has remained relatively quiet and diffuse despite these mature reflections. Perhaps this state can be traced back to Altman, who renounced the readymade quality of his earlier approach.

Does the semantic/syntactic/pragmatic approach continue to pay dividends as a common method for genre studies, even as media forms and technologies change? Seminar participants will respond with position papers that reflect critically, introduce other approaches, and assess the limitations of genre method for our diverse field. It is expected that several positions will emerge around which participants will be grouped; group leaders will gather questions and lead seminar discussion for a portion of the session. The goal of this seminar is to enhance our research and teaching of genre across media, which undoubtedly interests many SCMS members.



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Intersectional Spaces in Screen Cultures

Pamela Wojcik, University of Notre Dame

Paula J. Massood, Brooklyn College, CUNY

This seminar seeks to explore the many intersections and problematics of space, place, and identities in cinema and other media. Work on gender and space has been incredibly productive and rich across numerous disciplines. This seminar seeks to put work on gender in conversation with work on sexuality, race, ethnicity, age, class, nationality, religion and other identities as they intersect with each other in bodies and in spaces. We will be asking: How do various identities inflect the dynamics and ideologies at play in representations of space and place in cinema and other media? What kind of lens do space and place provide on intersectionality? How does a consideration of intersectionality deepen our understanding of not only identity but also space?

Spaces considered will include private spaces, public spaces, liminal spaces, and virtual spaces. Possible spaces include: the city, the street; institutional spaces, such as schools, hospitals, museums, and prisons; private homes and apartments; bathrooms, bedrooms, and other small spaces; the space of the stage, including dressing rooms and backstage; restaurants; malls; the space of the cinema; rural space and landscapes; the beach; suburban space; virtual spaces, including the space of videogames, movie magazines, and social media; and more.

Participants will be asked to write a brief (5 page) position paper exploring one specific space in relation to intersectionality (to consider, for example, how notions of home are complicated by considerations of class, age, sex, race) or by considering how identities (preferably more than one) are understood in relation to space (to consider, for example, how a consideration of the space of the hospital produces a new understanding of Muslim female heterosexual identity). Participants will be assigned papers to read and comment upon before the seminar and will work together to draft discussion questions for the meeting.



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Making Videographic Criticism: The Videographic Epigraph

Jason Mittell, Middlebury College

Kevin Ferguson, Queens College, City University of New York

Videographic criticism is a burgeoning intellectual practice at SCMS. The field has an award-winning journal, a newly-formed SIG, and videographic work increasingly appears at SCMS panels, facilitated through new courses taught across academia and the two popular offerings of the NEH-sponsored workshop, Scholarship in Sound and Image. Building on those successes, this seminar offers a beginner's introduction to making videographic criticism via an exercise taught in the NEH workshop: the videographic epigraph. Using the principle of learning via practice, this seminar will facilitate a conversation about the relationship between images, sounds, and critical language within videographic criticism. Videographic criticism is an important topic that will attract SCMS members, and a seminar will expand productive conversations about this work with novice practitioners.

This seminar will feature hands-on practice done in advance of the conference. All participants should have proficiency using a video editing platform, but little-to-no direct experience making videographic criticism. In mid-December, the conveners will host a teleconference session to review the technical skills needed and to share successful examples of videographic epigraphs. Each participant will then prepare a videographic epigraph by mid-January, following parameters to be distributed ahead of time, outlining the use of video, sound, and a quotation from a critical text.

The resulting videos will be shared amongst the seminar participants and auditors to watch in advance. The conference session will feature screenings of each epigraph, with conversations focused on what the process teaches us about both each source text and the larger balance between videographic and written rhetorics. We expect this seminar to be popular, and both participants and auditors will leave with concrete ideas for future videographic work as well as a better understanding of the videographic criticism they encounter.



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Media and Energy Studies

Brian Jacobson, University of Toronto

Mona Damluji, University of California, Santa Barbara

In recent years, public concerns about climate change and energy futures have generated vibrant scholarship in the interdisciplinary field of “energy humanities.” Film and media scholars have made central contributions to the methodological and empirical directions of this field. Such work includes: studies of the media produced by energy industries and corporations (for worker training and public relations); materialist histories of media technologies (from silent film lighting to server farms); and political ecologies of media industries (including practices and discourses of efficiency and waste in Hollywood).

This seminar aims to take stock of a rapidly expanding field. It asks how scholars working across different energy forms, media platforms, geographic locations, and historical periods can collectively define the field’s stakes and limits and push it in yet new directions. How, moreover, could we, as film and media scholars, contribute to the broader public discourse about energy politics? We will solicit papers that examine diverse geographical and historical contexts to address one or more key lines of inquiry:

1. What role do media play in energy industries?
2. What role does energy play in defining media technologies, systems, and industries?
3. What role can media and its criticism play in shaping energy futures?

We will proceed in three phases. In addition to papers, participants will be asked to submit two framing questions that we will use to guide a short opening discussion about the state of the field and stakes of our research. We will then move into small groups (organized by seminar leaders in advance) with the goals of fostering dialogues among different approaches to similar lines of inquiry and documenting ideas and questions that emerge. The seminar will reconvene to conclude with a discussion that shares subgroup ideas and maps next steps including potential future collaborations (conference panels, publications, etc.).



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Mediated Space by/for Young People

Peter Kunze, University of Texas at Austin

This seminar aims to bring together scholars working in the fields of media studies and childhood studies, broadly conceived, through an intensive investigation of mediated spaces. Spatiality as an area of inquiry was established by theorists like Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, Doreen Massey, and Yi-Fu Tuan, and it has gained increasing currency in media studies over the past few years, with important recent books by Pamela Robertson Wojcik, Brian Jacobson, Dan Herbert, and Nicholas Sammond, among others. Similarly, childhood studies has already engaged spatiality with close studies of playgrounds, schools, and urban development through important edited collections by Gutman and de Coninck-Smith (2008); Hackett, Procter, and Seymour (2015); and Cecire, Field, Finn, and Roy (2015). Media scholars can expand this work to include space within media and media within space, including children's bedrooms, social media as space, media in the classroom, theme parks, to name a few. Kim Rasmussen has also spoken about the division between places designed for children and places that children make their own. This seminar aims to explore this divide to enrich ongoing discussions of agency, identity, and resistance as well as novel approaches to media studies, such as architecture and urban studies, cultural geography, and the digital humanities. It's designed to generate collaboration between several SCMS special interest groups, including but not limited to members of Animated Media; Children's and Youth Media and Culture; Fan and Audience Studies; Media Industries; Media Literacy and Pedagogical Outreach; Nontheatrical Film and Media; and Urbanism/Geography/Architecture. Participants will submit their papers in January for a digital peer review by contributors and auditors (using platforms available through Google Doc or Academia.edu), while the seminar session in Toronto will work to define key theorists and themes among the papers, topics needing attention, methodological concerns, and opportunities for future development and collaboration.



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New Approaches to Film Aesthetics

Todd Berliner, University of North Carolina Wilmington

Malcolm Turvey, Tufts University

Film scholars sometimes regard aesthetic analysis as retrograde because it segregates aesthetic experience from other aspects of human experience. This seminar is designed to modernize the study of film aesthetics by tracing its relationship to the other aspects of cinema that interest scholars today, such as history, psychology, economics, culture, identity, technology, and ideology.

The seminar will address a variety of questions pertaining to film aesthetics, depending on the interests of individual participants. What follows is a sampling. How does economics affect the aesthetic design of movies? How do filmmakers appeal to different “aesthetic markets” based on race, gender, class, ethnicity, culture, or audience size? How do moral factors affect aesthetic experience? How does the experience of individual films change within different historical contexts? Can science help us understand film aesthetics? How have developing technologies changed the cinematic experience? How does sound contribute to the aesthetics of film? Drawing on the varied expertise of SCMS members, the seminar will offer a wide-ranging discussion of problems and possibilities in the aesthetic study of cinema.

During the seminar, rather than solicit a series of formal responses, the leaders will facilitate a discussion in order to make the seminar as conversational, illuminating, and engaging as possible. Toward that end, leaders will devise a set of 3-4 issues (propositions, areas of disagreement, or questions) culled from the position papers. The leaders will begin the seminar by posing an issue for group discussion, moving down the set as needed to further debate and the exchange of views. In order to ensure that all participants speak during the seminar, the leaders will also prepare at least one question for every participant, based on her/his paper, in order to engage those participants who have not yet spoken.



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New Directions in Black Film and Media Studies

Michael Gillespie, CUNY

Racquel Gates, CUNY

Beretta Smith-Shomade, Emory University

Kristen Warner, University of Alabama

The 1990s and early 2000s saw the release of a significant amount of critical scholarship devoted to the idea of black film and television. Indeed, this was an important moment in the evolving discourse surrounding blackness and film and media studies—occurring in conjunction with the simultaneous boom in black media production. This scholarship was vital to critically framing the then new film and television work while also reconciling it to then emergent critical methodologies and theories invested in black visual and expressive culture.

Presently, while we have the support of our field, our work is often not visible in other disciplines. When other disciplines write about film and media without citing the seminal works in our field, the result is underdeveloped analysis or erasure of schools of thought. The risks double when the invisibility of black media studies in broader academic and popular discussions stunts future scholarship growth because the work of the scholars who carved out the intersections of representation, film theory, and media industries becomes unknown and unseen.

This seminar is founded on the central idea that the work ahead for scholars in the current moment must be to appreciate what has been our field's productive complication of the idea of black film and media, particularly in the last 10 years, while forging this expansion and affirming with attention to the critical legacies which continue to vitally inform the field. In what ways as film and media studies scholars do we talk about race that is different than our other disciplinary counterparts? How do we reconcile the study of black film and media as an interdisciplinary pursuit that requires innovatively new entanglements of the study of art, politics, culture, and history without sacrificing our specificity?

Participants will be asked to write a 3-5 page position paper exploring one of the questions above.



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Non-theatrical film: Hemispheric American Perspectives

Laura Isabel Serna, University of Southern California

Julian Etienne, University of Texas at Austin

This seminar bridges scholarship on non-theatrical film and transnational cinema from the vantage point of the Americas -- Latina/o communities in the U.S., Mexico, Central America, and South America. The past decade has witnessed an upsurge in scholarship on amateur, industrial, sponsored, and educational film. However, most of this scholarship has focused on Europe, the United States, or Canada. At the same time, while film historians have productively questioned the analytical construct of 'national cinema', much work reifies the category 'cinema' sidestepping its different modalities—particularly those that might be defined as non-theatrical. How did non-theatrical film travel across borders? What can transnational approaches bring to our understanding of the ways in which non-theatrical film articulated race, gender, and class? How did institutions, institutional agents and film enthusiasts, participate in the formation of 'small image' film cultures that negotiated nationalist and cosmopolitan discourses? This seminar examines how non-theatrical films' trajectories in the Americas shed light on a long history of cinematic imbrications across the continent, which to date have primarily been confined to considerations of the commercial industry or art films. We will also consider how these relationships modify our understanding of local non-theatrical film contexts and practices. The topic is timely given the growing importance of non-theatrical film in the discipline and recent investigations of amateur, sponsored, industrial, and educational films in specific national contexts. The seminar promises to attract members from various caucuses and SIGs by examining the theoretical and methodological challenges as well the historiographical relevance of studying non-theatrical film from a hemispheric perspective. Seminar leaders will propose a list of key works and words for participants to choose from and respond to in a short paper anchored in their research contexts. Papers will pre-circulate and a set of questions will be written collaboratively to guide discussion.



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Protest Footage from 1968

Mark Shiel, Department of Film Studies, King's College London

I will lead a seminar at SCMS in Toronto on film and media in 1968. This will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the worldwide progressive protest movements of 1968 in 2018 while concentrating on their importance as subjects for the camera. While the cinema and media history of 1968, and associated theoretical issues, are quite well-known to some in SCMS, much of that history remains to be discovered and the exceptional importance of that year makes it vital for each new generation of film and media scholars to know and understand it.

While the seminar will attend to various aspects of the film and media representation of the protest movements of the day (student, anti-war, Black Power, second wave feminist, gay rights, environmentalist), the emphasis of the seminar will be on footage of acts of protest (marches, demonstrations, sit-ins, occupations, and other kinds of direct action) and its production in various formats and contexts (student filmmakers in 8mm or 16mm, feature filmmakers in 35mm, television news reportage on film or early videotape, films by civil rights organizations, the police or government agencies).

Seven papers will be pre-circulated, supported by relevant films or clips identified online or pre-circulated by Dropbox. There will be overlap, but each paper will have a different key question to address: 1) who or what is depicted in protest footage from 1968, 2) who is doing the representing and with what aims, 3) what were the particular production and technical challenges faced by the filmmakers, 4) in what contexts was protest footage distributed and watched, 5) how was protest footage received and interpreted at the time, 6) what protest footage has been preserved and what preservation issues does it pose, and 7) what is the meaning of protest footage from 1968 when viewed in the present-day?



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Race, Policing, and Media

Daniel Grinberg, University of California, Santa Barbara

Michael Litwack, University of Alberta

This seminar will address the intersections of race, policing, and media. It will center on the discriminatory applications of violence and gratuitous force against people of color, and how media technologies and discourses negotiate their experiences of law enforcement. Recently, the urgency of this issue has resonated through the circulation of cell-phone and bodycam footage of officers unjustly killing black men. Simultaneously, Muslim, Latinx, black, and Native communities in the United States continue to be disproportionately subjected to the racialized deployment of surveillance technologies. However, to partially counteract their precarious circumstances, communities of color are employing media platforms to document their experiences and advocate for policy shifts. A range of films, television shows, and other formats are also increasingly foregrounding subjects like police brutality and mass incarceration.

Bringing these and other media practices together, we believe that this topic would work especially well as a seminar. These issues' ongoing pertinence would attract a large audience and galvanize an engaged and necessary conversation. The topic also lends itself to integrating a rich diversity of perspectives. For instance, the participants can generatively examine race and policing through specific social categories, in U.S. or other national contexts, and across historical and contemporary formations. Furthermore, this seminar will consider what our field can contribute to understandings of physical and affective state violence. It will open a forum to potentially rethink key analytics in our field—spectatorship, industry, visibility, embodiment, labor—in relation to still-emerging histories of policing. Our vision for the seminar is to introduce discussion questions that bring together mutual threads among the participants' papers. We will also design these questions to expand the conversation beyond the scopes of the papers. In addition, we will identify key developments in this area and consider the future interventions that media scholars should strive to address.



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Reality and Identity in 21st Century American Television

Amanda Ann Klein, East Carolina University

Erin Meyers, Oakland University

To be a citizen with agency and value in contemporary American society, the individual must either claim or reject an identity. However, knowing which identity to claim or reject has become increasingly fraught. A defining characteristic of identity in contemporary America is its seeming plasticity, and its ability to lend itself to the machinations of capitalism at every turn. The rise and domination of reality television in the late 1990s and the development and domination of social media in the mid-to-late 2000s offer two key mediated spaces where such stories of the self are produced, disseminated and commodified across culture. These spaces highlight both the potential opening of expressions of identity and a simultaneous rigorous policing of what sorts of identities matter in public life.

This seminar investigates the aftermath of the 2016 Presidential election as symptomatic of this turn to identity politics in American discourse. If, as Sarah Banet-Weiser argues, identities are a story told to the self, what kinds of stories are Americans telling themselves in the wake of this historic and unprecedented political cycle? Participants should submit a 5-page position paper on various aspects of how identity—shaped and distributed online and through reality television—has brought us to the current bitter divide in American discourse evidenced by the rise in hate crimes /hate speech, the (racial/ethnic/gender) diversification of television programming, the rise of Donald Trump as the first “reality television” president, and the labeling, rejection, and commodification of Hillary Clinton as a “nasty woman.” Participants are asked to explicate one or more connections between the discourses of identity within reality television, as well as scripted television, and the contemporary social and political landscape. Participants will read each other’s essays prior to the seminar and prepare discussion points and questions based on the connections between their papers.



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Touch Screen Mediations: Intersectional Feminist Theories of Digital Devices, Bodies, and Applications

Michele White, Tulane University

There is a long history of film and media studies scholars analyzing screens, including feminist interventions into screen representations, conventions, and technologies. SCMS has supported digital research but considerations of material devices and embodied experiences could use further exploration. This seminar will allow participants the opportunity to extend research in these areas and consider how existent theories can be adjusted when screens are further incorporated into bodies; spectators are reconceptualized as active users; and individuals are called upon to touch screens as a means of conceptualizing themselves, summoning texts, and engaging with other individuals and the world.

Seminar papers might deploy feminist and related literature as a means of foregrounding the ways conceptions of embodiment are supported by these technologies and social processes. Participants' papers could also engage particular critical literatures, technologies, sites, or counter narratives about intersectional feminist screen constructions. Feminism, including its deployment of abjection, affect, body and disability studies, phenomenology, and queer theory, offers important interventions into studies of touch screens. Touch screens intercede in embodied and social conceptions and necessitate the kinds of critical interventions that are a facet of SCMS.

Seminar participants will develop papers collaboratively through a series of email exchanges and synchronous online dialogues before SCMS. This will allow participants to share their research and develop critical questions about how touch screens can be studied and conceptualized. These questions and the seminar papers will be the basis for the initial seminar engagement. Then, participants and auditors will break into small working groups based on questions of interest, propose provisional theses, and collaboratively meet for a final discussion and consideration of future work to be done in the field.



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Towards Adaptable Media Pedagogy

Melissa Lenos, Donnelly College

Anna Froula, East Carolina University

Participants in this seminar will focus on adapting cinema and media studies courses for students not traditionally prepared or equipped for college-level classes on these topics. These students may be unfamiliar with cinema and media studies “shorthand” that we’re accustomed to using in the classroom; they may lack access to commonly assumed “universal” texts or vocabulary and may not possess the cultural toolkit many of us assume contemporary students come prepared with on the first day of class. Additionally, students may have backgrounds or personal experiences that make seemingly “innocuous” texts difficult or painful to engage. Immigrant or refugee students, for example, may be unfamiliar with the tropes of American reality television, while students living in poverty may not have access to a television or internet access for home viewing assignments. The adjustment from military culture and routine to university life can also be difficult for student veterans who differ in age, life experience, and focus from typical college students. Perpetuation of the “digital native” myth encourages the assumption that college-age students have endless access to and familiarity with the “canon” of film and media texts.

Participants will submit position papers on specific adaptation successes and failures in their own classes as well as proposed approaches for classroom methods, assignment design, grading strategies, and pedagogy for adaptation that does not sacrifice intellectual rigor. Participants may focus on nonmajors, nontraditional students, students living in poverty, international and/or immigrant students, student veterans, or any population less prepared for film or media studies courses as traditionally taught in college and university classrooms, or as traditionally considered by media scholars.

This seminar would be useful for anyone wishing to expand their classroom practice beyond a “one size fits all” approach to cinema and media pedagogy to better serve students with differing backgrounds and abilities.



2018 CONFERENCE - SEMINAR TOPIC SUMMARIES

Unbound: New Possibilities for the American TV Series

Martha Nochimson, David Lynch Graduate School of Cinematic Arts

Once, you could not say “pap smear” on soap opera; a series on nighttime television about anyone as controversial as a working woman was considered outré; happy endings were all but mandatory; everyone in TV Land (who counted) was white and assumed to be heterosexual and Christian; and a television series was produced for television. The American TV series was radically straitjacketed. Fade out/fade in. Today “fuck” is just another ejaculation; gangsters, meth lords, and even serial killers can be protagonists; the very concept of closure is under siege; there is significant rainbow casting; and there are multiple delivery systems for serial narratives. Can America now boast that it is the home of art, or at least innovative, television? What are the implications of altered viewing conventions made possible by series' streamed on Netflix, Amazon, Hulu, and independent platforms? The seminar I envision will welcome a broad spectrum of papers that open up these and many other searching, informed questions: including those concerning specific shows; those about whether the changes in American television are profound or cosmetic; those about the roots of the changes; and those about the formal aesthetics of the new shows. I have had a good bit of experience with seminars of this type at conferences of the Shakespeare Association of America. My observation has been that seminars tend to be more exciting and inclusive if, in addition to the prepared comments of the seminar leader, pairs or groups of participant are given pre-seminar assignments and arrive with their comments on each other's papers in hand. In this case, with 8 participants, I would be inclined to assign pairs.



2018 CONFERENCE - SEMINAR TOPIC SUMMARIES

Video Games and Material Culture

Carly Kocurek, Illinois Institute of Technology
Chris Hanson, Syracuse University

Video games are often spoken of in terms of virtual experiences, a tendency particularly widespread at present due to the current focus on virtual and augmented reality as frontiers for development and study. However, video games are also material objects that are designed, manufactured, produced, shipped, sold, used stored, touched, etc. For example, players wrestle cords to hook up new consoles, ill-advisedly blow into vintage cartridges, and leave discs scattered over their desks. These material encounters with games shape our play experiences, but they are also fundamental to the operations of the industry and researchers who must necessarily deal with the realities and limitations of games' physical materials. Our experiences and perceptions of video games are heavily marked by games' physical presence, and a robust understanding of games culture must necessarily engage with that materiality.

This seminar developed in collaboration with the Video Game Studies Scholarly Interest Group invites work that considers games as part of material culture from diverse perspectives including but not limited to design, environmental impact, manufacturing, phenomenology, and industrial practice. In short, this seminar is organized around an interest in games not only as experiences, but as stuff. This proposed seminar builds on recent work by games archivists, historians, and labor experts and should help position game studies in broader conversation with media studies work on material culture and history. We will use a collaborative, workshop-based format intended to help participants move towards publication of their work and to encourage collaboration among both those who have contributed papers and others who attend.