From the “Director’s Chair”

The Film Studies Program was quite active this past Fall. We offered 24 different classes in Critical Studies and, with the help of Pittsburgh Filmmakers, 30 different courses in Production. Overall, we reached some 250 students (both undergraduate and graduate). The fall also saw visits by several prestigious speakers. Professor Barbara Klinger from the University of Indiana gave a talk entitled, The Titanic Haircut, and Professor Mary Ann Doane from Brown University spoke on the topic of The Close Up: Scale and Detail in Cinema. Furthermore, our “in house” lecture series (The Pittsburgh Film Colloquium) presented two sessions. In October, our own Professor Marcia Landy (English) gave a talk on Monty Python’s Flying Circus and Unholy Television and in November Carnegie Mellon’s Professor David Shumway spoke about Genres of Hollywood Romantic Comedy. Finally, in October and November Pitt’s Professor Phil Watts (French and Italian) organized a series of five French and Francophone films. Their titles are listed on page 7. We look forward to an equally busy and stimulating spring term.

Film Summit in Steeltown

It sounds like a typical Los Angeles soiree, but last October, Hollywood maven and mavericks brushed elbows with prominent community leaders right here in Pittsburgh.

On Saturday, October 25, 2003, the non-profit Steeltown Entertainment Project hosted a Pittsburgh Entertainment Summit at WQED Multimedia studios and The Andy Warhol Museum. The summit united entertainment industry leaders like Rob Marshall (director, Chicago), Jamie Widdoes (director, 8 Simple Rules for Dating My Teenage Daughter), Sally Ladiduss (writer, Mad About You and The Tracy Morgan Show), Terri Minsky (writer/creator, Lizzy McGuire, Less Than Perfect), Eric Gold (manager, Ellen Degeneres, Jim Carrey, and Vince Vaugh), Bernie Goldmann (producer, Looney Toons Back in Action and Taking Lives), Peter Ackerman (writer, Ice Age and Broadway’s Little Shop of Horrors), George Romero (director, Night of the Living Dead, The Dark Half, Bruiser), David Conrad (actor, Miss Match), and Jack Smith (co-executive producer, The Young and the Restless) with Pittsburgh community leaders. In the afternoon, the panel of Hollywood heavy-weights, who grew up in Pittsburgh, spoke during an hour-long WQED program about the possibilities for uniting Pittsburgh and Hollywood through the auspices of a non-profit organization.

In the evening, a cocktail party took place at the Warhol Museum with the aforementioned entertainment leaders and Pittsburgh patrons.

The summit explored ways in which the city can tap the talent and influence of Pittsburgh.

(Continued on page 2)
Vladimir Padunov is the Associate Director of the Film Studies Program and an Associate Professor in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures. He is also on the faculty of the Program for Cultural Studies. He regularly teaches courses on the history of Russo-Soviet cinema, contemporary Russian media, and the history of Russian popular culture. His publications have appeared in Framework, The Harriman Institute Forum, Isskustvo kino, The Nation, New Left Review, October, and Wide Angle. And according to him, he is a “slut.” “I find pleasure in all films,” he clarifies.

At Pitt, Padunov developed one of the most intensive curricula in Russo-Soviet cinema studies in the United States. In the fall, he taught for the last time Russian 0870 (History of Russian Film I: The Beginnings to Stalin), the first part of a course sequence he designed in 1997 (which concludes with Russian 0871, History of Russian Film II: From Stalin to the Present). The courses are being passed on to graduate students in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literature, most of whom, Padunov says, have completed PhD certificates in the Film Studies Program and require classroom experience teaching Russo-Soviet cinema.

As part of preparing the graduate students to teach courses on Russo-Soviet cinema, Padunov also created two new graduate level courses: From Lumière to Lenin (Russo-Soviet cinema from 1896 to 1934) and Post-Stalinist Russian Cinema (from 1953 to the present). He is preparing a graduate-level course specifically on Stalinist cinema (1934-53) to complete the trio of courses.

Padunov says that to his knowledge, no other university offers such an intensive series of courses on Russo-Soviet cinema at this level, or even an undergraduate course sequence dedicated to the topic.

With his wife, Nancy Condee, director of the Graduate Program in Cultural Studies, and help from undergraduate and graduate students and junior faculty, Padunov organizes the annual Russian Film Symposia, held the first week of every May. Symposia themes are generated from group discussions and Padunov’s research interests. The sixth symposia, to be held this May, will focus on innovations in and transformations of the Russian film industry: debut films, alternative technologies, the emergence of home theaters, and video-films.

Padunov’s field is narratology—the history and structures of narrativity, both verbal and visual. His interest in Slavic studies centers on Slavic narratives and their techniques of composition—oral, written, statically graphic, or dynamically graphic. “Film studies inevitably becomes a part of this picture,” he says. But his interests are not confined to Russo-Soviet cinema. He attributes his broad tastes to a childhood as a latchkey kid in New York City in the early 1950s, when admission to theaters “cost next to nothing and you were always guaranteed a double feature and a newsreel.”

Still, he is disappointed in the American film industry, which he describes as “the first and most egregious victim of mass consumed and...mass produced cultural artifacts. Whether we point to the explosive dominance of special effects or computer-manipulated imaging or the oxymoronic ‘collaborative creativity’ of the studios, the results seem to lead in the same direction: the erasure of the specific. We’ve ended up with a night in which all cats are black.”

Summit (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)
American Film Scripts Online now available

The University Library System recently acquired access to American Film Scripts Online (AFSO), a joint ongoing project of Alexander Street Press and the University of Chicago. To date, this database contains the full texts of 265 scripts written from 1903 to 2002 by 334 writers, along with information on the scenes and characters in the scripts, and the actors, directors, producers, and writers connected with them. The database aims to include over 1,000 scripts (and over 100,000 scenes) when completed.

Included in AFSO are tables of contents listing the scripts both alphabetically and by year of composition, as well as the characters, people and subjects related to the scripts, supplying links to additional information on them. Individual search screens are provided to help you locate information on specific writers, scripts, scenes and characters. The database also supplies simple and advanced full text search screens. A "Showcase" feature displays sample page images from selected scripts to give users a sense of the appearance of the paper originals.

To gain access to AFSO, click on the "Databases A-Z" link on the menu on the left side of the library's home page (www.library.pitt.edu), and then scroll down to the link reading American Film Scripts Online.

Summit (Cont)

“Too,” Kurlander wrote in a column for the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, published in November 2002, in which he insisted that—given the staggering number of Pittsburghers working in Hollywood—entertainment should be Pittsburgh’s most lucrative export.

Other topics discussed at the summit included how Pittsburgh shaped entertainment professionals and what can be done to nurture future producers, directors and writers; how film exhibition and education in Pittsburgh can contribute to the city’s film scene; the future of film, television, and other media in Pittsburgh; how Pittsburgh can use its strengths to establish a niche in the entertainment industry; establishing a formal mentoring network; and creating and packaging “Pittsburgh-centric” stories for film and television.

In addition to the star-studded cocktail party, the event included tours of the city’s unique resources, including the Carnegie Mellon University Entertainment Technology Center, the Manchester Craftsman’s Guild, and Pittsburgh Filmmakers) and the premiere screening of the short documentary Pittsburgh: Hollywood’s Best Kept Secret (produced by award-winning filmmaker Laura Davis).

Several other Hollywood insiders serve on the panel’s board of advisors, but were not able to attend the event.

The organization does not rely only on Hollywood residents. There is also a large group of prominent Pittsburghers on the board. These include the Film Studies Program’s own Director, Lucy Fischer, and Carl Kurlander. The board also includes Audrey Hillman Fisher; Kevin McMahan, President, The Pittsburgh Cultural Trust; Anne Lewis, President, Board of the Pittsburgh Children’s Museum; Richard Rauh, Actor, Inspector Gadget, Writer, and Director of Pittsburgh Film Festival (1979-1994); Bill Peduto, City Councilman; George Miles, President, WQED Multimedia; Charley Humphrey, Executive Director, Pittsburgh Filmmakers; Dawn Keezer, Director, Pittsburgh Film Office; William Strickland, Jr., President, Manchester Craftsman’s Guild; Henry Simonds, Filmmaker; Barbara Anderson, Associate Dean, College of Fine Arts, Carnegie Mellon University; Don Marinelli, Director, Entertainment Technology Center, Carnegie Mellon University; Ron Lindblom, Chairman, Conservatory of Performing Arts, Point Park College; and Van Kaplan, Executive Producer, CLO. The Executive Director of the Steeltown Entertainment Project is Ellen Weiss Kander, Esq.

For more information, go to www.steeltownentertainment.org.

Call for Film News!

Are you a Film Studies Alumnus? We’d love to hear from you.

Published, exhibited or done something extraordinary? Let us know.

Contact The News Reel editor, Jennifer Meccariello at jlm86@pitt.edu
Interview with Chuck Palahniuk

Excerpts from Carl Kurlander’s interview with Fight Club author, Chuck Palahniuk, when he spoke for the Contemporary Writer’s Series and the Film Studies Program at Alumni Hall on September 16, 2003 in conjunction with a screening of Fight Club

CK: When you were growing up, did you want to be a writer?

CP: I started writing in the fifth grade... My dad was never home. It was during one of the many trial separations. And by the time I got to the fifth grade, I had really attached to... the fifth grade teacher. So I wrote poems like crazy to get the praise of this male teacher-figure... and then I never wrote again until I was 33 years old.

CK: Did you ever meet a real writer?

CP: In high school. I grew up in a tiny town of 600 people called Burbank, Washington... in Eastern Washington State... all desert, all cactus... the only thing around there is the Hamburg Nuclear Reactor. They brought in on a visit-Writers program... a writer who was touring from Israel, and she was supposed to meet with the student body and only two people showed up - me and Fran Daigler. She looked at both of us and she said, “How the f—k can you live here?” I still remember meeting her. That was really sort of amazing, meeting someone who sort of made their living by writing.

CK: What did you think you were going to do with your life? You were a journalism major.

CP: Boy. You know, my siblings and I were the first generation to ever go to college, and my parents just had a vague idea of what college was going to be. It was going to be like a Bing Crosby movie. We would wear plaid socks. We would eat goldfish. My mom was a cocktail waitress at the Moose Club. My dad was a brakeman for the Burlington Northern. They had no idea what college was....And I wanted to be a writer, ever since fifth grade. And so my folks said, get a degree in journalism. And that’s what I got.... So I worked as a reporter for six months after college, got paid five dollars an hour, I had a 1977 Mercury Bobcat I’d been driving since high school, and I had a lot of student loans to pay off. So I went to Freightliner, I lied like crazy to get hired as an apprentice mechanic, and I worked at Freightliner for 13 years until I quit in 1998 to write full time.

CK: When you were working on the assembly-line, did you say in the back of your mind “I’m a writer, and I’m just doing this to pass the time”?

CP: Everybody on the assembly-line had a degree in journalism, and some of them were like 55 years old. And everyone talked about moving to another market. “I wanna move to the Seattle market...” like we’re such professionals. And I always thought that I’d write fiction when I retired, when I turned 65. Because according to my parents’ model, that’s how you succeeded. You found a good job, you gradually achieved seniority and gradual pay raises—that’s probably not a model that’s worked since 1955—but then someday you retired, and that’s when you pursued your passion. That’s when you finished your masterpiece. And I’m so glad that I did not wait until I was 65.

CK: You have such a clear, amazing voice in your work. How did you evolve finding your voice?

CP: First I wrote like Stephen King. Third person, omniscient, sort of modernist fiction. I was just trying to copy Stephen King’s voice. And then I learned how to do that following the rules of minimalism, and I still wrote fantastically crappy stuff. And one night after workshop we were drinking wine and telling stories, and [the instructor] stopped me and said, “Why don’t you just try to write the way you talk?” And I always thought that stand-up comedians were the premier oral storytellers of our time, because they know timing and delivery and rhetoric, they know about maintaining a story and doing little flashbacks, they know about appealing and really connecting with an audience. So I started trying to write as if everything was going to be read out loud, like a monologue, or a routine.

CK: How did you discover how to turn “writing like you talk” into a coherent narrative?

CP: A really good basic example is what became Chapter Six of Fight Club. It was a short story called Fight Club. It was the first thing I sold to any kind of a serious magazine. I was bored at work... I was working with transitional devices in a story... think about Citizen Kane, the movie. We’re basically going to get told the same story over and over again from different viewpoints. We start with the news-reel, a completely nonfiction context for telling that story... and the reporters, who don’t have names or even faces, they’re just silhouettes.

(Continued on page 5)
Palahniuk (cont.)

They are the transitional device that allows us to jump very rapidly, without losing the audience, from one viewpoint to another. I wanted to do that in a short story. So I thought, as a nonfiction device, I’ll make up seven rules. So I made up seven arbitrary rules. For... a club where you can just go and get into a fight. Like you would ask somebody to dance. So I made up these seven rules. And these rules allow me as a chorus to jump. As long as I come back to a rule, I can jump anywhere, past, present, future.

CK: You didn’t write the screenplay [to the 1999 film Fight Club] ... but do you want to say anything about the structure of Fight Club as you now appreciate it, or what you learned as a writer in watching it turn into a screenplay?

CP: I think I said everything on the commentary track (on the DVD). Jim Uhls (Fight Club screenwriter) did a fantastic job. The first go-round, Jim had done it without any voice over, and it was really just a dark, action-adventure movie, and director David Fincher came back from shooting The Game in San Francisco and read it, and said, this is not very funny, so take a whole bunch of lines from the book and insert them as voice over. That’s when it really came together.

CK: Have you tried writing screenplays subsequently?

CP: I took a screenwriting course from a woman who writes movies for the Oxygen Network. She was really deeply troubled by my screenplay.

Our Higher Faculties

These faculty members have shared with us some of their recent accomplishments.

Linda Benedict-Jones was a juror at the prestigious McKnight Foundation Fellowship Awards in Photography in Minnesota and a portfolio reviewer at Fotofest 2004 in Texas.

Jane Feuer spent a month in Berlin under the auspices of DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) and researched a new course offered this fall on Billy Wilder. In April, she will travel to Dublin as a keynote speaker for the conference on US Quality Television.

Lucy Fischer published Designing Women: Cinema, Art Deco, and the Female Form (Columbia UP) this fall. Stars: The Film Reader, co-edited with Marcia Landy, is forthcoming (Routledge). She gave five talks in Pittsburgh this fall and was a keynote speaker at the “City of Women” conference (U. of Florida) in December and at a Graduate Student Symposium (U. of Kansas) in January.

Adam Lowenstein will publish his first book. Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film has been accepted for publication by Columbia University Press’s “Film and Culture” series. It will appear in 2004-2005.

Neepa Majumdar’s forthcoming publications include “Sound Picturization’ and Bombay Cinema: Theorizing Aural Pleasures”; “Pather Panchali: From Neo-Realism to Melodrama”; “Doubling, Stardom, and Melodrama in Indian Cinema: The Impossible Role of Nargis”; and “The Indian Pearl White: Fearless Nadia at the Intersection of Hollywood and India.” She is organizing the Indian Film Festival at Pitt: March 23-April 10.


Vladimir Padunov was a panelist at a roundtable discussion of “Aesthetics and Advertisements” at the XXV Moscow International Film Festival in Russia (June 2003). With Prof. Phil Watts, he organized the film series “French Films from Europe and Africa” at Pitt this fall. In October, he was a juror for “Shaken’s Stars: 1st Festival of Kazakh Films” in Almaty, Kazakhstan. His articles, “Moscow’s Silver Anniversary: XXV Moscow International Film Festival (20-29 June 2003)” and “Subtropical Cinema: Kinotavr, Collective Heroes, and Small Screens,” with Nancy Condee, appeared in Kinocultura. A review of Boris Khlebinikov’s and Aleksei Popogrebskii’s Koktebel (Russia, 2003) appeared in Kinocultura. Padunov received a Sprout Fund...
Luckett, Jane Feuer, Carol Stabile, and Lucy Fischer,” she adds. “To them I owe the honor of this award. From the springboard they’ve provided me, I plan to launch myself into further studies of mainstream film and cultural materialism.” One of her long-term goals is to write—or edit—a book about “the all-purpose, multi-genre, culturally mother-loaded blockbuster Gladiator.”

The following is an abstract of Dione’s award-winning paper, “Foundations in Fashion: (Con)Forming the Corpus of Containment Culture.” Dione’s faculty advisor on the paper was Carol Stabile. Her graduate advisor is Lucy Fischer.

“The body’s capacity for inscription as a cultural text allowed postwar containment culture to create narratives so powerful that they insinuated themselves into the consciousness of the individual woman, who subsequently appropriated them as her own. Consequently, a subordinate and insulated postwar femininity was achieved, in part, as a result of the female subject’s sartorial interpellation by postwar films and advertisements, whose blinding narratives valorized an ideal female body achieved by the (trans)formative power of 50s foundation garments—underwear.

Pierre Bordieu appears to recognize specifically this formidable property of underwear, for he attributes one’s ideological makeover to the very enterprise that women’s undergarments undertook: corrections in “dress and bearing.” Moreover, the status of such garments as unmentionables virtually assured their ability to covertly (con)form the postwar woman who submitted to their constraints.

Unlike her post World War I counterpart, who enjoyed new freedom of movement, both spatially and sartorially, the post WWII female wore a constraining girdle (even beneath her bathing suit!) to ensure that her body, thus restricted in its action and agency, chastely fulfilled its function as America’s pre- and extra-marital sexual container. Similarly, while containing the female breast as bombshell, post-war brassieres, with their militarily-connotative production, design, and nomenclature, essentially faced the woman’s work of breastfeeding—which overwhelmingly gave way to bottle feeding—in favor of the man’s work of waging war.”

The Women’s Studies Student Research Paper Prize Competition recognizes excellent graduate and undergraduate student research in women’s and gender studies.
While We’re on the Subject

Events: 2003-04

Indian Film Festival — 3/23-2004—4/10/2004
Fearless: The Hunterwali Story
Shri 420/Mr. 420
Deudas
In Memory of Friends
Maaichis/Matches
Satya
Kannathil Muthamittal/
A Peck On. The Cheek
Contact: nmajumda@pitt.edu for more info

My Wife is an Actress
The Other World
The Son
Waiting for Happiness
In Praise of Love

Speakers/Events:
Maureen Turim March 2004
Linda Williams February 3, 2004
Tom Savini December 8, 2003
Mary Ann Doane November 10, 2003
Barbara Klinger October 3, 2003

Cinema News
Newly Released to DVD:
The Alien Quadrilogy
Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete Fifth Season
Spellbound
Swimming Pool
To Live and Die in LA
Horror Classics 50 Movie Pack DVD Collection

Newly Released to VHS:
About Schmidt
Gangs of New York
The Hours
The Pianist
Real Women have Curves
25th Hour

Higher Faculty (cont.)

Award of $7,000 for two film series for the fall of 2004.

Jen Saffron contributed work to the exhibition “A is for Aperture: Photographs by Regional Educators” at the Silver Eye Center for Photography in October. In July, she led 10 students in an Introduction to Video service-learning course in Petersfield, Jamaica. Students learned video technique by working in teams to create an advocacy video to help promote a summer youth camp that serves more than 300 underserved youth.

Carole Stabile completed a research project co-authored with Deepa Kumar on media coverage of Afghan women during the early days of the War on Terror. “Using Women as Middle Men: The Real Promise of ICTs,” (with Jonathan Sterne), will appear in 2004 in Feminist Media Studies. With Carrie Rentschler, she is co-editing an issue of National Women’s Studies Association Journal titled “States of Insecurity and Gendered Politics of Fear.”


Students in Jamaica

Jamaica 2003: Topics In Film: Intro to Video
Amizade Global Service-Learning Center
Instructor: Jen Saffron, MFA
July 9 – 23, 2003
Go to: http://www.globalservicelearning.org

GSL Photo Gallery from Jamaica

Lisa Warwick, Ben Finkelstein and friends

Film Studies Writing Awards

Graduate Award Co-Winners
Salome Skvirsky
Matthew Teichman

Undergraduate Award Winner
Amy Hirschman

Honorable Mention
Julie Wade

Congratulations!

Volume 2, Number 2
Jen Saffron exhibited at the *A is for Aperture: Photographs by Regional Educators* show. The exhibit was from September 3 - October 25, 2003 at the Silver Eye Center for Photography.