A spectrum is a broad, possibly infinite range of related points or ideas that are both discrete and integrated in a continuous and related sequence. Although the idea of the spectrum initially seems to point to a form of analysis that is all encompassing, spectrums also encompass discrete sites of contestation. The concept of the spectrum provided a fitting model for the kind of work and scholarly approaches that the conference organizers were seeking, but the discussion also alludes to the literal spectrums that pervade industrial histories of broadcasting. As Thomas Streeter reminds us, histories of broadcast regulation and spectrum allocation are not neutral or natural backgrounds to social interaction but contested spaces in their own right, defined as much by the deeper political orientations of policy makers and power dynamics of social consensus building. [1] By conceptualizing of the spectrum as a site of critical contestation in our conference theme, we encouraged the presenters to map out the continuities and deviations in their respective domains of inquiry while remaining attentive to the larger power dynamics that constitute such relations. The “spectrum” evokes and encompasses many discourses within cinema and media studies and this concept produced an appropriately wide variety of papers. A few key themes emerged and held these papers together, the most visible and resonant of which addressed questions of visuality, spectrality, presence and absence, hauntings, and labor/industrial practices. As Akira Lippit astutely
observed in response to the first panel of papers, “each presentation introduced a spectrum” in its own right. His observation demonstrates that this provocation and conference theme became a way of approaching each paper and understanding the range of ideas expressed therein as part of a continuum rather than as opposing dualities. This spirit and model of inclusive scholarship has been a central priority in the organization of the ZdC conferences and will be reflected in the upcoming 2011 conference on the critical valence of failure.

The Conference – February 27, 2010

The conference participants were largely composed of Ph.D. and M.A. students from around southern California, but also included graduate students who traveled from Illinois, Pennsylvania and elsewhere. While many came from cinema and media studies programs, other presenters from communications, cultural studies, and performance studies programs were also well represented. The conference was divided into three panels, “Specters, Passages and Boundaries,” “Contemporary Hollywood,” “Knowledge and the Apparatus,” and concluded with a lively roundtable discussion on the “The Stakes and Methods for Studying the Media Industries.” The discussion between Jennifer Holt (University of California, Santa Barbara), Nitin Govil (University of California, San Diego), Toby Miller (University of California, Riverside), and moderated by Ellen Seiter (University of Southern California) was provocative and informative for the audience in attendance. The titles of each segment of this daylong event reflected the wide variety of work that we hoped this conference theme would inspire. The roundtable drew into relief some of the larger concerns of methodology, research practices, and interdisciplinarity that are so central to our understanding as graduate students of the evolving field and its prospects for future academics and professionals.

The day opened with a series of remarks from Akira Lippit, Chair of the University of Southern California’s Critical Studies department. His welcome remarks highlighted the interdisciplinary approach of the conference and also asked the conference participants and audience to reflect on the way that spectrums, both as a theme and an inclusive approach toward scholarship, reflect the inspiration of Anne Friedberg’s life and work in the field of cinema and media studies as the late Chair of USC’s Critical Studies department.

The Panels

The first panel of the day, entitled “Specters, Passages and Boundaries,” was moderated by Akira Lippit and included a series of presentations on ghostings, interstitial states of being, and boundary crossings. These presentations inspired a compelling dialogue on the intersections of spectrality, visuality, and embodiment. Hye Jean Chung’s nuanced analysis of Shutter (2008) reveals the ways in which the film’s narrativization of spectral ghosts both obscures and reveals its debt to the 2004 Thai movie on which it is based. In mapping these two ghost stories, Chung calls for a more nuanced understanding of cosmopolitanism, one more attuned to the material contexts of
global mobility and reflective of global systems of economic and cultural exchange. By assessing the status of the original Thai film, and the disavowal of the labor of those who produced it, Chung urges viewers to develop what she refers to as “spectral vision.” Derived in part from Derrida’s theory of hauntology, she theorizes spectrality as a means to rectify social injustice through the recognition of both ghostly presences and the redress of moral debt.

Whereas Chung maps out a spectrum of embodiment and productive labor, Ivan Ross situates a continuum of philosophical metaphors of visual perspective from which to narrate and theorize historical experience. Conceptualizing a spectrum between two poles of visual perspective, he situates tensions between bird’s-eye and mole’s-eye view metaphors in order to draw correlations between nineteenth-century perceptions of history and twenty-first-century media theories. Significantly, he also draws attention to the multiplicity of experience provided by the image, not only as the conduit for coming to knowledge but also as an apparatus for meditating on the unknown.

Like Chung, Amber Bowyer’s analysis of Craig Baldwin’s *Spectres of the Spectrum* (1999) is haunted: by Marx, by Derrida, by ephemeral encounters with the archival histories of broadcast media, and by dialectical materialist engagement with broadcast history and its impact on personal memory. Bowyer maps the tensions in Baldwin’s film between the liveness of broadcast and the retrospective appropriation of found footage, between a sci-fi future and an archived past. In so doing, she also draws attention to the multiplicity of experience provided by the image, not only as the conduit for coming to knowledge but also as an apparatus for meditating on the unknown.

The second panel of the day, moderated by Tom Kemper, focused on contemporary Hollywood practices and texts. Using Will Smith and Tyler Perry as case studies, Leah Aldridge provides a historical framework for understanding a spectrum of cinematic blackness and transnational stardom. In her analysis of these box office sensations, Aldridge explains the ways these two stars project blackness in order to develop their respective brands. Both Smith and Perry in turn illuminate how their performances of blackness are forms of affective labor attuned to the specific desires of neoliberal spectators in the global economy.

After a brief lunch, we returned for the final panel which was moderated by Priya Jaikumar and entitled “Knowledge and the Apparatus.” These presentations examined discourses of knowledge production in relation to specific media and communication technologies. Michael Albright’s engagement with contemporary autobiographical documentary practices calls for a more nuanced understanding of documentary embodiment, intentionality, and its relation to the filmed encounter. His analysis of *A Silverlake Life: The View from Here* (1993), *The Gleaners and I* (2000), and *War Photographer* (2001) provides a forum for reconsidering discourses of embodiment and its relation to handheld documentary cinematography. For Albright, instances of the filmmakers’ hands entering the frame from behind the camera produce an embodied awareness of the active processes of decision-making enacted by the cinematographer/documentarian, an inscription as significant as the recording of the profilmic events unfolding before the camera.

Whereas Albright attempts to situate different degrees of embodiment in relation to the apparatus of the handheld documentary camera, Chuk Moran engages and defamiliarizes our understanding of time to call attention to its varying impacts on software coordination, knowledge work, and social interaction. Moran provides a distinction between Real Time and the “time of undo,” each uniquely inflected by their respective software environs in ways that we are liable to take for granted. Real Time’s blur of a
constantly updating present (e.g. CalTrans online traffic updates) appears continuous and “real” when in fact the perception of continuity is its own production. The time of undo, on the other hand, produces a present of continual contingency, one that is always potentially undone and reverted to a prior state. The tenuous relationship between these two forms of time, as reflected in Moran’s mapping of the perceived spectrum of temporal coherence, is crucial for understanding interoperable software infrastructures as well as new divisions of labor in the knowledge economy.

Roundtable Discussion – “The Stakes and Methods for Studying Media Industries”

Throughout the day there were moments in the papers that alluded to the presence (often spectral presence) of industrial production (whether in the cycle of remakes or the branding of blackness) and the presence of labor (through a handheld camera or the transformation of action through undo commands). However, the culmination of the conference with the roundtable discussion between Jennifer Holt, Nitin Govil, Toby Miller and Ellen Seiter (as moderator) served as a means of drawing out some of the discussions of industry that were already present, while also posing new questions, directions, and methods that could expand many of the ideas presented at the conference.

The roundtable discussion provided various insights into the possibilities and pitfalls of studying media industries. However, this discussion also provided some unexpected insight into the various ways that each of the participants came to the study of media industries and how it fits within the disciplinary and scholarly trajectory of film and media studies more broadly. Nitin Govil suggested that the study of media industries can often be seen as at odds with a film and media studies primarily based in textual analysis, but as Govil pointed out, “the field is not a rejection of textuality, but a disaggregation of textuality.” This comment nicely sums up the work that industry studies performs, but also raises a core question for media scholars about their relationship to textuality.

Although the roundtable discussion explored scholarly approaches to the study of media industries, a number of the responses invited the audience to think about their roles (or future roles) as instructors of budding media workers. Each of the panelists demonstrated how they respectively encourage their students to think differently about media industries, the ways that media content is produced, historicized, and archived and how this impacts the types of jobs that will be available for media makers as well as scholars. By opening up the discussion to explain the relationship between the study and pedagogy of media industries, the panelists presented another spectrum of points that demonstrated the value of industry studies for future media workers.

Despite the wide range of papers on disparate topics, there were several recurring points of discussion that emerged throughout the papers. These commonalities are reflected in many of the papers in this issue of Spectator. We feel that the conference papers we have included in this journal issue reflect the wide variety and high quality of work presented at the conference.
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End Notes