On behalf of my colleagues in the Institute for Comparative Modernities (ICM), I welcome the opportunity of our first newsletter to introduce the ICM, its mission, goals and program of activities. Many Cornell faculty and students are now familiar with the ICM’s activities, which we launched during this past (2007-2008) academic year. Many at Cornell or the larger Ithaca community and beyond attended our Fall 2007 inaugural lecture series that featured a group of leading scholars whose work engaged the study of modernity comparatively and in global contexts. The group included Cornell’s emeritus Professor Benedict Anderson, Professors Sibylle Fischer of NYU, and David Scott and Timothy Mitchell of Columbia University. We are in the process of working to make sure that these talks will be published as part of an annual publication series sponsored by the ICM.

Many Cornellians, among other invited guests, have also participated or attended the conference organized by our colleague Iftikhar Dadi (History of Art and Visual Studies) on Informalization and Representation in South Asia, which brought together a wonderful group of scholars from a variety of disciplines to examine the trope of the “informal” in relation to South Asia. Through comparative studies of economy and labor, borders and piracy, new publics and political protest, and the role of media and aesthetics in their enactment and visibility, the speakers and the engaged audience had a significant encounter. The papers from this conference will be edited by Iftikhar and published this coming year, we hope, as part of a series on Comparative Modernities to be published by the ICM.

For the benefit of those who are not familiar with the work of the ICM, I would like to introduce the ICM’s mission, goals and vision. The Institute is dedicated to the study of modernity in transnational and comparative perspective. It also hopes to galvanize work in this direction by encouraging cross-disciplinary collaborative research that is empirically faithful to geographical and historical contexts.
ICM?
WHAT IS THE

It must develop comparative cross-cultural modern culture and society cannot be limited to our interconnections are seen to have created the count of modernity in which deep and multifarious imitation. What is emerging instead is an attack on Europe was a matter of simple diffusion and imitation. What is emerging instead is an attack on geographic and historical specificity. It is also situated in relation to comparative methodological frameworks. By bringing attention to less frequently studied aesthetic and social practices from non-Western and immigrant communities, the institute hopes to correct existing standard accounts of modernity as primarily Western in origin and effects.

Institutional Mission
The Institute has begun to bring together groups of interdisciplinary scholars from different fields, including the humanities and the social sciences, interested in the issue of comparative/global modernities to realize seminars, lecture series, symposia, and a series of publications. In its first year of operation, it has already contributed to the intellectual environment at Cornell through vibrant debate of issues related to modernity and modernism, and has encouraged related ongoing initiatives and research projects.

The Institute provides a space for Cornell faculty and graduate students to organize cross-disciplinary research working groups; these may run for one or two years and will culminate in a conference and/or publication. The Institute will commit to providing seed money for the establishment of a number of collaborative research working groups.

The Institute provides intellectual and institutional support for scholars early in their careers at Cornell. Each year one of the ICM Executive Board or Advisory Board members will develop a theme for a project and lead its implementation. The Institute is in the process of developing a series of publications (special series, a periodical) with an academic publisher. This will be the venue to publish a series of books based on the proceedings of the seminars, lecture series, or conferences put together by the Institute’s members. The Institute plans to host scholar-in-residence and artist-in-residence programs to foster international intellectual and artistic exchange. These would take a variety of forms: in-residence, or in-vited for conference, workshops, collaborative work, and interaction with students.

The Executive Board members and founders of the Institute for Comparative Modernities are:

- Salah M. Hassan, Director (Director, African Studies and Research Center; History of Art)
- Fouad Makki (Development Sociology)
- Barry Maxwell, Resident Director 2008-2009 (Comparative Literature and American Studies)
- Natalie Melas (Comparative Literature)
- Viranjini Munasinghe (Anthropology and Director, Asian American Studies)
- Sunn Shelley Wong (English and Asian American Studies)

Our Advisory Board members are

- Benedict Anderson (Comparative Literature and American Studies, Government and Asian Studies, Cornell)
- Susan Buck-Morss (Government and History of Art and Visual Studies, Cornell)
- Brett de Bary (Asian Studies and Comparative Literature, Cornell)
- Manthia Diawara (Film and Comparative Literature, and Director of the Institute of African American Affairs, New York University)
- Okwui Enwezor (Dean of Academic Affairs and Senior Vice President, San Francisco Art Institute)
- George E. Lewis (Music, Columbia University)
- Lisa Lowe (Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies, University of California, San Diego)
- Timothy Mitchell (Middle East and Asian Languages and Cultures, Columbia University)
- Naoki Sakai (Asian Studies and Comparative Literature, Cornell)
- Shirley Samuels (English, and Chair, History of Art, Cornell)

For more informations about us, please see our website (http://icm.arts.cornell.edu/).

More recently, we launched our Fall 2008 lecture series with an outstanding talk given by Susan Buck-Morss, the Jan Rock Zubrow ’77 Professor in the Social Sciences, and professor of political philosophy and social theory in the Department of Government at Cornell University, who is also a member of our Advisory Board. On October 28, 2008, we presented our second lecture in the Fall 2008 series. Asif Bayat, the Netherlands-based Iranian American scholar and Director of the Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World, gave a brilliant and insightful talk entitled ”Islam, Democracy and Modernity.” In addition, our brochure and newsletter should be on their way to the mail boxes of many of our colleagues and students at Cornell or outside of it. We plan to conclude this academic year with a major workshop on ”The Space-Time of Modernity and Global Hierarchies,” to be organized by our colleague and board member Fouad Makki, Assistant Professor in the Department of Development Sociology.

We wish to extend a warm welcome and an open invitation to everyone to attend our launching reception on February 27, 2009, and the other activities and programs this year and in the years to come.

Salah M. Hassan
Director

The Institute of Comparative Modernities (ICM) addresses a key problem in the study of modern culture and society: the transnational history of modernity and its global scope. A broad range of scholarship over the last few decades has contested and complicated the two primary dimensions of the received narrative of modernity in its broadest sense: 1) that it arose strictly within the confines of Europe; and 2) that its extension outside Europe was a matter of simple diffusion and imitation. What is emerging instead is an account of modernity in which deep and multifarious interconnections are seen to have created complementary cultural formations. The study of modern culture and society cannot be limited to a single geographical area or a singular history; it must develop comparative cross-cultural frameworks, which can trace the links between particular forms of culture, power, and history and a global network of forces and relations. This Institute is dedicated to the study of modernity in such a comparative context. Its primary emphasis is on neglected or under-studied articulations of modernity outside of or marginal to the dominant paradigms of Europe and the United States, but it also gives serious attention to conflicts and complexities within Western modernity and its entanglement with other cultures. The Institute aims to make important contributions to a genuinely global analysis of modernity, a task of particular urgency in our time. Inadequate understanding of the complex history of modernity across the world has led to simplistic and untenable positions, which unknowingly repeat colonialism’s ideological divisions between “them” and “us,” with intractable backwardness all on one side and enlightened modernity all on the other. This results in ghettoized scholarship, detrimental to all. The usual equation of the modern with the West needs to be problematized and opened up to comparative examination.

This Institute hopes to galvanize further work in this direction by encouraging cross-disciplinary collaborative research that is empirically faithful to geographic and historical specificity, yet also situated in relation to comparative methodological frameworks. By bringing attention to less frequently studied aesthetic and social practices from non-Western and immigrant communities, the institute hopes to correct existing standard accounts of modernity as primarily Western in origin and effects.

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WHAT IS THE ICM?
Intellectual Vision and Objectives
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News & Events

2007-2008

Benedict Anderson, "Cutting History Off at the Pass: Time and Space on the fringes of the late 19th C world-system." September 27, 2007

Anderson’s lecture was an exploration of José Rizal’s astonishing last novel, El Filibusterismo, situated in the transnational space/time of the late nineteenth-century global landscape. Imperial power, anarchist bombings, and anti-colonial insurrections were transformed to explosive effect by the gifted young Filipino novelist, and make possible a new understanding of the literary and political interactions between world capital and colonial periphery in the fin-de-siècle. Noting that Rizal’s novel, peculiar enough for the nineteenth century, was set in a time yet to come “in the near future,” Anderson went on to speak more generally about pasts/futures/presents anchored in different spaces.


Mitchell was organizing expert knowledge and its objects, in terms of a novel and bounded world called “the economy.” The third lecture for the 2007-2008 academic year for the Institute for Comparative Modernities was delivered by Professor David Scott of the anthropology department at Columbia University. Professor Scott’s most recent books include Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) and Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). He is the founding editor of the journal Small Axe.

Professor Scott is currently working on the question of Third World sovereignty which was the subject of his presentation entitled “Norms of Self-Determination.” In his presentation, Scott systematically and critically examined the conditions stipulated for Third World sovereignty from the time of Empire to the post cold war context. He asked if sovereignty was irrelevant to the Third World given the present political order or if sovereignty was still an unfinished project; Scott traced how the ideological terms for the privilege of sovereignty had dramatically shifted from the decolonization period to the post cold war context.


The normative conditions for self-determination during the decolonization period rested on a moral imperative that granted a toleration of pluralism of political forms, the post cold war period, Scott argued, has witnessed the meteoric rise of the concept of democracy where all debate around political possibilities are foreclosed by the ‘blackmail of democracy.’ Detached now from the anti-colonialist narrative marking the dusk of Empire, democracy has become the new global standard of the post cold war international system. Ironically, democracy as a new normative standard is highly intolerant because it endorses only a single form and ethos of political identity. As such, the dominance of democracy marks a triumphant narrative of the West whereby “democracy is the new political name of an old civilizing project.”


Sibylle Fischer is Associate Professor in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Comparative Literature, and Africana Studies at New York University. She is the author of Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution (Duke University Press, 2004), a groundbreaking study which has received four major awards to date. As the first full account of the ramifications of the Haitian revolution in 1804 for the culture of the Hispanophone Caribbean islands during the nineteenth-century, the book is an important contribution to the study of Caribbean history and culture. It also develops a very innovative interdisciplinary methodology combining literary analysis with archival research in order to study the traces of an incompletely recorded history.

While the normative conditions for self-determination during the decolonization period rested on a moral imperative that granted a toleration of pluralism of political forms, the post cold war period, Scott argued, has witnessed the meteoric rise of the concept of democracy where all debate around political possibilities are foreclosed by the ‘blackmail of democracy.’ Detached now from the anti-colonialist narrative marking the dusk of Empire, democracy has become the new global standard of the post cold war international system. Ironically, democracy as a new normative standard is highly intolerant because it endorses only a single form and ethos of political identity. As such, the dominance of democracy marks a triumphant narrative of the West whereby “democracy is the new political name of an old civilizing project.”

The lecture, consisting entirely of new work, essentially extended some of the main arguments about disavowal in Modernity Disavowed to the domain of political theory and offered an original resolution of a much discussed central contradiction in the work of the seminal philosopher of liberalism, John Locke (1632-1704), whose ideas were particularly central to the American Constitution. The contradiction concerns Atlantic slavery. Fischer outlined Locke’s economic and political connections to slavery during his time. He was an investor in the English slave trade through the Royal Africa Company and he also contributed to the drafting of the constitution of the Caribbean islands which codified the master’s absolute power over his slaves. This and other texts appear to be in direct contradiction with the main tenets of Locke’s philosophy, namely the absolute freedom and equality of men in a state of nature. Scholars have largely side-stepped the contradiction by suggesting either that the support of slavery was in some sense a sure-path or error with no intrinsic bearing on Locke’s philosophy or that fundamental racism made him implicitly exclude Africans from the category of humanity, and hence from the human right to freedom and equality.
Through a rigorous textual analysis of key passages in Locke’s writing, Fischer argued that, on the contrary, the question of slavery is central to Locke’s writing and that in the end it boils down not so much to a contra-
diction but to the complex of its disavowal for which the double negative encapsulated in the formulation: The African is not not human! the African is not not a beast. The ramifications of this argument are for what is perhaps the fundamental tenet of philosophical (and political) modernity are potentially very great, for the argument suggests that the exclusion or denigration of non-Europeans and slaves from full humanity—and hence from freedom and from the autonomy of rea-
sion—is not introduced ex post fact, or fundamentally subsidiary to the major philosophies of the enlighten-
ment, but rather intrinsic to them from the very start. The lecture was well-attended—with between 30-40 people in attendance—and drew a genuinely interdisci-
plinary crowd including students and faculty from History, Art History, Development Sociology, Gov-
ernment, Anthropology, Comparative Literature, Eng-
lish, Romance Studies and Africana.
We organized a follow-up seminar the following
morning loosely organized around a reading of the in-
troduction to Modernity Disavowed. Despite the un-
appealing time—9:30 Friday morning—and a
snow storm, we had 10 people in attendance, two fac-
ulty members (Melas and Wong), six graduate stu-
dents (Government, English, Romance Studies) and
two undergraduates. We started with a general con-
sideration of participation, but the discussion really took off
when students began articulating how the questions addressed there related to their own research. Had there not been a bus to catch the discussion could eas-
ily have continued another hour. As it was we had to
break it off at 11:30.

The rise of this visual popular culture and its asso-
ciated informal politics has not received sufficient at-
tention. Precisely because the path towards smooth
and formal participation in official public life is blocked or impeded for diverse groups, their concerns
are expressed obliquely by images, specters, shadows, and silhouettes. Thus a fuller account of civic and po-
litical activity will need to come to terms with these
popular activities of non-state urban actors, includ-
ing those of artists as they increasingly venture beyond the
cultural circuits. A wider conception of public sphere, beyond rationalized and legalized de-
bate, needs to encompass the symbolic and fantastic
dimensions of the increasingly aestheticized and spec-
tacularized character of urban popular culture in con-
temporary South Asia and Middle East. This research
project examines informal activities since the begin-
ning of the twentieth century, by historical and com-
pared studies undertaken by scholars in a variety of
disciplines.
Organized by Itthikhar Dadi, this two day conference
held at the Multi-purpose Room of the Afrcana Stud-
ies and Research Center examined the trope of the “in-
formal” in relation to South Asia in the present
and recent past, through comparative studies undertaken
by scholars from a variety of disciplines. These in-
cluded studies on economy and labor, security and
culture, which are treated as informal, having
laboration to indifference to antagonism, but which
cannot in any case be dismissed as peripheral to the
state. And while the participation of non-state actors in
constructing social movements has a genealogy that
extends back into the early years of the twentieth cen-
tury, the “emerging public sphere” has greatly ex-
panded in significance during the last two decades, as
the domain of the state has been increasingly seen as
“in retreat” since its heyday in the 1950s and 1960s.
While scholarly literature has been salutary in bringing
attention to the salience of this development, contribu-
tors have largely stressed its socio-political and
religious dimensions. There have been few attempts by humanists to understand the aesthetic strategies of
mediation in the South Asia. In particular, the articu-
lated relationship between modernity and representa-
tion has resulted in a great flowering of representations of “everyday life.” The relationship between popular (folk) culture and mass media in urban South Asia and Middle East is mutually constitutive and complex, and
allows for various groups and agents to exploit the aes-
thetic potential available in both realms. If popular
culture allows aura and charisma to retain potency in
the modern urban site, the reproductive potential of
mass media, based on seriality and repetition of cul-
tural codes, makes for malleable and widely recogniz-
able representational languages for production and
consumption in response to new social and political
developments. Mass-mediated popular culture also al-
 lows for much greater participation by numerous non-
state bodies, political organizations, religious parties,
artists and others, producing the city as an extremely
rich and dense palimpsest of visual and representa-
tional references.

Kausath Basu is Carl Marks Professor in the De-
partment of Economics, and Director, Center for An-
alytic Economics, Cornell University. In his paper,
“The Informal in South Asia: Notes from the Field,” he
argued that in economics a sharp line is often
drawn between the formal and the informal. The labor
market has a formal sector, the one that is analyzed,
modeled and dissected, but across its boundaries lie
the “informal”—unregulated, murky, ill-understood.
Economists treat the law as well-defined, structured
and with clear implications for how an economy func-
tions, but just beneath and beyond its shadows
stretches the terrain of social norms, collective beliefs
and culture, which are treated as informal, having
fuzzy origins and no clear structure. His lecture re-
ported on how the formal and the informal sectors in-
teract and how some of the clues to an economy’s
success and failures lie in the “informal.”

Arindam Dutta is Associate Professor, History, The-
ory and Criticism at MIT. In “On the Way to the
Thousand-Pillared Mandap: The Folkies of Debta,”
he analyzed how neoliberal refashioning of India’s
economy has spawned resistance in marginal and
tribal areas in much of the northeast of the country.
Analyzing the monuments to resistance figures killed
in encounters with the government, Dutta argued for
their status as memorials to a conflict in which sub-
stantial figures face increasingly intrusive state and capi-
talist penetration into the periphery.

Jamal J. Elias is the Class of 1965 Term Professor
and Chair of the Department of Religious Studies as
well as Interim Chair of the Department of South Asia
Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. In his pres-
ervation, “An Economy of Signs in the Decoration of
Vehicles in Pakistan," he showed how the last three decades have witnessed a dramatic, qualitative increase in the level of vehicle decoration. More recently, the Pakistani Anglographic bourgeoisie (and an international art community) has appropriated truck decoration as a national pop art form in which vehicle decoration is detached from the significance it holds among the section of society that produces it and constitutes its primary audience. For the Anglographic bourgeoisie, vehicle decoration is Ritch kath through this appreciation, which they participate in an imagined national popular culture.

**Shelley Feldman** is Professor of Development Sociology and former Director of the South Asia Pro-gram and the Program on Gender and Global Change and currently the Director of Feminist, Gender and Sexuality Studies. Her paper was entitled "Claiming a Past, Making a Future: In Honor of the Liberation War Museum, Dhaka, Bangladesh." Twenty-four years after an anti-colonial struggle against the British, the war in East Pakistan was a struggle for a second inde-pendence, this time from Pakistan. It took another twenty-five years for a constituency of public citizens to build a national war museum demanding recognition of this genocidal war and its freedom fighters. Focusing on the Mukti Joddah Jadughar (Liberation War Museum) as a site of recuperation and countera-ction, she offered a reading of Bangladeshi history that acknowledges the centrality of independence in constructing national citizenship, particularly salient given the resurgence of political Islam.

**Kaji Jain** is Assistant Professor at Center for Visual and Media Culture at the University of Toronto. Her paper, "I have Nothing to Hide": Icons, Publics, and the Vectors of Porous Legality in Postcolonial India," discussed monumental religious statues springing up all over India and in the South Asian diaspora since the early 1990s, that is, directly in tandem with eco-nomic liberalization. Jain situated them in a broader historical view of the ways in which the market has been and is being produced as an entity that articu-lates with the state in India, and what that has meant for the category of culture, and for the contexts of pro-duction, circulation and reception of images, as well as the kinds of subjects and subjectivities that they bring into play.

**Genevieve Lakier** is currently a fellow at the Weath-erhead Center for International and Area Studies at Harvard University. Her paper, "The Syndicate and the Chakka Jam: Protest and the Extraegal in Nepal," dis-cussed the modalities by which a cartel of public transport syndicates shut down all public and private transportation on the highways of Nepal for a period of thirteen days “wheel stop” or “chakka jam” in 2003. She examined the chakka jam in the context of the on-going struggles by the government in Nepal to reform the transportation industry, as part of a broader neo-liberal push against anti-competitive market practices. The ultimate failure of the government to implement these reforms in the face of the syndicate’s chakka jam
Biodun Jeyifo (Professor of African and African American Studies and of Literature and Comparative Literature, Harvard University) "Afropessimism and Afrofuturism and Postmodernism"

March 30, 2009. 4:30 – 6 p.m. Kaufmann Auditorium Goldwin Smith Hall

Biodun Jeyifo taught at Cornell University as Professor of English for eighteen years before departing for Harvard in July 2006. He had previously taught at Oberlin College and at the University of Ibadan and the University of Ife in his native Nigeria. Between 1980 and 1982, he served as the National President of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), the country’s professional association of teaching and research faculty; in this position, he helped to shape state policy in the direction of consolidation of academic autonomy and adequate funding of tertiary education in Nigeria. Professor Jeyifo works on the complex connections between literature, critical theory, radical humanities scholarship and twentieth century progressive and revolutionary social philosophy. His most recent book-length publication, American Library Association’s Outstanding Academic Texts (OATS) awards for 2005.

**SPRING 2009 EVENT**
**ICM OPEN HOUSE**
2/26, 8:00 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.
Institute for Comparative Modernities open house reception. Alumni, students, faculty, staff, and the public are welcome. Our inaugural reception will be a time to eat, drink, converse, and learn about the ICM.

Toobogan Lodge, 38 Forest Home Drive.
For location and parking, see http://www.icm.arts.cornell.edu/contact.html

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**ICM ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2009**
May 12-14, 2009
Working Group:
- The Space-Time of Modernity and Global Hierarchies

**Participants:**

- Contemporary debates about alternative or multiple modernities can be situated among a number of new ways of understanding the relationship between historical time and global social hierarchies. This relationship has conventionally been understood in terms of a growing antagonism between an abstract world-time of capitalist modernity, and differential spaces and times not yet drawn into that world, and hence defined as different. Abstracted from nature and emptied of cultural meaning, world time was elaborated into an overarching temporal ideology of Progress and in the context of the colonial experience superimposed on the infinite plurality of local times and places, distributing them into a hierarchy that legitimated capitalist modernity's geopolitical dominance.

- Recent years have witnessed a virtual paradigm shift that has begun to displace this predominantly unilateral and Eurocentric understanding of the origins and dynamics of modernity as a historical process. The extension of globalization studies back into the past has uncovered causal patterns of interconnectedness reaching back well beyond the era of capitalist industrialization. Simultaneously, a major revival of World History studies has significantly revised our understanding of the "rise of the West" itself, relocating it in a wider interactive narrative of the birth of the modern world. In addition, postcolonial theory has sought to recover both the active agency of subaltern subjects at the height of European imperialism, and the "alter-native" and "multiple modernities" which have subsequently come to hybridize the nature of the contemporary world.

- Yet while all these approaches illuminate the play of difference, polarity, and inequality across the political multiplicity of modern social development, arguably none has yet constituted that multiplicity itself as an explicit object of theory. The intention of this workshop is to bring these various approaches together for a critical reconceptualization of the space-time of modernity, one that offers a way of rearticulating a range of issues that have become locked into a series of unhelpful binaries: internal/external, modern/traditional, West/non-West.
This book argues that inclusiveness is not a sufficient response to postcolonial and multicultural challenges to comparative approaches because it leaves the basis of equivalence unquestioned. What is needed is a concerted examination of the process of comparison itself. In readings of important novelists (Joseph Conrad), journalists (David Hammonts, Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons), and theorists (Edouard Glissant, Jean-Luc Nancy), All the Difference in the World elaborates the importance of a diasporic framework, not only as an intrinsic standard against which one understands and in relationship to time and space, and the second one extending the same critical attention to the work of the three artists. Taken together, the volume’s fourteen essays and two interviews represent some of the most exciting and innovative scholarship on contemporary African diaspora art, conceptual art, and new media. They affirm the importance of colonial encounter, as we understand it, does not refer to a time-bound, specific historical occasion that has been completed and left behind, but rather refers to a recurring mutual exposure to alterity in the form of material practices, bodies of knowledge, and ways of relating to and imagining the world that must be negotiated. Through the concept of colonial encounter, we intend to problematize the privileged notion of modernity as a continuous, progressive process predicated upon the notion of a transhistorical (Western) subject on one hand and the developmental unfolding of a race of people, uncontaminated origin, on the other. Notions of “progress” have justified the forcible imposition of Western schemes of thinking, acting and being in the world in the form of enslavement, assimilation, the obliteration of histories, and the eradication of peoples. In our view, “progress” implies an extrinsic standard against which one understands some prior instance in relation to a current one in order to judge the latter as “better,” because more “advanced,” than the former. Such judgments are underpinned by an unacknowledged metaphysics of perfection that depends, tautologically, upon the fulfillment of a modern essence. Rather, these encounters should be explored as sites of social, cultural, and commercial exchanges and negotiations that constantly influence, incorporate, and transform culture. This does not imply that relations of power are absent; quite the contrary, power and domination are ubiquitous and define the character and form of exchanges.

The forefront of these negotiations is located near margins and borders - at the cultural frontiers of society, where dynamic transnational spaces emerge. Rather than centers, we examine these spaces of modernity, finding new productive ways to dislocate and denaturalize it.

**“Contact Zones in Transnational Space”**

**Group Members:**
- Tina Shresha, Anthropology
- Isvan Small, Anthropology
- Reighan Gillam, Anthropology
- Bernardo Brown, Anthropology
- Josh Kirshner, City and Regional Planning
- Berk Eskin, Government
- Faculty Sponsor: Viranji Munasinghe

The focus of this reading and discussion group is to explore situated notions of modernity through the lenses of diaspora and transnationalism. To do this, we draw particular attention not to the way in which monolithic cultural apparatuses conflict and collide, but rather to the everyday interactions and exchanges that take place where they intersect. Cultural encounters do not have to be seen as unavoidably leading to antagonistic confrontation and/or synthetic merging. Rather, these encounters should be explored as sites of social, cultural, and commercial exchanges and negotiations that constantly influence, incorporate, and transform culture. This does not imply that relations of power are absent; quite the contrary, power and domination are ubiquitous and define the character and form of exchanges.

- **“Colonial Encounters”**
  - **Group Members:**
  - Lily Gai, English
  - Sinju Graf, Government
  - Onur Ulas Ince, Government
  - Pinar Kemerli, Government
  - Anthony Reed, English
  - Aaron Phillip Tate, Classics
  - Faculty Sponsor: Barry Maxwell

Any account of modernity’s present that does not inquire into the traces colonial encounters have left upon it would be incomplete. The concept of colonial encounter, as we understand it, does not refer to a time-bound, specific historical occasion that has been completed and left behind, but rather refers to a recurring mutual exposure to alterity in the form of material practices, bodies of knowledge, and ways of relating to and imagining the world that must be negotiated. Through the concept of colonial encounter, we intend to problematize the privileged notion of modernity as a continuous, progressive process predicated upon the notion of a transhistorical (Western) subject on one hand and the developmental unfolding of a race of people, uncontaminated origin, on the other. Notions of “progress” have justified the forcible imposition of Western schemes of thinking, acting and being in the world in the form of enslavement, assimilation, the obliteration of histories, and the eradication of peoples. In our view, “progress” implies an extrinsic standard against which one understands some prior instance in relation to a current one in order to judge the latter as “better,” because more “advanced,” than the former. Such judgments are underpinned by an unacknowledged metaphysics of perfection that depends, tautologically, upon the fulfillment of a modern essence.

Broadly speaking, our concerns coalesce around questions of continuity and origin, which rest upon the violent suppression of those concrete modes of civilization that challenge the legitimacy of Western practices and knowledges. We will follow an itinerary that visits such historical moments as the emergence of political liberalism and the formation of private property as informed by British colonialism in America, India and the Caribbean; the infliction of Enlightenment ideology by the experience of the Haitian Revolution; and the mutual articulation of antiquity and the modern nation. We will particularly emphasize those processes and strategies of aesthetic manipulation that obscure, contain or depoliticize such contaminations in order to produce the semblance of continuity. Aesthetics, we believe, brings into sharp focus politically urgent questions as the unequal allocation of the capacity or right to speak or represent, conditions of intelligibility and unintelligibility, and the limits of representation. To this end, we will primarily engage texts from the domains of history, classical and contemporary political thought, literature and literary theory. Through this project, we hope to gain new insight into the political conditions of modernity, finding new productive ways to dislocate and denaturalize it.


Marcus Bullock and Peter Paik (Rutgers University)
**Program Coordinator**

The ICM has recently hired Julie Tabiticas Moore as Program Coordinator. She will be responsible for overall coordination of the Institute’s events, graduate reading groups, publications, finances, and building use. Julie comes to the Institute with a background in program development in the arts.

Julie previously was the Program Coordinator for The Arts Guild of Old Forge, Inc., an arts organization located in the Adirondack Mountains. While working at the Arts Guild, Julie founded The Northeast National Pastel Exhibition, the first national pastel exhibition featured in the northeastern United States.

She moved to Ithaca in 2005 and began working for the College of Architecture, Art, and Planning as the Department of Architecture’s Archivist and Special Projects Coordinator. She coordinated the department’s accreditation; maintained an electronic archive of student coursework; and coordinated communications for the department.

Julie received a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Rochester Institute of Technology with a focus in painting and sculpture. After graduation Julie had the opportunity to study in Cortona, Italy where she learned the skills of traditional fresco and egg tempera painting, silver casting, and further developed her techniques in transparent watercolor painting. She also worked for Dejan Pevjovic’s Bronze Studio assisting sculptor Pevjovic on a commission for the University of Rochester.

**COORDINATOR**

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**PROGRAM**