

DePaul American Studies

2320 N Kenmore Ave.
SAC, Fifth Floor
Chicago, Illinois 60614-4086

Phone: 773-325-7163

Warm Regards From Our Director, Amy Tyson

Welcome to our March 2015 newsletter!



Around this time of winter, it is always a pleasure to start thinking about the American Studies Program's **Spring Luncheon**. Mark your calendars for Tuesday, May 12 from 1:00-3:00, in the Lincoln Park Student Center, Room 220. The luncheon boasts good food, lively conversation, and even prizes. Yes, prizes. At the luncheon, we'll be awarding our annual **Richard deCordova Scholarship Award** for an outstanding interdisciplinary American Studies paper. Speaking of which....

Have you produced a paper or project with an interdisciplinary approach on an American topic during 2014-2015 (papers/projects can originate from any course at DePaul)? If so, we welcome online submissions for the deCordova Scholarship Competition from any currently enrolled DePaul undergraduate; submissions are due Monday, April 6. Paper or project submissions will be evaluated based on originality, interdisciplinary perspective, clarity in reasoning, writing, and presentation, and adequate and correct documentation: <http://depaul.academicworks.com>. In addition to a cash prize, this year, the winning entry will also be published in DePaul's College of Liberal Arts' student journal, *Students Creating Knowledge*.

On Tuesday, February 24, the American Studies Program welcomed **Prof. Whit Strub**, Associate Professor of History, and Chair of Women's and Gender Studies at Rutgers University. Prof. Strub's talk, "Historicizing Porn Studies: From Urban Crisis to VHS (1970-present)," enjoyed robust attendance, with over 50 guests, including students from **Prof. Jaime Hovey's** course **AMS 276: History of Sex in America**. AMS student newsletter editor **Cynthia Ramos** interviewed Whit after his talk; the interview (page 8) profiles how Whit found his way from initially studying progressive era railway regulation to the seemingly disparate and interdisciplinary field of "porn studies." He mused:

...there is very much a dialectic at play there that would be lost if we gave up these interdisciplinary spaces where people are allowed to experiment and draw on outside disciplines, theories, or analytical methods. We need to make the case to the public, students, and university administrators that it is necessary intellectual work.

Certainly, the combined profiles in this newsletter are testament to how interdisciplinary programs like American Studies provide creative and necessary intellectual space for conversations to take place across sometimes-limiting disciplinary boundaries. **Prof. Robin Mitchell** (pages 2-3) joined our AMS Program Committee in Fall 2014. Her home department is in Women's and Gender Studies, and she writes about the gendered constructions of blackness in the French imagination after the Haitian Revolution. Though a historian of France, Prof. Mitchell's teaching and scholarship is not delimited to that nation's geographical boundaries; her scholarly conversations necessarily cross into the "Americas." In so doing, her work pushes us to broaden our conceptions of how American Studies must sometimes cross geographical boundaries no less than intellectual and methodological ones. We're delighted that Prof. Mitchell's boundary-crossing **Deconstructing the Diva** course will be a regular cross-list with American Studies. Women's representations across geographical boundaries are also taken up in our alumna profile (pages 6-7) of **Alex Meda** (class of 2007), executive director of the internationally-touring, all-Latina theater company, Teatro Luna. Our student profile (pages 4-5) on AMS senior **Clelia Sweeney**—whose senior thesis focuses on the role that serial killers have played in the American imaginary—also makes the case for American Studies as providing necessary space for thinkers to engage with critical analyses across disciplinary boundaries.

What an honor to write the notes to this stand-out issue of the AMS quarterly newsletter: thanks to AMS student newsletter editor **Cynthia Ramos** and **Prof. Allison McCracken** for their efforts.

Best wishes for the Spring.

-Amy M. Tyson, Ph.D.
Director, American Studies
Associate Professor, History

Prof. Tyson received her Ph.D. in American Studies
from the University of Minnesota in 2006.

March '15 AMS Newsletter
Produced/Edited By:

Cynthia Marrero-Ramos
American Studies Program
Newsletter Editor-in-Chief

cynthiamramos05@gmail.com

With oversight from:

Allison McCracken, Ph.D.
American Studies Program
amccrac1@depaul.edu

SAC, 5th Floor
2320 N. Kenmore Ave
Chicago, IL 60614

What is in this edition...

2-3 - Faculty Profile:
Dr. Robin Mitchell

4-5 - Student Profile:
Clelia Sweeney

6-7 - Alumni Profile:
Alexandra Meda

8 - Visitor Profile:
Whitney Strub

AMS Program Requirements

- 3 Core Methods Courses (AMS 211, 213 & 215)
- 6 Courses from One of the Five Concentrations
- 3 Electives Courses on U.S. topics, either AMS courses or university courses approved of by the AMS program
- 1 Senior Seminar

Faculty Profile: Professor Robin Mitchell



Professor Robin Mitchell
College of Liberal Arts &
Social Sciences

Women's and Gender Studies Assistant Professor Robin Mitchell explores the complexities of gender and race, especially in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Paris, through a critical, historical lens. In addition to her affiliation with American Studies, Dr. Mitchell is also affiliated with African and Black Diaspora Studies, and the Department of History. She is no stranger to marginalization and believes that working from a peripheral standpoint provides an opportunity to ask different questions in order to arrive at new answers. This method of inquiry is interdisciplinary because it inevitably transgresses the boundaries of any single discipline. After traveling across the United States as the daughter of an air force officer, and working in numerous fields throughout the corporate world, she truly embodies the phrase she uses to describe herself: *I am from everywhere*.

Dr. Mitchell never planned on becoming a historian, but she developed her love of France at a young age. Her mother read Harlem Renaissance writers to her as a child because African American history was entirely absent from her curriculum. She attended Mills College, a women's college in Oakland, CA where she received her BA in Ethnic Studies with a concentration in 19th century African American literature.

Her undergraduate thesis discussed the Harlem Renaissance and the Négritude Movement in Paris between the two World Wars. And yet she was still continuously surrounded by claims that black people were not present in France.

And so my mother would read us Harlem Renaissance writers and she would say 'Oh, he went to Paris.' So from about the time that I was five years old I thought... 'I'm supposed to go to Paris.' I had heard these stories. I had seen these pictures of black people in France. And nobody really validated that. When I was an undergrad I was at a bookstore and I saw this book called Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light by Tyler Stovall. And I thought I'm not crazy. Here it is. Here are all the things that I heard. So I went to my college advisor and said 'this guy. We've gotta get this guy to come talk.' He [Tyler Stovall] needs to come to Mills. So he came to speak and I was just mesmerized by him. And we had a conversation. He asked me what I was doing for grad school and I said 'I'm thinking about Columbia.' He said, 'Come to Santa Cruz.' And I ended up getting a full ride to Santa Cruz to do my PhD. After two years, when I got my master's degree, he got a job at Berkeley, and took me with him.

When she arrived at Berkeley, the focus of her research was 20th century French History. However, in her reading she came across a woman by the name of Sarah Baartmann, who was also known as "The Hottentot Venus;" she was sold to the brother of her master in South Africa and was brought to London and Paris to be exhibited. This discovery shifted Professor Mitchell's research interests to 19th century history. Sarah Baartmann became the focus of her Master's thesis and one of the chapters in her dissertation. Now Baartmann is included in her book.

Professor Mitchell's book is currently titled **Vénus Noire: Black Women, Haiti, and the Production of Gender and Race in France (1750-1850)** and it will go into production in 2016 with the University of Georgia Press. It focuses on the representations of black women in France, particularly after the Haitian Revolution, women who were like Sarah Baartmann: a young girl named Ourika, who was sold as a house pet to the Duke of Orléans; Jeanne Duval, Charles Baudelaire's common law wife; and Suzanne Louverture, Toussaint Louverture's wife.

There weren't that many [black women in France], but they seemed to pop up in these sort of odd places. They show up in paintings. They'd pop up in songs, just these really sort of odd places. They seemed to take up a lot of space in the French imagination... So I wanted to find out why these black women seemed to take up so much space. And that led me to the Haitian Revolution. I wondered how France made sense out of losing their number one colony. What I realized is that one of the ways that France was working out that loss was by transferring those anxieties onto another body, onto black women. It was very difficult to talk about black men, even though black women, of course, were also fighting in the Haitian Revolution. The nature of Revolution often becomes 'military,' which is equal to men for many people. When scholars talk about the Haitian Revolution, it's usually only black men they're looking at. What I realized is, you can still have a conversation about racial inferiority by [directing the discourse] to another body. Since [France couldn't really] talk about the inferiority of black men because blacks had won the revolution, France put those anxieties on a black female body.

"I insist upon women speaking, speaking loudly, speaking often and taking up space in the world."

Robin Mitchell, continued

Dr. Mitchell is currently teaching a course titled **WGS 255 Deconstructing the Diva** that is cross listed with American Studies. This course examines the history of the Diva. Throughout the course, the definition of Diva morphs from “women behaving badly” to “women who are perceived to be behaving badly.” As a result, the class studies witches, flappers, the prima donna, and racialized Divas like the Black Diva, the Latina Spitfire, and the Asian Dragonlady.

I wanted to look at how this label is both imposed upon women but also how women, if they're able, are able to push back against that label. I wanted to look at the Diva in all its complexities.

This year, Dr. Mitchell is also teaching **WGS 100 Women's Lives: Race, Class, & Gender**, **WGS 250 Feminist Frameworks**, **WGS 386/483 (ABD 386) Black Women's Experiences**, and **WGS 395 Advanced Seminar, Women's & Gender Studies**. Her courses are heavily discussion-based and she expects the utmost participation from all of her students. The bar is set high for them, all the time. She is especially adamant on the felt presence of women in academic settings.

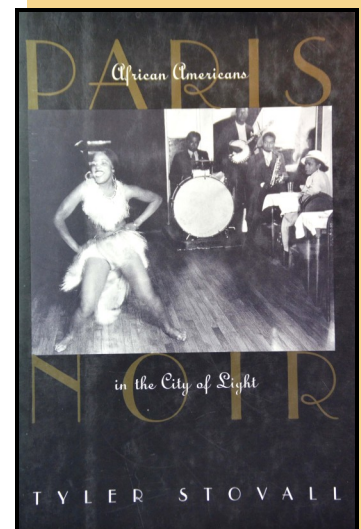
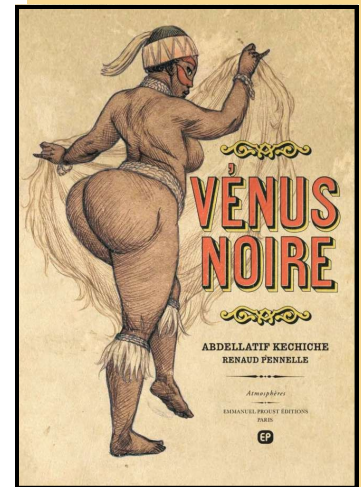
One of the things that's important to me in teaching in this discipline is for women to take up space. I insist upon women speaking, speaking loudly, speaking often and taking up space in the world. I expect women to walk into a classroom and take it over.

The passion she has in her teaching has not gone unnoticed. Throughout her four years at DePaul, Dr. Mitchell has been the recipient of many awards involving her work with students including the Gerald Paetsch Academic Advising Award, the “Woman of Spirit and Action” Award (for two straight years), and the DePaul University ENGAGE Award (for three straight years). We are incredibly fortunate to have her as a faculty member at DePaul.

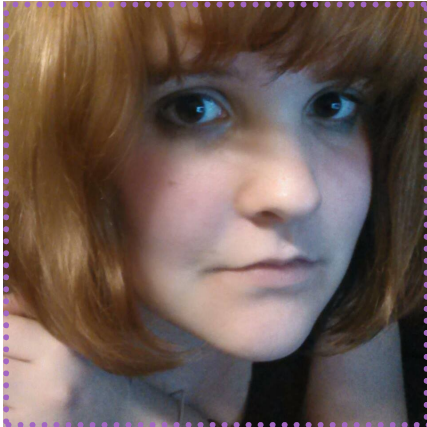
And I know for a lot of students they're never going to see a teacher like me again, and that's a huge responsibility. I don't take it lightly. I tell my students on the first day. I tell them on the last day too: it's a tremendous privilege that I get to stand in front of you, but I take it very seriously. This isn't the place for you unless you take it as seriously as I do, this is a gift that you get to sit in this room...I've gotten a number of awards from students and believe me I am so humbled by that. The fact that students feel that you've changed them or you've helped them... I'm very grateful. I've got these awards and notes on the wall because they mean something to me. Students that take the time to write something about you means a great deal to me, so I do not take it for granted.

Since Dr. Mitchell is keen on addressing the importance of marginalized subjects, I asked her if she was optimistic about the future of race and gender relations. She answered with a story from her time as an undergraduate student. After working on her own play, she began to read plays by the celebrated American playwright August Wilson. He wrote a series of somber, moving plays about African-American life, one for every decade of the 20th century. When she had the opportunity to go hear him speak, she asked one of the theater managers if she could meet with him, and was lucky to have a five-minute conversation with him.

I was asking him questions about the play and at one point I stopped, and said, “I'm sorry. I'm very nervous.” And I asked a question that was just so obnoxious: “You've done these plays. They're so sad, so...what's the point?” And he just sort of stopped. And I thought I'd asked a really bad question. And he got this smile on his face and he said “We're still here. At the end of the day, we're still here.” It's such a simple sentence and so profound. In the midst of all this, in the midst of all these attempts to literally eradicate us off the face of the Earth, we are still here. And so I take a lot of faith in that. We're not going anywhere. We're going to make this work. We're going to keep fighting. We're going to keep yelling, crying, mourning. We're going to keep being joyful, but we are still here.



Student Perspective: Clelia Sweeney



Student Perspective: Clelia Sweeney, Class of 2015

The American Studies major can sometimes be difficult to define in a clear-cut manner since it encompasses a multitude of methods and subject areas, unlike other more traditional disciplines. This openness is what grants American Studies majors the freedom to mold that definition into what they want it to be. AMS Senior Clelia Sweeney is doing just that. She has taken advantage of this freedom to shed light on the American fascination for the deviant.

Clelia grew up in a small town in Vermont, in a log cabin surrounded by a forest. She enjoyed the seclusion at times, but aspired to live in a more populated area. Before coming to DePaul, she attended Bard College at Simon's Rock, a liberal arts and sciences "early" college for high school juniors and seniors. She decided to leave Bard College half-way through her sophomore year to take some time off and finished her Associates Degree at the Community College of Vermont. She wanted to study culture, literature and film, but did not know how to apply those to any specific major. She came across the American Studies major while doing online research. DePaul became her top transfer choice since it was located in a large Midwest city and had a strong American Studies program. Her first few months on campus were a bit stressful due to the transition to DePaul's Quarter system and keeping up with her first job at the Cafe in the Loop campus Barnes and Noble. But Clelia took advantage of the free museum days in Chicago, which she thoroughly exploited over the summer.

My favorite was the International Museum of Surgical Science, a gorgeous and grisly collection of medical/bodily artifacts.

A few months later, Clelia found her current part-time job at an independent bookstore called The Book Table in Oak Park. This is an ideal job for Clelia, who not surprisingly loves to read. One of her favorite genres is satire, and one of her favorite books is *A Confederacy of Dunces* by John Kennedy Toole because of the sharp humor he employs to capture a specific culture in New Orleans.

Aside from her studies and her part-time job, Clelia has been running a personal blog titled ROGUE VOLTS OF EUPHORIA (www.rogue-euphoria.blogspot.com) since her sophomore year of college; her blog consists of articles she's written about her experiences ranging from "Pączki-Eating Competition on Valentine's Day" to "The Psychopath Sideshow," along with citations of her most cherished essays. Clelia titled her blog after this quote from one of her favorite writers, Tom Wolfe:

"It was a strange time for me. Many rogue volts of euphoria. I went from one side of this country to the other and then from one side of England to the other. The people I met—the things they did—I was entranced. I met Carol Doda. She blew up her breasts with emulsified silicone, the main ingredient in Silly Putty, and became the greatest resource of the San Francisco tourist industry."

Clelia has always been interested in things and people that deviate from the norm and/or are marginal social actors such as cult members and serial killers. She sparked this curiosity when she was about 11 years old after finding a book titled *The Encyclopedia of Serial Killers*. After reading it cover to cover, she was struck by the story of Elizabeth Báthory, a Hungarian princess who had inventive torture methods and bathed in her victims' blood. This story terrified Clelia enough to make her give away the book to her friend, although the curiosity lingered. She never thought she could pursue these interests in an academic setting, until she found the American Studies program.

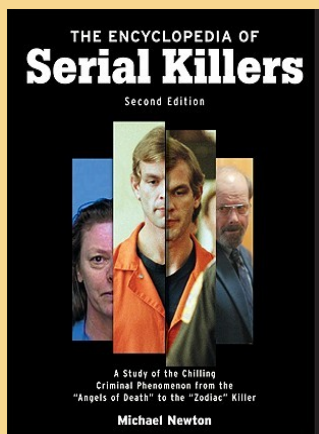
I love that I found a major where I can actually study this stuff and have it mean something.

Clelia drew on this interest and developed it into her Senior Thesis, titled: "Probing the Public Wound: The Serial Killer Character in True Crime Media." It evaluates media coverage of serial killers in American culture, and the ways in which these figures are converted into freak shows for entertainment.

In the 90s once therapy became more popularized with television "therapy" programs, like Oprah, the coverage became more about "why do they do what they do?" Suddenly they became fascinating psychological cases.

She analyzed TV interviews and documentaries with a focus on Jeffrey Dahmer because he was a widely recognized figure in the 90s. He also took advantage of the public confessional to arouse sympathy. The media would conduct interviews with Dahmer where he would share details about his life and confess his crimes and motivations openly. Clelia explained how troubling this type of coverage was because it depicted Dahmer as a terrifying psychotic figure while also providing an opportunity for his humanization and exploitation.

*This shows how American Culture values people who are individualistic, people who are outlaws. They do what they want, live outside of moral society, but they can still fit in. They get power and they don't get caught. This idea of a "mastermind killer" is very appealing to people. And I think it's good to interview and humanize people, but we should not pretend that these acts are just for psychological study; this is entertainment. People want to hear them talk about the twisted things they did because they like being shocked and they like being horrified. They like it at a distance. Then **Silence of the Lambs** (1991) came out and Hannibal Lecter was a very likable serial killer character which created a type of sympathy for serial killers. And then there was Dexter.*

Clelia Sweeney, *continued*

Last year, Clelia won the DeCordova Honorable Mention writing award in 2014 for her essay titled "White Male Revenge Fantasy: An Examination of Privilege in *Dexter*" which was written for Allison McCracken's **Television in American Culture** course. Clelia argues that *Dexter* is positioned as the ultimate privileged male, being able to decide who lives or dies -- who is "trash" -- and that this is what audiences like him for.

All of his victims are from marginalized social groups; either gay, non-white, overweight, female, etc. And the way the show frames the people of color that Dexter interacts with is heavily reliant on racial stereotypes -- all Latinos are hypersexualized, all black men are violent, all women secretly want to be mothers... I became angry watching the show because I was excited at the prospect of having a modern serial killer character to watch, but Dexter is a completely unrealistic and uninteresting serial killer. The audience never sees him lose control of his (rational, male) emotions, and he always seems to have the upper hand over everyone.

Clelia loves the courses she is able to take in American Studies. Last year Clelia took **American Popular Culture 1880-1940** with Allison McCracken where she was excited to learn about crossdressers, crooners, and early film stars. She particularly enjoyed writing her final essay about Clara Bow, one of her favorite film stars from the 1920s and 1930s, and discussing how Clara Bow was often exploited by the film industry.

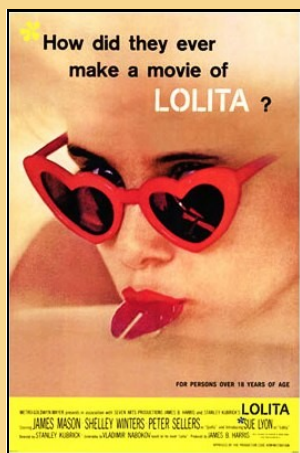
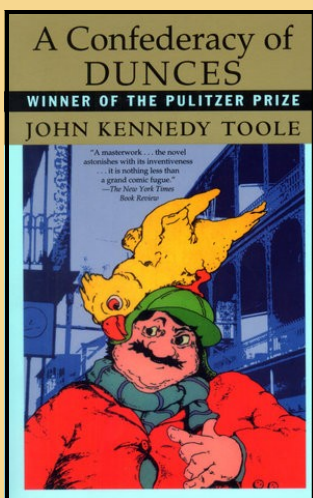
*There have been many times like that in my courses, where I have been able to research long time interests of mine. I researched serial killers, Clara Bow, and Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, which is probably my favorite book ever. I was in a class on 60s film with Michael DeAngelis and I wrote about the 60s adaptation of the *Lolita* novel into a film (**Stanley Kubrick's *Lolita* in 1962**). Another class that I loved, not so much even for the content than for the teacher, was **Westward Expansion in the US** with Gail Terry. She is so excited about her material and it's wonderful. She was really good at having us analyze an author's purpose and deconstructing texts.*

Clelia is currently taking **Deconstructing the Diva** with Robin Mitchell where they explore the concept of the Diva and its origins. They started the course with a study of witches, followed by the history of the hysteric. So far, Clelia has been most impacted by Dr. Mitchell's lecture on the Hottentot Venus and the exhibition of women who do not fit the physical expectations of womanhood.

In the spring of 2014, Clelia participated in a Service Immersion Trip with the University Ministry Department. They went to Cincinnati for a weeklong trip that was focused on poverty and homelessness. During their trip they assisted lower class families in food pantries and toured the county jail in order to gain a better understanding of the ways poverty and the prison system are interrelated. She noticed the disdain that some of the prison guards had toward the inmates and the way that this translates from prison walls to exterior society, especially once inmates are released. They were able to listen to two men speak about their experiences exiting the prison system and being homeless due to their inability to find employment. Clelia had never participated in community service before and this trip helped her gain a new perspective on the issues of poverty. She is going to participate in the 2015 Spring Service Immersion Trip that will take place in Washington, DC.

She loves to travel and aims to visit as many places as she can. I asked Clelia what she believes to be the most significant skills and experiences that the American Studies program has offered her:

I think the best thing that American Studies gives you is not just the ability to critique what's going on around you, but the need to critique everything that is around you. Especially since it's American culture that we're studying, it's all relevant; it's your daily life and how you deal with people, the ads you see, the packaging on coffee cups, everything. It makes you much more aware of everything and much more accountable for what you say and what you do. It's really important to critique your own thinking; the way you think of yourself and the world, especially the way you think about other people.



"I think the best thing that American Studies gives you is not just the ability to critique what's going on around you, but the need to critique everything that is around you."

Alumni Profile: Alexandra Meda



Alumnus, Alexandra Meda Class of 2007

DePaul alum Alexandra (“Alex”) Meda always wanted to work in politically engaged theater. She graduated from DePaul in 2007 with a double major in Non-Profit Theater Management and American Studies. She is now the Executive Director at Teatro Luna, the first Chicago based, All-Latina, Non-Profit Theater Company. It was founded in 2000 by Coya Paz and Tanya Saracho. Teatro Luna aims to represent the diverse experiences of Latina, Hispana, and Pan-Latina women while providing a safe artistic, social, political, and educational community. Luna has developed from being a small and locally based company to performing internationally. Alex has made tremendous contributions to the growth of the organization.

Alex traveled to many states and countries as a child and attended a Theater Magnet High School in Orlando, Florida right across the street from Universal Studios. Her sophomore year, she was able to go to the Edinburgh Arts Festival and this visit cemented her desire to pursue a career in the Arts. She moved to Chicago to attend DePaul as a BFA Non-Profit Theater Management Major.

Alex consistently sought to challenge herself academically and would often take 24 credit hours at a time. Her first exposure to an American Studies course was **AMS 380: Television and American Identity** with Allison McCracken, which led her to explore more American Studies courses and eventually declare it as her double major. She feels being an AMS major was one of her most rewarding times at DePaul:

The American Studies program at DePaul gave me the skills and curiosity to build a life of inquiry and it provided me a critical lens on culture and the status quo.

These skills were translated into her work as an intern at About Face Theater and Teatro Luna.

Alex had read about Teatro Luna in an American Theater Magazine; they had built a national reputation. When she was interning at About Face Theater, a theater organization in Chicago that aims to advance the national discourse on gender and sexual identity, her mentor Paula Gilovich introduced her to one of the co-founders of Teatro Luna: Coya Paz. Paula introduced me to Coya and said: “You’re a Latina; you need to know this other woman who’s running this all-Latina company. After this meeting it took Alex about a year of incessant emails and phone calls to finally get a response regarding the opportunity to work with the company. She interned with Teatro Luna during her last two years at DePaul, sometimes even working full time with no pay. Throughout her time in the Theater school, she struggled with finding the opportunity to bring her subjective, ethnic experiences into the forefront of her art; this later became the driving force of her future work with Teatro Luna.

The theater school, back then, sort of created an environment where they didn’t want us to identify ourselves as ethnically specific artists. They would say “You’re bigger than that, you’re just an artist,” which at the time I sort of agreed with. I actually think my artistry has expanded since I’ve been able to self-identify. It has not been limiting, it has actually been expansive because I have a foundation to start off from.

Immediately after graduating, Alex continued working at Luna and also launched her own consulting service organization, called **The Artist’s Initiative** to serve artists and organizations of color that were in their early stages. She has maintained this organization independently and currently works with various companies on grants, strategic planning, and facilitation for diversity issues.

During this time, Teatro Luna was going through a period of major change as they were approaching their ten year anniversary. The founders were experiencing transitions in their own lives that made it necessary for them to withdraw from the theater. Thus, Teatro Luna adapted and reshaped the theater’s management in 2010, and Alex became the Executive Director.

Unfortunately it is often the history of female-centered arts organizations. It’s very hard for them to make it past the 7 year mark. We are the only company like ours in the country that has made it to 15 years. I have so many reasons why that could be. The idea of sisterhood is a really foreign concept today and I think that the culture we live in, as women, always wants the narrative to be cat-fights. Society loves to pit women against each other. This outside influence on the individual creates a really odd group dynamic. It wasn’t unique to us. This is a phenomenon that happens internationally in female-centered groups, but there is a huge history of it in this country. We were faced with the question: do we shut down at the ten year anniversary or do we keep going? Do we start fresh?

Alex describes Teatro Luna as destined to be ever-changing because of its mission as an activist, politicized, and safe space for women. In order to decide how they should move forward as an organization, she had to reflect on her experiences with Teatro Luna. Their shows based on real life stories had a profound impact on their audiences, especially those stories that represented women of all types. Also, the process of creating and performing these stories had an effect on the performers themselves. Alex explained that every show gave the women of Teatro Luna an opportunity to transform their own conceptions of gender and subjectivity. She experienced moments of ideological enlightenment with several of their auto-biographical and ethnographic projects, particularly one called **Machos**.



Machos originated in 2006 and was based on interviews with 150 men from across the country regarding what it means to be a man. Eight women in drag played these men. It was an incredibly self-reflective process for the women who were working on the project.

And we realized, "What is our own role in the promotion of machismo, or aggressive masculine pride?" Although I had loved our previous work and it was all transformative, I think that is what really connected me to the idea that theater is a powerful tool for social change. It was through that project that I realized what this company can do is my calling. I had a vision that the company could exist as more than just a platform for play production. It really needed to build and be for community, and if it could do that here, in Chicago, it can and should do that in other parts of the country. I wanted Teatro Luna to be a national organization. It was necessary. We all came to the table without ego saying "We are going to give to this company and to this community more than we take." And I think that is key. That is the most fulfilling kind of work.

In 2013, after a great deal of networking with friends and different theater groups, Teatro Luna went on their first national and international tour, which changed the course of Teatro Luna forever. They performed "Luna in Lace," a compilation of six different shows from their last seven years. It functions as a "choose your own adventure play" where the performers provide the audience with a menu of 21 scenes from which they are to pick 12 throughout a series of different games. This tour led them from small, rural towns to major metropolitan areas across the US; they were able to reach audiences of all ages and backgrounds. They also toured internationally and visited Edinburgh, London, Dublin, Belfast, and Glaisdale.

Alexandra Meda, continued

Teatro Luna expanded their understanding of what their audiences lacked and needed, especially after noticing the generosity in donations at certain small towns. I asked her what she thought this indicated about her audiences.

I think it says that they are absolutely devoid of their own stories. Can you imagine, first of all, thinking that the arts aren't for you because that's only for rich people, in your mind? And then, on top of that, if you do fight the cultural bias and go, you see the same white oriented story over and over again. I think we don't recognize the power of seeing our own stories, good and bad, stories that aren't replications of gang-bangers, or a maid, or a pregnant teen.

Alex also shared some of their most recent work with me. In 2014, Teatro Luna traveled to Latin America. They went to Bogotá, Colombia where they served as delegates for the Theatre Communications Group Conference, a national theater service organization, to meet with over 30 different artist companies. This fostered their desire to form international partnerships. The plan is for Teatro Luna to work with Latin American artists, and then bring those artists to the US where they would show their work. The work of artists from both Latin America and the U.S. would then be presented in either country. This program is still in development.

*And in March of last year, we left on a two week development tour. Instead of building your work in your home city, where the press or audiences stop coming to it because they think they've already seen it, we actually build it on the road. For example we went to Louisiana, Connecticut, all over Texas, and we were performance workshopping a script we had been working on for a year: **Generation Sex**. We performed it in eight or nine cities.*

Shortly after the **Generation Sex** tour, Teatro Luna was selected to participate in the **Encuentro**, the first National Latino Theater Festival in 30 years in LA.

How does a theater company this small do all that? Because we really believe we have to change the world. That's it. We don't have money. We don't have anything. But we have ideas and we say "fuck it. We're going to do whatever we want."



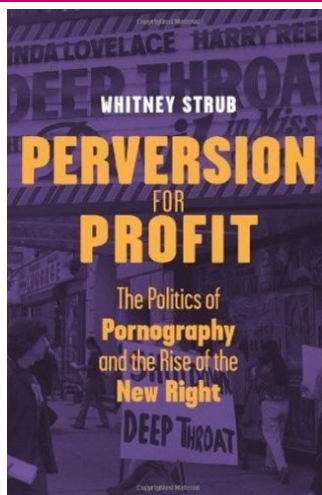
Winter 2015 - Visitor Profile : Whitney Strub

This quarter we had the honor of hosting Whitney Strub, Associate Professor of History and the Director of the Women's and Gender Studies Program at Rutgers University-Newark. Dr. Strub is author of the book ***Perversion for Profit: The Politics of Pornography and the Rise of the New Right*** (published in 2011 by the Columbia University Press) in which he analyzes modern conservatism and the ways that this movement mobilized around pornography in the sixties in order to set the template for later sexual politics – debates over LGBT rights, abortion, feminism, etc.

Dr. Strub grew up in rural Wasilla, Alaska. He moved with his family to LaCrosse, Wisconsin after 9th grade where he remained throughout his undergraduate studies at the University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse. In need of a change of scenery, Dr. Strub moved to Los Angeles, where he attended the University of California and received a PhD in U.S. History. His dissertation was originally meant to focus on railroad regulation in the progressive era, but he quickly realized that this topic had already been exhaustively analyzed. The desire to explore the ways in which conservatism shaped the politics of the US led him to shift his focus to pornography, especially since there had been little work done on the history of the politics of porn in the 20th century.

That's kind of how it works in academia; you find the gaps that you're analytically interested in and you kind of claim them or pounce on them. I'd always been interested in cult movies and the politics of feminism and sexuality. I was going to initially write a dissertation about the Feminist Sex Wars actually, but Carolyn Bronstein (a professor in Public Relations and Advertising here at DePaul) had just written her dissertation that she was re-tooling into a book on the topic I wanted to explore (Battling Pornography: The American Feminist Anti-Pornography Movement, 1976-1986-Cambridge University Press, 2011). So I expanded my focus to conservative politics, the rise of the new right, and the politics of porn.

This research led him to the most interesting part of his study – the group **Citizens for Decent Literature**, a pro-censorship advocacy group founded by Charles Keating in 1958. Whit gave up his apartment and rented a mini-van that he lived out of while he traveled across the country in a research hunt focused on building a narrative for this group. The Citizens for Decent Literature did not leave behind any archives; therefore, Whit resorted to, what he calls, “tracking them through their enemies.”



Local ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) chapters, at Princeton and Cincinnati, Ohio for example, had these treasure troves of material – like tax returns and correspondences. I don't even know where they got them all.

Dr. Strub's talk was titled: "Historicizing Porn Studies - From Urban Crisis to VHS (1970-Present)." He provided a genealogy of Porn Studies that he divided into three camps: Conservative Sexual Politics, Experts and Empiricists, and Anti-pornography Feminism. All the activity surrounding sexuality in culture demonstrates that sex and pornography are deeply rooted in social and political discourse. Dr. Strub followed this genealogy with his thesis:

Pornography is mainstream culture, especially in the 70s, 80s, and 90s to a greater extent than most porn studies scholars have recognized... Gay male porno challenged dominant narratives of the urban crisis; with urban crisis and urban decay comes a certain freedom... And porn studies has not taken into account the way that technology has reshaped our sexual memory. If we look at the invention of the VCR and home-viewing, it radically changes pornography in America from a public thing, where you go to a theater, to a privatized and domesticized experience, where you watch VHS tapes at home.

Dr. Strub is planning on doing scholarly work regarding the city of Newark and is currently working on a "Queer Newark" oral history project with a few of his peers. Newark has a vibrant queer history that no one has analyzed, recorded, or written about; therefore, The Queer Newark Oral History Project (QNOHP) is a community that aims to collect and preserve this history of Newark.

(<http://queer.newark.rutgers.edu/>).

In addition, Dr. Strub is co-editing a collection on pornography in the 70s (the title is in flux but is currently *From Porno Chic to the Sex Wars*) with Carolyn Bronstein; this collection combines film studies with history in order to create a multi-disciplinary dialogue on pornography. Dr. Strub runs two independent blogs, where he is able to do non-academic work that theoretically engages with culture in more informal ways. The first is a Tumblr blog that he edits with a colleague in Film Studies from the University of Chicago where they upload one post per day of a cat in a radical film. (omgcatrevolution.tumblr.com) Dr. Strub also started a personal blog two years ago where he focuses on films shot in Newark. (<https://strublog.wordpress.com/>)

American Studies is a platform where this type of work can be actualized. Often times we struggle with promoting the major because students do not understand what American Studies is. Dr. Strub believes that because AMS is a fluid and flexible discipline, it pulls together camps of people that think critically about culture and politics in ways that are informed by a variety of disciplines.

I think there is very much a dialectic at play there that would be lost if we gave up these interdisciplinary spaces where people are allowed to experiment and draw on outside disciplines, theories, or analytical methods. We need to make the case to the public, students, and university administrators that it is necessary intellectual work.

I asked Dr. Strub why he feels that the type of work he is focusing on, and the work that is being done in places like Women and Gender's Studies, LGBT Studies, and American Studies is important:

I think it's critical to foster a dialogue on sexuality as best one can in this day and age where there is a sort of saturation of sexuality on the internet and yet still a sort of absence in our political discussions. It's important to put this history in the forefront, to inform and educate people on how sexual politics have operated historically because these patterns recur. The next battle might not be gay rights, and it might not be pornography but the underlying dynamics are going to be the same. In an effort to dismantle that pattern as best anyone can, we need to have an understanding of that past. It's important especially in classes like LGBT Studies to remind people who might have monolithic notions of what LGBT means how intersectional analysis works; how some people still get left out of a progress narrative.