Comparative Media Studies

Established as a graduate program in 1999–2000, Comparative Media Studies (CMS) infuses the study of contemporary media (film, television, digital systems) with a broad historical understanding of older forms of human expression. The program embraces theoretical and interpretive principles drawn from the central humanistic disciplines of literary study, history, anthropology, art history, and film studies and aims for a comparative synthesis that is responsive to the distinctive emerging media culture of the 21st century. Students in the program are taught to explore the complexity of our media environment by learning to think across media and to see beyond the boundaries imposed by older, medium-specific approaches to the study of audiovisual and literary forms.

The comparative and cross-disciplinary nature of both the graduate and undergraduate programs is embodied in a faculty drawn from the Art and Architecture; Anthropology; Foreign Languages and Literatures; History; Literature; Music and Theater Arts; Philosophy; Writing and Humanistic Studies; Science, Technology, and Society; Media Arts and Sciences; Political Science; and Urban Studies and Planning programs. Approximately 35 faculty members teach subjects in Comparative Media Studies.

The graduate program consists of a two-year course of study leading to a master of science degree. The program aims to prepare students for careers in fields such as journalism, teaching and research, government and public service, museum work, information science, corporate consulting, media industry marketing and management, and educational technology. Our recent graduates are working in such fields as higher education, teaching, journalism, and photojournalism, as well as at media and technology consulting firms and media production companies. The undergraduate program, approved as an interdisciplinary major in spring 2003, mirrors the graduate program in concept and ambition and has been experiencing steady growth since its inception.

Research

Themes

Like the academic program, CMS research themes cross academic disciplines and involve both traditional and emerging communications media, establishing a focus for public presentations, research projects, and curricular initiatives. The primary research themes are:

- Convergence Culture—understanding the new media landscape
- The Education Arcade—the pedagogical potentials of computer and video games
- Innovation and diversity in game design
- Digital databases and humanities computing
- New media literacies
- Media in transition

- The future of civic media
- Global culture

Projects

The Singapore-MIT GAMBIT Game Lab, a five-year research initiative that addresses important challenges faced by the global digital-game research community and industry, focuses on identifying and solving research problems using a multidisciplinary approach that can be applied by Singapore's digital-game industry. The initiative, funded by Singapore's Media Development Authority, builds collaborations between MIT students, faculty, and staff and their counterparts in Singapore, who bring a range of competencies—including technical skills, conceptual design, art creation, and game design—to translate the research into small, polished, playable games. Lab spaces specifically designed to facilitate the multidisciplinary interaction, creative exchange, and agile software development necessary for this work are nearing completion in Building NE25 and will be operational by the middle of July 2007.

The MIT Center for Future Civic Media is a new joint effort that bridges two established programs at MIT—the MIT Media Lab, known for inventing alternate technical futures, and CMS, which identifies the cultural and social potential of media change. Made possible by a four-year grant from the Knight Foundation, the Center for Future Civic Media will work to create technical and social systems for sharing, prioritizing, organizing, and acting on information. Examples include developing new technologies that support and foster civic media and political action, serving as an international resource for the study and analysis of civic media, and coordinating community-based test beds both in the United States and internationally. Faculty and staff are currently setting up the center so that research can begin in the fall.

The Convergence Culture Consortium (C3) expanded from three to five corporate partners, adding Fidelity Investments and Yahoo! to the three initial partners (Turner Broadcasting, MTV, and ad agency GSD&M). C3 tracks new forms of storytelling, advertising, and branding; analyzes them; and examines how they can be placed in a larger cultural and commercial context. The project has released eight white papers on topics including the cultural value of fans, player motivation in massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs), alternate reality gaming, college dorm media consumption, product placement and advergaming, digital rights management, and mobile entertainment. In addition, C3 hosts an annual public conference (Futures of Entertainment) as well as a closed-door symposium for sponsors, maintains an extensive and respected blog, publishes a weekly newsletter of news and critical commentary, offers onsite briefings and brainstorms, and provides speakers for industry events. The central focus for the coming year will be "spreadable media," exploring the ways that consumers enhance the value of brands and content by "spreading" them across the media landscape. The consortium continues to attract new members and to generate significant interest from the public and industry alike.

The New Media Literacies project, sponsored by the MacArthur Foundation, completed Phase 1 of its operations and started Phase 2 on July 1, 2006. The first phase sought

to identify core social skills and cultural competencies young people need to fully participate in the emerging media culture and piloted pedagogical approaches for integrating those skills into in-school and after-school programs. During the second phase, the project is developing a range of curricular materials, including a case book for media ethics (in collaboration with Harvard's Project Zero), a library of short digital films and other resources focusing on the creative and ethical choices that media makers face, and a series of initiatives designed to show the fit between media literacy principles and traditional school content. The project is part of a larger MacArthur initiative involving coordination and collaboration with researchers at the University of Southern California, the University of California–Berkeley, the University of Wisconsin–Madison, the University of Chicago, and American University. This larger initiative is designed to explore the social and educational opportunities of the new media landscape.

The Education Arcade seeks to identify the pedagogical potential of games as a medium and to find ways to use games for learning both in and outside of the classroom. This year, the Education Arcade continued work on its Learning Games to Go initiative with support from Maryland Public Television through a grant from the Federal Star Schools program. It is developing four online games, each with mobile components, for middle school math and literacy learning targeted toward underserved populations. Team members are also developing augmented reality games with projects using such simulations as an avian flu outbreak to test response scenarios and a planned bioterror lab to model the spread of conflicting ideas in a dispersed civic debate.

Locally, CMS and the Academic Computing group in Information Services and Technology have collaborated to create MIT Ghost (formerly Virtual MIT), an MMOG environment based on student life at MIT. The project targets incoming MIT freshmen and takes the idea of an open university to the next level. By creating an online representation of MIT and its various cultural communities, it will make MIT culture more accessible to incoming students. Most recently, the Education Arcade has been exploring questions relating to high schoolers' use of social networking, games, and new media in their academic studies. This research, sponsored by NBC News, will inform NBC's development of iCue, a suite of online learning tools and games that give students access to the archives of NBC, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post* as supplements to their advance placement studies.

Now in its sixth year, the Metamedia digital archive project, sponsored by the d'Arbeloff Fund for Excellence in Education, continues to develop interactive media archives for use across a broad range of topics in the humanities and social sciences. Intended to serve as rich media modules that teachers and students can use to explore a variety of subject areas; create, annotate, and share rhetorical multimedia collections; and collaborate over the Internet, Metamedia archives have been integrated into a variety of curricula, fostering students' critical analysis of historical and contemporary media texts. Recent projects include the Historical Punch Archive, the Archive on the Revolving Door as a Metaphor, the Contemporary French Arts Archive, the Belgian Contemporary Culture Archive, and the Asian Games Village Archive, strengthening the international reach of the project and making the most of the project's decision to develop a system based on widely accepted open standards. A new digital archive project, Repertoire,

integrates Web 2.0 technologies such as social tagging and mashups with Google Earth. Two new projects, US-Iran Relations–Missed Opportunities (in collaboration with the Center for International Studies and others) and the Global Shakespeare Archive, use this digital archive framework, providing a new sustainable model for digital scholarship and education in the humanities and beyond.

Fundraising

CMS dramatically increased its fundraising activity in AY2007. A continued goal of activities this past year was to develop and implement sustainable and scalable business, teaching, and research models within which faculty and graduate students could explore interdisciplinary research themes and educational priorities. As it continues to solidify administrative and academic infrastructures, CMS has focused on cultivating larger scale research projects and gifts from corporations, individuals, and foundations.

Singapore's Media Development Authority and CMS launched the new Singapore-MIT GAMBIT Game Lab, focused on promoting innovation in computer and video games. CMS received the first installment of the $12 million committed over five years.

The Knight Foundation awarded CMS and the Media Lab $5 million over four years to create the Center for Future Civic Media.

Phase 2 of the New Media Literacies project launched in July, and the MacArthur Foundation awarded CMS the first $600,000 of the $1.8 million committed over three years.

Two new members joined the Convergence Culture Consortium, increasing the total number of members to five. The consortium raised $350,000 in membership dues in FY2007 and is in discussion with other potential members for FY2008.

The Education Arcade continues to benefit from the $550,000 multiyear Star Schools grant as part of its ongoing collaboration with Maryland Public Television. NBC News awarded $390,000 to the Education Arcade to conduct research on one of its new educational tools, NBC iCue. The Education Arcade is also in discussions with the Smithsonian to develop games for its website, with WGBH to produce civics games as part of a Corporation for Public Broadcasting initiative, and with Fablevision to design an interactive website for Children's Hospital. In addition, the Hewlett Foundation has expressed interest in a white paper about the potential use of games for language learning. The Education Arcade has partnered with faculty in Singapore to apply for grants sponsored by Singapore's Ministry of Education to develop games with pedagogical potential.

The fund recognizing outstanding media productions by CMS undergraduates, established in honor of longtime CMS program administrator Chris Pomiecko, continued to grow, with new contributions amounting to $2,500.

CMS received the first $100,000 installment from an anonymous donor who pledged $500,000 over five years in support of the CMS program. The new fund supported an

international graduate student and a postdoctorate fellow as well as various program activities.

The Greg Shaw Technologist in Residence Fund continues to support new technologists. Greg Shaw, an alumnus in electrical engineering and computer science and an early supporter of the CMS program, established the fund.

Gerald Katell, an MIT alumnus and CMS Advisory Group member, continued payment on the $1 million pledged to endow the Gerald L. Katell (1962) Fellowship and Education Fund in Comparative Media Studies.

Governance

The Comparative Media Studies program has two directors: Peter de Florez professor of humanities Henry Jenkins (Literature and CMS) and Professor William Uricchio (Literature, Foreign Languages and Literatures, and CMS). The program is under the auspices of three humanities programs: Literature, Writing and Humanistic Studies, and Foreign Languages and Literatures. Administratively, CMS is housed in the Literature program. The program is governed by a steering committee jointly chaired by Professors Jenkins and Uricchio. Other committee members for AY2007 were Professor James Buzard, head of literature; Professor Jing Wang, head of Foreign Languages and Literatures; Professor James Paradis, head of Writing and Humanistic studies; and Professor Janet Sonenberg, head of Music and Theater Arts. A faculty committee, composed of all affiliated teaching and research faculty, also guides CMS.

Staffing

The CMS staff more than doubled in AY2007 and underwent several changes in its configuration. In order to manage the increased volume of academic and research activities, CMS hired an administrator of academic programs, Leila Kinney; a systems administrator, Rik Eberhardt; and a financial assistant, Ximena Forero-Irizarry. Two postdocs, Joshua Green and Alice Robison, joined CMS in the fall to help with teaching and research activities. Green also manages the Convergence Culture Consortium. Philip Tan, executive director of the Singapore-MIT GAMBIT Game Lab, joined CMS as a visiting lecturer. Tan hired two new staff members, Matthew Weise, producer, and Clara Fernandez-Vara, research associate. Tan is currently searching for a postdoc and financial administrative assistant and will be hiring a programmer, artist, and developer in the fall.

The New Media Literacies project is currently searching for a new research manager and an outreach coordinator. Convergence Culture Consortium will be hiring a program manager in the late summer, and the Education Arcade has hired a technologist, Ravi Purushotma, and a research associate, Jason Haas. The Center for Future Civic Media will be hiring a project manager, technology coordinator, outreach coordinator, and three postdocs later this summer. CMS hired Geoffrey Long as communications coordinator and is currently searching for an administrative assistant to serve as undergraduate administrator and a computer support assistant to work with the CMS systems administrator. Generoso Fierro, who was the CMS undergraduate

administrator, now handles CMS and GAMBIT events. Amanda Ford replaced Evan Hinkle as the CMS administrative assistant.

Postdoctoral Program

The two scholars appointed in the first year of the CMS postdoctoral program made significant contributions to teaching and research. Joshua Green (Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia) taught two courses, one on creative industries and another on media in cultural context, while also managing the Convergence Culture Consortium, for which he organized a successful two-day conference, Futures of Entertainment. Alice Robison (University of Wisconsin–Madison) contributed to the New Media Literacies project and taught a course on video game theory and analysis as well as one on media literacy. She also organized several professional working groups, the MIT Videogame Theorists Group, the Harvard Interactive Media Group, and the Boston chapter of Games for Change, a national organization devoted to the development of games for social change. Green and Robison have been reappointed for the coming academic year, and CMS anticipates the appointment of additional postdoctoral scholars in the Singapore-MIT GAMBIT Game Lab and the Center for Future Civic Media.

Graduate Admissions

The CMS graduate program, which offers a master of science degree, continues to thrive. Of the current cohort of 21 students, nine are women and six are international, including students from Belgium, China, Colombia, Israel, and Pakistan. Ten students completed their theses and received degrees in June, and four others were scheduled to receive their degrees in September.

There was a 23 percent increase in applications to the graduate program, for a total of 83, as well as an impressive yield of 80 percent. Of the 15 admitted students, 12 enrolled in fall 2007, including three international students (from Costa Rica, India, and Iran), nine women, and one participant in the MIT Summer Research Program (MSRP), a diversity outreach initiative sponsored by the Graduate Students Office. The three students who declined admission each elected to pursue the PhD instead (one at New York University and two at Berkeley), which confirmed the sense that our main (perhaps our only) competition is from PhD programs. All of the 12 admitted students received tuition and a stipend for the academic year as research assistants for the sponsored research projects hosted by CMS. The graduate homepage is http://cms.mit.edu/academics/gradprogram/.

Undergraduate Education

The undergraduate program reached a milestone in March, when it received a very favorable review from the Committee on the Undergraduate Program, with participation from the chair of the Committee on Curricula. Established as MIT's first full interdisciplinary major beginning in the 2003 fall term on a five-year, experimental basis, the CMS major will be presented to the faculty for a vote of approval in fall 2007, as the final step in this process. A survey of current majors and recent alumni conducted for the undergraduate major review revealed a high degree of satisfaction with the program to date and an appreciation of its distinctive role at MIT. One recent graduate characterized

the program this way: "As an institution recognized internationally for its excellence in the sciences and engineering, MIT had the ability to put humanities in the most unique, most relevant, and most realistic context. …CMS at MIT combines all the best aspects of MIT along with a humanities twist. This kind of program can't exist anywhere else in the framework it does at MIT."

Among the 28 students who graduated between 2003 and 2006 are video game producers, educational and social networking software designers, and marketers of electronic music and health care software at companies including Microsoft, Google, Electronic Arts, and Blink Music Studios. As of June 2007, CMS had 21 majors, 8 minors, and 52 concentrators. Undergraduate involvement in research continues to be strong. Eleven students were paid or received credit for Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program projects during the academic year, and another 11 will participate in summer 2007 in the newly established Singapore-MIT GAMBIT Game Lab. The undergraduate homepage is http://cms.mit.edu/academics/undergrad/.

Visiting Scholars and Research Affiliates

The teaching, research, and publications of the CMS faculty and research staff address the dynamic reconfiguration of the media landscape that is taking place beyond MIT, and a growing number of international and national scholars have been attracted to the program as visiting scholars and research affiliates. Tomoyuki Iino (Sophia University in Tokyo) worked on a comparative study of American poetry and music from the mid-1940s to the late 1970s. Professor Iino presented his work during Independent Activities Period in January. While visiting at CMS, Frank Fleerackers, dean of the law faculty at Leuven University in Belgium, professor of law and conflict analysis at the Brussels University (KUB) faculty of law, and professor of alternative dispute resolution at the European Academy of Legal Theory, worked on a book about conflict analysis and the potential uses of new media as a means of building consensus around new laws and legal interpretations.

Christopher Weaver, who received his SM from MIT and later founded Bethesda Softworks, a leading software entertainment company, again offered a very popular project-based course on video game design as a visiting scholar. Frank Espinosa, the creator of the critically acclaimed comic book series *Rocketo* and a Martin Luther King Jr. visiting scholar, offered a series of two classes on character design and world-making. He has been reappointed for academic year 2008.

CMS hosted two visiting students as well during AY2007. Ksenia Prasolova, sponsored by Fulbright, worked on her PhD thesis for the Department of Foreign Literature of Immanuel Kant State University of Russia (Kaliningrad) on literary theory and fan fiction through the Harry Potter phenomenon. Cabell Gathman is currently a PhD student in sociology at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, and her research concerns technologically mediated social interaction, particularly how people use multiple technological channels (for example, email, instant messaging, MMOGs, and social networking sites) to develop and maintain relationships and construct gender identities in online spaces.

In addition to hosting visiting scholars, CMS maintained research affiliations with numerous scholars during AY2007. Alex Chisholm is codirector of the Education Arcade at MIT, and over the past seven years he has collaborated on research, product, and program development with Microsoft, Electronic Arts, Sony Pictures Imageworks, the American Theatre Wing, LeapFrog, NBC Universal, and the MacArthur Foundation. For the Education Arcade, Jason Haas focused on the forthcoming website from the MIT–NBC Educational Research Initiative, iCue.

Parmesh Shahani, former research director of the Convergence Culture Consortium, relocated to India this academic year to head the incubation lab at the Indian corporation Mahindra but continued to maintain close links with CMS and contributed several articles to the consortium's weekly newsletter. Grant McCracken, who also is affiliated with C3, published two books, *Culture and Consumption II* and *Flock and Flow*, both with Indiana University Press. Robert Kozinets (York University, Toronto) presented a paper titled "New Voyages and the Paradox of Prosumption" at the C3 consortium partners' meeting in April 2007. McCracken and Kozinets also served on CMS thesis committees.

Song Shi's research while at MIT focused on mobile media, the Creative Commons in China, and plans for a virtual world during the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Christopher York, digital library consultant for MIT's HyperStudio project, developed tools for automatic extraction of dates and locations from historical corpora (for example, 19th-century Boston city directories and period maps) and explored ways to plot and analyze the resulting data using geographic information system mapping and timelines.

Events and Programs

C3 Futures of Entertainment

As advertisers look for new ways to engage audiences, content creators search for new audiences, and audiences seek new ways to connect with culture, the nature of what counts as "entertainment" is rapidly changing. We are seeing the blurring of aesthetic and technological distinctions between media platforms, of "advertising" and "content," and of "creator" and "consumer," and the Futures of Entertainment conference brought together key industry leaders who both shape and must respond to these new directions in our culture. The conference considered developments such as user-generated content, transmedia storytelling, the rise of mobile media, and the emergence of social networking. More information about the conference can be found at http://convergenceculture.org/futuresofentertainment/2006/.

Beyond Broadcasting: From Participatory Culture to Participatory Democracy

Sponsored by CMS, Harvard Law School's Berkman Center for Internet and Society, and Yale Law School's Information Society Project, this conference brought together industry experts, academic leaders, and political activists to explore the means, the message, and the meaning of the post-midterm, pre-presidential YouTube moment. The conference focused on how participatory culture puts the tools of media creation in the hands of citizens themselves and explored the implications for political culture and the democratic process.

MIT Short Film Festival

Research associate Kurt Fendt (Foreign Languages and Literatures and CMS) organized the third annual presentation of new European short films gathered from festivals and European film schools.

MiT5: creativity, ownership and collaboration in the digital age

Nearly 300 scholarly presentations helped more than 500 attendees explore the technical and social processes by which digital technologies make, reproduce, challenge, and enlarge culture. The conference addressed such questions as: What constitutes fair use of another's intellectual property? What ethical issues are posed when sounds, images, and stories move from one culture or subculture to another—or when materials created by a community or religious or ethnic tradition are appropriated by technologically powerful outsiders? What constitutes creativity and originality in expressive formats based on sampling and remixing? What obligations do artists have to those who inspired and informed their work, and how much creative freedom should they exercise over their borrowed or shared materials? More information can be found at http://web.mit.edu/comm-forum/mit5/subs/media_in_transition.html.

Communications Forum

Directed by Professor David Thorburn, the Communications Forum sponsors lectures, panel discussions, and conferences on all aspects of technology and communications, public policy, and media in transition. The forum sponsored several panel discussions that attracted large audiences from the academic community at MIT and in the Boston area. This year's speakers included Yale law professor Yochai Benkler, science fiction writer and MIT adjunct professor Joe Haldeman, media activist Dan Gillmor, and columnist Alex Beam. The Communications Forum cohosted the fifth Media in Transition conference with CMS. For more information about the forum, see http://web.mit.edu/comm-forum.

Colloquia

CMS sponsored weekly colloquia designed to give our graduate students and the academic community at MIT a rich and challenging intellectual experience and opportunities to interact educationally and socially. Topics included "Social Data Analysis," "Marketing in the Age of Consumer Empowerment," "World Wrestling Entertainment and American Professional Wrestling," "New Media and Art," "How the Soap Opera Genre Is Changing with the Times," and "Ambiguity, Process, and Information Content in Minimal Music" More information can be found at http://cms.mit.edu/events/colloquiaforums.php.

Honors and Awards

Professor Jenkins's *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* won the 2007 Kovacs Book Prize, an annual award given by the Society for Cinema and Media Studies.

Education Arcade project manager Scot Osterweil's *The Road to Zoombiniville* was the top-rated presentation at this year's Serious Games Summit. The summit was part of the Game Developers Conference held in San Francisco.

CMS and the Media Lab were awarded the top prize in the Knight News Challenge: a $5 million grant to fund the Center for Future Civic Media. The center will experiment with new technologies to empower community news and enhance democratic participation.

Professor David Thorburn (Literature and CMS) was awarded a Fulbright fellowship to support a research and teaching stay in the Netherlands.

Assistant professor Sarah Brouillette (Literature and CMS) was awarded a 2007 Rockefeller Humanities Fellowship (at the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage) for her project "Theorizing Cultural Heritage."

Publications

Several faculty members affiliated with CMS published books and media projects this year, including Professor Jenkins with three books: *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*; *Fans, Bloggers and Games: Media Consumers in a Digital Age*; and *The Wow Climax: Tracing the Emotional Impact of Popular Culture* (all published by New York University Press). Senior lecturer in literature Wyn Kelly edited two books: *A Companion to Herman Melville* (Oxford University Press) and *Herman Melville, Benito Cereno* (Bedford/St. Martin's Press). Assistant professor Sarah Brouillette published *Postcolonial Writers and the Global Literary Marketplace* (Palgrave). Associate professor of history Jeff Ravel edited Volume 36 of *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, an annual publication of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (Johns Hopkins University Press). Senior lecturer Edward Barrett (Writing and Humanistic Studies) published a narrative poem, "Kevin White" (Pressed Wafer).

S.C. Fang professor of Chinese language and culture Jing Wang (Foreign Languages and Literatures) published a paperback edition of her edited volume *Locating China: Space, Place, and Popular Culture* (Routledge). CMS visiting scholar Christopher Weaver was awarded one patent domestically and two patents internationally in motion-controlled security devices and spatial proximity databases. Assistant professor Jay Scheib (Music and Theater Arts) staged six productions in national and international venues: Daniel Veronese's *Women Dreamt Horses* in New York; Saska Rakef's new play *Shelter* in New York and Ljubljana, Slovenia; an adaptation of Shakespeare's *All's Well that Ends Well* titled *All Good Everything Good* in Bologna, Italy; Irene Popovic's opera *Mozart Luster Lustik* in Belgrade, Serbia; the live-cinema performance work *This Place Is a Desert* in Boston (traveling to New York in the fall); and the opera saga *Kommander Kobayashi* in Saarbrücken, Germany.

Henry Jenkins
Director
Peter de Florez Professor of Humanities

William Uricchio
Director
Professor of Comparative Media Studies

More information about Comparative Media Studies can be found at http://cms.mit.edu/.