

Department of Popular Culture Newsletter

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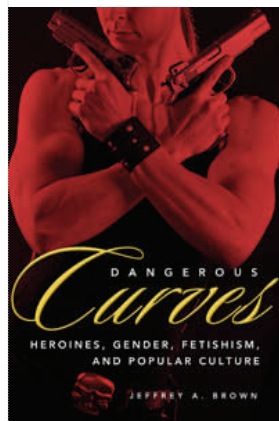
EDITORS' NOTE

Welcome to Newsletter 2(3)!

This is our last travel issue, with reports from India and Southeast Asia. In our next issue we resume marking faculty and student achievements. It's been quite an amazing year for Popular Culture. We received the largest donation in our history, one of our faculty is spending the year as a Visiting Professor at the Sorbonne in Paris, five professors presented their research overseas, another saw the release of his second book (see this issue's front page story), and this newsletter is coming out to coincide with the Music and Everyday Life conference, co-sponsored by the Department. Next year we will be celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Popular Culture MA program. Stay tuned for further details in our next issue on how we plan to commemorate that milestone.

***DANGEROUS CURVES* BY JEFFREY BROWN RELEASED IN FEBRUARY**

Dr. Jeffrey Brown's newest book *Dangerous Curves: Gender, Fetishism, and Action Heroines in Modern Popular Culture* was released February 1, 2011, on the University of Mississippi Press. In this landmark book in the analysis of gender and media Dr. Brown discusses the immensely popular action heroine character as an example of, and challenge to, existing theories about gender as a performance. His work draws upon past scholarship addressing the negotiation of gender roles in performance, violence, and the representations of sexuality. He also suggests new directions that may help free the action heroine from the predictable analyses with which she has been interpreted. The excessive sexual fetishization of action heroines is a central theme throughout the book. Brown interprets the action heroine as a representation of changing gender dynamics that balances the sexual objectification of women with progressive models of female strength. Crucially, the book moves



beyond examining representations of action heroines in Hollywood film and television to consider this character in contemporary popular literature, comic books, cartoons and video games.

Second year MA student Kendall Binder focuses on the book's discussion of "superhero sexualization" which, according to Binder, is something with which the gay community sympathizes. "As young heterosexual boys may veer away from the sexualized image of the female superhero, gay boys look up to them—the female superhero sexualization is something young gay boys relate to—specifically during his teen years, because the gay boy is dealing with 'abnormal' sexual feelings for the same sex—so young gay men may dismiss the macho male super-

hero in the same way the young heterosexual boy dismisses the tough girl," he said.

Binder also suggested that empowered female musicians could be studied the same way.

"*Dangerous Curves* is an excellent vehicle in film studies as well as a vehicle to study female rock stars, —Joan Jett, Lita Ford, Courtney Love, PJ Harvey, and yes—the all-so-ever kitschy and pastiche goddess, Lady Gaga. They defy the patriarchal boundaries of rock and roll and exemplify a sexual freedom and sexual identity through crass lyrics and hypersexualization. They are tough and, in Lady Gaga's case, can rule the world," Binder said.

"*Dangerous Curves* is a book that should excite any movie-goer interested in the most fun of film genres," says Popular Culture 2010 alumna Tierney Oberhammer. She finds the book is "as much about action heroines as it is about you and your conception of gender and sex." Oberhammer also liked the



fact that, because of his understanding of “the complexities, contradictions and exceptions characteristic of the current era,” Dr. Brown “doesn’t make end-all claims” in his book and thus gives room for future discussions on gender roles in film.

For more information about Dr. Brown’s book please visit: <http://www.upress.state.ms.us/books/1323>

OTHER RECENT BOOKS OF NOTE:

Idolized: Music, Media, and Identity in American Idol by Katherine Meizel (former BGSU Ethnomusicology Instructor and friend of the POPC Dept.) Indiana University Press. http://www.iupress.indiana.edu/catalog/product_info.php?products_id=459267

Divine Inspirations: Music and Islam in Indonesia edited by David Harnish (BGSU Professor of Music) and Anne Rasmussen. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oup.com/us/companion.websites/9780195385427/book/?view=usa>

RAY and PAT BROWNE SCHOLARSHIP IN POPULAR CULTURE

By Menghan Liu

Alice M. “Pat” Browne established the **RAY and PAT BROWNE SCHOLARSHIP IN POPULAR CULTURE** in 2010 to support students at BGSU who are entering the field of Popular Culture.

According to Marilyn Motz, the popular culture department chair, the scholarship will be awarded for the first time by this spring.

“A continuing popular culture major undergraduate will be honored at the College of Arts & Sciences Honors and Awards Reception ceremony. Pat will be invited to the ceremony, too. The grant will be for the upcoming academic year of 2011-2012,” Motz said.

Pat is best known, both nationally and on the Bowling Green State University campus, through her work in Popular Culture. She and Ray Browne founded the BGSU Popular Culture Library and the *Journal of Popular Culture* in 1967, the BGSU Center for the Study of Popular Culture in 1968,

and the Popular Culture Association and the BGSU Popular Press in 1970. All of these activities brought worldwide prominence to the study of Popular Culture and recognition to Bowling Green State University as a leader in the field.

Ray Browne recognized Pat’s selfless efforts toward the development of the Popular Press: “...through the years her title has been everything from Business Manager to Editor. But throughout, her duties have consisted of virtually everything.” Motz confirms Pat’s positive influence on the studies of popular culture. She recalls that some of the books that Pat chose to publish were truly ahead of their time. For example, Richard Chalfen’s *Snapshot Versions of Life*, published in 1987, has now become a major source for the burgeoning current scholarship on amateur photography and home videos.

Pat is a pioneer, and not only for her groundbreaking work with Ray Browne in popular culture studies. According to Motz, she has now established the first substantial scholarship offered to popular culture under-

graduates.

“I think it will make a big difference in helping students with financial need to attend the university, especially given the current situation of economic crisis,” Motz said.

AWARD ELIGIBILITY AND SELECTION CRITERIA

1. The recipient(s) must be a rising Sophomore, Junior or Senior Popular Culture major.
2. The recipient(s) must be in good academic standing.
3. The recipient(s) shall demonstrate financial need as determined by the Office of Financial Aid.

A selection committee in the Department of Popular Culture shall determine the recipients.

The Department extends its congratulations to this year’s Ray and Pat Browne Scholarship recipient, Rebecca Denes, a sophomore with a double major in Popular Culture and History. Congratulations are also due to our other undergraduate awardees this year: Jacob Brown, Michael Kneisel, and Marisha Pietrowski. Nice going, guys!

BGSU POPC GOES TO INDIA, PART TWO

By Dan Shoemaker

Unlike my traveling companion, I had never been to India. I was very grateful to have Dr. Kristen Rudisill as my chaperone. Luckily, her skills as a black belt were not needed; everyone I met in India was friendly and gracious. I could not have had a better experience.

I did not take a camera with me to India, because I would not have known what to point it at; the whole experience was so rife with novelty that I would’ve had to record all of it. What follows, then, is a series of snapshots from my memory.

My initial impressions of India were overwhelming. We arrived at Delhi in the evening, and were met at the airport by Anil Batra (the father of Puja Batra-Wells, who graduated from the POPC MA program last year), who welcomed us into his home for the night. The traffic was really something! Apparently, the lane markings painted on the road are just suggestions, and drivers pass on either side. Instead of using turn signals, drivers honk to each other to signal their presence and approach. Instead of individual strict obedience to the rules of the road, driving in India seems much more improvisational and collaborative, as if everyone on the road is a member of a jazz ensemble playing the same spontaneous composition. At earlier times in my life, I have had delivery jobs in which I drove for a living, but I do not have the skill set to drive in India.

Outside my car window were buildings that looked as though they’d been built between the 1930s and the 1960s in terms of architectural style, but they looked much older. Maybe the humidity affects the stonework in ways to which I am unaccustomed, but the overall sense I had of the first buildings I saw in Delhi was one of erosion and decay, and the impression was further cultivated by the fact that the roadways appeared to be under constant repair, not unlike Michigan. The Batra home was very comfortable, though, and the next day Kristen and I were given a brief automobile tour of embassy row, whose streets and buildings were well-maintained. We stopped briefly at a small, upscale shopping mall, and I was surprised to see the visage of Colonel Sanders hanging over a storefront.

Most of my visit was spent on the campus of the University of Hyderabad, which I’m guessing must be on the very outskirts of that



city, judging from the density of the foliage. Dr. Rudisill and I were jet-lagged the whole time we were there, and I woke-up uncharacteristically early most mornings. I'd been told that I could see various kinds of wildlife on campus if I went for an early morning walk, but I demurred at the prospect. On the morning of the last day on campus, I watched as a troop of monkeys blithely descended from the treetops to the roof of one of the campus buildings, climbed down the front of the building, and casually sauntered across the landscaped yard until they could disappear into another stand of trees. It wasn't any more startling than seeing a small group of raccoons, but what surprised me was the monkeys' apparent sense of ownership of the space, their boldness, and their complete disregard for any human presence on the scene. At twilight of our last day on campus, I saw a bat leave the treetops on his way to the evening buffet. I have seen many bats in my time, but never one so large. The bat keeps getting bigger and bigger in my memory the more I think about it, but an accurate measure of its size was that, upon first seeing it, I thought it was an owl or a hawk. All of these experiences were reminders of the variability of the conditions of daily life and their impact on subjectivity, which scholars of Popular Culture take under consideration when employing the Bowling Green approach.

The conference was a great success (as Dr. Rudisill has already written, in our previous issue). I was especially interested in the structure of the conference: we seasoned, established scholars (six of us, from three different countries) gave our papers in the mornings of each day, modeling Popular Culture scholarship for the graduate students. In turn, the grad students presented their papers each afternoon, and benefited (we hope!) from hearing our feedback on their research. I was impressed by the variety and quality of the conference presentations, and by the work ethic of the students, who were genuinely eager for advice on ways to improve or expand their research. I am sure that everyone in attendance learned a great deal. One important lesson for me was learning how the U.S.A. is perceived by the citizens of another nation. I realized that it is much easier for me to distinguish between the domestic policies of different Presidential administrations than it is to discern nuances in the foreign policy of a Superpower. This underscored for me the importance of historical and cultural context in understanding American mass media texts, and more thoroughly sensitized me to how American Popular Culture (one of our major exports) represents us to the rest of the world.

Along those lines, the most shocking lesson I learned happened after the conclusion of the conference, while staying with Dr. Rudisill's friends, Shannon and Jeff Anderson. Having traveled to the other side of the planet

"The most shocking lesson I learned happened after the conclusion of the conference."



Golconda Fort, the tourist attraction where Dr. Shoemaker discovered that his red hair was a tourist attraction.

for the first time, I had wanted to spend a couple of days as a tourist after the conclusion of the conference, and the Andersons generously offered to put me up (or put up with me?) for the remainder of my stay. I spent two days as their guest, and they and their driver, Zeph, took excellent care of me. I had heard that the city of Hyderabad had a reputation as India's equivalent to Silicon Valley, which accounts for its nickname, "Cyberabad." Zeph told me that most of the high tech development has happened in the last decade, and that the local population welcomed the influx of jobs. Driving around the city, I saw many corporate logos that I recognized in addition to Colonel Sanders; these included Baskin Robbins, Nike, and others. So, I somehow had the expectation that the population of the city would be fairly cosmopolitan (like Silicon Valley, where I grew up). I was mistaken; I could count the non-Indians I saw in Hyderabad on one hand. On my big day as a tourist, I visited Golconda Fort, a fabulous structure from the 12th century with amazing acoustic properties. During the couple of hours I spent there, three groups of Indian tourists asked to have their picture taken with me. When I asked Zeph why that had happened, he explained that it was because I was a Westerner. Later, it became clear to me that my status as a Westerner was conveyed by the color of my skin, and that this also signified wealth. Zeph explained that drivers get kickbacks from store owners if they bring a Westerner to their shop. At one establishment where I shopped for souvenirs, the shopkeeper tried to sell me "a conversation piece for my coffee table" for seven hundred and fifty dollars (US dollars, not rupees). I laughed, because I was looking for something in the twenty dollar range; I simply haven't got a spare seven hundred and fifty bucks to spend on décor. But it was certainly a clear lesson to me about skin privilege, and the class privilege that Westerners are assumed to have (and in many cases, actually have) relative to people in other nations.

Above all, my visit to India was a study in contrasts. Perhaps this was an inevitable result of importing my American subjectivity into an Indian context. I was struck by the fact that the gleaming, postmodern skyline of Hyderabad that has been created by the influx of multinational IT capital stands right next to the crumbling infrastructure of colonial India, and the abiding edifices of traditional Indian cultures. Much of the squalor I saw in Hyderabad seemed to derive from lack of government spending on public health, and from the privatization of most education; in some ways, the downside of Indian public life is the preview of dystopian outcomes of right-wing, neoliberalist policy agendas that might be enacted in the United States. But the most encouraging aspect of my visit concerned multicultural tolerance. In visiting Hyderabad, I was impressed that the city had very large Muslim and Hindu populations, both of which had overlapping religious festivals (for the former, Eid, the end of Ramadan; for the latter, the festival of Ganesh). There didn't seem to be any discernible hostility between differing religious sects, and religious intolerance wasn't a major issue in civil governance, as far as I could tell. So it might be that India has a thing or two to teach the United States, whose motto is supposed to be "e pluribus unum" – out of many, one.

I am extremely grateful to everyone whose hospitality made my visit possible, successful, and memorable: Dean Mohan Ramanan, Dr. Pramod Nayar, Anna Kurian (all of the University of Hyderabad); Juliet Wurr, Peter Eisenauer and Salil Kader of the American Consulate; all of the friendly and diligent students who attended the conference, and the other visiting scholars; Jeff and Shannon Anderson, Zeph, the entire Batra family, and, of course, my colleague and bodyguard, Kristen Rudisill, without whom I would have been completely at sea.



INDONESIA 2011: Thoughts on Our Trip to Jakarta and Semarang

By Esther A. Clinton and Jeremy Wallach



Opening ceremony, CELT conference, Semarang, Central

Speaking of our president, we found out that Blackberries (which are now ubiquitous in the country) are called “Obamas” in Indonesia.



Rush hour traffic in downtown Jakarta on the way to the TV station.

Dancers wearing the traditional costumes of four major island territories circle around a fifth dancer waving the red and white Indonesian flag. The costumes of the dancers represent the traditional dress of Kalimantan, Sumatra, Bali, and West Papua. This performance takes place on a fifth island: Java, Indonesia's politically dominant and most populous island. During the Soeharto dictatorship, multiculturalist national displays like this one were endlessly lampooned by cultural observers, but now, over a decade later, they are still a key component of Indonesian nationalist rhetoric. In fact, when Barack Obama visited Indonesia a few weeks before we did, he commented on the similarity between Indonesia's national motto of unity in diversity, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* and *E Pluribus Unum*, both stressing a multicultural nationalism that purports to celebrate, rather than seeks to level, differences. During our eighteen-day trip to Indonesia this past January, where we attended two academic conferences, we saw evidence of a sincere commitment to this pluralistic version of the nation in popular, rather than official, culture.

Speaking of our president, we found out that Blackberries (which are now ubiquitous in the country) are called “Obamas” in Indonesia. This is not because Obama was famous for using one on the campaign trail, but because while growing up in Indonesia he was known by the name “Barry Soetoro,” and he is “Black.” Indonesians love such wordplay.

The first conference we attended was in Jakarta, Indonesia's capital city, and was quite intense. Presenters came from Australia, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Singapore, the U.S., and of course Indonesia, and the papers ranged from unbearably dry and boring to fascinating multimedia events incorporating video clips of rapping over traditional gamelan music and death metal dangdut disco. The conference ended with a bang on the last night after a grueling 14-hour day (not easy to endure when your stomach's acting up). After the last panel, we were driven by bus through brutal Jakarta rush-hour traffic (we actually had a police motorcycle escort, otherwise we'd probably still be sitting in traffic) to the headquarters of Trans TV, one of several private television stations established in the wake of the media deregulation that began in the mid 1990s. After a short information session about the network, we were ushered into an auditorium to join the studio audience for the taping of one of Indonesia's most popular talk shows, *Bukan Empat Mata* (Not Four Eyes).

Of course, the presence of a bunch of foreigners in the first five rows of the audience could not go unremarked upon by the show's celebrity host, Tukul Arwana, who is infamous for mercilessly making fun of both the



A view from Soegijapranata campus.



A quiet side-street in Jakarta.

audience and the guests. At one point he sarcastically likened Jeremy to Arnold Schwarzenegger using an Indonesian pun.

Appearing on Indonesian national television was only the beginning. We spent the next two weeks hanging out at the headquarters of Rolling Stone Indonesia, seeing bands, sitting in traffic, and purchasing enough batiks, CDs and DVDs to last (hopefully) until the next time we make it back to that part of the world. We tried all kinds of wonderful food: *bakmi goreng* (fried noodles), *nasi goreng* (fried rice), *rendang* (spicy coconut beef), *gurame* (a fresh water fish), *tempe* (fermented soy bean cake, which is much better than it sounds), *bubur ayam* (chicken rice porridge, a traditional breakfast food), various exotic fruits, different kinds of *kue* (a sweet, sticky rice cake), satay and red rice, *otak* (cow brain, which Esther did not try), *ronde* (a warm ginger and peanut drink) and pizza at Pizza Hut. (It's not that we ate every hour or so, as this list makes it sound, it's that in Indonesia a single meal typically includes many different dishes.)

We travelled six hours by train (an interesting experience) from Jakarta to Semarang, Central Java, so we could both represent BGSU and our department at the Culture, English Language Teaching, and Literature (CELT) Third Annual International Seminar, a conference on the teaching of English held at Soegijapranata Catholic University. Dr. Angela Nelson and Dr. Radhika Gajjala were also invited to present at the conference, and gave their papers via Skype. In addition to papers given by scholars from around Indonesia and from various countries, the conference featured performances, including the dance performance described above, karaoke, a gamelan fusion group, Chinese-Indonesian dance, and an evening city tour. After the conference we flew back to Jakarta to make the most of the time we had left there.

We met some of Jeremy's old friends, including rock star Arian Tigabelas of the notorious heavy metal bands Puppen and Seringai, *Rolling Stone* executive editor Wendi Putranto, student activist turned businessman Ahmad Najib, and Mas Budi, Jeremy's very first Indonesian language instructor, now an officer in USAID Semarang. We also got to meet Indonesian jazz legend Bubi Chen and interview him about his long musical career.

It was Esther's first visit to Indonesia, and she loved it. Jeremy was pleased by the changes he saw. The country seemed to be doing comparatively well economically, there were far fewer smokers, and people seemed relatively upbeat and optimistic about the future. This impression is consistent with the overall trends in Indonesia, which has prospered despite worldwide recession and natural disasters, and has enjoyed a stable democracy for the last ten years. We look forward to going back.

From the Grassroots Campaign: The Asian Tour

By Dr. Matthew A. Donahue

I have been traveling throughout Asia on and off for the past decade; this has related to creative projects, research, family, and fun. My grassroots campaign was all of the above and this time around, in late December 2010 and early January 2011, included stops in Kyoto, Nara, Osaka and Tokyo in Japan as well as Singapore, Hong Kong and Macau where I promoted my MAD 45 music project, researched the heavy metal T-shirt and the souvenir T-shirt in popular culture, and did some street photography, documenting Christmas displays in Asia and other pop culture realities. The newsletter editors requested a few highlights and photos...here goes.



Dr. Matthew Donahue at Toda Ji Temple Nara, Japan

One of my favorite places in Japan, Asia, and on the planet is Nara, a quaint Japanese town that is home to the Big Buddha of Todai-ji Temple. This temple is one of the largest existing wooden structures in the world and is home to Birushana Buddha, a symbol of Nara which dates back to 752 AD. While the temple has been rebuilt many times over and is now only two-thirds its original size, it is awe-inspiring. Another highlight in Japan was Tokyo's Harajuku which is home to all things pop culture, from the East and the West. My research of late has been on the T-shirt in popular culture and there was no shortage of them in Harajuku.



Chinese New Year Display in Singapore

Next stop Singapore, which is the basis of a photographic/ethnographic project highlighting Christmas display traditions all over the island, but particularly Singapore's main drag, Orchard Road. Every December for over 27 years Orchard Road has been taking part in this decorative spectacle consisting of elaborate Christmas light displays, performances on the street, and bigger-than-life-size Christmas statues. These Christmas displays also tie in with the pre-celebration and decoration in Singapore for Chinese New Year.

Off to Hong Kong...A high point of this stop was a visit to Temple Street Night Market for more research on the heavy metal T-shirt and the souvenir T-shirt. There was a plethora of both, everything from Obama to Black Sabbath! The New Year celebrations in Hong Kong were quite spectacular,



Temple Night Market Hong Kong



Harajuku t-shirt stall Tokyo, Japan



Street Performers on Orchard Road in Singapore



1,111 Dragon and Lion Dance in Hong Kong



Dr. Matthew Donahue at the ruins of the Cathedral of St. Paul

particularly on New Year's Day 1-1-11, when Hong Kong staged a record-breaking Dragon and Lion Dance extravaganza consisting of a parade of 1,111 dragon and lion dancers!

The last stop was Macau, China, known for its aspirations to become the casino capital of the world. While they have a way to go before they can make this boast, I was impressed with its unique combination of Portuguese and Chinese architecture. This was highlighted by the city's main square, which is home to the ruins of the Cathedral of St. Paul. The night scene in Macau was simply amazing, from its flickering Chinese lanterns to its over-the-top opulent casinos.

As I write this and reflect on my Grassroots Campaign of Asia, I am devastated by the tragedies of the recent earthquake and tsunami in Japan and my heart, soul and prayers go out to the Japanese people.



As Above: Hollywood legend and BGSU alumna Eva Marie Saint with Dr. Chuck Coletta. On March 16th, Chuck and about 30 other BGSU faculty, POPC students, staff, alums, and friends traveled to the Cleveland Institute of Art to join the actress at a screening of *North by Northwest* (part of the "Turner Classic Movies" National Film Fest), one of Ms. Saint's most celebrated films.

UPCOMING EVENTS

April 13 World Percussion Night, 8 PM Kobacker Hall.

April 14 Popular Culture Colloquium, "Popular Culture; Storytelling for Change: Women's Activism and the Theater of Pritham Chakravarthy," 11 AM BTSU 207, Kristen Rudisill.

April 14 "Colorblind?: The Contradictions of Racial Classification," 5:30-7:00PM BTSU 206, Dr. Michael Omi.

April 14-15 Digital/ Media, Race, Affect and Labor Conference

Bottom Right: Esther Clinton and Jeremy Wallach at the BGSU Faculty Recognition Dinner on March 22nd. Photo by Bill Engelke.

Bottom Left: Dr. Matthew A. Donahue backstage with Lemmy from Motörhead at the band's show in Chicago in February 2011. Donahue, a Motörhead fan for over 30 years, was the grand prize winner of the Motörhead Super Fan contest sponsored by the group's record label for his documentary *Motörhead Matters*.

