INTERVIEWS WITH:
B. RUBY RICH
MONICA MACER
MICHAEL SHAOWANASAI

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Editorial Note
By Gavin Williamson

This issue of Eyecandy takes a radically different approach to media criticism from editions in years past. While the tendency for film and media journals has been to critique media from the often hermeneutically sealed framework of academia and frequently with the magnified lens on film texts, this issue turns its gaze to a diverse array of modes of writing and image-making. Although previous journals have included one or two interviews, Eyecandy 17 features four interviews with a sweeping range of industry professionals. Our contributors have written about media critic B. Ruby Rich, television writer for Lost and Prison Break Monica Macer, Thai filmmaker Michael Shaowanadasai, and independent producer/director Catherine Ryan of Luna Productions, as well as on the recent Academy Award win by Martin Scorsese and the topic of digital media piracy. In broadening the scope of Eyecandy, our goals are two-fold: first, to provide a rooted, industrial perspective on the production and distribution of film and television, and also on the art and act of media criticism itself; and second, to widen our textual horizon to include television and digital media, as well as film. Furthermore, while Eyecandy 17 features some of UC Santa Cruz's most promising critical writers on film and digital media, the accompanying Eyecandy 17 DVD features some of UCSC's brightest film writers, producers and directors. In this sense, this issue promotes a multifaceted and interdisciplinary awareness of "film" as not simply a final material product or a singular media object, but also as a significant piece of a socio-cultural media puzzle. The objective of Eyecandy 17 then, is to engage with and promote a vibrant media culture through a critical thinking and awareness of the visual image.
Creating *Iron Pussy*:
An Interview with Michael Shaowanasai

When admiring a piece of art one can easily feel connected to its creator, though often this connection is the product of subjective interpretation. In searching for the inherent “meaning” of a piece one often forgets the power of simplicity. We search for profound meanings under simple representations. When I met Thai filmmaker, Michael Shaowanasai, he reminded me of this tendency to overanalyze a text until it represents a concept different than originally intended. The renowned photographer, videographer, and installation artist recently came to UC Santa Cruz for a screening of his acclaimed *The Adventures of Iron Pussy* (2003) and to exhibit a series of his photographs at The Sesnon Gallery. Afterwards, he invited me to Foster’s Freeze, where we spoke about the film and his career in both Bangkok and San Francisco.

**IT:** How was *Iron Pussy* created?

**MS:** I don’t really remember. I just came up with a character one day and then came up with a storyline. It’s that simple, really. There was never an *Iron Pussy* epiphany! People are usually amazed when I tell them that there was no specific moment of creation. The portrayal of the women in the 60s and 70s was significantly different. The heroines were doing things that they weren’t supposed to do because they were still considered unequal to men.

There was this frequent portrayal of the strong woman who did extraordinary things, but nobody recognized her. Let’s say Wonder Woman had a day job as a secretary because she lives in a world where women aren’t supposed to have such enormous power. She has to conceal her power. We all have to conceal our power to seem like a woman. If you look at a comic strip, how many women are there? There is Wonder Woman, Cat Woman, sometimes she’s good, sometimes she’s bad, and then there is Supergirl. The thing about these heroines is that they don’t usually have their own series so they just make guest appearances. They’re sidekicks.

**IT:** How do Thai audience reactions differ from those of the Western world?

**MS:** The Thai weren’t really enthused. Some people say that they appreciate me showing them that you can make this kind of film with such a low budget. I’m not saying that my films are brilliant, but they have an
"You are younger than I am and you have specific ideas about certain concepts like, the 7-Eleven or ‘queer.’"

established heroine and a plotline. Still, today, many years after the last short Iron Pussy film I made, I walk down the street or at the bus stop, on the train people ask me, “So when are you going to make the next Iron Pussy film?”

IT: What about the feedback from the queer community?
MS: I didn’t have much feedback from the Thai gay and transgendered community. I had some, but not a lot of attention. I didn’t get an award for being “the gay of the year” or “the transgendered hero of the year.” I think they like it but they don’t show it, which is fine with me. This is the character of Thai people. They don’t really express their feelings, they wouldn’t shout “hurray!” I believe that there are people that appreciate what I do in the queer community, for which I’m happy. I don’t need a plaque that says ‘Gay Employee of the Month,’ and of course my work has been screened everywhere, which makes a quiet statement. Strangely enough, straight people are the ones that love my work and show it everywhere.

IT: How did living in San Francisco affect you as an artist? Would you consider yourself to have a diasporic vision?
MS: When you live outside of your hometown, it definitely affects your vision. But if you are smart enough, rather, if you are experienced enough, then you will use that for your advantage. I wouldn’t say that the fact that I lived in the United States for twenty-something years affects my work, but it used to. It’s refreshing to travel. Most people here [in the U.S.] don’t travel. It gives you a fresh perspective. But right now, I know where my home is. I might not like some things about it but it’s still my home. Home isn’t always great, but it’s a good place to be. Some people embrace ‘abroad’ so much that they call the other place ‘home.’ I can understand that and in some ways I am the same way. I was born and raised here and I decided to move back to Thailand. It was a big decision for me because my generation was a generation that migrated to America, Europe, Australia, etc. and didn’t return. They were looking for a better life abroad. This country is full of people looking for a better life. I like Bangkok. I like Thailand because there is so much for me to do considering my interests and abilities. America used to be good for me, but not lately. Anywhere I feel comfortable is my home. Today it’s Bangkok. Tomorrow it might be Istanbul or Athens.

IT: Iron Pussy’s day job is working as a 7/11 clerk. Was this an intentional representation of globalization and the integration of Western concepts (in this case companies) into the Thai culture?
MS: That’s your interpretation. You are younger than [I am] and you have specific ideas about certain concepts like, the 7 Eleven or “queer.” I’m not going to give you a straight answer like “oh yeah that was my intention, because it wasn’t, really. Look at it in a simpler way. Don’t glorify it. Don’t complicate it. Don’t make it too complex. But of course there is complexity within simplicity and your analysis is important. I mean, you can ask me that, but a lot of things I put in there have no meaning.

Peasant (2007)

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stores are everywhere and of course that is the result of globalization. Yes, we have problems with that as well, but I didn’t take that into account really. Its significance was to show how the character is an ordinary person. That doesn’t mean that I say his transgendered identity is an extraordinary person either. He/she is an ordinary person. Because it’s a universal chain store, 7 Eleven is something everyone can relate to. I always think that if I won the lottery, I would work at 7 Eleven because it’s easy job. If I won the lottery I wouldn’t take a job at Wall Street. I used to work as a clerk at a store, if can be monotonous … but sometimes, they can be extraordinary. You can go to the store and you’re happy to see them, and they give you change for laundry. That little thing, change, can do wonders. It may brighten your day. Extra-ordinary doesn’t have to come in extraordinary form.

**IT:** What is the significance of the biblical reference in *Iron Pussy III*? Do you frequently use biblical references in your work?

**MS:** The biblical thing is… actually I don’t want to use the term ‘biblical;’ biblical deals too much with a book. That term is not working. I’m not Christian. I’m not Catholic. I’m actually a Buddhist. There is nothing wrong with being interested in an extraordinary story that is written in a book. I often go to museums and look at paintings. Most Renaissance paintings deal with stories from the Bible. In those days of course there was no printing process, so you had to tell the story in a single frame. Take a paragraph:

Salome touched the lips of John the Baptist after he was told he could have anything he wants. The mother of Salome said that you must ask for the head of John the Baptist and it will be presented in a silver platter.

All that appears in one painting and I am fascinated by it. What I’m doing is providing a context through video. I include many references from the Bible in my photography as well.

**IT:** What is your favorite *Iron Pussy* and are there more to come?

**MS:** My favorite is *Iron Pussy III* because you get some information on her background and how she became Iron Pussy. I want to make more of them but am having a hard time finding a director.

**IT:** You seem to criticize globalization/Westernization as well as notions of patriotism when you mock claims of national superiority. In this regard your choice of villains is very interesting. In the *Iron Pussy* episodes, the villains are either Chinese or Japanese, yet interestingly refuse to be categorized vaguely as ‘Asian,’ they also claim to be too superior to be included in such group. What is the significance of this emphasis on national specificity as opposed to ‘Asianness’?

**MS:** The Turkish say that they are better than the Greeks, the Greeks say they are better than the Armenians, and the Armenians say no way I’m so much better than… I don’t know whoever is equal to them. Gypsies? I don’t know. The French say they’re better than the Italians. The English say they’re better than Dutch, and the Spanish say that they’re better than the Portuguese. A comparison between two similar nations is universal really and we cannot escape that in a world where we judge by skin color and religious beliefs. What is going on has been going on for years and we can deal with it or just sweep it under the carpet.

**IT:** So there was no intention in criticizing the common tendency to categorize nations due to their similarities?

**MS:** It is emphasis more than a criticism. A lot of things like this, you don’t say aloud. That’s why I make films. That’s what a film does. That’s an international film. You can say the things you’re not supposed to say. Look at *Grash* (2004). They call each other n**** all the time. I know they do that in real life too, but they exaggerate it in film. This is the nature of film. It is a characteristic of cinema. There are so many people out there that make films so true to life, but I’m not that kind of guy. Sometimes life is boring and monotonous. Everyday you wake up, brush your teeth and get coffee, go to work, come back. You have to consider that I have twenty-three minutes to say something when I make episodes of *Iron Pussy*. I want to say something. If I have a channel, people will hear it. You, for example, have a different background than I do. You’re from Turkey and if you can hear my messages, then it works. There are a lot of people who watch the movies and say “I don’t know what he’s talking about.” In a way, this works too because I have provoked this person to think. Not a lot of people agree with me, but that’s fine. That’s the point of watching a movie. Once you get the message, how you process it is up to you.

Apichatpong Weerasethakul, co-director of *Iron Pussy*, also visited UC Santa Cruz thanks to Professor Peter Limbrick and a grant from Porter College.

- *Idil X. Tabanca*
The Best Loser

Martin Scorsese’s status as one of the most underappreciated directors of contemporary cinema ended when *The Departed* (2006) won Best Director at the 2007 Academy Awards. Although his classics, *Mean Streets* (1973), *Taxi Driver* (1976), *Raging Bull* (1980), *Goodfellas* (1990), and *Casino* (1995) have won numerous awards including those from the American Film Institute, the Director’s Guild, and the Golden Globes, the Oscar for Best Director has long been elusive.

What does it mean for the Academy to overlook Scorsese for over 20 years? Does Scorsese’s work challenge the status quo? Is his work too dense? Or, is he a victim of bad luck in the years that he was nominated? It is all and none of these reasons. Scorsese is a filmmaker who often ventures outside the boundaries of traditional cinema, but he is typecast as a director whose work is defined by crime and violence. When his films do not revolve around these themes, they are largely ignored by the Academy and, moreover, by the public. This essay considers the critical reception for the Scorsese cannon as a way to interrogate why it took so long for Scorsese to win the Oscar for Best Director, and why *The Departed* was the film that finally did it.

While Scorsese received initial success with *Mean Streets, Taxi Driver* would be his breakout film. However, although praised by critics as a significant film of the decade, *Taxi Driver* was ignored by the Academy and Scorsese did not receive a nomination for either Best Director or Best Picture. He continued the theme of a tortured individual whose life is defined by violence in his next film, *Raging Bull*, which earned him his first nomination for Best Director in 1981. The film also received numerous nominations for: Picture, Actor, Actor and Actress in Supporting Roles, Cinematography, Editing, and Sound; it won for De Niro’s lead performance and Thelma Schoonmaker’s editing.1 Critic Amy Taubin writes in the *Village Voice* of *Raging Bull*, “The most obvious basis for the film’s claim to greatness lies in Scorsese’s devastating critique of the very codes of masculinity that shaped him as a filmmaker, and in Robert De Niro’s performance, through which that critique is made flesh.”2 The film lost out to first time director Robert Redford’s *Ordinary People*.

http://eyecandy.ucsd.edu
(1980), which was described by New York Times film critic, Vincent Canby as “a moving, intelligent and funny film about disasters that are commonplace to everyone except the people who experience them.” Although Mary Tyler Moore gave a commanding dramatic performance in this emotionally wrenching film about a dysfunctional family coming to grips with the death of their eldest son, the film arguably lacks the complex layers of Raging Bull. The critique of masculinity in the film may be difficult to locate in the violence, but in telling the story of this boxer, Scorsese is showing the id of the male psyche, and casting a disapproving eye upon it.

Scorsese’s next nomination for Best Director came in 1988 for The Last Temptation of Christ, a film that sparked controversy in the Catholic Church. Scorsese’s film, based on a novel by Nikos Kazantzakis, which was listed on the Roman Catholic Church’s index of forbidden books. That year, The Last Temptation of Christ was overshadowed by Rain Man (Barry Levinson, 1988). While it is not hard to understand why a “feel-good” movie such as Rain Man would beat out the controversially charged The Last Temptation of Christ, few hailed Last as a triumph. One of the film’s strongest supporters was Roger Ebert, who writes,

During the hallucination, there is a very brief moment when he is seen making love with Magdalene. This scene is shot with such restraint and tact that it does not qualify in any way as a “sex scene,” but instead is simply an illustration of marriage and the creation of children. Those offended by the film object to the very notion that Jesus could have, or even imagine having, sexual intercourse. But of course Christianity teaches that the union of man and wife is one of the fundamental reasons G-d created human beings, and to imagine that the Son of G-d, as a man, could not encompass such thoughts within his intelligence is itself a kind of insult.

Ultimately, the film’s supporters were outweighed by its dissenters. Many women’s groups were angered by the use of a female voiced Devil, and a line that claimed all women are alike. While Scorsese was conscious that the religious content of the film would enrage some, it was not his intention to slight women. In the novel, the Devil who tempts Jesus came in the form of an Arab boy — but Scorsese altered it out in fear of causing more controversy. Moreover, in many of his films, one can see strong female characters that while rarely the leads, contribute importantly to the story. The Last Temptation of Christ was not made to offend, but rather, to enlighten by providing a depiction of Christ who is flawed like any human. This was Scorsese’s attempt to break out of the framework of violence and crime that was defining (and perhaps, confining) him. The film was absent of violence and radiated the techniques and practices of a director trying to come to grips with his own faith.

Scorsese’s next landmark film, and one of his most acclaimed, is GoodFellas (1990). Film critic Marie Kathryn Connelly writes:

GoodFellas is a landmark film for Scorsese in that it combines some of his finest craftsmanship and elements of personal style while also being a very available work of art for a wide audience... [and it] was selected by a number of film critics as the movie they believed should re-
“The film recreates the lifestyle of low-level gangsters, these men are not like Don Corleone from *The Godfather*, they do not pull the strings, they *are* the strings.”

The film recreates the lifestyle of low-level gangsters, these men are not like Don Corleone from *The Godfather* (Coppola, 1972), they do not pull the strings, they *are* the strings. This feature paints a vivid picture of the day-to-day workings of mafia foot soldiers. Canby asserts, “*Goodfellas* is both the most politically serious and most evilly entertaining movie yet made about organized crime...” As a film that captures both the intricacies and the brutalities of the mafia, this would be Scorsese’s greatest loss, as that year the Best Director award went to Kevin Costner’s *Dances with Wolves* (1990). The film’s tackling of crime as a boys club that excludes the women in these men’s lives is unique as Scorsese allows the viewer to see the mafia world from Karen’s (Lorraine Bracco) perspective. Nonetheless, it is a film within the expected generic and stylistic boundaries that viewers (and the Academy) had come to know and recognize, which perhaps accounted for its Best Director loss.

Despite his prolific output—five films and two documentaries—Scorsese’s next nomination as director (he would receive a nomination for Best Adapted Screenplay in 1995 for *The Age of Innocence*, for which he also would lose) did not come until 2002 with *Gangs of New York*. During the interim, Scorsese tackled two diametrically opposed projects: *Casino* (1995) and *Kundun* (1998).

*Casino* is a sprawling epic about the birth of the Las Vegas mafia during the 1970s, which was ridiculed for its similarities to *Goodfellas*. In fact, the film was mockingly labeled “*Goodfellas 2*” by many critics because it seemed to recycle many of the generic markers of *Goodfellas*: voice-over narration, Scorsese and Pileggi as screenwriters, De Niro and Pesci as the stars, and most directly, Schoonmaker’s brilliant and fast-paced editing for which she had just won an Oscar. Ultimately, the film’s competent elements were overshadowed by its similarity to Scorsese’s earlier renditions of gangster-themed narratives.

Scorsese was attracted to *Kundun* because it extended his fascination with religion beyond a Western sphere. While the film is strikingly beautiful, it is perhaps a film that Scorsese, as a Western director, was ill-equipped to tell. The film traces the meticulous ways in which a Dalai Lama is groomed from birth to adulthood and changed from an unassuming child into a powerful Tibetan religious leader, as well as the devastating persecution the Tibetans endured under the surrounding Chinese government. While one can admire Scorsese’s attempt to open the Western world up to the tragedy of the Chinese occupation of Tibet, the film lacks the understanding of a Buddhist per-

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pective. Along these lines, Roger Ebert writes, “Scorsese seems to be searching here for something that is not in his nature and never will be.”

Kundun, like The Last Temptation of Christ, explores human spirituality and the Academy ignored the film as it had done with The Last Temptation of Christ 10 years before. This was not the Scorsese that Academy voters were used to and they demonstrated little interest in awarding him for a film about a culture other than his own (urban, Italian American).

A work that was closer to the expected Scorsese oeuvre but which nevertheless did not become a winning film was Gangs of New York, a film that Scorsese had wanted to tell since the late 1970s. Scorsese specialist Jim Sangster writes, ... [Scorsese] also knew it would have to be a story on an epic scale and, by the time his reputation was big enough to tackle such a project, Michael Cimino’s Heaven’s Gate (1980) had convinced the film studios that epics were too risky to invest money in."

When Miramax finally gave Scorsese a substantial budget to create his vision, he found himself creating an over-blown period piece, similar to Cimino’s Heaven’s Gate, a feature that nearly bankrupted United Artists. Gangs of New York lost the Best Picture Award to Rob Marshall’s musical Chicago (2002), and Scorsese lost as Best Director to Roman Polanski for The Pianist (2002). This was perhaps Scorsese’s most deserved loss. It appears that Scorsese was so tempted to realize the film he had dreamt about making for more than 20 years, that his usual quality as a filmmaker was diminished by a big budget, big star, blockbuster aesthetic. Gangs of New York received ten nominations, but they all seemed to be granted because the film was simply too big to ignore. In this sense, and unlike many of his triumphant character studies, the film rang hollow rather than hallow. Los Angeles Times film critic, Kenneth Turan, writes, “Gangs of New York seems ... to have lost its sense of story and its narrative drive, to have quite simply lost its way. Its two-hour and 45-minute length is elephantine enough to include an actual elephant, but what it doesn’t contain is any compelling reason for us to pay attention.”

Scorsese is almost on his home turf again, but not quite. While the film marks a return to the gangs, mafia, Italian heritage, and violent themes that have shaped his career the film is also removed from his previous work as a period film. It was the first occasion in which Scorsese seemed to rely heavily on special effects to communicate his vision; because of the lack of realism, the film felt hollow and artificial.

In contrast, The Pianist was a deeply personal account. Polanski had grown up in Poland during the Nazi occupation and experienced many of the events depicted in the film. It was a film that rang true to the personal works that Scorsese had built his career on but yet which Gangs of New York seemed so removed from. Gangs of New York lacked the poignancy of Polanski’s account of a Jewish pianist in a Warsaw ghetto, and critics were especially harsh on Scorsese, as if to say that he should have known better than to make the piece as poorly as he did.

It was when Scorsese returned to a contemporary time period in The Departed, that the critics that had abandoned him returned to praise him again. For example, Peter Travers described the film as “a new American crime classic from the legendary Martin Scorsese, whose talent shines here on its highest beams.” The Departed is taut, its acting is top-notch, and Schoonmaker’s editing is flawless.

Scorsese has a long history of obsession with the outsider and The Departed is the epitome of alienation. If Taxi Driver points to the political alienation of the Vietnam era, The Departed further refines this theme into a contemporary, dystopian, and social alienation. William Costigan (Leonardo DiCaprio) is a Massachusetts State Trooper working undercover in Frank Costello’s (Jack Nicholson) Mafia syndicate. Meanwhile, Colin Sullivan (Matt Damon) is rising in the ranks of the Boston Police Department Special Investigations Unit as an undercover informant to Costello. Both characters are accepted and trusted by their respected communities, however, because they are both two-faced, maintaining a balance between reality and performance, the line
between good and evil becomes more difficult to discern as the narrative progresses. Glenn Kenny of *Premiere* writes, "The Departed* ends up the most affectingly bleak movie Scorsese's made since *Taxi Driver.*" The film analyzes more than any other Scorsese film, what is really considered good and bad, right and wrong, moral and sinful. Furthermore, by linking themes of alienation and displacement with a contemporary setting, *The Departed* found the solid footing that *Gangs of New York* lacked.

Like *Gangs of New York,* *The Departed* marks Scorsese's return to a crime-themed narrative, a genre often used to define Scorsese's filmography though it is only a fraction thereof. The Academy, as well as public opinion, seems to want to isolate Scorsese inside a box to define him. Scorsese's attempts to break from the conventions that define him have been received by the public and the Academy coldly.

With *The Departed*, Scorsese has returned to his home turf, the type of film that he began his career with. Perhaps *The Departed* deserved to win Best Picture and Best Director for characterizing alienation and abandon so articulately, but this win also functions as a stand in for all the films that were never nominated or lost.

During his acceptance speech at the Oscars, Scorsese humorously poked fun as his turbulent history of losing at the Academy Awards.

Could you double-check the envelope, please...I just want to say too that so many people over the years have been wishing this for me. Strangers. You know, I went walking in the street, people say something to me. I go in a doctor's office, I go in a whatever. Elevators, people saying, "You should win one, you should win one." I go for an X-Ray, "you should win one." I'm saying, "thank you." This is for you."19

Scorsese's films have questioned morality and masculinity, and have pushed the limits of the film medium itself. Scorsese's newly acquired Oscar now stands not only as a testament to his incredible skill on *The Departed,* but also as a representation of and a reward to a filmmaker who has enriched the medium of cinema, creating intensely personal and captivating series of films that continue to inspire and enthral audiences worldwide.

-William Hoschele

7. Connelly 155.
13. Sangster 270.
Modes of Writing:  
An Interview with B. Ruby Rich

B. Ruby Rich is a UC Santa Cruz professor of Community Studies, but her critical work extends beyond academia. She is a media critic, film scholar and cultural critic who serves on film festivals and juries, and also publishes in major periodicals including The Village Voice and the San Francisco Bay Guardian. Much of her work is linked to the cinefeminism of the 1970s (the intertwining of feminist film criticism, the feminist film movement and the growing film festival circuit) and more recently to her 1992 Village Voice article where she coined the neologism New Queer Cinema (NQC). But Rich’s work is more than objective criticism, its semi-autobiographical. Her 1998 book, Chick Flicks: Theories and Memories of the Feminist Film Movement blends socio-historical cultural criticism with her personal narrative and subjective film experience. I recently met with Professor Rich on the UCSC campus to talk about genre, NQC, and modes of writing.

GW: One of the themes Eyecandy is interrogating this quarter is the notion of genre and its usefulness as a means of categorizing films. How would you define genre, and how is it operating in film today?

BRR: Let me be polemical, I think that the way film studies has evolved in the U.S. has been very unimaginative and what people have to hold on to are usually auteur categories, national cinemas, and genre studies.

GW: So using genre as a category is a way of pigeonholing film studies?

BRR: Well it’s a way of creating categories, it’s a way of circumscribing histories, it’s a way to have some feeling of competence regarding the film object you are trying to analyze or talk about, it’s a way to feel that you are on solid ground. I think that genre has really mutated. There are more people in the Academy dealing with contemporary work than there used to be. But I think that there is still a kind of tyranny sometimes that genre can wield over the way we think about contemporary production which tend to not to adhere to genres; it may adhere to formulas, but I’m not sure that the reassuring world order that was in place when genre categories were first rolled out is there anymore. As a result I think there is way more hybridity than people acknowledge, and at the same time there is an insufficient updating of genre to account for the very different modes of production and distribution that we have now.

GW: In the same vein, Western genre has been a prime topic of discussion in the wake of Ang Lee’s Brokeback Mountain (2005), how does Brokeback Mountain work in terms of genre and with regards to your neologism New Queer Cinema (NQC)?

BRR: Well, I think we should wait for the new issue of Film Quarterly to come out. They are doing a special issue on Brokeback Mountain. I have a piece in there, D.A. Miller has a piece, so do Chris Berry and Robin Wood. In my article, Brokering Brokeback, I was looking at the reception of the film and the ways in which people wanted to either celebrate or attack it, and what different communities got constituted around it. So I did something very straightforward and now I’m waiting to see what company I’m in and what people have to say. But in terms of genre, when I came up with the idea of NQC, I was responding to a particular moment when suddenly there was this outpouring of original, stylistically innovative film and video around queer issues. I saw it as a very post-Aids crisis phenomenon; not that Aids was in anyway over, but that the decade of first crisis was over, and that people were beginning to try starting to spin out aesthetic responses to it and make art.
out of it, make culture out of it, make stories out of it.

GW: And these were films like Todd Haynes' *Poison* (1991)?

BRR: Todd Haynes' *Poison* (1991), Tom Kalin's *Swoon* (1992), Derek Jarman's *Edward II* (1991), Issac Julien’s *too forgotten and only fiction feature Young Soul Rebels* (1991); which believe it or not out-grossed *The Crying Game* (Neil Jordan, 1992) in the UK that year. There were a lot of very exciting films and equally exciting videos. It was the era when Sadie Benning picked up a pixel-vision camera. There was a lot of exciting lesbian energy in video and a lot of exciting gay male energy in low budget feature film. Benning was turning 18 and Jarman was turning 50, that was the kind of span that there was. Then very quickly we began to get films like *Go Fish* (Rose Troche, 1994) and *The Incredibly True Adventures of Two Girls in Love* (Maria Maggenti, 1995) so that women began to catch up with some of that energy [in film as opposed to video]. When I first came up with the idea I wasn’t thinking of it as so much of a genre, but as a momentary phenomenon. But then the name stuck, and I’m not sure that I would call it a genre now, but at that moment when I wasn’t calling it that, then I think perhaps it was. There were so many shared characteristics, shared political concerns, shared approaches to narrative and character, shared approaches to acting, stylistic flourishes and budget affinities that maybe then I should have argued it as a genre. Then it got diluted and went in different directions, and certainly *Brokeback*, for me, represents a moment after the NQC, though it fits neatly into genre discussion; not only the Western — which has been done, but in terms of the Melodrama and Chinese Cinema [Ang Lee is a Chinese director].

GW: What about the small screen? Granted, onscreen representations of queerness have shifted drastically from those of the past, and we have also seen a marked increase in the viability of television’s depictions of queerness. But it seems that the small screen offers less poignant character development than the big screen does. Shows like *Will and Grace* or *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, seem to be treading water in a tepid ocean of stereotypes, why the disparity between the mediums?

BRR: It’s an interesting question. I’m not sure I have an answer. My impression is that television in general is faster to respond to social issues than cinema. Partly, I think viewer: I spoke on a panel *The Honeymoon is Over: Queers Destroy Gay Marriage*, and probably the best reaction I got was when I went through a litany of how films have or have not treated queer marriage, and then there was the night that Shane left Carmen at the alter which is how *The L Word* ended last season and there was a huge response. So I think television taps into the culture in a different way, people gather at houses to watch it, people are logging onto <www.aferellen.com> to talk about every single episode of *The L Word* and anything lesbian on TV. There are these really sizable online and offline communities that follow the shows, make community out of them and use them as lifestyle markers, not just products. Television gets embroiled in debates in a way that film doesn’t as much. I was just quoted in the *Philadelphia Enquirer* on whether Isaiah Washington’s Dr. Preston Burke in *Grey’s Anatomy* (who made a homophobic slur), should become gay. [I responded by saying] I wanted to know if that would be his punishment or his reward. So there is a way in which television gets conscripted into our life. I remember the coming out moment on Ellen’s [Ellen DeGeneres] old show. I was walking home through the Castro that night, the streets were empty, and through every window you could see the flickering light of the television set and hear people laughing or gasping. It was almost like the *Queer Super Bowl*. I think television gets taken into people’s lives a bit different. That said, often the representations we see on TV are kind of cartoonish, and that shows are ruled by formulas. But *LOGO* [An LGBT television/entertainment network] is different. We are talking like queer channels don’t exist. I think the cable channels are very different and if you look at *LOGO* it’s a startling example of how different real Queer programming can be rather than a network’s attempt to include a demographic.

GW: Do you think cinema is slightly more nuanced in its representations though slower to respond?

BRR: I’m not enough of a television

http://eyecandy.ucsc.edu 11
different forms of writing. You are one of the few writers that have been able to establish themselves as a critic in both a journalistic and scholastic sense, and you did it without a PhD. How does operating in both modes helped your writing in both forums? In the same vein, Roger Ebert says of your book, *Chick Flicks: Theories and Memories of the Feminist Film Movement*, "Ruby Rich reinvents both herself and her approach to film criticism, in a book that alternates autobiography and theory." How do you feel about the plasticity of the writing medium?

**BRR:** Well, from the beginning writing was a way to talk to people. The very first writing I did about film was neither academic articles nor journalism. It was program notes to accompany film screenings at the film center at the School of the Art Institute at Chicago [1972]. Program notes—by definition—had no status, they’d be all over the floor at the end of the screening. It was a very freeing medium in which to find my voice. The only rule was that I couldn’t say something bad about the film—not unlike writing about film for festival catalogues which did end up doing later in life. So that gave me a lot of freedom and from there I was invited to start writing for the *Chicago Reader*, and almost simultaneously was asked to start writing on *Jump Cut* [A film journal founded by John Hess, Chuck Klienhaus and Julia Lesage in 1974], which was just starting then. So, very quickly I was writing in two very different places out of that beginning I began to go to conferences to deliver papers. But, because I wasn’t in an academic position I had a lot of freedom, and that’s where some of my early theoretical writings came from. The best lesson was a sense of freedom about the limits of film discourse and how many of those limits were self-imposed out of either obedience or fear. I had a different set of constraints such as not being to say anything bad when I was a program note or when I worked at *The Village Voice* in New York, not being able to write about New York filmmakers. So what I learned about writing was that many of constraints come from the outside; that obedience of one set of constraints doesn’t mean obedience to another, and by shifting venues and sites of publication, I could shift the constraints. My Oddity is only a problem in the US. The idea of writing in an in-between space that is not entirely journalist, not entirely academic, but a passing facsimile of both, is not a foreign idea outside the US.

**GW:** I just read Vivian Sobchack's *Carnal Thoughts* and was struck how she managed to formulate a highly academic text around her own and very personal subjective and bodily film experience. You’re blending of theoretical historical and personal narratives in *Chick Flicks* harks from a related arena, how do you think writing about your own first person experience has impacted by your multiple writing venues?

**BRR:** I really just tried to write what interested me in a way that interested me without having a clear goal. I was often responding to injustices, as I saw them, or to particular reputations begin inflated or demeaned. I think I had a lot of nerve when I was young because I didn’t know any better, and that that has served me well.

**GW:** Can I ask what you are working on now?

I’m trying to get myself to write the book on the rise and fall of NQC. I published an article on subtitling, the foreign film market and hidden politics of international film festivals and have become really interested in the question of film infrastructures I’m also interested in looking at the evolution of independent film and the ways in which its been refitted into a market and what has been gained or lost. I’m very interested in Palestinian film. And I’ve just edited a new special section on documentary in *Cinema Journal* that will be out in the next issue.

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-Gavin Williamson
File Download Ahoy!

Pirates are everywhere! No, not those based on a popular Disneyland ride, or those from a high budget porno movie, but media pirates. In this day and age, media piracy is, indeed, everywhere despite various attempts by different industries to either thwart or capitalize on the practice. While it is still possible to go to the local record/video/game store and pick up the latest hard copy of whatever media tickles your fancy, the technology for pirating media continues to move at a rate that is drastically changing the way business is done.

Throughout the 1990s, when computers could already word process and create spreadsheets quite efficiently, continued advancements in computer technology (including graphics cards, processor speed, hard drive sizes, etc.) were unknowingly laying the groundwork for all forms of media to converge on the computer. Up to this point, media such as video, music, and games for the mass market was mainly restricted to physical products such as cassette and video tapes, CDs, video game cartridges, and eventually DVDs. However, it subsequently became possible for first, the technically savvy, and then, the average consumer, to rip much of that content from the hard copy thanks to their “super computers” and transfer it into digital information.

Some may argue that this was already possible through video and cassette tape recordings (and floppy disc copying for games) except now, not only was the content available for mass reproduction through a couple of hot key presses or clicks, as opposed to the process of dubbing a tape, but a massive beast known as the Internet had just grown a pair of broadband wings.

Before this all took place on a macro level, there were various individuals already sharing and pirating files via painfully slow (by today’s “First World” standards) connection speeds. The end of the 1980s brought with it the development of two programs that made file sharing possible: the Bulletin Board System (BBS) and Internet Relay Chat (IRC). However, these interfaces were not particularly user-friendly as the former required physically calling a computer through a LAN line (telephone) while the latter, despite being a precursor to modern chat and instant messaging programs, required the use of specific chat commands. FTP (File Transfer Protocol) was another non-mainstream yet relatively common method of transferring files between two computers as well.

Eventually, programs such as Napster and KaZaA came along in the late 1990s that allowed for simple search queries to be typed in and a list of users who were sharing those files (mostly mislabeled songs and pornography clips) would result. The user could then double-click the desired file and it would transfer. During this period, CD burners were reaching a mass market price that would allow any person who owned one to rip off their CDs into WAV (raw audio) format that could eventually be converted into a compressed and efficient MP3. CD burners could, of course, also do what they were meant for and create ultimate mix-tapes and copies of albums for the new millennium.

Unfortunately (for the pirates), the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) and major record labels (as well as the band, Metallica) rejected and continue to reject file sharing as they wage a serious campaign against it. Numerous lawsuits against various parties (including: Priority Records v. Chan (2005) and Elektra v. Santangelo (2005) to name a couple) have been and continue to be filed. Interestingly, on March 21, 2007 the RIAA sent out pre-litigation settlement letters to students at 23 U.S. universities including UC Santa Cruz. 17 careless Slugs received letters earning us the number 3 spot as far as UC violators go, behind UCLA and Berkeley (21 and 19 respectively). Another 13 universities were sent letters on May 2, 2007.
The settlements for first time offenders, often averaging around $3000.00, are "designed to recoup a very small piece of the massive damage inflicted on the music community as a result of piracy." Violators are encouraged to pay their settlements online at p2plawsuits.com, indicating that rather than an attempt to recoup lost revenue, download related copyright lawsuits has turned into a business of its own.

Likewise, in an effort to rival this trend of free music distribution, many artists and record labels have teamed up with companies and services such as itunes, legalsounds dot com, emusic dot com, Real's Rhapsody, and many others to digitally distribute their music files (with added copy protection technology). Recognizing that consumers were becoming accustomed to finding their music online, these companies created a business model that benefited from being reasonably priced and free in the legal trouble sense.

In 2001, a technology known as BitTorrent was developed by Bram Cohen to transfer many kinds of files, not just those that are copyright protected. BitTorrent made the owners of the transferring files harder to track while establishing an ideal method for large file transfers (as in hundreds of megabytes to several gigabytes). Instead of having a direct file transfer between the person downloading and those uploading, BitTorrent breaks up the file to be transferred in a way that every person downloading has a different piece of a puzzle and are constantly trading with one another, relieving some stress on the original file owner's bandwidth. Torrents are also not restricted to a particular server to host them as the files they pay to download content. But because of the nature of the software, it is virtually impossible to completely stop people from illegally transferring other files. Even when privately owned material is leaked through torrents and is then shut down, there is still a window of time that others are able to download the file and in turn, create a new torrent of it which can then be re-uploaded at a later date.

Since labels and distributors have traditionally sold their media via purchasable discs, cartriges, tapes, etc., a problem arises when fans have become accustomed to free downloading and transferring of content and no longer care for the physical object. Nevertheless, there is still money involved in this process as torrent tracker sites usually accumulate revenue from advertisements as opposed to charging for the actual product/service.

Torrent tracker sites as well as torrent users are not without legal troubles. In order to try to rid themselves of such vulnerabilities,
the popular tracker site, The Pirate Bay, held a fundraiser in early 2007 in hopes of purchasing the Principality of Sealand (a.k.a. Roughs Tower, an island fortress/platform created in World War II by Britain) whose location in territorial waters allows for claims of sovereignty and more importantly, a chance for a nation with no copyright laws. At the time of this writing, the company is also expressing interest purchasing a much more affordable small island instead.7

There are many instances of media piracy that do not involve business plans or battling copyright laws, though that is not to say that they are entirely legal; rather, they exist as a product of the passions of fanatical individuals. Animated shows from Japan are constantly fan-translated and subtitled for free online distribution via torrents. If not for this method, it would be reasonably difficult for Western audiences to view such programs in a timely manner or even at all. In addition, if current American anime distributors do not yet own the rights for those shows, or if they never pick them up, charges are less likely to be pressed for such practices. Often times, companies monitor the popularity of the different series to determine which would have a fan base if licensed and brought to the U.S.; it is then agreed upon with the torrent hosting site that the corresponding torrents would be taken down.9

Similarly, there have been many console video games that were never released stateside, (such as text heavy RPGs (Role Playing Games)). As a labor of love, groups of dedicated, bilingual fans take it upon themselves to release translation patches for ROM (Read Only Memory, or in this context: pirated) versions of these games. Usually these are for titles whose parent companies do not care to license and localize outside of Japan. This in turn allows new audiences, who wouldn't be able to purchase the games had they wanted to access to them.9

However, videogames bootleggers should not be mistaken for heroes (or Robin Hoods) in the online media transfer world since rampant PC game piracy10 has forced its industry to change strategies in order to remain viable. Console games (those played on a television) are usually harder to copy and pirate, whereas games played on the platform that would serve to copy them anyway (i.e. the computer) are much easier to duplicate and distribute. Because of this, PC game companies are turning to digital distribution to sell their games. Some companies license their games to consumers on a pay-per-game basis through the online retail versions of traditional brick and mortar stores11 while companies like Steam and Gametap distribute software through subscription services (the latter having both free and premium membership options). Instead of selling CDs and DVDs in fancy packaging at the local video game store, after a few clicks (and credit card number typing) entire games are downloadable and playable within minutes, much like the successful itunes business model.

By looking at the history of the different industries, it seems that pirating and free and open distribution of files is not going to go away but will simply adapt to the preventive strategies that the products' companies choose to deploy. It is also unlikely that artists, producers, and programmers will stop creating their art due to rampant piracy, contrary to what some pessimists predict.

Personally, as a both a participant in file sharing and firm believer in the right to share files, I do not advocate the supreme piracy or mass distribution of all content. Rather, I see purchasing power as just that, the power to support the media that one wishes to succeed and wants to see more of. Piracy, on the other hand, can be seen as a tool to keep media corporations in check about shoveling talentless, derivative, content onto consumers, for if something is truly wonderful and entertaining, it will stand on its own merits. As long as the distributors of media are able to present a superior and more easily accessible product to sway the casual consumer while making efforts to evolve from and expand upon traditional business models, then they should do just fine.

At the time of this writing, a "21st century digital revolt"12 resulted in the mass distribution of the HD DVD encryption key across the internet which poses a crisis for the intellectual property owner, which provides a huge bonus for the consumers and a win for freedom-of-information activists. More importantly, this serves as a reminder that a constant battle between media pirates (most of whom are everyday, non-fanatical, people like you and me) and media companies/distributors is raging on (whether we realize it or not).

-Alejandro Quan-Madrid

2The RIAA. 20 Apr. 2007
Glossary

Autorun file
As small piece of information outside of the content on a disc that tells the machine reading it to run/play the program/media automatically. If the information is ripped from the disc as pure data and is lacking this protocol, the resulting copy will not work correctly.

ISO files
Exact copies of CDs and DVDs that can be burned to blank discs in their entirety.

Mixtape
Originating from the practice of putting a mix of different songs on a cassette tape taken from the radio or other tapes. In Hip Hop, a mixtape can be a collection of beats from various artists (which promotes animosity with the RIAA) with the featured artist(s) rapping over them, usually in a freestyle fashion. These work to build buzz by word of mouth for the artist(s) or for upcoming album releases.

Optical Disk
Like a DVD with special features, or a video game with the autorun file.

To rip/burn
This refers to the practice of taking the content off of a CD or DVD/transferring it to a separate blank disc.

ROM (read only memory)
In this context, a console video game that has been stripped from its source cartridge. These are different from...

Torrents or .Torrent files
Files that require a client program that supports the BitTorrent protocol. A torrent file allows access to download/upload files that are being transferred between seeders (those who possess the complete file) and leechers (those who want the complete file).

Torrent tracker site
A web site that keeps track of all sorts of different torrents.
Breaking through
with Monica Macer

Monica Macer, who has been a writer for the hit television programs, *Lost* (2004-present) and *Prison Break* (2005-present), and a writer’s assistant for *24* (2001-present), recently sat down to talk with me. We discussed ways in which her political, social, and ideological perspectives have influenced her as a writer, as well as her success in Hollywood. Macer broke into the industry after working as a writer in theater, and she was able to make the transition into television largely because she had mentors to guide her and because she has supportive parents. Macer is half African American and half Korean, which is attractive to networks because she knows and can write about both cultures. Networks are often attracted to writers from diverse backgrounds because personal experiences help to shape a writer’s unique voice.

The programs Macer has written for are both politically engaged and socially relevant. *24* is an Emmy and Golden Globe winning program about Jack Bauer, an agent for the fictional CTU (counter terrorism unit) based in the Los Angeles area. *24* has been controversial because of some graphic content. Initially, the United States military expressed a liking for *24*, however, they soon began to resent representations of the military using torture. As a result, *24* has cut back dramatically on the number of torture scenes. *Prison Break* is political in that it confronts questions about the criminal justice system and the United States government. Engaging with the on-going debate about the death penalty, *Prison Break* raises the issue about whether or not it is ever just to take the life of another.

Like *24*, *Prison Break* and *Lost* have graphic content, though it is not the only aspect of the programs that audiences are attracted to. The unique casts are very appealing. *Lost* (which is also Emmy and Golden Globe award-winning) is about a multicultural and international cast of survivors of a plane crash on a mysterious island somewhere in the South Pacific. (“The Island” takes on a character of its own, as those who have seen the series know.) *Prison Break* has a mixed cast of veteran actors along with rising stars, Wentworth Miller and Dominic Purcell. Miller and Purcell play two brothers, one who gets framed for murdering the Vice President’s brother by a mysterious organization called “The Company.” The Company represents how a few powerful people who have their own hidden agenda can control the United States government. Miller portrays a structural engineer who purposely gets himself put into jail to break his brother out. *Lost*, *24*, and *Prison Break* have attracted a large following due to winsome casts, witty dialogue, creative plots, and complex storylines.

After a lecture that Ms. Macer gave as a guest in Professor L.S. Kim’s class, Television, Culture Society, I spoke with her one-on-one about working in the competitive Hollywood atmosphere.
EyeCandy (EC): What was your path to becoming a successful writer?

Monica Macer (MM): I knew that I really wanted to be a writer for a long time and while I was attending Vassar College, I began to write plays. Back east, the theater is really what people view as high art, television is considered to be a form of entertainment for the mindless. I did some work for a few plays, and I was lucky to have a mentor who suggested that I go to Hollywood and start a career as a writer for television. I took his advice, and I applied to a writing program at FOX. Then I moved to Hollywood where I was trained how to write for television. I also took writing for television classes in UCLA’s extension program; that program is run like a writers room at a major studio and my teachers were all writers in the industry, so I really learned a lot in that kind of environment.

EC: What inspires you to write and what are some of your influences? Is it racial issues? Political issues? Religious issues?

MM: I think what inspires me to write a lot of the time are, funny moments that I’ve observed or witnessed. I am not necessarily a comedy writer, but I love character. I really like fish out of water stories, where people are put into extreme circumstances or conditions they are not used to. I think about the first season of Prison Break, when Michael, a structural engineer and very well educated man, is thrown in to this chaotic system of prison. Michael loves his brother so much and wants to get him out of prison but in order to do that, he has to get put into prison so he can break him out. He obviously did not fit in at prison but the process of making him fit into that kind of environment was what inspired me. I love 24 and my bosses Joel Surnow and Howard Gordon helped shape my voice as a storyteller, and I am thankful for that.

EC: How does religion come into play in Prison Break?

MM: The writers had to be very careful about how we confronted religion in the show for a number of reasons. Mainly, we did not want to offend anybody. For example, there is one scene when John Abruzzi played by Peter Stormare, sees an image of Jesus crucified on the cross in a water stain in his cell. We originally had an image of the Virgin Mary; however, we changed the image to a picture of Christ on the cross because we thought that Abruzzi’s character would find the image more compelling than a picture of the Virgin Mary. Also, the scene consists of Abruzzi finding Jesus after he was nearly killed by T-Bag, another inmate who is by far the most controversial character. Michael Scofield often is seen talking to his brother, Lincoln Burrows, in the church at the prison, which is obviously a house of God and also very religious. In fact, Michael comes to a point where he is so befuddled about the choices he has made and is very upset because he had to kill someone. Michael Scofield has to confess his sins to a priest. The way the characters handle their problems by finding faith in their religion is positive and makes the characters and audience stronger.

EC: What was your role in the creation and development of the some of the characters in Prison Break?

MM: Our boss, Paul, wrote the show; he created the world and the plot. Over time, we (the writers) got to influence the show. For instance, when the character of Walter Chen was being created in Prison Break, he was made Korean American because of me. Right before the script went off to get copied I said we should change his name to Bill Kim, which is a Korean name. Everyone in the room helps to create the characters and contributes to the story, or the witty bits of dialogue. It is very exciting to me because when everyone says it is a good idea and then it gets put on the show, you can watch the show and say “that was my idea.”

EC: What are some of the consistencies among 24, Prison Break, and Lost?

MM: I would have to say that I am
very lucky to be on high concept shows. 24 is a very high concept show, one season is a 24 hour period, every episode is one hour in that day. 24 is high-concept because a real-time format had never been used before on television. The show, Lost, was thought of time and time again but nobody knew how to craft the idea of strangers on a deserted island. An idea that my boss thought of was to have the Island be a character and a personality on the show which was also ground breaking and had never been done before. I would say Prison Break is also the same to that extent, very high concept. Break in break out, getting thrown in jail to get my brother out of jail. Prison Break was actually so high concept that it was originally supposed to be a feature film, but thank God they made it into a television show because I have a job now [Laughs]. I would have to say that I am very lucky to be on high concept shows.

Televison has actually been starting to use more advertising practices during the live broadcast and not in commercials but have yet to place a commercial in the show like some movies have done in the past. A lot of companies like Toyota actually call the producers and say that they want a scene with one of the characters driving a Yaris, one of the cars they make, and then buy time on the show in order to do that.

EC: How does Prison Break represent the U.S. government?
MM: I would say our show is kind of anti-government on purpose because we have a conspiracy and the government is "the bad guy." We like that; it is fun, and because it was set up that way from the very beginning because Lincoln Burroughs was accused of killing the Vice President's brother. In every good drama you have to have a good guy and a bad guy. And in this case, the U.S. government is that bad guy. In the second season of Prison Break, Caroline Reynolds (the Vice President) is a bad guy. It is all about good versus evil, and in our case Caroline Reynolds embodies that. In Prison Break, we never have our good guys use weapons or guns to solve a problem. Pointing a gun at somebody should not be a way to get the problem solved.

EC: How much can you get away with when you are making your shows? For instance, is the math, which Michael Scofield uses to break out of prison actually correct? Can the tattoo of the Devil when projected on a wall, if accurately drilled at the top of the two horns and the bottom of the chin, really break down a wall?
MM: No! That is not true, we came up with what is called Hook's law, which is when you drill into certain points in a wall, and it comes down. Well it is true that if you drill into a wall at certain points then it will come down, but we fabricated to create a certain affect.

In watching television programs, one often forgets about the work of the production and, instead, cares about and enjoys the plot and the actors. Television writers are often relegated to the sidelines. But writing -the process of creating the ideas for the stories - is where television begins. By highlighting the behind the scenes work of the writing process in 24, Prison Break and Lost, this interview hopes to feature and pay respect to the often unappreciated or under-appreciated role that writers play in the creation of television.

-Michael Mann
Soldiers of Conscience: An Interview With Filmmaker Catherine Ryan

Nestled in a small house at the foot of the Berkley Hills just twenty minutes from San Francisco lies Luna Productions – a small independent film company run by Catherine Ryan and Gary Weimberg who specialize in producing documentary films. Ryan and Weimberg’s base of operation is in fact the couple’s house, which includes a editing suite in the back where Wiemberg edits the films they produce. Ryan and Weimberg have worked together since 1980, and have produced such films as *The Story of Mothers & Daughters* (1997) for ABC TV, *The Double Life of Ernesto Gomez-Gomez* (1999) which was created for the POV series on PBS, and *Teens* (2000), the first ever documentary produced for The WB Network.

Their latest production, *Soldiers of Conscience* (2007), tells the story of three solders that came back from their tour of duty in Iraq with very different perspectives on the conflict is currently being pitched for distribution in theaters and on DVD. I sat down with Ryan to get her insight on the changing landscape of independent filmmaking during the digital revolution, the creation of this film and the effort to take it public, her experience working with Weimberg and Luna productions, and her life as a filmmaker.

**JW:** Tell me about *Soldiers of Conscience.*

**CR:** *Soldiers of Conscience* is about the moral question that solders face about killing in war. It is a film told by soldiers from their [personal] experiences, which range from those who would do it again, to those who say “I could never do this again, I am a Conscientious Objector, put me in prison.”

**JW:** How did you decide upon the topic?

**CR:** We have done a lot of documentaries on social issues, and this terrible war in Iraq was going on; everybody was talking about it, and concerned about it. Gary and I met with a retired lawyer who during the Vietnam War, had been involved with helping to defend Conscientious Objectors. He was really curious about what had happened to those people now.

And as we started to look into it and talk about it, we said there are Consciences Objectors in this [Iraq] war, that’s the interesting story to tell. What’s going on now? By the end of the Vietnam, [1975] there were 170,000 conscientious objectors because it was such a bad war and people knew it. This war it is just beginning. It is really important kind of resistance to have the actual people who were expected to do the killing to say...
It is very expensive to get archival footage, but even more expensive to go and film in Iraq. We heard about one production company whose security cost was $800,000 a day."

"no" while it is going on.

JW: What were some of the difficulties you faced while making this film – especially with the military?
CR: Getting access to soldiers who were actively in the army was probably the biggest challenge because we had to go through the army to get permission. We had cooperation, but it took a very long time - nearly a year - to get to someone who would let us do what we wanted. It was hard for them to give access now because with this war and this administration, everything is kept quiet. Once we had official access, then we had to deal with finding the individuals who would want to come forward, and would want to participate. Luckily they did. Another difficulty we had was how to represent Iraq through archival footage. We opted not to go to Iraq and get our own war footage. The soldiers whose stories we were doing were already back, they had been there. So we felt we could tell the story through archival footage. But getting the archival footage is a big challenge. There are so many people over there who are filming. There are people who are embedded, people from every country around the world. There is all this stuff out there, but how do you find it? How do you find the good stuff? Well, we went through a lot of footage. People would tell us, "this journalist, this Dutch guy, was here for this amount of time, we would contact him, look at his stuff," we got some wonderful footage from this Spanish documentary, the images were great. It is very expensive to get archival footage, but even more expensive to go and film in Iraq. We heard about one production company whose security cost was $800,000 a day.

JW: And how did you go about contacting these soldiers?
CR: It was different with each person. Kevin Bendermen [for example] was going to be court marshaled in under a month form when we first read about him. So we contacted him via the internet, got his confidence, and then we moved in on him for a whole week before his court marshal. We found Adin Delgado, because he did a slide show at Berkeley High School. The military spokesperson in the film is Pete Kilner who teaches at West Point, and we found him form a New Yorker article about the effects of war on Veterans.

JW: The distributor has it even though its your project?
CR: It's been with Film Makers Library, a wonderful educational distributor out of New York for all these years. But now that everything is changing and more it's DVD and individual sales than institutional sales, we're looking into how to distribute it differently.

JW: What was your first film?
CR: The first documentary that I was a producer on was a film called Maria's Story, which was part of PBS's POV (Point of View) series. Some people said it helped stop the war in El Salvador because it really showed what was going on. It made Senator John McCain so angry that he said we were un-American and should not be allowed to make films anymore. In Congress he said that! Ron Dellums watched it and said we are not sending another dime to that war until I make everyone in Congress watch this film! So it really did get into the dialogue of what was going on. The film continues to do well. In fact, the Santa Cruz Film Festival actually showed Maria's Story three years after its completion.

Ryan's partner: Gary Weimberg.
ago and The Rio Theatre and brought Maria from El Salvador for the festival. The Rio was sold out. It was amazing how successful it was all these years later. It’s been with the distributor and we are in the process of maybe turning it into a docudrama.

JW: What is your filmmaking background?
CR: I came into filmmaking from learning on the job, not from school. I started in the editing room at Mendelson Productions in Burlingame. They used to make Charlie Brown specials, on 16mm film. I learned on the job how to log and sync up film, although I think I never really got good at that. I did assistant and sound editing, and then worked at Lucas film doing sound editing. But feature films got really tiring, because I was not the producer or director, which I thought, was the fun job. When you are just doing sound editing year after year it gets kind of boring. But it’s a great skill to have and I am really glad to have done that. I learned a lot.

JW: So what advice would you give a young filmmaker coming out of college and trying to get into the game?
CR: Choose a part of the industry you want to become skilled in. Choose weather you want to go into editing, operating a camera, or going into sound. Pick a piece that you have a lot of interest in and that you really want to develop your skills in. Use that as the entree into getting the experience of working on productions. While you’re doing that you’re simultaneously thinking about the kinds of films you’d eventually like to make. Some people feel if they start in production they will never get to do their own stuff. I don’t see it happening that way. If people really get locked in because they have a real job that puts them in touch with a lot of different productions, they get a lot of experience. Then they are more likely to follow through and eventually make their own films. It also helps to make it real. You learn there are parts to filmmaking, and you know different people do different parts. I know if my dialogue editor is out of sync by one frame. I see it because I’ve spent a long time syncing up dialogue. The things on production like lighting and microphones were harder for me because I didn’t ever do a production job. I did post-production. So I think it’s really good to get a lot of experience. It’s really a good idea to take internships and unpaid jobs because those turn into real jobs. People who show that initiative – show that real motivation – are the ones that we call when we need somebody right away. And those jobs go on your resume. That’s the other thing to remember. It does not matter if you get paid or not, it’s a job experience that goes on your resume and your resume is important in this business.

JW: Do you think that digital filmmaking is an advantage for filmmakers?
CR: It’s great because it’s creating the possibility that so many more people can try their hand in filmmaking. Independent filmmaking is really going to get better with more people being able to give it a shot. And it’s so much cheaper than all of it used to be, and it’s faster. With Final Cut Pro, a computer, and a decent monitor you can have a whole editing room $10,000. We used to edit on beta decks, which cost $50,000, and you needed two!

JW: Do you think video and DVD rentals, Netflix, and more people watching TV shows and films on their computer, has had an impact on how you will distribute your films now and in the future?
CR: I think it has, I mean just today we were talking to a producer’s representative and he was saying
that the thing you have to look into now is people being able to directly download your film form your website. This is all new to me. But, you know this has been the truth in film since 1990. With every format change, with every new part of this communications business, distribution changes radically. I mean when I started you could make a living in educational market. You could have a one-hour film that would sell all over the country for $800, or $1,200. Now you’re lucky if you get twenty dollars in the educational market. Obviously that’s not the way to go. If we lose theaters and people are only seeing things alone or with one other person next to them on a couch it looses something. The film festivals are blossoming so maybe that will be the special arena for seeing things. That is the business to go into. They charge for entry fees. And they get so many submissions. I mean every festival right now taking feature length documentaries are getting between 1,400 and 2,000 submissions. For shorts, it’s double. In the last ten years, it has grown exponentially.

**JW:** What has been your experience with getting your films, especially this film into film festivals?

**CR:** Well, I think we are off to a good start. Atlanta is an excellent place to have the premiere. I am really glad it is in the South. I think that’s part of why we are getting so much good press is that people in Georgia really care about the military. We want this film to be for everybody and not just Berkeley or liberal audiences. I’m really happy to have Seattle as the next film festival, they are making it one of the four featured films of the festival so that’s going to be good. Atlanta will give us a chance to get our feet on the ground, because right now we just finished making the film. We’ve not raised distribution money, so we are doing

!["Just today we were talking to a producer’s representative and he was saying that the thing you have to look into now is people being able to directly download your film form your website. This is all new to me. But, you know this has been the truth in film since 1990.”](image)

**JW:** Do you have advice for a film student who wants to get his or her film distributed?

**CR:** Definitely, student filmmakers should absolutely go the festival circuit. It’s the best way, its maybe the only way to get a distributor to be interested. Also, all these festivals give huge discounts for submitting your film while you’re a student. You should submit to a lot of festivals, really get it out there. It’s really a good opportunity.

**JW:** Can you give us a release date for *Soldiers of Conscience*?

**CR:** Hopefully by the fall.

**JW:** What do you hope this film will bring to the audience who watches it?

**CR:** We really hope that this film will encourage members of the audience to take the moral question that soldiers face seriously and really ask them how they feel about war as a major national industry.

For more information on the film go to www.SocFilm.com

*Jack Winton*
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