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 30 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 fields such as higher education, teaching, journalism, photojournalism, and at media and technology consulting firms and media production companies. The undergraduate program, formally approved by the Institute's faculty as an interdisciplinary major this academic year, mirrors the graduate program in concept and ambition and has been experiencing steady growth since its inception. As in the past, CMS has an impressive roster of funded research projects and outreach activities.

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 agendas, 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
- Informed citizenship and the culture of democracy
- Global culture and media
- Media in transition
- Transforming humanities education

These research themes infuse our academic program, help to shape our outreach activities, and attest to our commitment to bridging disciplines within the Institute, and between it and the world. The themes find tangible form in the research projects described below.

Projects

Our newest project, the MIT Center for Future Civic Media (http://civic.mit.edu/), was established in 2007 as a joint effort between the MIT Media Lab and CMS, bridging two established programs at MIT—one known for inventing alternate technical futures and the other for identifying the cultural and social potential of media change. Funded by a four-year grant from the Knight Foundation, the center is developing 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. The center hosts weekly research meetings at MIT, periodic community dinners and forums, and the annual Knight News Challenge winners' conference in June.

Project New Media Literacies (NML; http://www.newmedialiteracies.org/), sponsored by the MacArthur Foundation, explores participatory culture with an eye toward identifying the social and cultural skills that we think young people should learn and be given the chance to practice in order to successfully navigate a contemporary media culture. It is our belief that young people need to both make and reflect upon media and in the process, acquire important skills in teamwork, leadership, problem solving, collaboration, brainstorming, communications, and creating projects. NML is developing a range of materials, including interactive learning challenges that offer teens a rich variety of ways to explore and practice skills needed in the new media culture, a series of teachers' strategy guides designed to show the fit between media literacy principles and traditional school content, and a case book for media ethics (in collaboration with Harvard's Project Zero). NML is part of a larger initiative that MacArthur has launched to explore social and educational opportunities in the new media landscape, in coordination and collaboration with other researchers at Indiana University; Global Kids; Common Sense Media; the University of California, Berkeley; and the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

The Education Arcade (http://www.educationarcade.org/) 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 (LG2G) initiative with support from Maryland Public Television through a grant from the Federal Star Schools program. It is developing an online game for middle school math and literacy learning targeted toward underserved populations. Team members are also developing augmented reality games with projects using simulations such 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. The Education Arcade continues to explore questions surrounding high schoolers' use of social networking, games, and new media in their academic studies. This research, sponsored by NBC News, has informed NBC's development of iCue, a

suite of online learning tools and games that give students access to the archives of NBC as a supplement to their advance placement studies. In the past year the arcade has also explored the use of games in promoting compassion and altruism as part of Children's Hospital Boston's Generation Cures initiative. In addition, the arcade is designing a social networking game intended to teach English to Spanish speakers in conjunction with the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation's Open Language Learning Initiative. Finally, with a grant from the National Science Foundation, the arcade is creating a series of multiplayer games that engage students with issues of data and data collection.

The Singapore-MIT GAMBIT Game Lab (http://gambit.mit.edu/), 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 this research into small, polished, playable games. Sister laboratories in Cambridge and Singapore facilitate the necessary multidisciplinary interaction, creative exchange, and agile software development among GAMBIT's international researchers, students, and developers.

The Convergence Culture Consortium (C3; http://www.convergenceculture.org/) includes as its corporate partners Yahoo!, Turner Broadcasting, MTV, and ad agency GSD&M. C3's mission is to track new ways of storytelling, advertising, and branding; analyze them; and examine how they can be placed in a larger artistic and commercial context. The project's team members have authored a series of white papers, operate two project-related blogs, and hosted a highly influential conference on the topic of media convergence (Futures of Entertainment). The consortium continues to attract new members and to generate significant interest from the public and industry alike.

The Metamedia archive project (http://metamedia.mit.edu/), a collaboration among CMS, Literature, and Foreign Languages and Literatures, continues to develop interactive archive models for use across a broad range of topics in the humanities and social sciences. The project, sponsored by the d'Arbeloff Fund for Excellence in Education, is now in its seventh year. Intended to serve as modules that teachers and students can use to explore rich subject areas, create rhetorical multimedia documents, and collaborate over the internet, Metamedia archives have stretched instructors' and students' notions of textbook, research paper, and classroom. Recent projects include the Comédie Française Performance Archive, US-Iran Relations: Missed Opportunities, the Beijing Film Academy Animation Archive, and Asian Shakespeare in Performance, strengthening the international reach of the project and making the most of the project's decision to use an open standard system.

Fundraising

In AY2008, CMS benefited from its many funding initiatives and now enjoys unprecedented financial stability. This fundraising success is due to our sustained focus over the past few years on developing large-scale and long-term research projects and

gifts. We made significant progress on our research this year and held several large conferences to disseminate information. We also produced papers, books, and media projects that will soon be published and/or made accessible to the public. We fully funded all graduate students who were able to participate in the research as part of their education, and we staffed the research initiatives with talented and skilled personnel. The one remaining deficit for CMS is additional faculty to enhance and deepen our existing curriculum and research. We cannot grow any further until we have the faculty necessary to sustain growth.

The Singapore-MIT GAMBIT Game Lab received its second installment of $2,243,000 to continue researching and creating games. After an initial ramp-up period, GAMBIT moved forward during the past year with a full staff, several faculty-led research projects, and a vibrant summer program in which more than 40 Singaporean students residing in Cambridge to work and study with MIT students, faculty, and staff.

The Center for Future Civic Media began operations in June after receiving its first installment of $1.2 million. This year saw the hiring of staff including a research director, research associate, and a part-time conference coordinator; the launch of a newly developed website; the assignment of three CMS research associates to the project; and a successful June conference that brought all Knight grantees together. The second installment of $1.5 million is due in late summer.

Phase 2 of Project New Media Literacies received its second installment of the $1.8 million committed over three years. This year the project solidified its research, restaffed, and began disseminating its findings.

Three members renewed their membership with the Convergence Culture Consortium for another two years, and two new international members are in the process of joining, bringing our total fundraising to date to $1,120,000. We also charged admission for the first time at the annual Futures of Entertainment conference, generating an $8,000 surplus.

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 another $470,000 to the Education Arcade to continue research on NBC's new iCue educational tool. The Education Arcade also subcontracted with Fablevision to design an interactive website for Children's Hospital Boston and received funding from the Hewlett Foundation to develop games for language learning. The latter two projects are administered through the Department of Urban Studies and Planning (DUSP) to help ease the administrative strain on CMS.

CMS received the second $100,000 installment from an anonymous donor who pledged $500,000 over five years in support of the CMS program. The new fund supported three international graduate students and allowed us to set up a professional development fund for thesis research and for CMS students to travel to professional conferences.

This year, CMS held the first Julius Schwartz Memorial Lecture, which featured Neil Gaiman and sold out. The Julius Schwartz Memorial Fund, established several years

ago, has become self-sustaining as a result of revenues received from this lecture. We are currently securing speakers for future years and anticipate similar success.

The fund recognizing outstanding media productions by CMS undergraduates, graduates, and the MIT community established in honor of longtime CMS program administrator Chris Pomiecko continued to grow, with an annual endowment income of almost $1,000.

Greg Shaw, an electrical engineering and computer science alumnus and early supporter of the CMS program who established the Greg Shaw Technologist in Residence Fund, donated another $5,000 to CMS. The endowment fund continues to support new technologists, including a communications manager and a computer support technician.

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. We are able to support an international student annually.

We received various gifts from donors who were impressed by the program, including Sloan alumnus Steve Memishian, who donated $10,000 for general programmatic use. Together with funding from other sources, we were able to support an additional graduate student in the class of 2010.

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 AY2008 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 staff continued to grow at a rapid rate in AY2008 to support the increased volume of research and our academic programs. The majority of the staff positions were funded by CMS sponsored research revenues. To support our administrator of academic programs, we hired an undergraduate administrator, Becky Shepardson, who is overseeing catalogue coordination, grade submissions, the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP) and advising undergraduates. We also hired a part-time office assistant, AJ Liberto, and will be hiring a part-time communications manager. GAMBIT hired a prototyping manager, Marleigh Norton; a lead producer, Sara Verrilli; a technical director, Andrew Grant; and an art director, Jason Beene. GAMBIT currently houses a postdoctoral associate, Doris Rusch, and a lecturer jointly appointed with the Program

in Writing and Humanistic Studies, Jesper Juul. Project New Media Literacies also increased its staff, hiring a new research director, Erin Reilly; an outreach coordinator, Jenna McWilliams; and a project manager, Kelly Whitney. The Center for Future Civic Media hired a research director, Ellen Hume (through the Media Lab); a research associate, Geeta Dayal; and a technology consultant, Noah Blumenson-Cook. We have plans to hire a postdoctoral associate this year, and we hired a new research manager, Daniel Pereira, for C3. C3 also houses a postdoctoral fellow, Esteban Ollé.

Postdoctoral Program

The CMS postdoctoral program recruits younger scholars and media makers to support both teaching and research activities. Continuing appointments were awarded to Alice Robinson (working in the area of games, media literacy, and learning) and Joshua Green (working in the areas of creative industries and convergence culture); in addition, Esteban Ollé (Spain) was appointed to work in the area of creative industries, and Doris Rusch (Austria) has been appointed to work in the area of games.

Graduate Program

The graduate program, which offers a master of science degree, continues to thrive. Of the current cohort of 20 students, 13 are women and six are international, including students from India, Costa Rica, and Iran. Eleven students will receive degrees in 2008. This year Kevin Driscoll, CMS 2009, received the Hugh Hampton Young Memorial Fellowship, and incoming student Michelle Moon Lee was awarded an Ida Green Fellowship. There was a 17% increase in applications to the graduate program this year, for a total of 97, as well as a yield of 100%. The 10 admitted students who will enroll in fall 2008 include one international student (Belgium) and seven women.

Graduates of the CMS master's program are currently employed at companies such as HBO, Midway Studios, Nickelodeon, PBS, WHERE, and Greenovate, in positions such as creative strategist, game designer, television producer, and project manager. Others have gone on to PhD programs in communications and media studies at such schools as the University of Southern California and the University of Wisconsin, Madison, as well as MIT's Program in Science, Technology, and Society. Graduates are now in faculty positions at Simon Fraser University, the University of Michigan, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Parmesh Shahani's CMS master's thesis was published as *Globalization, Love and (Be)longing in Contemporary India* (Sage, 2008). For more information on the CMS graduate program, see http://cms.mit.edu/academics/graduate_program.php.

Undergraduate Program

After receiving unanimous votes of support from the Committee on the Undergraduate Program (CUP) in March 2007 and the Committee on Curricula (CoC) in fall 2007, the proposal to make the SB in comparative media studies a permanent major was forwarded to the Faculty Policy Committee in January 2008. The final step was a vote by the entire MIT faculty on April 16, in which the SB program again received unanimous approval. The change in the program's status from an experimental to a permanent major will be effective for the 2008–2009 academic year.

Thirty-seven students have graduated from the CMS undergraduate program from its inception as an experimental major in 2003 through 2008. CMS graduates have gone on to careers in global digital commerce, video game production, marketing, and graphics and social networking software design at companies such as Nike, Electronic Arts, Microsoft, Google, and the Congressional Quarterly; others have pursued studies in theater arts or law school. As of May 2008, CMS had 18 majors (nine graduating in 2008), 13 minors, and 53 concentrators. Undergraduate involvement in research continues to be strong. During AY2008, student participation in UROP was triple that of the prior year, and 62 students were paid or received credit for UROP projects. Another 12 students will participate in summer 2008 in CMS's Singapore-MIT GAMBIT Game Lab. For further information about the CMS undergraduate program, see http://cms.mit.edu/academics/undergrad_program.php.

Events and Programs

CMS maintained a high level of outreach activities with numerous lectures, conferences, and other activities. Where possible, these events (as well as our colloquia and Communication Forum lectures) are recorded and podcast by way of our website. Most of the research groups also have active and well-trafficked blogs. The year's activities included:

- "Media Literacy: Creating and Learning in a Media-Saturated Culture" (October 27), a one-day conference organized by CMS and HOME, Inc., on innovative pedagogical practices that support school reform

- "The Futures of Entertainment 2" (November 16 and 17), a conference on transmediality, ubiquity, and engagement organized by C3

- "CMS Research Fair" (February 28), an event designed to highlight recent CMS research activities and introduce new staff

- "Purple Blurb," a five-part lecture series organized by Nick Montfort (Writing and Humanistic Studies and CMS) and cosponsored by CMS

- "It's Never Lupus!: Fox's *House, M.D.* and the New Procedural Drama" (February 26), with Katie Jacobs, coproducer of *House, M.D.*

- "Slightly More Than Expected by a Band of Novelists: On How and Why a Group of Writers Called Wu Ming Set Out to Disrupt Italian (nay, European) Literature and Popular Culture (and Then Came to Boston to Brag About It!)" (April 2), with Wu Ming 1

- The 10th Annual Media Spectacle (April 28), a competitive showcase of MIT-produced media

- The First Annual Julius Schwartz Lecture (May 23), with Neil Gaiman (best-selling novelist, screenwriter, and comics luminary)

- The MIT Short Film Festival, organized by Kurt Fendt (Foreign Languages and Literatures and CMS) and Karen Verschooren (CMS), presenting new European short films gathered from festivals and European film schools

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. Presenters and topics included Chris Csikszentmihalyi, Henry Jenkins, Beth Noveck, and Ethan Zuckerman, "What Is Civic Media?"; Ian Bogost and Mario Armstrong, "Games and Civic Engagement"; the creators and producers of *Heroes*, "'Appointment TV' to 'Engagement TV'?"; John Romano, "Prime Time in Transition"; Eggo Mueller, Roberta Pearson, and William Uricchio, "Global Television"; Yochai Benkler and Cass Sunstein, "Our World Digitized"; Lance Bennett and Alan Khazei, "Youth and Civic Engagement"; and Thomas Malone, "Collective Intelligence." 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. Presenters and topics included Andrew Slack, "The Harry Potter Alliance: Harry Potter Is Changing the World"; B. Joseph Pine II, "Technology and Media in the Experience Economy"; Lee Hunt, "Lee Hunt's Best Practices"; Katie Salen, "Being Me: A Game School Project"; Caroline A. Jones, "Video Art History?" (cosponsored with the List Visual Arts Center); Leon Trilling, Michael Stiefel, and Wesley Harris, "Maps, Mental Models and Applications"; John Cayley, "P=R=O=G=R=A=M=M=A=T=O=L=O=G=Y"; Thomas Doherty, "Hollywood's Censor: Joseph Breen and the Production Code Administration"; Mike Rubenstein, Natalie Lent, and Shenja van der Graaf, "Viral Media: Hows and Whys"; Denis Dyack, "An Evening with Denis Dyack"; Gregory Anderson, "The Show Business High Wire Act: Walking the Tightrope Between Studio Filmmaking and Independent Production"; Edward Dimendberg, "Remembering Los Angeles in the Digital Age: Pat O'Neill's *The Decay of Fiction*"; and Chantal Akerman, "Moving Through Time and Space" (cosponsored with the List Visual Arts Center). For more information, see http://cms.mit.edu/events/colloquiaforums.php.

Honors and Awards

Sarah Brouillette (Literature and CMS) was a Rockefeller humanities fellow at the Smithsonian's Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Junot Díaz, the Rudge (1948) and Nancy Allen professor of writing at MIT (Writing and Humanistic Studies and CMS), won the John Sargent First Novel Prize, the National Book Critics Circle Award, and the Pulitzer Prize for *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (Riverhead Books, 2007). Henry Jenkins was awarded the 2007 Choice Outstanding Academic Title for *Convergence Culture*. Erin Reilly (research director, Project New Media Literacies) won a 2007 Leaders in Learning Award from Cable in the Classroom and was named one of the 2007 Top 20 Educators to Watch by the National School Board Association. Doris Rusch, GAMBIT researcher, was Programme Committee cochair for the F.R.O.G. (Future and Reality of Gaming) conference in Vienna, Austria. Jay Scheib (Music and Theater Arts and CMS) was awarded an Obie for *Untitled Mars* and was an MIT Edgerton Award winner.

Visiting Scholars

This year's visitors helped reinforce CMS's commitment to cross-cultural approaches to media study. Visitors included Pilar Lacasa (Spain), Jaroslav Svelch (Czech Republic), Yu-Ling Lu (Taiwan), Rongting Zhou (China), Jesper Juul (Denmark), Mia Consalvo (United States), Frank Espinoza (United States, Martin Luther King Jr. visiting scholar), David Finkel (United States), Mitu Khandaker (United Kingdom), and Chris Weaver (United States).

Publications

CMS-affiliated faculty and staff produced many articles, books, and media projects. Eric Klopfer (DUSP and CMS) published *Augmented Learning: Research and Design of Mobile Educational Games* (MIT Press, 2008). Parmesh Shahani (C3 affiliate and CMS alumni) published *Globalization, Love and (Be)longing in Contemporary India* (Sage, 2008). Edward Barrett (Writing and Humanistic Studies and CMS) published *Bosston* (Pressed Wafer, 2008). Junot Díaz published *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (Riverhead Books, 2007). Diana Henderson (Literature and CMS) edited *Alternative Shakespeares 3* (Routledge, 2008). Henry Jenkins' *Convergence Culture* was translated into Italian, and his *The Wow Climax* was translated into Chinese.

Wyn Kelly (Literature and CMS) edited *"Whole Oceans Away": Melville and the Pacific*, with Jill Barnum and Christopher Sten (Kent State University Press, 2007), and published *Herman Melville: An Introduction* (Blackwell Publishing, 2008). Jeff Ravel published *The Would-Be Commoner: A Tale of Deception, Murder, and Justice in Seventeenth-Century France* (Houghton Mifflin, 2008). Irving Singer (Philosophy and CMS) published *Ingmar Bergman, Cinematic Philosopher: Reflections on His Creativity* (MIT Press, 2007), and MIT Press established The Irving Singer Library, which will include reprinted editions of seven books. Martin Marks (Music and Theater Arts and CMS) composed, performed, and recorded numerous scores for silent films and DVD editions. Jay Scheib directed several theatrical productions in the United States and abroad during 2007–2008.

Henry Jenkins
Director
John E. Burchard 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/.