



## DEPARTMENT OF CINEMATIC ARTS NEWSLETTER

ISSUE #2  
SUMMER 2017

### IT'S IN THE CAN!

#### Letter from the Chair

By: Paula Amad, Associate Professor and Chair  
(phone: 319-335-2827; e-mail: paula-amad@uiowa.edu)

Dear Friends of the Department of Cinematic Arts,

I am pleased to be able to share with you our CAN issue #2 for Summer 2017. It's been another incredibly busy and rewarding year which I hope you will enjoy reading about in the following pages.

We were thrilled to start the year off by welcoming a new faculty member Assistant Professor Chris Goetz to our department. Chris received his Ph.D from University of California, Berkeley (2016), and is a specialist in video games and new media and is building a vital new area of expansion in our department. I am also excited to announce that this Fall we will welcome Associate Professor Christopher Harris to the department as the Head of Film and Video Production. Chris received his M.F.A from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (2000) and is an award-winning experimental filmmaker whose works explore issues of race, the urban landscape, and the medium of film itself.

We are proud to be a Department that is committed to promoting cinema as a bold and innovative art form that makes us think, feel, and act like no other medium can. To that end, this year we hosted a rich array of provocative artist and scholar talks and film screenings through our various forums, including Headroom, Vertical Cinema, the Iowa City International Documentary Film Festival and the Department Colloquium. These events not only enrich the experience of our students but also feed the cinema appetites of the broader community who we always welcome to such events (and who turn up in droves!). And speaking of our local community, we were especially pleased this year to help judge the films of a group of Bettendorf Middle Schoolers thanks to our generous student volunteers.

We are also extremely proud of all the student accomplishments of the past year, including prestigious external and internal awards for M.F.A and Ph.D. students. This was also the second year in a row that one of our undergraduate students, Camden Kent, had their research accepted for presentation at the Undergraduate version of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies annual conference.

Also, please check out our new Mission Statement on our website which encapsulates our goals and principles as we move ahead as a department dedicated to excellence and innovation in research, teaching, and service in the domain of moving image culture.

<https://clas.uiowa.edu/cinematic-arts/about/mission-statement>

And, as always, please feel free to contact me with any feedback or suggestions.

Wishing everyone a great summer!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, likely belonging to Paula Amad.

### IN THIS ISSUE



Current and former Cinematic Arts Ph.D. students and faculty at the Society for Cinema and Media Studies annual conference in Chicago, March 2017. From L to R: Chang-Min Yu, Amos Stailey-Young, Seth Kim, and Paula Amad

# The Department of Cinematic Arts Colloquium Series

## The Conversations that Connect Us

By Chris Goetz, Assistant Professor of Film Studies

Cinematic Arts is a focal point of intellectual activity in a campus community dedicated to sharing exciting new research and creative work in the arts and humanities. This year, the Cinematic Arts Colloquium, a wide-ranging speaker series hosted by the Department of Cinematic Arts, invited a full roster of speakers from a range of disciplines.

These speakers shared their work to an auditorium of students, faculty, and community members both within the department and across campus. Not only does the Colloquium connect us with our film and media-related neighbors on campus, but it establishes film's own presence and continued relevance in other disciplines. Moreover, for the students who attend, it is valuable practice at engaging speakers in an in-person, academic forum.

Part of what is unique about Cinematic Arts is the integration of film and video production with critical film studies. And the colloquium this year thrived off that connection, with special emphasis on the work of critically engaged artists from across disciplines.

Jean-Francois Charles, composer, clarinetist, live electronics designer, and Assistant Professor of Digital Arts and Composition at Ulowa's School of Music debuted a collaboratively written and performed cinematic score for a rarely seen Dziga Vertov film, *The Eleventh Year* (1928, one year before his more famous *Man With a Movie Camera*). Colloquium participants screened the film with the new score, listened intently to Charles' behind-the-scenes account of its production, and engaged actively in a Q&A that ranged from technical to theoretical and historical questions about the relation between score and film.



Jean-Francois Charles presents *The Eleventh Year* (Dziga Vertov, 1928)

In a radical departure from silent Soviet documentary filmmaking, Associate Professor in Animation at Ulowa's School of Art & Art History, Peter Chanthanakone, followed Prof. Charles in a presentation of his own experimental computer animations at the Colloquium. An award-winning animation artist and director, Chanthanakone first screened a selection of his short films and then explained the technical and material challenges facing computer animators more generally.

The Q&A revealed more of the labor that goes into computer animation, which helped connect the deliberately rough aesthetic of Chanthanakone's work with the polished images from big-budget commercial studios like Pixar.



Peter Chanthanakone presents 15 films in 15 years

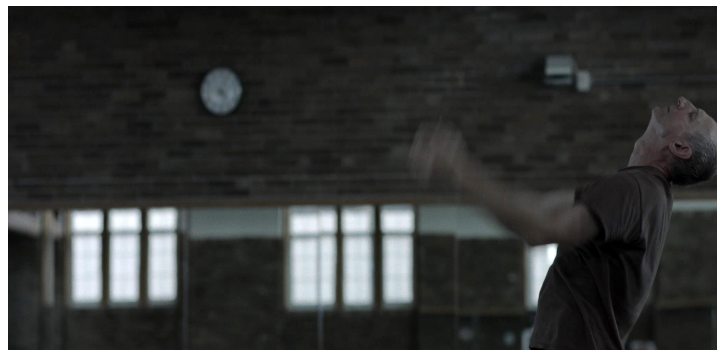
In a presentation that took advantage of the colloquium's flexible format, Daniel Fine--Assistant Professor of Digital Media in Performance in the Department of Theater Arts, Dance, and the Public Arts Cluster--delivered a collaborative and interactive Colloquium performance. Fine transformed the Adler Journalism Building auditorium with the use of side-wall projectors and interactive software for displaying messages from the audience in real time. Fine also discussed past installation work, which explores and blurs the lines between theatrical, cinematic, and new digital storytelling techniques.



Daniel Fine presents *Alternative Screens: Video and Digital Media in Live Performance*

The year was rounded out by our own Mike Gibisser, Assistant Professor of Film & Video Production, Dept. of Cinematic Arts and the Public Digital Arts Cluster. Gibisser screened a preview of his recent film, *World of Facts*, about two sisters who return to their Midwestern hometown after a family tragedy. *World of Facts* is a minimalist character study that explores the simultaneously mundane and dreamlike experience of living day to day amidst the heightened time of mourning. Gibisser discussed his filmmaking practices in a productive Q&A that ranged in topic from the physiognomy of his actors to his creative influences.

Cinematic Arts Colloquium will return next year and is free and open to the public. We look forward to offering these exciting presentations and conversations to our students, faculty, and broader community.



Mike Gibisser's *World of Facts*, (2017)



## Films to Make You Think, Feel, and Act

By Assistant Professor and Head of Film and Video Production Mike Gibisser

The Headroom Screening Series finished another successful season of programming, which included fruitful collaborations with the new student-group, Vertical Cinema, as well as the Iowa City International Documentary Film Festival (IC DOCS). Always committed to its mission to introduce the Iowa City community to work that pushes against the boundaries of traditional Hollywood or narrative fare, this season's visitors were evenly split between artists and curators, allowing us to explore a broad range of contemporary and historical avant-garde film and new media work.

Headroom and Vertical Cinema teamed up in the fall to bring filmmaker and recent Creative Capital awardee, Christopher Harris, to Iowa City, as well as Walker Museum archivist and curator, Ruth Hodgins. Harris presented a full slate of his award-winning films and Hodgins shared a program called, *Living In the Stacks*: A selection of titles from the Ruben/Bentson Moving Image Collection, which included work from artists Maya Deren, Hollis Frampton, and Marcel Broodthaers. In December, we welcomed filmmaker, Sky Hopinka, to share a program of his recent work. Notably, one of his films, *Visions of an Island*, screened for us at Headroom ahead of its official premiere at the Sundance Film Festival the following January; his work continued on to be included in the Whitney Biennial in March.

In the Spring, Headroom collaborated with IC DOCS to present former Ann Arbor Film Festival director David Dinnell's juror show, a thoughtfully curated program of films that effortlessly moved between work that engaged directly with the Iowan landscape (Barry Kimm's 1989 film, *The Measurements of Oxford* and Ana Mendieta's *Untitled: Silueta Series*, 1979), to themes of political activism and history (Zelimir Zilnik's *Black Film* and Jay Lash Cassidy's *Best of May*, 1968), to the poetic and metaphysical (Seamus Harahan's *Auftakt* and Neil Beloufa's *Kempinski*).

## Bringing the best of documentary to Iowa City

By Emily Drummer, M.F.A. graduate student in Film and Video production and director of IC DOCS Festival

The Iowa City International Documentary Film Festival returned to Iowa City this spring with 70 films and videos from across the globe screened between FilmScene, Adler Journalism Building, and RADInc, April 20-22. The Festival, now entering its fifteenth year, is committed to screening short-form nonfiction films that pose radical alternatives to conventional approaches to documentary filmmaking. The festivities included 7 competitive programs; 4 non-competitive programs including programs with films by jurors David Dinnell and Azadeh Navai, Film & Video Production alumnus Rebecca Meyers, and filmmaker Brett Story; and after-parties at RADInc, Motley Cow, and Trumpet Blossom.

IC DOCS was made possible by the hard work of a group of thirteen undergraduate students in the Film Programming for Festivals and Microcinemas course offered by The Department of Cinematic Arts this spring. The students spearheaded every element of the festival--from programming to community outreach to graphic design to film trafficking--and worked tirelessly to guarantee its resounding success. The festival's 2017 winning films were *Se Shin Sa*, dir. Eunhye Hong Kim, *Visions of An Island*, dir. Sky Hopinka, and *Welcome to David Wojnarowicz Week*, dir. Steve Reinke.

Honorable mentions included *Baba Dana Talks to the Wolves*, dir. Ralitsa Doncheva, *Old Hat*, dir. Zach Iannazzi, and *What Happened to Her*, dir. Kristy Guevara-Flanagan.



## The Skies the Limit for New Student Organization

By Carl Elsaesser and Emily Drummer

Vertical Cinema's inaugural year was a tremendous success. We started out the first semester by collaborating with the Headroom Screening Series to bring filmmaker Christopher Harris and curator and archivist Ruth Hodgins to campus. Both programs were well attended from community members and students, but also helped spread the word about our new endeavor and spurred conversations of future programs including the possibility of a program of Scottish female experimental filmmakers coming in the fall! We also teamed up with filmmakers from the University of Boulder and the University of North Carolina, Durham to co-present a program of shorts coming out of our perspective programs. We had guest filmmaker Irene Lusztig swing by to present her feature film, *The Mother Archives* and ended the semester with guest filmmaker Michael Wawzenek who presented a program of his shorts. Spring semester we teamed up with IC DOCS to bring out filmmaker Azadeh Navai to present a program of her work. All in all, Emily Drummer and Carl Elsaesser, Cinematic Arts Graduate Students, were quite busy this year bringing filmmakers and curators out at different stages of their careers and focusing on different aspects of moving image work. Next year we aim to continue to foster a sense of community around experimental moving image work and challenge audiences to think boldly about moving images!



## Congratulations on PhD Student Accomplishments!

By Associate Professor and Head of Film Studies Corey Creekmur

Graduate students in Film Studies at the University of Iowa have an impressive track record earning prestigious grants and awards to support their research, and the past year was no exception. In addition to the successful completion of professional milestones like passing Master's or Comprehensive Exams, and holding successful dissertation prospectus meetings, our students received exceptional recognition via awards in 2016-17.

Three students successfully defended their dissertations in Film Studies this Spring:

**Katherine Steinbach**

Documentary Adaptation: Non-Fiction Transformations via Cinema and Television

**Leah Vonderheide**

Inner Lives: The Moral Cinema of Bresson, Rohmer, and the Dardennes

**Joshua Kierstead**

Noir of the Past: Hollywood's Cynical Secret

We had a number of Film Studies students receive awards that allowed them to conduct important research for their dissertations:

**Juho Ahava** conducted research in Moscow with a T. Anne Cleary International Dissertation Research Fellowship

**Pat Brown** is conducting research in Berlin with a prestigious DAAD Fellowship

**Anu Thapa** will conduct research in India this summer with a Stanley International Research Award

Other research awards are helping students conduct dissertation research closer to home:

**Juana New** will prepare for her dissertation with a Graduate College Summer Fellowship and a Post-Comprehensive Research Award

**Amos Stailey-Young** has a Post-Comprehensive Research Award that will allow him to visit film archives in the United States.

In addition to these awards, graduate students in Film Studies at the University of Iowa continue to distinguish themselves through regular conference presentations and publications in a wide range of venues.

## Congratulations on MFA Student Accomplishments!

By Lecturer in Film and Video Production Jason Livingston

MFA Students in Film and Video Production in the Department of Cinematic Arts continued to impress us all with their accolades and accomplishments.

**Sam Kessie** showed *Body & Form* as part of Iowa Public TV's new program The Film Lounge and landed a prestigious research and travel grant through the Stiftung Kulturwerk cultural foundation in Germany to pursue her project, *The Prostitution Dream*.

**Kai Swanson**, also in her first year, screened in no less than four international film festivals.

**Traci Hercher**, on an Iowa Arts Fellowship, proved invaluable as a graduate student liaison in this year's successful FVP job search, and conducted research for an upcoming traveling exhibition curated by Joyce Tsai of the University of Iowa Museum of Art.

**Carl Elsaesser** earned the Rozen Grand Prize for his film *Vague Images at the Beginning and End of the Day* at the Binghamton Babylon film festival and spent two weeks as an artist-in-residence with Squeaky Wheel in Buffalo, NY.

**Emily Drummer**, our other second year MFA candidate, screened her work at nearly a dozen venues, including the Haverhill Experimental Film Festival and Other Cinema in San Francisco.

**Metrah Pashae**, recipient of a Princess Grace Award, continued to develop, shoot and edit her feature-length avant-garde work, *Attraction*.

**Carley Maur** screened work in Los Angeles and successfully completed the MFA program with *Weather Patterns*, her thesis project about Pride parades, containment of the commons, and queer embodiment.

## Gleason Documentary Team Visits Cinematic Arts

By Katherine Steinbach, Ph.D. Film Studies graduate student

Director Clay Tweel and producer Mary Rohlich shared their filmmaking expertise with Cinematic Arts students during a Q&A on Friday, August 26, 2016.

Iowa City native Rohlich brought the emotional documentary *Gleason* to the Englert Theater for a special screening and benefit for Tackling ALS. Steve Gleason, former New Orleans Saints defensive back, was diagnosed with ALS--also known as Lou Gehrig's disease--in 2011. The documentary follows Gleason over five years, through the disease's progression and his family's expansion. He was given a life expectancy of two to five years, and the film is an intimate portrait of tenacity in the face of terrible odds. Gleason's powerful connection to his wife Michel and their child is central to his success.

Tweel and Rohlich answered questions from both undergraduate and graduate students about the challenges of funding documentaries, of attaining that crucial bond with their subjects, and of bringing lightness to a dark story. They shared their diverse backgrounds in both fiction and non-fiction.

Rohlich began in development, and has since partnered with director/producer Seth Gordon on several successful comedies, including *Horrible Bosses* and *Identity Thief*. ClayTweel has primarily work in documentary, with films like *Make Believe*, *Print the Legend*, and the 2015 Sundance hit *Finders Keepers* on his resume. Rohlich and Tweel have worked together on several documentary projects.

Since *Finders Keepers* recently received high praise, and is readily available on Netflix, students had several questions for the team about this film and its quirky subject. The battle over a human foot found in a meat smoker is, after all, a unique controversy. The filmmakers addressed the wide variety of stories to be told via film, if you can just gather some meager funds, invest the time, and trust your team.

*Gleason* has since been released online and via DVD. Clay Tweel and Mary Rohlich live in Los Angeles.

## The University of Iowa At SCMS

by Associate Professor and Head of Film Studies Corey Creekmur

It was another year of active participation by faculty and graduate students from Cinematic Arts at the annual conference of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS), held in Chicago this March. The Department is an Institutional Member of SCMS, and the conference is the most prominent professional meeting in the field: it's a great place to learn about current research, network with scholars with related interests, and catch up with friends, former students, and former teachers.

Cinematic Arts faculty members Paula Amad, Corey Creekmur, and Steven Ungar all presented work on panels, as did affiliated faculty Garrett Stewart (English) and Kathleen Newman (Spanish and Portuguese). Current graduate students who presented work at the conference included Amos Stailey-Young, Matthew Hipps, Chang-Min Yu, and Leah Vonderheide.

As usual, a great many more of our former students, or scholars with Iowa connections, presented their current research in Chicago this year. Indeed, every year, generations of film and media scholars with links to Iowa attend this conference, and many of these have served as elected SCMS officers and been the recipients of the organization's prestigious awards. This year, an informal gathering of current and former Iowa faculty and graduates was arranged in collaboration with the Department of Communication Studies at the conference, we hope to continue this tradition at future meetings of the society.



Former faculty and film studies graduates catching up at SCMS. From L to R: Kathy Morrow, Mike Slowik, Steve Choe, Jon Crylen, and Nilo Courret

## Annual Film Studies Lecture on Experimental Videogames

by Alex Denison, Ph.D. Film Studies graduate student


Patrick Jagoda, Associate Professor of English and Cinema and Media Studies at the University of Chicago, was invited to present his recent work on experimental videogames. In his illuminating talk, he drew an affect theory and recent scholarship in Games Studies to explain how nearly all videogames perpetuate neoliberal ideals regardless of how innocuous they might appear on the surface. His test case for this assertion is *Candy Crush Saga*, the popular smartphone game that draws players in by creating easy tasks for them to accomplish only to become increasingly difficult to the point where players pay money for extra plays. The majority of his talk, however, was devoted to avant-garde games that push against the neoliberal agenda with their lack of a sense of accomplishment, nonexistent narratives, and superfluous wait times. His key example of these experimental games is *Dys4ia*, a game that details the experiences of a transgender character. It incorporates levels such as a Tetris-like mini-game where the shapes do not fit to represent gender dysphoria and shows the both painful and boring process of hormone replacement therapy. It is works like *Dys4ia*, Professor Jagoda argues, that serve as an answer to the 'gamification' of everyday life.

His talk was followed by a fruitful Q & A session where he fielded questions from the audience for over half an hour.

## Hawkeyes in Hollywood

by Camden Kent, B.A. Undergrad and Department Student Ambassador

On Friday, November 11th, 2016 I attended an event entitled "Blazing a Trail West: How Two Iowa Law Grads Became Big Names in California Entertainment Law." The main speakers of the event, Zachary Beckman and Andrew Randone, were graduates from Iowa's College of Law who had taken their chances by moving to Los Angeles to make a career in the film and entertainment industry. During the discussion, Zachary and Andrew spoke about their different experiences in the industry and told their inspiring stories of working their way up from internships to their current positions. They also discussed the evolving nature of the entertainment industry, and their particular legal areas, from smaller scale independent productions to the rise of digital streaming services like Netflix. While the discussion was geared towards law students, I found it very informative and eye opening as a cinema major. During the Q&A portion of the event, both speakers mentioned their love of movies, and how cinema classes in their undergraduate careers inspired them to work in the movie business. As a cinema major, it can sometimes seem as if the most obvious way to follow your passion for cinema is through a career in production. However, Zachary and Andrew show that a passion for movies and a strong work ethic can lead to a wide variety of fulfilling career paths.

<p><b>Intellectual Property Law Society</b></p> <p>Join IPLS and the Sports Law Society for</p> <p>"Blazing a Trail West: How Two Iowa Law Grads Became Big Names in California Entertainment Law"</p> <p>with <b>Zachary Beckman &amp; Andrew Randone</b></p> <p><b>12:40 - 1:40 PM</b> <b>Nov. 11<sup>th</sup> - BLB 235</b></p>	 <p>Sponsored by the <b>Sports Law Society</b></p> <p>also sponsored by the <b>Innovation, Business, &amp; Law Center</b></p>
--	--

## Nurturing the Next Generation of Filmmakers

by Associate Professor and Chair Paula Amad

This year we were especially happy to participate in a new outreach initiative in which our undergraduate and graduate students judged the short fiction and nonfiction films made by a group of Bettendorf Middle School Students. We were very impressed with the potential and quality of the middle school students' work. We welcomed the group of winners and their teachers to campus in April to congratulate them and give them a tour of our facilities and encourage their passion for cinema as a future educational and career goal.

Special thanks to Ph.D student Matthew Hipps and M.F.A student Sam Kessie for leading the judging side of this important outreach effort. As one of the middle school students mentioned in her thank-you letter "I am glad that you gave us the chance to visit because it allowed me to see how great a school the U of I really is and it opened my eyes to the opportunities and courses I could take in the future" We hope to be able to continue to nurture the talent of more Iowan students in the future.



Students from Bettendorf Middle School, and Mike Gibbier



**Make a Gift** at this link:

NOTICE: The State University of Iowa Foundation is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization soliciting tax-deductible private contributions for the benefit of the University of Iowa. Please review its [full disclosure statement at http://www.uifoundation.org/about/disclosures/](http://www.uifoundation.org/about/disclosures/).

Department  
of  
CINEMATIC  
ARTS  
Newsletter

E210 Adler Journalism Bldg.  
104 W. Washington St.  
IOWA CITY, IA 52242-2004  
Phone: 319-335-0330

 THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA  
COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS & SCIENCES

[ADDRESSEE]

[Street Address]

[City, ST ZIP Code]