SWEENEY TODD & the Aesthetics of Affect

a study of the critical and cultural reception of Tim Burton’s Horror Musical
I t’s been a long hot summer here in Austin, but it hasn’t slowed down many people around the University. Last spring we spent several weeks interviewing people for three positions, and now three new professors have arrived on campus: Ed Rabbie, who specializes in directing and narrative filmmaking; PJ Raval, an expert cinematographer; and Dr. Weihong Chen, a sociologist investigating aspects of the Internet. They will add greatly to our curriculum and bring new projects into the mix.

I’m happy to report that we pursued establishing an endowment in honor of former professor Nick Curnoe and as of July reached the minimum threshold ($25,000) needed to create the fund. Thanks go to all of you who reached for your checkbooks and donated to the good cause. The focus of the fund will be to support documentary filmmaking, with social justice themes, and we hope to grow the endowment so that we can support more film students.

When IFC and Sundance Channel president Evon Shapiro visited the department last spring, he offered an internship opportunity for the summer, the Cable Center agreed to support it, and student Noel Wells jumped on it. You can read about her experiences at the Independent Film Channel in New York in this issue. We’ve been fortunate to be able to offer more internships around the country in the last few years, and students love the experience they’re gaining.

The Harry Ransom Center provides many exciting opportunities to media researchers. Robert De Niro’s scripts, costumes and other materials are newly archived at the HRC, and it has been a treasure trove for film students researching the actor’s career and influence. Some of our doctoral students spent the summer examining the archive and are writing papers on De Niro’s work and approach, and you’ll hear more about their work in later issues. David Mamet also contributed his papers to the HRC, and now Mr. Mamet visits UT annually to work with students, as detailed in one of our stories here.

New faculty work includes a co-edited book by Janet Staiger on the Convergence Media History, and in this issue she also contributes some observations about the role of emotion in film. Professor Caroline Frick shares her work creating the Texas Archive of the Moving Image, located here in Austin. Professors Michael Kackman and Mary Kearney and doctoral student Laura Simmons returned from the Paris television conference “Television: The Experimental Moment” that is publishing articles by them on the early history of international television.

Our students continue to do terrific work. Over the past few years, endowments have supported small travel and “research & development” grants for our students, and the outcomes of those grants include papers delivered at international conferences and travel to film festivals with accepted work, which we’ve written about in this issue. The MFA students also are getting used to winning awards. Ben Steinbauer’s MFA thesis film “Winnebago Man” landed a win and a distribution deal with the film’s win at the Sarasota Film Festival. Doctoral student Matt Payne just published the co-edited book Joystick Soldiers (Routledge press) on his main research topic, military video games. And our alums also are making waves.

We’re looking forward to an exciting fall with upcoming visits from some of our alums working in a range of media positions. Please drop by if you are in Austin, or let us know if you would like to re-connect with the Department and give a lecture or meet with some of our students. We’d love to see you.

With best wishes.

Sharon Flinn
Chair, Department of Radio-Television-Film
Philip G. Warner Regents Professor in Communication

The COMMUNIQUE is a publication of the Department of Radio-Television-Film at The University of Texas at Austin.

All rights reserved, 2009.

Lead Editor & Designer
Chris Margrave

Associate Editors
Sharon Strover, Michelle Monk and Mike Andrick

Art Consultant & Contributing Designer
Adam Locky (1977-2009)

Printing
Capital Printing, Austin, TX

Print Consultant
Mickey Broussard

All inquiries and comments, including requests for faculty contact information or for permission to reprint articles, should be addressed to:
Publisher, Communiqué
The Department of Radio-Television-Film
University of Texas at Austin
1 University Station
Austin, TX 78712
or 512.471.4071
email: rtf-advising@austin.utexas.edu

ISSUE 04 | 2009
COMMUNIQUE
THE DEPARTMENT OF RADIO-TELEVISION-FILM | UT AUSTIN

rtf.utexas.edu

DEPARTMENTS
CONVERSATION p18
Kim Hall & Soham Malha on writing with David Mamet

DEPARTMENT NEWS p16
Student & faculty awards, Portugal, and more

FACULTY PROFILE p19
Andrew Garrison and Laura Stein

ALUMNI NOTES p21

STAFF PROFILE p22
Susanne Kraft, Post Production Supervisor

SPOTLIGHTS
Summer in NYC p18
Noel Wells on interning with IFC Channel in New York City

Along Came Kinky p20
RTF alumna David Harman visits about film chronicling Kinky Friedman’s 2006 run for governor

Back Story Update p23
An update on Miguel Angelz, Wanawaya Alang
The Robert De Niro Collection

The Robert De Niro collection of film-related materials is now open to researchers and the public at the Harry Ransom Center, a humanities research library and museum at The University of Texas at Austin. The materials, donated in 2006 by actor-director-producer De Niro, document his professional career from the 1960s through 2005. The collection includes more than 1,300 boxes of papers, film, movie props, and costumes.

Filling more than 300 archival boxes, the paper portion of the collection includes De Niro’s heavily-annotated scripts and correspondence, make-up and wardrobe photographs, wardrobe continuity books, costume designs and posters, and extensive production, publicity, and research material. The papers document De Niro’s work on 69 films, from the 1968 film “Greetings,” through “Hide and Seek” (2005), and demonstrate De Niro’s preparation for his acting roles and the collaborative nature of his work with noted writers, directors, actors, and other film artists. The type and amount of material vary for each film.

“This is an important and incredibly rich collection,” said Steve Wilson, associate curator of film at the Ransom Center. “It covers so many aspects of filmmaking, from scripts and screenwriting to costumes and film and video. Scholars and students can follow the development of such films as “The Deer Hunter” (1978), from the printed page to the screen. I simply don’t know of another film archive quite like it.”

With about 8,500 items filling more than 1,000 boxes, the costumes and props within the collection constitute the Center’s largest single costume holding and include such iconic items as the leopard-print boxing robe worn by De Niro in “Raging Bull” (1980) and the voluminous, body-length coats of the creature in “Frankenstein” (1994). Some of the costumes and props are accompanied by wardrobe continuity books that include notes from the wardrobe crew and photographs of De Niro in costume.

“Because of the comprehensiveness of the costume holdings, scholars can witness the conceptualization and realization of a character not only within one cinematic moment, but throughout the entire film,” said Helen Adair, the Ransom Center’s associate curator of performing arts. “The collection also illuminates production aspects such as the costume budget, the editing process of the costume designer, and wardrobe and makeup treatments that either enhance the expression of a character’s state or action, or that are used for scenes involving special effects.”

The collection, appraised at more than $5 million, took more than two years to process, organize, and catalog. A finding aid that provides an inventory of the collection and a database of costumes and props is available on-line. Also included is information about using the collection and the Center’s policy on access to costumes.

The Robert De Niro Endowed Fund supports research in the collection. Information about the Ransom Center’s fellowships is available online. Additional materials for more recent De Niro projects will be added to the collection and made available at future dates.

Other substantial film collections at the Ransom Center include those of producer David O. Selznick, screenwriter Ernest Lehman, and actress Gloria Swanson. For more information, contact Jennifer Tisdale, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center.
THE STUDENTS SPEAK...

“W hen an industry guest normally speaks on campus, I feel like they give the same sort of paint-by-numbers answers. The same cannot be said of the Master Class, where there is much more time and a much more intimate setting to allow people to speak openly and honestly.” – James Henson, RTF Senior

“Every week seemed to be another opportunity to pick the brain of someone who had succeeded in the industry. What I most enjoyed about these intimate sessions was how candid the guests were and how thrilled they seemed to be talking about their work to a group of interested film students. I found Mike Judge to be the most compelling. His friendly nature and humorous tone kept me fully interested.” – Maxim Pozderac

“I’m usually not one to get star-struck, but when I was standing next to Mike Judge I basically forgot how to speak English. Abraham Lincoln could have walked through our doors and I wouldn’t have been more star-struck. In a way it’s a shame because he is such an approachable, good-natured guy and would have answered any question from probably anybody.” – Chris Canning

“Morgan Spurlock taught me that it’s important that I am very conscious of the stories and images I am putting up on the screen. The stories we tell can have a very real effect on our audiences.” – Tim Hudgin

“I think Richard Linklater gave great advice to aspiring filmmakers and his relaxed nature made me think I was having a casual conversation with a friend. Also the private screening of ‘Me And Orson Welles’ was a nice surprise and a learning experience.” – Sarah Grubard

“The most compelling guy had to be Harvey Weinstein, because I had no pre-conceived notion of what to expect and he blew me away. A real pro! I learned a lot about his role in the industry enough to realize I don’t think I could do it (not enough moxie) but I’d like to have a guy like him in my corner. In this one evening I get the super-condensed dose of all the industry connections and buzz I sort of had expected when I came to UT but that never materialized. Maybe without knowing it I saved the best for last.” – Kevin Pinkerton

“After all the great stories were told and the classroom portion of this evening had ended, I was invited on a one-on-one walk with Mike Simpson to Rudy’s BBQ up ahead for a granola for me as I am now looking forward to the possibility of being so ignored myself. Staring in the mirror, of course.” – Cole Dabney

“Mike Simpson blew me away. A real pro. I learned a lot about advice to aspiring filmmakers and his relaxed, humorous tone kept me fully interested.” – Max Simmons

“I'm usually not one to get star-struck, but when I was standing next to Mike Judge I basically forgot how to speak English. Abraham Lincoln could have walked through our doors and I wouldn’t have been more star-struck. In a way it’s a shame because he is such an approachable, good-natured guy and would have answered any question from probably anybody.” – Chris Canning

“Morgan Spurlock taught me that it’s important that I am very conscious of the stories and images I am putting up on the screen. The stories we tell can have a very real effect on our audiences.” – Tim Hudgin

"I think Richard Linklater gave great advice to aspiring filmmakers and his relaxed nature made me think I was having a casual conversation with a friend. Also the private screening of 'Me And Orson Welles' was a nice surprise and a learning experience." — Sarah Grubard

"The most compelling guy had to be Harvey Weinstein, because I had no pre-conceived notion of what to expect and he blew me away. A real pro! I learned a lot about his role in the industry enough to realize I don’t think I could do it (not enough moxie) but I’d like to have a guy like him in my corner. In this one evening I get the super-condensed dose of all the industry connections and buzz I sort of had expected when I came to UT but that never materialized. Maybe without knowing it I saved the best for last." — Kevin Pinkerton

"After all the great stories were told and the classroom portion of this evening had ended, I was invited on a one-on-one walk with Mike Simpson to Rudy’s BBQ up ahead for a granola for me as I am now looking forward to the possibility of being so ignored myself. Staring in the mirror, of course." — Cole Dabney

On the eve of the 2009 Cannes Film Festival where he was about to premiere the newest Quentin Tarantino film ‘Inglourious Basterds,’ Weinstein sat down with host John Pierson for the Master Class. During his talk with the Master Class, Harvey spoke about what it was like to shake up the sleepy little town of independent film, how much money a severed ear costs you, how he wanted Daniel Day Lewis to play Travolta’s hit man, and how seductive it is to move up to $100 million films like ‘The Aviator,’ and why he’s proud of keeping the Brazilian masterpiece ‘City of God’ on screen for well over a year.

This wasn’t exactly a normal Master Class on the UT campus since Harvey Weinstein is insanely busy and suggested doing a satellite link from New York. Pierson, having known him since before he was “One Name Harvey,” broke all his rules and said yes. It was definitely a technical challenge but worth every ounce of trouble.

A more fitting end to the particular lineup of speakers this spring might only exist in fiction. Having heard numerous references to Harvey Weinstein this semester, as well as other references I’ve heard the past fifteen or so years, I had a certain image in my mind about Harvey – an abrasive one. Yet in this case he was the essence of an old school gentleman.” — Adrienne Harmon

"I’m just glad I got to see some actual hometown heroes that are people and not megastereotypical tyrants hell bent on destroying the industry one film at a time. Though that’s fun too." — Aaron Marquis

"We had the pleasure of hearing from an agent, a writer, a lawyer, a producer, a director, a cinematographer, and an animator, but in the end the one that really stuck in my mind was MARK WOOLLEN, trailer maker extraordinaire." — Jason Woolfshart

"Am I sorry Mark Woolllen drew the veil away from the trailer and its construction? Maybe a little, but as with every guest who came through the doors of Studio 4D this semester, I found the knowledge gained a good deal more gratifying than the blissful ignorance that had preceded it. Which is to say every Monday evening expanded what I knew or thought I knew about the culture and industry of movies and movie-making.” — Will Dunlap

"Ellen Kuras’ humility, class, and purity of passion made me actually believe that it’s possible to remain true to oneself while creating a legendary canon of work. Researching her life and work was extremely inspiring but having the opportunity to hear her talk about her experiences and choices was compelling.” — Jackie Stone

"As film students we almost forget the role that memes like Chris Garcia & Marjorie Baumgarten play in our viewing experience. I feel that this semester helped illuminate an overlooked part of the movie industry." — Chris Kim

"Every week seemed to be another opportunity to pick the brain of someone who had succeeded in the industry. What I most enjoyed about these intimate sessions was how candid the guests were and how thrilled they seemed to be talking about their work to a group of interested film students. I found Mike Judge to be the most compelling. His friendly nature and humorous tone kept me fully interested.” — Maxim Pozderac

"I’m usually not one to get star-struck, but when I was standing next to Mike Judge I basically forgot how to speak English. Abraham Lincoln could have walked through our doors and I wouldn’t have been more star-struck. In a way it’s a shame because he is such an approachable, good-natured guy and would have answered any question from probably anybody.” — Chris Canning

"Morgan Spurlock taught me that it’s important that I am very conscious of the stories and images I am putting up on the screen. The stories we tell can have a very real effect on our audiences.” — Tim Hudgin

"I think Richard Linklater gave great advice to aspiring filmmakers and his relaxed nature made me think I was having a casual conversation with a friend. Also the private screening of ‘Me And Orson Welles’ was a nice surprise and a learning experience.” — Sarah Grubard

"The most compelling guy had to be Harvey Weinstein, because I had no pre-conceived notion of what to expect and he blew me away. A real pro! I learned a lot about his role in the industry enough to realize I don’t think I could do it (not enough moxie) but I’d like to have a guy like him in my corner. In this one evening I get the super-condensed dose of all the industry connections and buzz I sort of had expected when I came to UT but that never materialized. Maybe without knowing it I saved the best for last.” — Kevin Pinkerton

"After all the great stories were told and the classroom portion of this evening had ended, I was invited on a one-on-one walk with Mike Simpson to Rudy’s BBQ up ahead for a granola for me as I am now looking forward to the possibility of being so ignored myself. Staring in the mirror, of course.” — Cole Dabney

"We had the pleasure of hearing from an agent, a writer, a lawyer, a producer, a director, a cinematographer, and an animator, but in the end the one that really stuck in my mind was MARK WOOLLEN, trailer maker extraordinaire.” — Jason Woolfshart

"Am I sorry Mark Woolllen drew the veil away from the trailer and its construction? Maybe a little, but as with every guest who came through the doors of Studio 4D this semester, I found the knowledge gained a good deal more gratifying than the blissful ignorance that had preceded it. Which is to say every Monday evening expanded what I knew or thought I knew about the culture and industry of movies and movie-making.” — Will Dunlap

"Ellen Kuras’ humility, class, and purity of passion made me actually believe that it’s possible to remain true to oneself while creating a legendary canon of work. Researching her life and work was extremely inspiring but having the opportunity to hear her talk about her experiences and choices was compelling.” — Jackie Stone

"As film students we almost forget the role that memes like Chris Garcia & Marjorie Baumgarten play in our viewing experience. I feel that this semester helped illuminate an overlooked part of the movie industry.” — Chris Kim

"I think Richard Linklater gave great advice to aspiring filmmakers and his relaxed nature made me think I was having a casual conversation with a friend. Also the private screening of ‘Me And Orson Welles’ was a nice surprise and a learning experience.” — Sarah Grubard

"The most compelling guy had to be Harvey Weinstein, because I had no pre-conceived notion of what to expect and he blew me away. A real pro! I learned a lot about his role in the industry enough to realize I don’t think I could do it (not enough moxie) but I’d like to have a guy like him in my corner. In this one evening I get the super-condensed dose of all the industry connections and buzz I sort of had expected when I came to UT but that never materialized. Maybe without knowing it I saved the best for last.” — Kevin Pinkerton

"After all the great stories were told and the classroom portion of this evening had ended, I was invited on a one-on-one walk with Mike Simpson to Rudy’s BBQ up ahead for a granola for me as I am now looking forward to the possibility of being so ignored myself. Staring in the mirror, of course.” — Cole Dabney
Soham
Well, that’s a good question, ‘cause we were told to forget everything.
Kim
Yes, we were told to forget everything we know as our preparation….
Soham
We were supposed to come without laptops.
Kim
And there was a total of 12 people.
Soham
Yeah, two RTF production students, four screenwriters, four Michener students, two theater students, and two creative writing students from the English department.
Kim
It was held at the Harry Ransom Center in a small room where we were told not to remove any of the furniture; that the furniture was all donated specifically for that room and it was antique. We then proceeded to break two of the chairs over the course of the workshop.
Soham
I broke one chair, and some other dude broke another chair. In fact I broke the first chair as the first day was ending. Mamet showed up in a beret.
Kim
A beret a day.
Soham
It was cool how he showed up early the second day. He seemed really jazzed.
Kim
He was?
Soham
So what were you expecting the first day?
Kim
I thought he was going to come in with a plan. Maybe already have the core of a story and have us brainstorm the three acts. Or just have us ask writing questions.
Soham
Had you read plays?
Kim
I’m mostly familiar with the films he’s directed or written: “Glengarry Glen Ross,” “State and Main,” “The Spanish Prisoner;” “Vanya on 42nd St…” “The Edge,” an excellent film starring Anthony Hopkins, Alex Baldwin, and Bart the Bear.
Soham
So you weren’t expecting much.
Kim
I was just thinking he was going to talk at us.
Soham
Why are you projecting?
Kim
(laughs)
I just thought it would be him imparting his knowledge on us. So I was happy that it didn’t end up being that at all.
Soham
I guess he came here a year ago when the Ransom Center acquired all his papers and there was a lecture which was very much “Here’s a celebrity, let’s ask him questions and have him answer!” Mamet’s someone who doesn’t want to over intellectualize the process, so the lecture was funny and he spouted a lot of witty lines. But as a writer you didn’t get a whole lot except, “work hard but don’t be a slave to the audience,” rather than “Here’s how I do the work.” It was more celebrity storytelling as opposed to really learning something as a writer. So I was pleasantly surprised by the workshop.
Kim
Could you be more specific?
Soham
Well he did do a little of the celebrity storytelling, but everyday (the workshop was three hours long, three consecutive days) we would have about 45 minutes Q&A, which was interesting because it was a group of writers; not directors, not actors, but writers. Which is what Mamet’s famous for. So the questions were more pertinent. They were either about his process, philosophy, or about his business, and I guess he felt at ease to answer them a little more bluntly.
Kim
The first day he began by asking us what we wanted to know. So a lot of us were obviously interested in how he goes about translating an idea into a play or screenplay. Then he asked us what kind of subjects we were interested in or specific story ideas we had. One person said Zionism, while another said she’s writing the story of a young girl who’s trying to find her mother. Mamet latched onto that one right away and that’s the story we developed over the three days.
Kim
So that’s what cool about it. He basically pulled an idea from the group and we brainstormed a treatment of it together. We only got through one act and a half but it was cool because we’d all throw out ideas and Mamet would put his head down for a few seconds as he was trying to come up with the best solution.
Soham
So you weren’t expecting much.
Kim
It was at each stop along the way, we would ask, “Why does this need to happen and why now?” If there’s no reason for it to happen, then it shouldn’t be in the script.
Soham
But it wasn’t like we said, “Here’s what happens at the beginning, middle and end,” and then went back and filled everything in. That’s what was interesting about the process he revealed to us. A lot of times you see short films and they’re those sort of one joke wonders….
Kim
And here we’re starting with an idea and moving forward…
Soham
…without knowing where we’re going, without knowing the end or the punchline. That’s very step by step method which I thought was the unique thing about his process.
Kim
It also solidified the idea of the audience being with the protagonist, i.e. we’re on a journey with the protagonist.
Soham
Three things off the bat he mentioned were: who wants what from whom, why now, and what happens if they don’t get it. He also began by handing out notecards and said, “I just saw this great foreign film but I don’t remember what it was called.” Then he had us write down a question in response which most of us replied, “What’s it about?” and that was the point of his whole workshop. It’s all about the story; it’s all about the plot. It’s not about the theme; it’s not about the moral. You have to create that excitement within the audience where they’re wondering what’s going to happen next. If you follow that model, then you’ll have a successful story.
Kim
It was interesting that as we went along he kept commenting on how our ideas were so much better than what he’s used to when he does this same process for television. I didn’t know if I believed him but I guess it seemed sincere. Overall it was interesting because it was the first time I’d brainstormed a story from scratch with other people.
Soham
They also showed “The Spanish Prisoner” while he was here giving the workshop and you could see this process being applied. Where you have a very clear idea in your head, and you know that he wants to get rich from the very beginning, and because of that he becomes embroiled in this plot that the audience is also involved with step by step. It propels you from scene to scene and moment to moment. And it’s very different from “Glengarry Glen Ross,” which suggests that the process we were using isn’t the only one Mamet uses when he writes. He said his main goal, as a writer, is to delight the audience. In reviews of “The Spanish Prisoner,” either Siskel or Ebert said the film was “delightful.” And it’s because you watch it and you’re continually wondering what happens next and when it ends you’re shocked and surprised and happy. But it doesn’t leave you with much more than “it’s a delight.” However, you wouldn’t necessarily say that about “Wag the Dog” or “Glengarry Glen Ross.” Those are like the pinnacle. If I were going to tell someone to see a Mamet film I would probably recommend one of those, as opposed to the “The Spanish Prisoner.”
Kim
I really liked how he kept saying he writes because he becomes curious about a specific subject or a way of life. What better way to discover something than through writing a play or film about it; like survivors in “The Edge” or injustices in “Reds.” You start in a sort of dark-knowledge-cave and then chip your way through it, along with the character. You don’t know what you’re going to find or if an avalanche will fall on your head.
Soham
It was very anti-moralistic filmmaking or theatre. Rather than see an issue-based story he’d just read the essay or the newspaper article. He said you can’t tell a story uninfected, because the audience will always interpret something from what you say, so be careful of trying to add meaning. If you think you’re smarter than the audience, you’re going to fail. And you run the risk of being boring or didactic. He actually belittles his own profession as a gig writer, claiming that he’s learned everything from the audience, what works and what doesn’t.
Kim
Kim Hall was very encouraging too. Through the brainstorming process he kept urging us to take this story and go film it with a skeleton crew. I’m not sure of any of us wanted to do it, but he liked how he was pushing the idea of just getting your work out there at any cost.
Soham
So what’s the biggest thing you took away from the workshop?
Kim
Mainly the process of starting from a place of ignorance and curiosity and moving forward from there. Discovering things along with your character.
Soham
… and going places you didn’t expect.
Kim
Yes. I started to do that now with the script I’m writing… let them unfold as I go instead of figuring it all out at the beginning. It’s more organic and freeing in a way.
Soham
Same for me. And that’s what is making it unique and exciting for the audience, since they won’t see the premise at the beginning.
Kim
I think that’s it. Thank you for joining Soham and I on our rehash of the Mamet experience. We hope it wasn’t too boring or didactic.
Soham
Kim Hall and Soham Mehta are both advanced MFA production students in the RTF graduate program.
It is not surprising that the play, “Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street,” performed mostly comically, would delight a Broadway audience in 1979. A barber with no regard for human life, a neighbor pie-maker who finds a solution to profit from his dead bodies, and a villainous judge seem ripe for allegorical reading. Nearly thirty years later, Tim Burton’s 2007 rewrite of the Stephen Sondheim “musical thriller” produces a very different feel. The filmed version exploits the possibilities of cinematic specificity—what makes film different from other media. I watched my fellow audience members flinch at the crunch of the first head as it hits the floor, falling into the cellar from Sweeney’s barber chair.

In film scholarship, reception studies has a long-standing attention to spectator affect in theorising textual effects such as “identifica-tion.” As Stephen Heath elegantly borrows from Roland Barthes, Heath describes a film as a “festival of affects.” Any film is. However, in the rush to consider affect, scholars often consider it as a sneaky gimmick to trick audiences into corruption, agreeing with disreputable ideas because of the sway of their emotions.

A different approach proves instructive to understanding how audiences and critics receive a text or film. This approach is founded on what may appear to be an obvious, even ridiculously transparent, observation: people who enjoy a film evaluate it as excellent; those who are repelled, do not. No such thing as a “purely cognitive” aesthetic judgment occurs. Yet this point is as obvious as something we all know. Affect is not just a side feature of experiencing an art object; it constitutes the experience and the film’s so-called “meaning” and value. To sidestep matters of affect—what constitutes pleasures and displeasures, what emotions are raised, how aspects of the text create these, and how our culture evaluates those emotions, indeed the politics of emotions—is likely to miss fundamental factors in the constitution of the reception of the film and the film’s ideological work. Our horizons of expectation are not only historical context, generic and intertextual knowledges, and the author-function; our horizons include socially constituted politics of affect.

“Bloody Good”

Hare Robert Jauss is very helpful in laying out some terms for thinking about the reception of Burton’s “Sweeney Todd.” In his Toward an Aesthetic of Reception, he lists what we might consider...
as part of the horizons of expectation are rather incongruous.

The film critic for The Boston Globe, “What Tim

For the five British reviewers, the reference points are not the 1920s Universal horror films, the Saw series, and gothic horror such as “Texas Chainsaw Massacre” as they are for the US (and Australasian) critics. Althen, “Aufs Blut,” 536. Fisher. One writer, David Benedict, has valuable comments to make about the sound design and its affective properties of the movie; he even used a microchip to describe the machinery of the film, “it is a scary, brutal, frightening film—also a musical, by the way—and the music of the way through the story, it’s just as good as the story and the singing is only so-so.” 11 .

And evaluation derives from this conformity between expectation and genre. T and then move into affective statements, with

The five negative reviews come from Edward

The "Bloody Good" trailer of the movie that Burton planned to make for the budget of a musical, "Sweeney T odd, the musical," and Michael Althen labels it a "Gruisical."

Sondheim his back on somber materials. As he states, "we” is not a hot term for the musical or its..." whereas "the next movie, something, something..." He notes that...acter and the adaptation and musical treatment is consistent through the non-US press.

For its US reviews, it has been labeled a "Gruisical."

For the Carnegie Times reviewer, the affect differed in the theater. The review of the movie is not the...e="Bloody Good," and also

in..." The five negative reviews come from Edward Porter (London’s Sunday Times), Clarence Tsui (South China Morning Post), an anonymous reviewer in Cerino Times (Australia), Tom Baker (Tokyo’s Daily Yomiuri), and Althen (Frankfurt Allgemeine). The review of the movie has the same take on why the film failed, affects central to each one’s evaluation.

And evaluation derives from this conformity between expectation and genre. T and then move into affective statements, with
Making Movies: Here

The Legacy of Itinerant Filmmaker Melton Barker

by Carolyne Frick
Assistant Professor
Department of Radio-TV-Film, UT Austin

In April, 2009, The New York Times reported on the latest online distribution ventures of Hollywood’s usual suspects. It was unremarkable anywhere, in the four major television networks. Speaking in strong support of Hulu.com, the president of NBC Universal, Jeff Zucker, stated that “adver-
sissement have made it clear that they want a safe environment unpolished by videos of cats on skateboards.” Zucker’s dismissive tone contrasts with the ubiquitous popularity of (sometimes hilarious) cat videos evidencing a not particularly subtle jab at YouTube’s prominence in the world’s leading video site—and the most celebrated contemporary example of the so-called “cult of the amateur.”

For the last several decades, media archivists and librarians around the world have been collecting and placing increased importance upon what YouTube now “broadcasts,” but what a number of North American scholars and archival practitioners refer to, instead, as “orphan films” (e.g., home movies, industrial films, advertising films, educational pictures, and other ephemeral moving images that, combined with feature entertainment, constitute a more holistic and inclusive global heritage). One unique, understudied genre of this orphan material is that of the so-called “itinerant film.”

Beginning with the inception of the cinema in the late 19th century, traveling filmmakers found a livelihood throughout North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand—quite possibly the entire world making a business out of “making movies here.” All itinerant films featured community landmarks, businesses, and, most importantly, local residents. During the 1930s and 40s, these filmmakers often contracted with itinerant producers to create the local films, then marketed and promoted the films by presenting them alongside their own dramatic performances on a variety of major theatrical features. A large percentage of these itinerant films did not utilize a narrative structure whatsoever; rather, the camera panned through schoolchildren, factory workers and others in a style not altogether different from the early Lumière actualités. Other itinerant films either co-opted some sort of limited narrative, or mimicked popular Hollywood films and genres, such as the immensely popular Our Gang short subjects, as a method of encouraging community participation as well as to amuse audiences.

The work of Melton Barker—a lifelong movie enthusiast from Dallas, Texas—offers a unique and highly prolific example of the itinerant film mode of production. Barker directed both narrative and non-narrative local films in communities across the United States for over forty years. Out of the entire Barker oeuvre, the films that appear to have endured the longest are Barker's versions of films in the style of Hal Roach's series featuring local "little rascals," including numerous iterations of a film entitled "The Kidnapper's Foil." Current data indicates that Barker made over 150 of these short films and very possibly hundreds more.

B y 1903 and raised in Texas, Barker claimed to have begun his professional life by working with one of major Hal Roach—producing some sort of limited narrative, or mimicked popular Hollywood films and genres, such as the immensely popular Our Gang short subjects, as a method of encouraging community participation as well as to amuse audiences.

Although no corroborative evidence has emerged thus far to prove or disprove Barker's stated, newspaper reports from the early 1930s indicate that Barker had already begun working not only with film, but also with sound—on technology as well. Barker's work making Dallas talkies in 1932 was particularly noteworthy due to Barker's received discovery of Spanky McFarland, one of the more endearing popular child stars of Hal Roach's "Our Gang" series. Through his decades-long film career, Barker claimed to have been the one responsible for Spanky's stardom, having worked with the child in local Dallas advertising campaigns for local bread and ice cream companies in 1930. Although the veracity of Barker's assertion might never be proven definitively, publicity photographs circulated to the press by the filmmaker of himself with Spanky in front of a Hal Roach production truck support the Texas' claimed celebrity connection (photo below).

Thus, while the lure of Hollywood success, of potential overnight fame and fortune, was a significant role for many participants in Barker's films, most parents would have realized that the odds of such a fairy tale ever becoming reality appeared to be a more common trait shared by the child (and the few adults) actors that participated in Barker's films. Barker himself felt: a true love of Hollywood movies and film culture generally. Interviews with Barker's former family members, as well as Barker's own home movies, indicate that the Dallas native entertained a lifelong love of Hollywood; from traveling, to Los Angeles to opening and operating a number of movie theatres in different regions of Texas at varying times throughout his life, Barker spent the better part of his life in the film business. A hardworking entrepreneur whose life “on the road” witnessed a lifelong struggle with alcoholism and three divorces, Barker struggled to balance his love of the Hollywood myth and product with his youth.

Barker, throughout his career, referred to his work with Spanky McFarland, one of the more endearing popular child stars of Hal Roach's "Our Gang" series. Through his decades-long film career, Barker claimed to have been the one responsible for Spanky's stardom, having worked with the child in local Dallas advertising campaigns for local bread and ice cream companies in 1930. Although the veracity of Barker's assertion might never be proven definitively, publicity photographs circulated to the press by the filmmaker of himself with Spanky in front of a Hal Roach production truck support the Texas' claimed celebrity connection (photo below).

Barker's own marketing materials bear out this complicated negotiation. His promotional brochure (ca. late 1940s to early 1950s) entitled, "The Kid Movie. The Inside Story by Barker" proclaims, "Barker movie productions begin," with a sobering take on the reality of the average American's chance at stardom: "Most every
talent show in town, and besides, I work too hard for this
all the time."

Melton Barker

Barker, like other independent filmmakers even today, appeared to have worked on a project in the hopes of not only making money, but to fulfill his dream of becoming a "professional filmmaker" (as Barker himself described on the screen, and a scant forty-one years after appearing on the screen, and a scant forty-one years after appearing on the screen, and a scant forty-one years after appearing on the screen, and a scant forty-one years after appearing on the screen).

Barker's career offers a great example for new possibilities in media research that can shape our understanding of 21st century media convergence. Illustrating the far more convoluted and convergent history of media better than what historians typically have written, itinerant filmmakers operated in a proactive manner. Barker's career continued to be a great example of the relationship between all areas of media production and complicate easy assumptions related to 21st century media convergence.

But such issues can be raised only if the films survive, and, alas, to access them to create true historical meaning. Melton Barker, with his long lasting career that spanned from the heyday of the Hollywood studios to the current era of internet distribution, serves as a harbinger of future research to come that will further challenge traditional notions of the relationship between areas of historical production and complicate easy assumptions related to 21st century media convergence.

Next to Barker's plea for solid Hollywood impersonation, Factory programs delineated the undercurrents of man’s mode of production: pre-planning and rehearsal. Barker demanded a day's work a day—four to five days of training (so that the children's voices could be audible on the filmstrip, operators prepared their machines for the next day), and only one to two days of shooting. Noting that filmmaking was an expensive undertaking, and not one that allowed him to become wealthy, Barker charged fees for participation—fees that appeared to vary from town to town, from $4 to $40 dollars of $20 and offered additional acting lessons for several dollars as well.

Next to Barker's career, and the news materials, the filmmaker's oeuvre in and of itself, delineated the undercurrents of man's mode of production: pre-planning and rehearsal. Barker demanded a day's work a day—four to five days of training (so that the children's voices could be audible on the filmstrip, operators prepared their machines for the next day), and only one to two days of shooting. Noting that filmmaking was an expensive undertaking, and not one that allowed him to become wealthy, Barker charged fees for participation—fees that appeared to vary from town to town, from $4 to $40 dollars of $20 and offered additional acting lessons for several dollars as well.

A Chattahoochee, Tennessee, local theater owner received strong feedback in 1949 from patrons who asked for a “$1 tip” for Barker's show to support his fee for children to participate after the kids had auditioned with over 1,000 others in the community. Barker expressed frustration when questioned about critics who castigated him for his work being a "mocking filmmaking". Barker continued by noting that he grew tired of such complaints from "ignorant" people, hoping instead that conversational filmmakers would continue to support his work so that they would "see it's legitimate. The kids get a big kick out of being in a movie, and besides, I work too hard for this to be a fake."
COMMUNIQUE
16
Department News

RTF Students On the Road

Every year the Department awards a select number of travel stipends to RTF students to support their research or film project. Below are updates from three of the 2009 Travel Award recipients.

ANGELA CHEN
B eing in New York City in the midst of the production of my thesis film was like an intoxicating dream. Without the funds from the RTF travel award, I would not have been able to travel to New York for the Tribeca Film Festival in which “Cal Express” (dir. Sergio Carvajal; prod.edit. Angela Chen) was competing within the short films section.

A study with listeners concluded that my experimental microphone was an equal favorite with the Soundfield commercial microphone. The RTF Undergraduate Travel Award helped pay for expenses to present a paper on this research to the Audio Engineering Society Conference in Munich, Germany, this past May.

MARSHALL RIMMER

The travel award I received has greatly helped me by both allowing me to create professional contacts and by spreading awareness of my Web-series, “The Wingmen.” This March, with the help of the RTF Department, I was able to travel to an awards ceremony put on by The International Academy of Web Television held in Los Angeles, California. “The Streamy Awards,” as they are called, are dedicated to recognizing outstanding achievement for shows produced originally for broadband distribution. Our series was nominated for an Audience Choice Award alongside industry giants William Shatner and Joss Whedon. Having been a finalist in South by Southwest’s Greensheet Awards in 2008, our show was new to recognition. However, a fancy schmancy awards gala in the heart of entertainment industry was another story. I met producers, agents, showrunners, and even paparazzi. When I traveled this past winter to LA for the Texas Filmmaker Showcase, I actually met up with a couple of the people that I met in March. I graduated this May and this trip really helped me gain the confidence and contacts that I needed to approach the real world of media and teaching techniques that have informed my teaching. I graduated this May and this trip really helped me gain the confidence and contacts that I needed to approach the real world of professional music recording. It was an intoxicating dream.

DAN HEMINGSON

In the fall of 2006, I took my first ACTLab course with Professor Sandy Stone and discovered the sound system used in the ACTLab. Studio 64. Having long been interested in audio, this opportunity to work with the possibilities of sound was exciting. The next semester one of my ACTLab projects was to record ambient sound in 5 channels and to present the recording in 3.1 surround. Professors Mark Sarisky and Bruce Pennycook introduced me to ambientic recording and built an ambitious microphone. Through independent study in the Butler School of Music, I made simultaneous recordings of performances and performances using my microphone and two commercial ambisonic microphones. My research evolved into further recordings and new experiments that compared the quality of the microphones used in the recordings.

The first half of the course concentrated on the impact of the digital revolution on the shifting nature of business models and productive output. The second half focused on the evolution of contemporary narrative forms, including traditional dramatic principles of character, scripts, the students also explored how “the recognition, Steinbauer’s film “Lives” won the 2009 Barbara Jordan Media Award for Special Recognition of a Web-series in the 2009 Sarasota Film Festival. Along with the recognition, Steinbauer’s film will receive a U.S. distribution deal with Final Features and a screening at the Stranger Than Fiction series.

“The Independent,” an online magazine covering the independent film industry, cited the RTF Department’s MFA screenwriting program as one of the “10 Best Academic Programs for Aspiring Screenwriters” in its December 2008 issue. The MFA in Screenwriting in the RTF Department is a two-year degree program designed for individualized study into storytelling for the screen. The program is offered at the $(x,y)$ location of the $z$-axis $(x',y,z')$.

RF Lecturer Wins Barbara Jordan Award

RF lecturer Steve Mims’s documentary short “Changing Children’s Lives” won the 2009 Barbara Jordan Media Award for Special Recognition of a Web-series in the 2009 Sarasota Film Festival. Along with the recognition, Steinbauer’s film will receive a U.S. distribution deal with Final Features and a screening at the Stranger Than Fiction series.

The MFA in Screenwriting in the RTF Department is a two-year degree program designed for individualized study into storytelling for the screen. The program is offered at the $(x,y,z)$ location of the $(x',y,z')$.

COMMUNIQUE
17
Department News

Screenwriting Program Named Top 10 in Country

“For the first time in its history, this year’s Independent Spirit Awards featured a category specifically created to recognize independent filmmakers who have made a significant first feature. The restricted number of entries, which is limited to five, makes the award even more special for the nominees, each of whom will be featured in a profile on the Independent Spirit Awards website.”

WRITING TECHNIQUES

During the summer of 2009, the Department continued its partnership with Portugal by sending a number of its talented professors and lecturers to Porto and Lisbon, Portugal, to lead courses in subjects ranging from animation to independent media studies topics.

Angela Chen

While examining a variety of techniques for the creation of narrative interactive music, the course explored hybrid electroacoustic musical spaces using different kinds of controllers from MIDI and the popular wi-immo to more complex VR-based systems. As the culmination of the two-week course, each student shared their creation in a “summit” setting.

“Due to our increasing understanding of the ways that digital technologies impact Hollywood’s business model and profitable output, the Independent Spirit Awards addressed the merits of media products addressed the merits of media products and the so-called “national cinemas.”

Technology & Culture

Dan Hemingson

This year’s award was inspired by a new wave of digital technologies that have evolved over the past decade. They have opened up new avenues for music creation in a “concert” setting. Among the many kinds of technology that have been explored during this course, students will gain an understanding of the ways that digital technologies impact Hollywood’s business model and profitable output.

Creating & Designing Interactive Music w/ Bruce Pennycook

The Barbara Jordan Awards recognize outstanding achievements by representatives from various communications media fields (print, radio, television, advertising, the Internet and public relations) who are innovators in the field of public service and who are dedicated to recognizing outstanding achievements by representatives from various communications media fields (print, radio, television, advertising, the Internet and public relations). The Barbara Jordan Awards recognize outstanding achievements by representatives from various communications media fields (print, radio, television, advertising, the Internet and public relations).

The UT-Portugal Digital Media Project is now its third year and already has accomplished many of its goals, including establishing an annual festival history, and online learning resources that focus particularly on the role of “national cinemas.”

Digital Documentary Production w/ Nancy Schieren

Students in this course examined current documentary forms such as oral history, ethnography, and intergenerational storytelling with the goal of creating a product that would be of interest to an audience.

Department News

The UT-Portugal Digital Media Project is now its third year and already has accomplished many of its goals, including establishing an annual festival history, and online learning resources that focus particularly on the role of "national cinemas."
During the summer of 2009, the RTF department and the Cable Center partnered with the IFC Channel to create the inaugural summer-long internship for one lucky RTF student. Neil Wells, the program’s first intern, shares his experience.

n my first day interning at the Independent Film Channel, it rained. I looked over a welcome packet and figured out how to use my phone, then huddled home. On my second day, it was bright and sunny and by mid-afternoon I found myself 10 feet away from five scantily clad ladies as they danced, sang, and jigged their nether regions in the faces of five pseudo-celebrity judges in the hopes of winning the ultimate title of “America’s Hottest Rocker Mom.” The summer, I would say, started off with a bang.

IFC, like every media company and television network, has had to adapt to the quickly evolving technologies in today’s market. As an IFC marketing intern, I’ve assisted the marketing department as they focus on their target audiences via grass roots and D.I.Y. campaigns, including internal and direct outreach. I spend most of my time on the Internet researching websites, groups, and fan pages that are relevant for each project, though every once in a while I do something more direct like place fliers in trendy NYC neighborhoods. Projects have ranged from promoting mini-series, including the early August premiere of “IFC’s 50 Greatest Trailers list,” to put in the effort. And spend a lot of time online.

The fine line that IFC and every company dances around is the difference between truly connecting with fans and being annoying spam. I’ve learned though my internship that a direct, honest approach is much more well-received than a copy and pasted post on a Web forum. And truly getting people involved is the first step in avoiding that pitfall of copy-and-paste advertising. The “America’s Hottest Rocker Mom” competition was a real contest, with hundreds of women sending in their pictures to be judged, but it was inherently linked with the premise of the IFC program “Z-Rock.” By creating a little fun and lighthearted in the campaign, people don’t feel like they’re being pondered or tallied.

I’ve learned to use Facebook and Twitter in advertising and content support, as well as how to utilize meme-making sites like Digg and Fark. For IFC’s 50 Greatest Trailers list, I compiled numerous Web sites, web forums, blogs and groups where movie fans would likely visit and interact. Once the list was live, not only did I contact administrators, tweet from my own Twitter account, and post on forums, I submitted the links to Digg and Fark. The hope was that Digg and Fark would feature the list, which would drive countless hits and traffic to the IFC site. By sending it to friends, writing witty captions, and soliciting people’s opinions, the list quickly went viral and made it to the front pages of both Web sites.

In the end, I’m learning a lot about IFC and have gotten a good taste of how New York City film and TV industries operate. I got a second internship at an independent production company and have had so much fun researching the best-wise-over-actors enthusiastically endorse the best workout products and teeth cleaning tools. And you wanna know something? Turn out all of those testimonial videos really are REAL people. In my spare time, I’m running around the city taking pictures, attending local independent film festivals, and planning my last year in school. I have a new understanding of what a company needs to do to stay alive in this quickly-evolving industry.

And if I’ve learned anything, it’s the good news that, well, the world doesn’t care. How people find political power, how they find personal power, creative power, spiritual power. In his films and through his teaching, he explores the ways people become “actualized,” as some psychologists say, and the obstacles—social, political, and personal—they overcome.

**RECENT/FORTHCOMING WORK**

**FIELD / WORK**

Garrison is a documentary and narrative filmmaker and is interested in different ways of getting films to different audiences. He is the creator of East Austin Stories, a documentary class in the RTF department that holds live screenings and offers web streaming and downloads, as well as DVD’s and television broadcasts, of its film projects. He’s shown strangers on the street in Europe student documentaries from the class on his iPod.

**FIELD / RESEARCH**

Laura Stein’s research and teaching interests lie in Communication Law & Policy, as well as the First Amendment, media regulation, alternative media, and grassroots political communication.

**BOOK/FILM RECOMMENDATIONS**

“Trouble the Waters,” a documentary that was nominated for an Academy Award in 2008. The film is about two residents of the 9th Ward in New Orleans, who have the presence of mind to document their experience of Hurricane Katrina as it happens on a home camcorder. The film also explores the aftermath of the disaster on their lives. I walked out of the theater thinking, “Everyone in America should see this film.”

**ONE ADVANTAGE TO LIVING IN AUSTIN**

Having the rare combination of an accessible and manageable city with far more things to do (music, food, art, outdoors, etc.) on any given day than a city its size normally has.
**COMMUNIQUE**

**COMMUNIQUE** 20

about politics. The time it takes to make a movie is both. Specific to “Along Came Kinky” it’s a film I’d actually met Kinky at a Jewish holiday dinner at I’d been out of film school a year and hadn’t jumped all over it. I don’t think it ever changed. I was keeping an eye, because you never know what may end up being small to learn from and that not all

**Alumni Notes**

Alexander G. Alvarez (BS ’75) has recently been appointed 2012-2015 by the KONY Sankey Mattingly Program in Asia Studies. Alex P. Krueger (BS ’91) is a freelance food writer for The Stranger and The Seattle Times. C. Arliss Arnold (BS ’05) is a freelance producer specializing in New York. Brian Reuter (BS ’03) is a technical director with the Produce Marketing Association of North America (PMA).

**Communiqué**: What led you to make this film?

**David Hartstein**: What led you to make this film?

**The most macro-level answer (especially with as little money as I had), there’s no possibility of a project is too small to learn from and that not all possible way there could have had an outcome on this particular race. And really, I didn’t have a political agenda. I didn’t know enough about the players going in to have a well-formed opinion. I just wanted to get close to the process and document Kinky’s campaign as I saw it. Of course that will be different from how I know it is, how the other candidates and their supporters saw it or how anyone saw it, but with my subject there’s no way around that. But when the film is most successful is in illustrating a process that is far removed from how most people see a campaign. The people who work on them are too close to it and really I don’t think there’s any way that just following a campaign as it’s happening in the media will get someone close to how it works. Ultimately I like the way the film works as a film about politics as that a vehicle for a particular partisan stance. That said, it’s an on-repeated reason of film theory that “all film is political” – I was keeping an eye, because you never know what may end up being small to learn from and that not all
SUSANNE KRAFT
post-production supervisor

Susanne supports and maintains numerous computer systems and is an expert in Final Cut Pro editing workstations that range in complexity from low end digital video firewalls to high-end uncompressed HD Definition workstations. In other words, she holds down the RTF post-production fort. A graduate from UT Austin with a BA degree in Information Studies, she holds down the RTF post-production fort. In other words, she holds down the RTF post-production fort.

Susanne likes animals, especially cats. She dabbles in real estate unless she has to do any remodeling herself. She’s short on dislikes, though bad traffic and shellfish do summon her ire.

**A favorite moment as RTF staff member**

My favorite moments are the End of Semester Screenings at the Alamo DraftHouse theaters. Seeing films at the Alamo. I really enjoy being up in the projection booth and looking down on all the excitement taking place in the theater below and then finally staring the screenings and seeing the beautiful images screen. My favorite moments are the End of Semester Screenings at the Alamo. I really enjoy being up in the projection booth and looking down on all the excitement taking place in the theater below and then finally staring the screenings and seeing the beautiful images screen.

**Favorite Movie(s)**

These wouldn’t necessarily show up in a “Best Movie” category, but I always appreciate a good story, a great script and work. My favorite movies are the ones that make me laugh, cry and think. My favorite movies are the ones that make me laugh, cry and think.

**Favorite Austin eatery**

I love VEGGIE HEAVEN on the drag. It’s vegetarian and everything is good, fresh and, of course, low calorie. But who’s out looking for a restaurant that’s good, fresh and, of course, low calorie? I love VEGGIE HEAVEN on the drag.

**One advantage of living in Austin is...**

...living in Manor. Just kidding, but I wouldn’t be able to afford five acres in Austin. I once felt like Eva Gabor on Green Acres living on a plot of land in Manor, Texas, but now I can’t live with close neighbors anymore.

**Back Story Update**

WORKS WELL WITH OTHERS

An update on the making of a graduate thesis film

In the second issue of the Department’s Communicate magazine, Miguel Alvarez sneak peeked at the cover as he stood inside the ambitiously built set of his thesis film, “Mernenoye Rising.” Where is Miguel now in the production of his story of a deep space pilot orbiting a newly-discovered planet? Who has helped along the way?

Below, Miguel provides an update on his film. And RTF Media Librarian, Lee Sparks, shares about building the model for the space ship that was used during filming.

**Miguel Alvarez, RTF graduate filmmaker**

A star working for so long building the set, it was a huge relief and joy to finally start shooting. It was similar to being a kid washing your dream boat right behind your eyes - all along all you want to do is jump in it and race it. At present, we’ve shot everything and I’m just about done finishing a final edit. Then we start on effects work. It’s been a looming process already.

But I’ve learned a lot during this project, especially about the art of compromise. Past projects taught me to try to keep everything in the script to doable things. But there’s always something that you’re so sure you can pull off until your Producer or AD or DP looks at it and says, “Uh-oh....” There was a sequence in the script where the ship loses interior gravity - and void! - our actor here feels weightless. We had a stunt guy come out and price it for us. We figured out where to hang the wires, and all the other logistical stuff associated with it. But then when we looked at the schedule, we realized there was just no time to devote to it. We would have needed a full day for just that sequence and on our timeframe, we were way behind schedule.

Moments like those make you realize what really works and what you can get away with once you’re in the groove of production. But the whole production went so smoothly, considering the scope of everything.

I’ve definitely got to thank the core art team - Javier Bonafont, Nazannin Shiral, Eliza Hook, and Andrew King. Those people worked their asses off every day for nearly three months building the sets, gizmos, and other sci-fi thangamabobs.

Now, I’d just like to get the film out there once it’s finished. So many people worked so hard on it and I want everybody to see the fruit of all that work. Hopefully it’ll lead to opportunities for not only myself, but everyone else as well. I’d also like to finish up this feature script I’ve had percolating for a while. It’s called “Atlantic City,” and it’s about a couple of drifters from small town Texas that fall in love. I’ve got a Panavision grant for a camera package for 40 days that I’d like to use to shoot it. It’s just a matter of finding some financing and getting rolling. I mean, after shooting “Mernenoye Rising.” I sort of feel I’m ready for anything now.

**Lee Sparks, model builder, RTF media librarian**

Inspiration for the model came from various sources. The art director, Javier Bonafont, drew a great sketch of the layout and shape they wanted and handed me a few boxes of scale models to start with. The front end is actually made of Christmas ornaments! And there are car exhaust systems in there too, as well as grass hoppers and lattice bridges for model trains. But it was agreed that one design influence was the Valley Forge from “Silent Running,” as well as the Cygnus from “The Black Hole.” Miguel was constantly referencing the “VAISMARK” aesthetic and would encourage me to draw from this discipline if I wanted direction. Also, I took some impressions from Jules Verne literature and, especially, “20,000 Leagues Under the Sea,” “Master of the World,” and “The Mysterious Island.”

As for planning out the construction, I knew I needed to create a large model that would be photographed from a variety of angles, would be sturdy enough to move around, and yet light enough to be suspended by wires if necessary. So I ran out to build the front and back ends with the lightest materials I could find. The engine is made from a 3-liter Coke bottle and a CD spindle. And for the control rod that serves as a structural support from end to end, I wound up using a piece of thread ribbon from Breed & Co. around which are glued various pieces of Russian satellite models, V-8 engines, trestle bridges, and more than a few custom-made pieces measured and carved by hand. Again, I was terrified the thing would collapse during photography, so I went out of my way to make it as strong as possible. The irony is that it was designed to be supported by a base in the middle that we were going to paint green and remove in post, but when the day came, they just strung it up with fishing line from either end.

Throughout the whole film production, there was a real spirit of camaraderie that was palpable and shared by everyone involved, and there were a LOT of people involved. I was really impressed with Mig’s ability to motivate people to donate their time and skill to a student production. He had a talent of getting the best that people had to offer by being incredibly flattering to them as ARTISTS. He had graduate students and undergrads working for him, people’s boyfriends and girl friends who didn’t even go to school here. LT staff like myself, and I even saw his dad in there for several days with a spotwelder. It was amazing and inspirational. I just want to see the movie now.
Photo taken by Noël Wells, RTF student, while interning in New York City.