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MEDIATING THE MOMENT

A(n Interdisciplinary) Conversation

Communication, Media, and Film Graduate Student
Conference Abstracts

University of Calgary
May 1st and 2nd, 2025

20
25



**UNIVERSITY OF
CALGARY**



THURSDAY, MAY 1
Room 148

Utilization of Myth Across Mediums and Texts

Moderator: Kristina Hanley (University of Calgary)

The Masculine Problem with *Barbie* (2023) as a Feminine Text: Its Narrative Structure Universalizes Gender

Rebecca Wissink (University of Calgary)

Barbie (2023) promised women a story about women, or at least about the childhood doll many of us owned. *Barbie* matters given the cultural conversation about feminism the film generated. The film matters because women were in creative control. The film matters because it broke records and should have laid to rest any Hollywood claims that women's stories don't sell. I utilize feminist and anthropological theory to argue that *Barbie* employs a narrative structure called the hero's journey (Campbell, 1949), which is a gender-reductive myth based on androcentric analysis. Because gender matters, when employed it changes the outcome of research (McRobbie & Garber, 1976; Meehan, 2002), and gender was absent from foundational anthropological theory (Slocum, 1975). I offer a qualitative case study of *Barbie* in which I consider the text through three frameworks of the hero(ine)'s journey. *Barbie*, in being largely faithful to a white, western, masculine framework, dismisses real-world knowledges of feminine experiences. Thus, the critical intervention my work offers is to encourage media makers to engage with real women's lived experiences, engage with the research of women's experiences, and build new foundations for women's stories that do not begin with men's interpretations of the world.

Choose Your Own Aristeia: Simulations of Homeric God-Mortal Relations in Contemporary Tabletop Gaming

Nina Houle (Simon Fraser University)

Greek mythology is a point of fascination throughout 21st century popular culture, including within tabletop games. Many games go beyond using mythology as a simple aesthetic theme, weaving ideas from ancient Greek epics, poetry, and theatre into their mechanics and rule systems. These games use visual trappings to convey a sense of mythological antiquity, but the process of playing them also encourages a close, detailed reception of ancient Greece. The ways in which games portray relationships between gods and humans is of particular interest, as it closely mirrors mortal/immortal interactions in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. These games therefore facilitate the reception and interpretation of ancient text for a modern audience, creating multi-temporal environments and narratives.

I closely analyze a small selection of contemporary games that feature mythologically influenced scenarios, including *Cyclades* (2009) and *Santorini* (2016). I place these games in conversation with Homer's works, particularly passages of divinely backed heroism. In these games, players assume roles that resemble mythological heroes, while game elements such as decks of cards represent the gods. These elements bestow benefits and abilities upon players, who compete against each other. Thus, the ways these games portray the gods is in line with the behaviour of gods in epic poetry. Furthermore, these games often require players to maintain the favour of the gods, reflecting the reciprocal relationship between deities and mortals that is present throughout the ancient Greek mythos. They therefore perpetuate a historically-informed vision of antiquity, in a nuanced and interactive manner.

THURSDAY, MAY 1
Room 148

Utilization of Myth Across Mediums and Texts (continued)

Moderator: Kristina Hanley (University of Calgary)

Out of Bounds: National Myths, Global Relations and the Toronto Raptors
Amy Parks (Queens University)

This paper examines commercial basketball as mediator of national imaginings, both within and between collectives. While the National Basketball Association (NBA) enjoys an ever-expanding global reach, basketball itself has yet to usurp hockey in Canada or baseball and football in the United States as hegemonic “national sports.” Rather, atop the shifting and erosive sands of globalization, basketball’s nationally ambivalent, athletically-spectacular productions foreground cultural anxieties and contradictions while reworking myths of belonging.

As the only NBA franchise in Canada, the Toronto Raptors have taken their brand from hotly-marketable science fiction creatures in the 1990s, to decidedly urban antiheroes nearly two decades later. Early mediated representations of the team reflect the sentiment that signs of “Canadianness” were neither compatible with the franchise’s aspirations to be a “global” brand, nor with basketball culture. Yet, the franchise’s 2014 rebrand, which included the debut of their new tagline, “We the North,” appears to celebrate the very civic and national myths the franchise once fiercely eschewed. By examining this marketing pivot against the broader ebbs and flows of international interdependence and disintegration, I demonstrate how the marketing of this Canadian team in an American league reveals basketball’s mediation of the shifting mythological fault lines between Canada, the United States, and nationally-constituted conceptions of “the global.” That is, while under the rubric of the “outer-national” (Gilroy 1995), Canadian basketball plays a central role in an emergent mythology of global relations.

The Body Keeps the Score: Institutional Surveillance and Monstrosity in *The Magnus Archives*
Emilie Charette (University of Calgary)

This qualitative research project examines how monstrosity is articulated in the contemporary British horror fiction podcast *The Magnus Archives* (2016-2021), particularly through the main character, Jonathan “Jon” Sims. The podcast is set in a private research organization, the Magnus Institute, which collects first-hand accounts of supernatural experiences. Through a close thematic textual analysis, I argue that *The Magnus Archives* articulates monstrosity as deliberately cultivated in individuals by institutions through practices of surveillance, discipline, enculturation, and control. Through his work as the new head archivist of the titular archives, Jon is subjected to institutional surveillance that shapes his behaviour and his body. Through Jon’s gradual journey into monsterhood, the podcast “monsterizes” and problematizes knowledge production within the Western context: archives and other institutions of knowledge production are inextricably linked to power, surveillance, and domination, particularly imperial domination, and cannot separate themselves from these origins, despite recent calls to “decolonize.”

THURSDAY, MAY 1
Room 140

Visual Research Gallery

Photography, Memory & Migration: Self-Authored Visual Narratives of Migrant Women
Photographers

Amanda Zanco (University of Calgary)

Given the politicized nature of migrant women's representation in international media, my research explores photographic practices that capture their experiences, emphasizing the interplay of aesthetics, politics, memory, and migration. In exploring these intersections, the study frames the political as a space resulting from human relations and acts of dissensus during the engagement with images and image-making practices; aesthetics as understood as a form of knowledge and sensory appearance mobilized through photography, and migration as a force that informs the creation of visual narratives. The study focuses on self-authored visual narratives created and circulated by six migrant women photographers that challenge the simplistic representation of migrant women as a humanitarian symbol of distress. In particular, the research discusses how these photographic projects subvert the conventional images of migration, reframe the discourse through personal stories and engage with a subjective, feminist postmigrant photo aesthetics. As part of the research-creation aspect of the study, I curate an exhibition that combines the photographic works of the six artists who are participants, each offering a deeply personal exploration of migration through themes of return, homecoming, community, identity, agency, and womanhood. Their works present counter-visual narratives that challenge, transform, and nuance the intimate realities of migration, pushing back against the often sensationalized and oversimplified portrayals of migration in the media. By focusing on the complexities of the migration experience, this exhibition invites viewers to engage with the diverse and multifaceted nature of migration beyond conventional and institutional narratives.

Literacy in Waiting

Brandi Weston (University of Calgary)

Inspired by the meaning and composition of Diego Velazquez's *Las Meninas* and Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things*, *Literacy in Waiting* is a deeply personal piece about me and the tension I experience as I raise children in today's digitally dominated society. The piece speaks to how they acquire and interpret information, form their identities, who or what influences their understanding, and the friction experienced in the process. This friction is most manifested internally by me as I grapple with effective parenting approaches that facilitate understanding while considering history in the context of the present.

As a communications and media scholar, I reflect on history to understand where we are today and what may come. With a discerning eye, direct and metaphorical nods to important historical figures, critical theorists, feminists, and others can be discovered. Their ideas connect us to the past while contributing to the present. Themes related to commodification, representation, consumerism, manipulation, and choice are also present.

As a parent, I strive to instill foundations of knowledge and encourage critical thinking around consumption, but there is often a disconnect between what is presented by me and what is understood by my children. I want to help them to know the rich history and crucial perspectives that have brought us to today but compete with the lure of instant gratification achieved on a touchscreen, alter-egos established through avatars, and the subtle marketing of YouTube influencers.

THURSDAY, MAY 1
Room 140

Visual Research Gallery (continued)

#PCN / Project Compassion Now!

Shafira Vidyamaharani (Simon Fraser University)

Inspired by posters, zines, and graphic artworks of early AIDS activism by grassroots group AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP), #PCN / Project Compassion Now! is a research creation project on harm reduction communication, solidarity, and drug user liberation. This project aims to unify collective efforts toward liberation for people who use drugs, which advocates for human rights, public health, bodily autonomy, cognitive liberty, and self-determination. By drawing on my own positionality from the rave subculture, my research builds on the historic solidarity and drug use in the electronic dance music scene. In partnership and alignment with Canadian Students for Sensible Drug Policy (CSSDP)'s mandate to support drug education efforts, #PCN responds to calls for the development and dissemination of realistic and evidence-based harm reduction education. At the core of this research is the development of pocket-sized, zine-style toolkits designed for distribution at raves, festivals, and other social spaces where substance use is prevalent. These “psychedelic toolkits” include: (1) Substance information and their effects, (2) Harm reduction strategies for safer use, (3) Guidance on mixing substances, including risk assessment, (4) A “trip itinerary” to help individuals plan and navigate their psychedelic experiences. Each toolkit is designed to be double-sided, with one side dedicated to practical, harm reduction content, and the other featuring graphic posters promoting drug user liberation and decriminalization. These materials will serve as educational resources that go beyond abstinence-based approaches, focusing instead on meeting people where they're at, reducing risks associated with substance use, and fostering self-determination.

Visualizing Social and Environmental Justice Through Cartoons

Maryam Mahdavian (University of Calgary)

This exhibition highlights the vital role of visualization and art galleries in disseminating research findings on social and environmental justice. Since increasing access to research on these pressing issues is essential for raising public awareness and driving social change, there should be greater emphasis on arts-based knowledge dissemination. By displaying wordless cartoons as visual translations of selected articles, this exhibition demonstrates how visual art can make research more accessible to a wider audience. Additionally, it underscores the role of art galleries as pedagogical spaces for fostering critical thinking and dialogue, strengthening the connection between academic research and public engagement. Notably, all the cartoons presented in this exhibition are my original creations as a cartoonist.

Forgotten Shepherds

Blair Maddock-Ferrie (Carleton University) (not in attendance)

Forgotten Shepherds explores the untold stories of Afghan interpreters who risked their lives supporting Canadian forces during the war in Afghanistan. These interpreters, vital to mission success, navigated complex cultural and linguistic challenges.

THURSDAY, MAY 1

Room 140

Visual Research Gallery (continued)

Anthro-Journo Collage: Overlap and similarities of two sister disciplines

Emily Kennedy (Centre for Anthropology and Journalism) (not in attendance)

My research straddles the two disciplines of anthropology and journalism, and how each can help the other. Collage is a medium for communication and conversation and its overlapping materials physically represent my overlapping research.

Promise You'll Listen?

Mia Portelance (Emily Carr University of Art and Design) (not in attendance)

Promise You'll Listen? is the intersection of new media and installation design in a physical echo chamber manifestation. The context is centred around alt-right social media content and propaganda, immersing viewers in an audio-visual experience.

THURSDAY, MAY 1

Room 148

Health and the Body, Mediated

Moderator: Shehrin Shiny (University of Calgary)

Performing Cancer: An autoethnographic exploration of public and private illness narratives in online spaces

Kellie Chouinard (University of Waterloo)

In 2001, Barbara Ehrenreich decried the burgeoning breast cancer culture in an article for Harper's Magazine, writing that this "cult" aims to normalize cancer through relentless optimism, paving over all other responses to the disease. Today, breast cancer is everywhere, including our digital spaces. And, as Anne Boyer notes in *The Undying*, to be diagnosed with breast cancer as a young woman today is to submit to a culture of compulsory storytelling through social media status updates: contemporary cancer narratives are crafted through aestheticized chemo-suite selfies shared to Instagram and captioned with recycled sentiments and positivity. But this is only half the story.

While in treatment for breast cancer in the first months of 2020, social media and digital communities offered me a way of connecting with new and existing friends through the pandemic, but the experience of optimism and positivity I felt compelled to share on my public Instagram account – complete with aesthetically pleasing selfies – was not the same story of isolation that I was living and writing about in my private blog.

Using my digital scrapbook project, *The Cancerland Selfies*, as a material object, this presentation offers an autoethnographic exploration of the too-muchness of contemporary cancer culture and of the dual narratives cancer patients often feel compelled to tell publicly and those we experience privately. Through the lens of autobiography theory and studies in online life writing, I aim to interrogate ideas about mainstream, digital cancer culture and the myth of the "good" patient/survivor.

THURSDAY, MAY 1

Room 148

Health and the Body, Mediated (continued)

Moderator: Shehrin Shiny (University of Calgary)

Medicine and Kin: the representation of more-than-human community ethics in Tasha Hubbard's *Singing Back the Buffalo* (2024)

Alex Ventimilla (University of Alberta)

My presentation explores recent developments in moving image representations of biodiversity through an analysis of *Singing Back the Buffalo* (2024). In the film, award-winning Cree auteur Tasha Hubbard sketches a postcolonial account of the buffalo's near-extinction to then highlight Indigenous-led efforts to "rematriate" the species. Recapitulating cinema's historical obsession with disappearing animality (Lippit 2000), the adoption of the documentary genre as the preeminent form for this task (Smaill 2016), and the rise of activist eco-documentaries in the 21st century (Hughes 2014), I focus on two recent turns intersecting in Hubbard's film. The first is the proliferation of titles interested in biodiversity loss and their contribution to the formation of the discourse of mass extinction (Heise 2016). The second is the parallel boom in films documenting ecological issues through an ethnographic lens fixed on the Indigenous peoples or situated communities affected by these problems (Schultz-Figueroa 2019). I then attend to Hubbard's strategic emphasis on excavating the colonial roots of the buffalo's near-extinction while providing testimony from Indigenous elders and conservationists suggestive of their epistemological understanding of the creature as both decolonial "medicine" and "kin" subject to Treaty Law (Kimmerer 2013). By pairing these tropes, I argue, *Singing Back the Buffalo* crafts a narrative about the intertwined fate of a more-than-human community struggling for ethical recognition (Rose 2011). Moreover, I conclude, the permeable boundaries and open-endedness of this relational web allows it to escape what critics see as the dehumanizing and declensionist tendencies of multispecies ethnographies (Smaill 2016, Rangan 2017, Rice 2022).

Edutainment or Miseducation? A Critical Analysis of PCOS Coverage in Women's Health Magazines

Jessica Avery (McMaster University)

This study examines the representation of Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) in online health magazines, addressing a critical gap in understanding how "edutainment" media shapes perceptions of hormonal conditions. While previous research has explored PCOS information on social media, health magazines have received less attention, despite their significant influence on medical advice-seeking behaviour. Through content analysis of Women's Health, Essence, and Parents magazines, this research investigates how PCOS-related information is communicated, with particular attention to both physical and psychological aspects of the condition. Findings reveal a significant imbalance in coverage, with 42% of content focusing on appearance-based concerns while only 4% addresses mental health aspects. The analysis, framed through Lauren Berlant's concept of cruel optimism, demonstrates how magazines predominantly emphasize fertility (45%), weight loss (27%), and hair removal (18%), with 54% of recommended treatments focusing on diet and exercise regimens. This narrow focus perpetuates traditional gender expectations and reduces women to their reproductive capabilities. Given that approximately 70% of patients initiate their health information search online, these findings highlight the urgent need for more balanced, supportive, and holistic representations of PCOS in health magazines. The study concludes with practical recommendations for creating inclusive health content that prioritizes mental health support and promotes self-acceptance, contributing to media studies literature and healthcare communication practices.

THURSDAY, MAY 1
Room 148

Health and the Body, Mediated (continued)

Moderator: Shehrin Shiny (University of Calgary)

Prestige TV and The Ideal Female Body

Erika Livingstone (University of Calgary)

Neoliberalism has continually broadened in the psyche of western culture, appearing as a moral ideal through various media forms. Particularly, this moral imperative appears in prestige television aimed at male and female audiences. Using six episodes from popular shows "The Sopranos", "Twin Peaks", and "Euphoria", I trace the neoliberal ideal across gender lines and arrive at the motivating possibilities of the female body, and its place in the neoliberal ideology. Between the tragic figure of a murdered prom queen in "Twin Peaks" and the duplicitous Livia Soprano, it seems that to be truly perfect, a woman must be a corpse.

FRIDAY, MAY 2
Room 140

Open Roundtables

How to Create a Departmental Podcast
Afrida Faiza (University of Calgary)

A group of graduate students in the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology initiated GRADPod, a podcast designed to foster collaboration and dialogue among students, faculty, and staff. Funded by the Taylor Institute Educational Leadership Grant, this interdisciplinary project seeks to bridge disciplinary boundaries by featuring interviews with diverse scholars and practitioners. While the concept of creating a podcast appeared straightforward, the team encountered significant challenges, including technical uncertainties, skill gaps, and the complexities of coordinating a voluntary, department-wide initiative. This paper reflects on the journey of developing GRADPod, examining what worked, what did not, and what could be improved in future iterations. By sharing these insights, we aim to contribute to broader discussions on innovative, community-building projects within academic departments. Ultimately, GRADPod represents an experimental model for uniting a department through digital media, offering lessons for others interested in similar endeavors.

Ahoo Daryayi: A Symbol of Feminist Resistance in Iran
Nahid Pouzesh (University of Lethbridge)

This paper examines the act of resistance by Ahoo Daryayi, a student from Tehran's University of Science and Research, who removed her hijab in public as a form of feminist protest in November 2024. Situating her action within the broader historical and sociopolitical context of Iran's mandatory hijab laws, the study highlights how such acts serve as a form of defiance against patriarchal oppression and a reclaiming of bodily autonomy.

Daryayi's protest became a widely circulated media event, drawing attention to the intersection of gender, identity, and subjectivity in public space. This paper explores the media's role in shaping the perception of such protests and the gendered responses they elicit. While some women reacted with derogatory comments, reinforcing internalized misogyny, men's reactions were generally more supportive. These conflicting responses illustrate how female identity is contested within patriarchal structures, where women are often positioned as objects of judgment rather than autonomous agents.

Drawing on Simone de Beauvoir's feminist philosophy, this paper argues that unveiling in protest is an assertion of self-definition, challenging dominant gender norms and reclaiming control over female identity. The Iranian government's response—framing such resistance as insanity and transferring protesters to psychiatric institutions—demonstrates an effort to delegitimize feminist agency.

By analyzing Daryayi's act within the frameworks of media representation and gendered subjectivity, this paper contributes to discussions on the visual and discursive politics of feminist resistance, exploring how acts of defiance challenge existing narratives of gender and identity in authoritarian contexts.

FRIDAY, MAY 2
Room 148

Art and Science, Mediated

Moderator: Brandi Weston (University of Calgary)

Accessing Academic Research and Writing

Nathan Lamarche (University of Alberta)

Interdisciplinary research requires scholars to branch out to new fields and learn their terminology. Field-specific terminology, while often unavoidable, can be restrictive to researchers from other fields, to new students in that field, and to the public. Unfortunately, much of the discussion surrounding academic access comes across as anti-intellectual and attacks those aspects of academic communication. These attitudes can be damaging to progressing towards more accessible discourse. Other writing-related difficulties can be overcome through a more mindful approach to language. For instance, many published papers and academic texts come complete with overly complex language, often not using any field-specific terminology at all, but rather dense, wordy language that could be both simplified and shortened without losing meaning or content.

My presentation will help graduate students develop their writing for their own presentations, publications, and classrooms, and to make their content more accessible to a wider audience and carry that culture forward in their careers. The focus will be on three main topics: cultural and linguistic diversity, simplifying language, and generalized audiences. I will teach strategies, resources, and awareness, and call to mind some of the issues we are experiencing with access in academia, such as predatory journals, fake conferences, and monetary barriers for readers and researchers alike. The research for this presentation will be in the interdisciplinary field of Writing Studies and also use examples from published works in various fields, including both Humanities and STEM.

A Feminist Subcultural Study of r/Cottagecore

Hunter Ramey (University of Calgary)

Internet aesthetics are a form of style categorization that have prominent popularity within the social media use of girls and young women. Often aesthetics are interpreted as the mass commercialization of a style, sometimes inspired by previous subcultures like goth or punk. There is a bias within female youth cultural studies to pay significantly more attention to girls' consumerist activities and less on the ways they interact, share and create using media. I argue that close analysis can show meaning within these aesthetics beyond consumerism. I investigate girls' media production within the r/cottagecore Reddit community to unearth the continuation of consumption-conscious subcultural activities such as Do-It-Yourself. It is important to note that r/cottagecore negotiates space within an internet aesthetic which can be problematic as the colonial nature of the cottage and the aesthetics use of DIY (crochet, embroidery, cooking, sewing) has gained the attention of another internet phenomenon: the tradwife. However, cottagecore can also be an aesthetic adopted by youth in rejection to overconsumption through progressive repurposing of traditionally feminine roles or by marginalized groups as a means of reclaiming space, such as queers of color. I analyze how r/cottagecore participants grapple with the complex environment of femininity, consumption and the intersectional considerations of participation.

FRIDAY, MAY 2
Room 148

Art and Science, Mediated

Moderator: Brandi Weston (University of Calgary)

The Sacrificing of Science and Research for the Clicks

Kristina Hanley (University of Calgary)

Academic research has traditionally relied on journalism to inform members of the public and policy makers alike, translating technical research into consumable and relevant news. Yet public trust in the news media is falling, and viewership is falling, increasingly replaced by social media, particularly as an information source for younger generations (Statistics Canada, 2024). Concurrently, health and science misinformation is becoming a significant challenge to public and individual health, occasionally with significant consequences.

As health and science misinformation becomes increasingly both an academic and political priority, research typically centers on large scale change and modifications to social media platforms. This research is driven by experimental designs with limited application, and based on media-effects models, while fact checking in youth and teenage populations remains understudied. With so much information constantly available, individuals can become easily overwhelmed, particularly when presented with conflicting narratives. At the same time, traditional news media is struggling to maintain quality science journalism, as it is expensive and time-consuming in a time when revenue is down. Additionally, with increasing national and international competition headlines needing to be eye catching and straightforward which often leads to clickbait.

Building Blocks: Blockchain and Cultural Production in the Arts

Kyle Wyndham-West (McMaster University)

This doctoral research investigates how blockchain technologies impact visual artists, focusing on the OpenSea and SuperRare platforms. Blockchain introduces novel opportunities for creating, owning, and trading art, such as fractional ownership and decentralized networks. While these technologies promise new artistic, economic, and intellectual property opportunities within Web 3.0, they also risk perpetuating existing inequalities and exclusion within the art market.

Drawing on scholarship from Benjamin to Dyer-Witheford, this study critically examines whether blockchain empowers artists or reinforces systems of financialization and oppression. Through interviews, surveys, and visual case studies, the project explores blockchain's potential to transform artistic practices and cultural production.

The research contrasts OpenSea, a high-volume NFT marketplace resembling a stock trading platform, with SuperRare, which operates as a digital art auction house emphasizing community and artistic intention. Analyzing these platforms will shed light on key differences between speculative financial trading and genuine artistic engagement.

By assessing blockchain's opportunities and challenges, this research aims to determine if NFTs enhance creative autonomy and access for artists or primarily serve speculative markets, contributing to broader debates on decentralization, ownership, and cultural equity in the digital age.

FRIDAY, MAY 2
Room 148

Institutional Power, Mediated

Moderator: Kellie Chouinard (University of Waterloo)

Field Theory and Boundary Work in Small-Town Newspapers: The Case for a Rural Journalism Subfield

Tyler Nagel (University of Groningen)

This presentation examines rural journalism as a distinct subfield within the broader journalism field, drawing on Bourdieu's (2005) field theory to explore how rural journalists navigate tensions between metropolitan-based norms and the realities of rural news coverage. Based on participant-observation and interviews in four rural towns in Alberta, Canada, the study highlights unique practices, including community-oriented content vetting, unconventional business strategies, and journalists' dual roles as local politicians.

Building on Carlson's (2015) conceptualization of journalistic boundary work, this research examines how rural journalism negotiates expansion, expulsion, and autonomy. Rural journalists balance professional roles with community obligations, incorporating practices metropolitan journalists might deem deviant, such as source-driven story vetting and financial reliance on local government.

This study contributes to local journalism research by framing rural journalism as a distinct subfield with unique challenges. It highlights how rural communities, often overlooked in media studies, face structural marginalization due to geographical dispersion and economic precarity. By framing rural journalism as a unique space of interdisciplinary negotiation between urban journalistic norms and local imperatives, this research redefines how we conceptualize and support journalistic practices in rural and remote areas.

Law in Conflict: Evaluating Depictions of International Law in Media Coverage on War

Brian Cox (Carleton University)

Media coverage of the conduct of armed hostilities plays a vital role in global public discourse, and discussion of compliance with international law features prominently in this reporting. Although correspondents and their editorial teams are not generally expected or required to be subject matter experts on topics they cover, the specialized nature of international law involving armed conflict poses a significant challenge to developing informed and objective media coverage of armed conflict. This presentation adopts a multidisciplinary approach to evaluating the methods and content of media coverage on war.

From the discipline of international law, the presentation clarifies doctrinal aspects of the law involving armed conflict that are frequently depicted in media coverage. From the discipline of applied military operations, the presentation describes standard target development and engagement processes that are also regularly represented in media reporting. These legal and operational aspects of the conduct of hostilities are applied to existing media coverage on war to assess whether prevailing reporting accurately portrays the law involving armed conflict. After clarifying several areas for improvement, the presentation concludes by suggesting techniques that can be implemented to mitigate these common limitations on the effectiveness of media coverage on armed hostilities.

FRIDAY, MAY 2
Room 148

Institutional Power, Mediated (continued)

Moderator: Kellie Chouinard (University of Waterloo)

Kenyan Journalism as Client Media: State Power, Imperial Influence, and the Marginalization of Muslim Minorities (1963–2023)

Osman Osman (New York University)

How do news media practices in postcolonial states marginalize minorities and sustain colonial legacies? This paper examines how Kenyan news media constructs national narratives that exclude Muslim minorities, particularly Kenyan Somalis. From the Shifta War (1963-1967) to the post- 9/11 War on Terror, the portrayal of Somali communities has shifted from "bandits" to global terrorist threats, entrenching their exclusion from the national identity. This research, analyzing 900 news articles and 25 interviews with journalists, uncovers a consistent collaboration between the media and the state that presents Muslim minorities as security threats. This project uses postcolonial and field theories to reveal how colonial strategies are embedded in contemporary conflict reporting. Despite changes from authoritarian rule in the 20th century to a liberalized media environment in the 21st century, the Kenyan journalism field continues to perpetuate Western narratives portraying Muslim communities as threats, thereby reinforcing exclusionary ideologies and allowing state narratives to dominate the journalistic field. I introduce the concept of client media to describe how the Kenyan state leverages the media to pursue its imperial ambitions, influenced by both historical and contemporary Western powers. During the Shifta War, Kenya protected British colonial borders against Somali resistance to uphold British interests. Today, Kenya aligns itself with U.S. interests within global counterterrorism, promoting narratives serving American geopolitical agendas. In other words, this paper argues that the fields of Kenyan journalism, military, and politics intersect to reinforce state exclusionary policies, solidifying a national identity that marginalizes Muslim minorities. This research contributes to discussions on how postcolonial media, state power, and identity politics in Africa shape exclusionary narratives that resonate both locally and globally, positioning Muslim minorities as perpetual threats.

Media and Minority Languages: Navigating Identity and Linguistic Representation

Sajedah Sadat Hosseini (University of Calgary)

Media serves as a powerful force in shaping the linguistic identities of minority language communities. Through explicit and implicit narratives, media constructs linguistic hierarchies that shape public attitudes, individual language choices, and broader sociopolitical discourses. In Canada, where linguistic diversity is central to national identity, media representations of minority languages play a crucial role in either reinforcing dominant language ideologies or providing alternative spaces for linguistic and cultural affirmation. This presentation examines how various forms of media contribute to the marginalization or empowerment of minority language speakers. While traditional media often privileges dominant languages and reinforces assimilationist narratives, digital and alternative media have emerged as critical sites of resistance, which foster community engagement, cultural reclamation, and linguistic agency. Drawing on sociolinguistic theories of language ideology, power, and identity, this presentation examines how media representations influence language maintenance efforts, intergenerational transmission, and the lived experiences of minority language speakers in Canada. It delves into the complexities of mediated linguistic identities, and highlights the intricate relationship between media, language preservation, and community resilience.

FRIDAY, MAY 2
Room 148

Human Connection, Digitally Mediated

Moderator: Nikki Reimer (University of Calgary)

Fatal Attachment? A Case Study on the Impact of Artificial Intelligence Companions on Teenagers and the Transformation of Relationship Dynamics in the 21st Century

Maria Carla O'Connor (University of Alberta)

The increasing integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) companions into our daily lives raises critical concerns regarding psychological well-being, social development, and ethical accountability. Multiple studies emphasize that adolescents are more sensitive to developing a genuine empathy for these –social– machines. By examining the tragic suicide of a 14-year-old teenager, Sewell Setzwer III, who formed a profound psychological dependency on an AI chatbot, this study explores the implications of AI companionship on mental health, focusing on issues of emotional isolation, digital addiction, and companies' inefficient regulations to prevent potential harms among young users.

The case also interrogates corporate accountability, parental oversight, and the broader ethical dilemmas posed by unregulated AI interaction. Drawing on media studies, psychological theories, technological ethics, and legal frameworks, this paper critically evaluates whether AI companies should be held accountable for the consequences of digital emotional entanglement. Finally, it aims to contribute to the ongoing debate on the evolving nature of human-AI relationships and their societal ramifications by examining existing regulatory mechanisms and proposing enhanced safeguarding measures.

The Soulmate Equation: The Commodified Connection of Dating Apps

Luna Quail (McMaster University)

This paper argues dating apps have become a cultural practice that have economized one of the most fundamental human interactions: romantic relationships. This paper analyzes Tinder and Hinge, the two most popular dating apps in the United States. My findings show both apps profit from the neoliberal market by commodifying dating, economically and through self-commodification.

In the first part, I argue that dating apps are essentially utilized as time maximizers, resulting in more overall time allocated to work and generating profit. In the neoliberal social structure, traditional in-person dating—meeting, going on dates, and socializing at places like bars, churches, and cafes—is seen as inefficient. Thus, dating apps act as time savers and ways to increase efficiency, and thus financial gains for their users. Economic value exists in dating apps due to the lack of time needed to be doing active traditional-style dating.

The second part of this paper argues that self-commodification through dating apps is enforced by Foucauldian biopolitics. Dating apps cultivate identity through biopolitics, influencing self-perception and value based on normative social standards. This is done though dating apps reinforcing socialized expectations of identity and desirability. At their core, dating apps treat users' identities as commodities. Therefore, easily consumable identities—those most conforming to traditional aesthetics of beauty—are valued higher as in they will receive more matches. Overall, this paper explores the hidden complexities and influences of one of the fundamental aspects of human life, the deep relationships formed between people.

FRIDAY, MAY 2
Room 148

Human Connection, Digitally Mediated (continued)

Moderator: Nikki Reimer (University of Calgary)

The Social Obligation Paradox: #BlockOut and Celebrity Silence on Instagram and TikTok

Hannah Blundon (Mount Saint Vincent University)

The #BlockOut movement emerged in 2024 as a grassroots digital protest urging social media users to block celebrities and influencers who remained silent on critical social issues, particularly the Israel-Hamas conflict. This movement reflected a broader societal shift in expectations for celebrity accountability, where public figures are scrutinized not only for their actions but also for their inaction. As social media amplifies both advocacy and backlash, #BlockOut raised key questions about the evolving role of celebrities in digital activism.

My master's thesis study explores the paradox of social obligation in the digital age: while silence is increasingly perceived as complicity, speaking out carries significant reputational and professional risks. Using a mixed-methods approach, my research examines user-generated content on Instagram and TikTok to analyze the discourse surrounding #BlockOut. I use critical discourse analysis and engagement metrics to assess the movement's impact, investigating whether it effectively pressures celebrities into activism or merely fosters performative allyship and digital polarization.

Findings from my research will contribute to broader discussions on digital activism, cancel culture, and the ethics of public accountability. As well, it will be part of the emerging discussions around what is effective digital activism. By situating #BlockOut within the framework of mediated power and social movements, this study highlights the tensions between influencer culture, audience expectations, and the commodification of activism. In an era where social justice movements are increasingly shaped by algorithmic visibility, this research seeks to unravel the complexities of celebrity silence and the collective push for digital accountability.

Currycels and the Digital Manosphere: Mapping South-Asian Masculinity in Incel Communities

Serene Varghese (University of Calgary)

Incel communities have become a growing subject of research, particularly regarding their role in shaping narratives around contemporary masculinity, gender roles, and harmful racial stereotyping. This installation will be a visual and audio one exploring the digital subculture and investigating how racialized masculinities are constructed in these forums.

Using a feminist media studies framework and a postcolonial analysis framework, this research installation will critically examine the pipeline that draws brown men into these communities. I will be conducting a content analysis of racist depictions of South Asian men in mainstream media (ex: the depiction of the character, Raj, in *The Big Bang Theory*), and of "alpha male" videos and other popular incel discourses, to consider how media representations contribute to sentiments of racial inferiority in brown men, and how these isolating feelings reinforce incel ideologies. Additionally, I will also examine how these incel forums engage in racial hierarchies.

This research contributes to a deeper understanding of harmful digital subcultures, contemporary crises in masculinity and ultimately their impact on women, and will raise questions around media censorship and moderation online – should harmful communities be allowed to have unmoderated spaces online?

FRIDAY, MAY 2
Room 148

The Moving Image, Mediated

Moderator: Nathan Lamarche (University of Alberta)

Anonymity and Becoming-Imperceptible on the Lower East Side: Gender and Gentrification in
Desperately Seeking Susan

Kyler Chittick (University of Alberta)

This paper examines "Desperately Seeking Susan" (1985) through an interdisciplinary lens that integrates Johan Andersson's concept of "gentrification by genre" with Jackie Stacey's feminist reading of the film. Andersson highlights how the film commodifies New York City's bohemianism, introducing it to mainstream audiences while eliding the grittier socioeconomic realities of gentrification. Stacey, on the other hand, underscores the film's interrogation of female desire and friendship, where feminine identification evolves into an embrace of multiplicity. Building on these frameworks, I argue that the film creates moments of feminist spatial-political resistance by engaging urban transformation as a site for gender subversion. Drawing on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of "becoming-imperceptible," I explore how the city's transitional state enables female protagonists Roberta (Rosanna Arquette) and Susan (Madonna) to resist fixed identities, slipping between visibility and invisibility. This anonymity destabilizes patriarchal norms by creating ephemeral spaces for feminist agency, even as it remains incompatible with sustained collective action. By synthesizing urban studies with queer and feminist film theory, this analysis situates the film as an exemplary cultural text for negotiating the intersections of gender, urban aesthetics, and the politics of space.

Mirrors, Screens, and the Imaginal Realm: A Persian-Islamic Perspective on Cinematic Ontology
Niusha Hatefinia (Simon Fraser University)

This paper explores the ontology of the cinematic image through Persian-Islamic philosophy, offering a fresh perspective that extends conventional film theory. Examining the analogy between the mirror and the image within this tradition, it argues that the film screen is not merely an illusory surface but a portal to the imaginal realm (*'ālam al-khayāl*)—a mediating world between the material and immaterial realms.

In Persian-Islamic thought, the imaginal realm is where spirits are embodied, and bodies are spiritualized, manifesting transcendent realities through symbolic forms. Unlike Lacan's mirror stage, which frames the mirror as a site of ego formation through misrecognition, Persian-Islamic philosophy views it as a reflection of an intermediary reality rather than an illusion of the self.

Building on this, the paper argues that the cinematic screen, like the mirror in Persian-Islamic thought, connects viewers to transcendent realities. While apparatus theory conceptualizes the screen as an illusory surface shaping perception, this study reimagines it as an interface with deeper dimensions of meaning and reality. This perspective challenges dominant Western-centric paradigms and offers new pathways for understanding cinematic ontology.

Through a close reading of Mohammad-Reza Aslani's *The Green Fire* (2008), this analysis demonstrates how the cinematic image transcends mere reflection, embodying supra-sensory elements that reveal hidden truths. By bridging Islamic philosophy and film theory, this study introduces a non-Western perspective on the nature of the cinematic image.

FRIDAY, MAY 2
Room 148

The Moving Image, Mediated (continued)

Moderator: Nathan Lamarche (University of Alberta)

Rotten Tomatoes: Methods of Quantifying Film Success

Aimee Koristka (University of Calgary)

The measurement of film success continues to be a contested topic. Beyond traditional written criticism, quantitative approaches to film criticism position a film's success relative (though not limited) to numeric scales, star scales, percentages, number of awards won, by monetary amount received at the box office, or by streaming watch numbers. These methods have become so prevalent as to warrant preemptive applications of quantification to unreleased films so as to predict their success (Lehrer & Xie, 2022; Toubia et al., 2021). As the entertainment industry continues to be an economic and cultural force, it is critical to research the ways in which the success of this creative medium is being resituated into quantitative terms.

This paper asks: *how are quantitative methods being used to determine a film's success?* I will begin by providing an overview of the disparate methods used to quantify a film's success, comparing their logics in how they suggest a film's success is best determined (preliminary literature includes Hennig-Thurau et al., 2009; Lehrer & Xie, 2022; Toubia et al., 2021; and Zuckerman & Kim, 2003). Following this, I will use the case study of the 2024 film, *Emilia Pérez*, to compare these methods, demonstrating the conflicting results produced by the quantifiable measures. Ultimately, this paper serves as an intervention into the application of quantifiable measures to determine the success of a creative media, demonstrating that while their use may allow for a greater understanding of audience consumption patterns, they are a reductive way of understanding the success of a film.

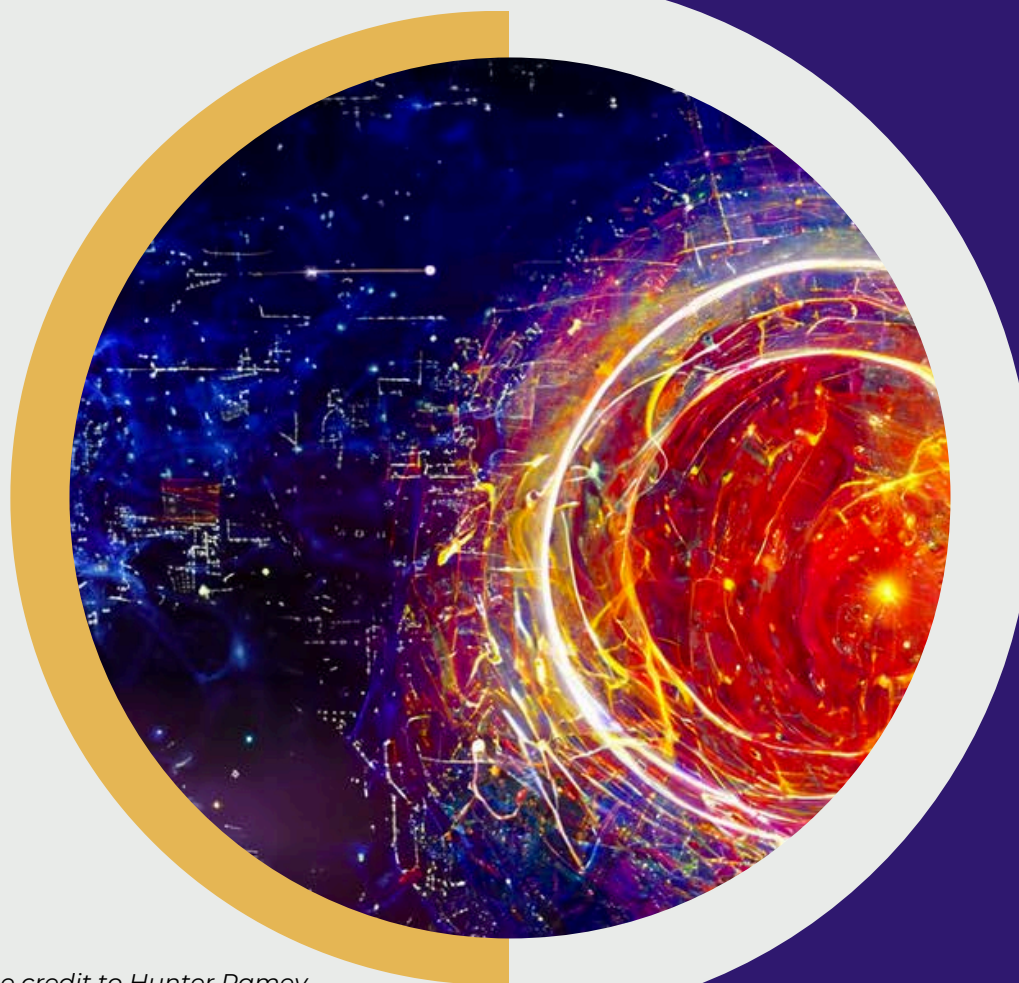


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