

# Wandering Through the Labyrinth: An Interview with USC's Marsha Kinder by Henry Jenkins (2015)

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We are delighted to republish here *Wandering through the Labyrinth: An Interview with USC's Marsha Kinder* By Henry Jenkins. This interview, originally published in four parts on Henry Jenkins' weblog (<http://henryjenkins.org/>) in March 2015, enables readers to quickly reflect on the evolution of the digital arts and humanities and on the term "transmedia" itself, while it also proposes alternative ways of framing issues of medium specificity. Moreover, it draws on how the term transmedia has been reformulated, moving from transmedia to transmedia storytelling, to transmedia learning, transmedia branding, etc. In this, the interview demonstrates how reformulations of the term are possible.

## *Original resources of the interview:*



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# Wandering Through the Labyrinth: An Interview with USC's Marsha Kinder by Henry Jenkins (2015)

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MARCH 5, 2015 – PART ONE

In 1999, the University of Southern California hosted the Interactive Frictions conference, organized by Steve Anderson, Marsha Kinder and Tara McPherson, with participants including some of the leading digital theorists, artists, and game designers of the period. Among those featured were: Edward Branigan, Justine Cassell, Anne-Marie Duguet, Katherine Hayles, Vilsoni Hereniko, Henry Jenkins (that's me!), Isaac Julien, Norman Klein, George Landow, Brenda Laurel, Erik Loyer, Peter Lunenfeld, Lev Manovich, Patricia Mellencamp, Pedro Meyer, Margaret Morse, Erika Muhammad, Janet Murray, Michael Nash, Marcos Novak, Randall Packer, Mark Pesce, Vivian Sobchack, Sandy Stone, Yuri Tsivian and many others. I speak at many conferences each year, but this remains in my memory a defining event in terms of my own thinking about digital media and a conference where I met a whole bunch of folks who I have ended up working with over the past decade and a half. For me, the conference brings back memories of the launch of the MIT Comparative Media Studies Program, which I was able to discuss in my remarks at the event, and also represents the first of a series of interactions with the USC faculty that led ultimately to my decision to move here almost six years ago.

Last year, Kinder and McPherson revisited this conference with a new book, *Transmedia Frictions: The Digital, The Arts, and the Humanities*, which brought together many of the original participants, who shared essays that built upon, but also artfully revisited, their original contributions at the event. The result is a great opportunity to reflect on the evolution of the digital arts and humanities across the intervening years, allowing us to test our original impressions and to reformulate them in response to so much that has happened since.

A key signal about what has changed is reflected in the title of the book – a movement from a focus on interactivity to an emphasis on transmedial relations. Here, Marsha Kinder is reclaiming a term she introduced in her 1993

book, *Playing with Power in Movies, Television and Video Games: From Muppet Babies to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. Asked to write a blurb for this collection, here's what I had to say: "As someone who attended and participated in the 1999 Interactive Fictions conference, which in many ways consolidated more than a decade of theorizing about and experimenting with digital media, I was uncertain what to expect from Transmedia Frictions. What I found was a rich collection that looks both backward to reconstruct the paths not taken in digital theory and forward to imagine alternative ways of framing issues of medium specificity, digital identities, embodiment, and space/place. This collection is sure to transform how we theorize – and teach – the next phases of our profound and prolonged moment of media transition."

Few scholars are better situated to reflect on those shifts than Marsha Kinder, who was among the first in cinema studies to embrace digital tools for presenting her scholarship and who has overseen some remarkable collaborations with leading creative artists over the past decade through the Labyrinth project. She has been a friend and mentor across these years, someone who was always leading the charge and inspiring younger scholars to think about new ways of doing and presenting scholarship, and someone who has bridged between theory and practice in bold new ways. Our work has been complexly entangled through the years, given our shared interests in children's culture, transmedia, games, and digital humanities. What began as an interview about her new book has turned into an amazing retrospective on her body of work in the digital humanities, which, true to her vision, is presented here in a multi-media fashion.

I will be following up this interview with Marsha with a second interview with her co-editor Tara McPherson, who has also been a friend and collaborator of mine over the past two decades.

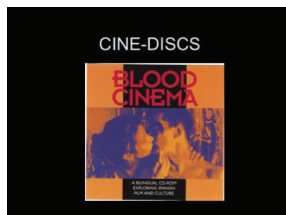
*Tell us about the 1999 Interactive Fictions conference. What were its aims? What do you see now, looking backwards, as its historical importance in the development of digital art and theory? How did it inform your own subsequent works in this area?*



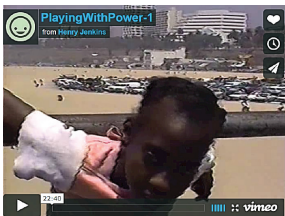
In 1997, I was asked by USC's Annenberg Center to direct a research initiative that would explore the potentially productive relationship (rather than rivalry) between cinema and the then-emerging digital multimedia. I saw this transmedia focus as an opportunity to combine the immersive and emotive power of cinema with the interactive potential and database structure of new digital forms.



Although I had already developed my concept of database narrative, I was just beginning to engage in production myself, making companion works for my two most recent books. For *Blood Cinema*, my book on Spanish cinema, I collaborated with my doctoral student Charles Tashiro on making the first scholarly interactive CD-ROM in English language film studies, which led to a bilingual series called Cine-Discs.



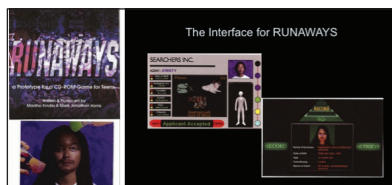
And, for *Playing with Power in Movies, Television, and Video Games*, I collaborated with another grad student (Walter Morton) on a video documentary showing kids interacting with Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.



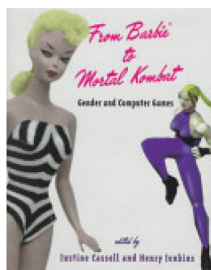
Video 1  
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When I asked one of the kids in the arcade why they couldn't play as April O'Neil, he said, "That's the way the game is made!" Of course, he was right. And that made me want to make my own feminist game on gender.

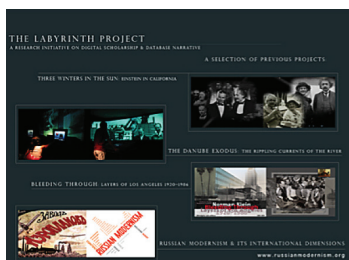
The next step was making a prototype for an experimental electronic game called *Runaways*...



which I co-wrote, co-produced and co-directed with documentary filmmaker Mark Jonathan Harris and which you, Henry, kindly featured at your conference on Gender and Computer Games at MIT and in your anthology, *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat*.



Those projects enabled me to become the founding director of The Labyrinth Project, and to decide it would function both as a research initiative generating new theory and as an art collective making works that would advance the creative potential of the new digital media.





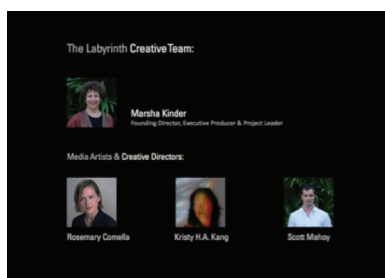
But to do this, I needed to quickly assess what had already been done and what was still emerging both in theory and practice. I also needed to find the most productive collaborators, and to discover which issues were driving the cultural debate and generating the most “friction.”

Being an academic, I decided the best way to perform that quick assessment was to host an international conference. Calling it “Interactive Frictions,” I knew it had to be very inclusive – with filmmakers, photographers, installation artists, animators, game designers, programmers, theorists, critics, cultural historians, curators, media scholars, and entrepreneurs. And because its scope was to be so expansive, I definitely needed innovative collaborators to help run the events. So I asked my colleague Tara McPherson and our graduate student Alison Trope to be my co-hosts at the conference, Holly Willis to co-curate the exhibition, and Steve Anderson to write the program. To emphasize the creative energy emerging from these new combinations as well as from their historical precursors, the conference was intentionally structured like a three-ring circus, featuring not only keynote speeches, live performances, and scads of panels but also a group exhibition in the Fisher Gallery including work from a wide range of artists – some well-known like Bill Viola, George Legrady, Vibeke Sorensen, and Norman Yonemoto, and others—including some of our students – just getting into the game. Amidst this array, we also showed three works-in-progress from The Labyrinth Project – collaborations with gay chicano novelist John Rechy (aka The Sexual Outlaw) and independent filmmakers Nina Menkes and Pat O’Neill. Here’s how I described the exhibition in the opening paragraph of our catalogue:

“Sparks. Heat. Conflict. This is what friction generates. Using friction as a catalyst, our exhibit features work produced at the pressure point between theory and practice. It brings together artists from different realms, at different stages of their careers, working both individually, and in collaboration in an array of different media: installations and assemblage art, independent film and video; traditional and computer animation; photography and graphic design; literature and music; computer science and interface design; websites, CD-ROMs, and other hybrid forms of multimedia. Coming from different domains, the pieces challenge and contradict each other. What unites them is the focus on interactive narrative.”



We received fabulous feedback on the conference, claiming it had energized all those who attended and broadened their conception of what digital multimedia could be. Despite this success, I decided not to make this conference a recurring event. Instead, I wanted to start producing experimental works in collaboration with others – works that could realize some of the possibilities that were discussed at the conference. So I put together a creative team of three media artists – Rosemary Comella, Kristy Kang, and Scott Mahoy– and that’s what we’ve been doing for the past seventeen years.



But, now that so much time has passed, that conference represents a valuable snapshot of what the discourse was like in the 90s. For, some of the essays in our anthology are even more revealing now than they were then – especially those that were foundational for the field (like Katherine Hayles’s “Print is Flat, Code Is Deep: The Importance of Media-Specific Analysis”) and those that presented historical precursors (like the pieces by narrative theorist Edward Branigan and early cinema scholar Yuri Tsivian). And it’s important that, not just the artists and editors, but most of the contributors to our volume went on to produce multimedia projects. We hope our “Interactive Frictions” helped make them do it.

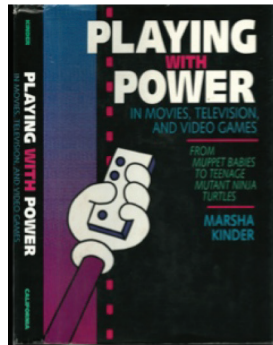


MARCH 9, 2015 – PART TWO

*Marsha, you coined the term “transmedia” in your 1991 book, *Playing with Power*, where you used it to describe an emerging entertainment supersystem. Your phrase has been widely picked up and applied to everything from transmedia storytelling to transmedia learning to transmedia branding to transmedia mobilization. You have chosen to use it as part of the title of this book. To what degree is this an effort to reclaim and redefine the term? Why did you find this an appropriate framework for thinking about the debates in this collection?*

Yes, in choosing to use “Transmedia” in the title of our anthology, I was reclaiming the term I had coined in 1991 in *Playing with Power*. But, in no way do I object to the way the meanings of transmedia have expanded – that’s the way language functions. In fact, Tara and I were also redefining the term “transmedia,” for it creates an opening for those new media that our anthology didn’t cover in depth – including smart phones – and those that haven’t yet been invented.

We were also using it as a substitute for the term “interactive,” whose definition and connotations are no longer hotly contested. Transmedia, on the other hand, evokes the issue of medium specificity (still very much in contention), without supporting one side or the other. Yet, as some of the essays in our anthology suggest, it also evokes the historic transformation we are now experiencing, in which all movies, videos, TV programs, and music are being redefined as software or data, a conversion with seismic financial and cultural consequences.



In *Playing with Power*, instead of using the popular buzz-word convergence, I coined the term transmedia because I saw it as a deliberate, dynamic move across media. This definition partly arose from my own transmedia experience – of having completed a doctoral degree in 18th century English literature



in 1967 and then publishing my first article two months later, not on Henry Fielding but on Antonioni's *Blow-up*. This move from literature to film led one of my literary colleagues to accuse me of having "betrayed the 18th century." Though flattered by the charge, I realized this move was not always freely chosen.

In *Playing with Power*, I linked this term "transmedia" to a new kind of postmodernist subjectivity that could be historicized. Priding itself on mobility rather than stability, this new protean subjectivity was embodied in those popular transformer toys and in the myth of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles,



where all four words in their name emphasize this kind of movement – whether it was natural growth from childhood to adulthood; or a de-novo mutation caused by urban pollution; or a fluid transnational identity linked to Japanese ninjas, California surfers, and Italian Renaissance artists; or an evolutionary move by amphibians from sea to land. Given this hyper-plasticity, the only fixed aspect of their identity was their masculine gender that depended on having the right toys and gear, which meant kids could buy into the system.

The turtles acquired their own cultural capital by becoming (what I called) a "transmedia supersystem," whose fluid movement across many different media (from comic books, to games, to television, to movies, and to a slew of licensed products, all with substantial financial rewards) made them even more worthy of imitation. In fact, you could find this transformative subjectivity not only in children but also in transnational CEOs of the time – like Akio Morita, the founding chairman of Sony, who said shortly after his company's 1989 purchase of Columbia Pictures:



Interestingly, Morita's statement identified transmedia movement not only with transnational moves but also with play, which led me to explore its connection with a particular kind of developmental psychology. Specifically, I relied on L.S. Vygotsky's "zone of proximal development," an area of accelerated learning created through play where a child always behaves beyond his average age and beyond Piaget's fixed developmental model. According to Vygotsky, when play is guided by an adult or more capable peers, the interaction could function as an accelerant. I argued that interaction with popular media (like television, films and computer games) could also fulfill this function, which is a basic premise of Sesame Street. Thus instead of echoing the dire warnings of many psychologists about the harmful effects on youngsters of watching television, I claimed TV could serve as a developmental accelerant that taught youngsters a form of transmedia literacy, which enabled them to bridge the gap between domestic and public space. For, ever since television became pervasive in the American home [a position now challenged by computers, ipads, smart phones and other digital devices], this medium had accelerated children's acquisition of a fluid postmodernist subjectivity marked by constant change – a subjectivity that helped explain the popularity of transformer toys and transmedia heroes like Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.

*Another key aspect of the original conference and to some degree this book was to broker a kind of conversation between experimental artists working with digital media and academic theorists seeking to imagine digital presents and futures. What do you see as the value of such interactions between artists and academics?*

I have always been convinced that there's an important interplay between artistic experimentation and theoretical breakthroughs. This is true in older art forms – such as literature, as much as in film and digital media. For example, in the 18th century although Dr. Samuel Johnson realized that Shakespeare's mixture of comedy and tragedy violated Aristotle's rules, he concluded there must be something wrong with the rules, and he attributed his own theoretical insight to Shakespeare's artistic experimentation. We can find this same kind of interplay in those artists (such as, Joyce, Beckett, Borges, Duras, Marker, and Akerman) whose experimentation is so radical that it transforms any theory applied to it or inspires the creation of a new one – the way Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* inspired Gerard Genette's *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, or Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* and Peter Greenaway's avant-garde films helped shape Lev Manovich's *The Language of New Media*. And we find a similar interplay in those figures who combine theory and artistic practice in their own work – such as, Eisenstein, Vertov, Pasolini, Deren, and Godard.

In the early days of The Labyrinth Project, I purposely sought out collaborators who were already experimenting with non-linear, open-ended narrative and associative structures – artists who (I thought) could bring a new level of sophistication to this new medium. Since we had no track record, I had to begin with artists I already knew and with whom there was mutual trust. Thus I chose my friend John Rechy, the gay, Chicano novelist whose *City of Night* mapped the gay cruising zones of the nation, whose *Numbers* focused on compulsive repetition in Griffith Park, and whose *Sexual Outlaw* was an edgy, non-linear fictional documentary.



Video 2  
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to watch the video  
or go to: <https://vimeo.com/8686582>

I also chose independent filmmaker Pat O'Neill, whose brilliant multi-layered films I had been writing about since the 1970s.

Our first signature genre was the digital city symphony, an update of the modernist city symphony with its avant-garde associations. Focusing on contested urban space through layers of time, it deliberately eroded the line between documentary and fiction. In *Tracing the Decay of Fiction: Encounters with a Film by Pat O'Neill*, the exploratory space was the Ambassador Hotel on the Miracle Mile in midtown Los Angeles, where the downtown power-brokers and Hollywood moguls first mingled. It was also the site where Robert Kennedy was assassinated in 1968 and where other historical traumas, both personal and cultural, took place.

In *Bleeding Through Layers of Los Angeles, 1920-1986*, an adaptation of Norman Klein's cultural history, *The History of Forgetting: The Cultural Erasure of Los Angeles*, documentary and fiction vied for control over this multi-tiered narrative. The contested space was a three mile radius in downtown Los Angeles, a neighborhood known for both its real-life ethnic diversity and fictional on-screen violence.



Video 3  
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*Bleeding Through: Layers of Los Angeles, 1920-1986 (2002) from Rosemary Comella (<https://vimeo.com/rosemarycomella>) on Vimeo.*

Another of our early signature genres was the interactive memoir, which preserves the unique web of memories and associations that an individual builds over a lifetime and that inevitably unravels with old age and death. These works encouraged users to interweave this personal material into a broader tapestry of historical narrative. Thus we chose vintage subjects who had complex relations with several different communities. As we've seen, *Mysteries and Desires: Searching the Worlds of John Rechy* features a gay Chicano novelist whose works purposely blur the line between autobiography and fiction.

*The Dawn at My Back: Memoir of a Black Texas Upbringing* was the interactive version of a print memoir by Carroll Parrott Blue, an African American photographer from an independent black community in Houston.



Video 4  
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to watch the video  
or go to: <https://vimeo.com/8653152>

And we also did one on Albert Einstein, called *Three Winters in the Sun: Einstein in California...*



Video 5  
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to watch the video  
or go to: <https://vimeo.com/8663590>

Presented as DVD-ROMs, websites, and installations, these database narratives from Labyrinth were featured at museums, film and new media festivals, and conferences worldwide. Three of our early works were included in Future Cinema: The Cinematic Imaginary after Film, a major exhibition co-curated by Jeffrey Show and Peter Weibel, which ran from 16 November 2002 – 30 March 2003 at ZKM in Karlsruhe, Germany, and subsequently travelled to Helsinki and Tokyo.

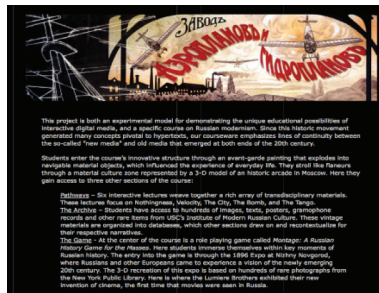
Despite many exhibitions (both on-line and in museums) of such works and those by others over the past twenty years, there are still very few critics, historians, or theorists who are writing about them – partly because the production process is opaque. I remember when Kevin Thomas, who was then Film Critic for the Los Angeles Times, came to our Labyrinth studio and was interested in writing about Mysteries and Desires. He said he was surprised that John Rechy could draw so well and was so good as a visual artist. When I started explaining who did what, he lost interest in writing about the project. Another time we were delighted to find that Bleeding Through Layers of Los Angeles was positively reviewed by David Ulm in the L.A. Times Weekly Book Review Section. Yet we were horrified that he wrongly assumed Klein's brief fictional pamphlet that accompanied the DVD-ROM was the primary source of our interactive project, which was merely a visual adaptation. Though several of the essays in our anthology address such experimental works, the history of projects like these still needs to be written. The pace of technological innovation and obsolescence is so rapid that it's difficult for academics and cultural historians to keep up – both with the specific works being produced and the digital futures they project. But we included some attempts in Transmedia Frictions.

### MARCH 11, 2015 – PART THREE

*I was struck in 1999 by your effort to also create a space where artists working in the museum and gallery space were engaging with game designers working in more commercial contexts. This dimension seems to have dropped out of the Transmedia Frictions book altogether. What does this suggest about the continued roles of cultural hierarchies in the realms of digital art and theory?*

When we planned the Interactive Frictions conference, we wanted to be as broad and inclusive as possible, which meant including games. I had hoped someday to finish the Runaways game as a Labyrinth project, once we had sufficient grant support and more sophisticated programmers. It was not that we looked down on games as unworthy of critical and cultural attention, but rather that we simply didn't have the resources to do a first rate job.

We made a stab at it in our on-line courseware project, Russian Modernism and Its International Dimensions, an archival cultural history which unfortunately we never finished – even though we had the assistance of Jenova Chen, the most successful student to emerge from USC’s Interactive Media Division; a grant from NEH; and first-rate Slavic Studies scholars (Yuri Tsivian on film, from University of Chicago; Olga Matich on literature, from UC Berkeley; and John Bowlt on visual culture, from USC). Set at the 1896 Russian Expo in Nizhni Novgorod (where cinema was first screened for the Russian public and where the Tsar and his court were in attendance), this project provided students with three ways of engaging with these historical materials.



They could explore a virtual 3-D model of the Expo and its pavilions, where they could play a game called Montage: A Russian History Game of the Masses.



The game enabled them to engage with experimental art, subversive politics, or new technology – the three forces that made modernism so distinctive in the Russian context.

Or, they could visit GUM, (Glavnyi Universalnyi Magazin), the “main universal store” in Moscow’s red square from the 1920s, whose innovative glass-roof design was also featured at the 1898 Expo. Like consumerist flâneurs strolling through a modernist arcade, here students could stop at several



shops, each presenting an illustrated interactive lecture on a range of topics (e.g., nothingness, velocity, the bomb, the expo, St. Petersburg: the novel and the city, etc.) by leading scholars both from the U.S. and Russia.

Or, they could visit the archive in GUM's basement, an extensive database of artworks that students could use in their own projects. Since the courseware was not finished, students were invited to help build the rest of it, as if they were constructionists, learning by doing. The project was designed to show how aesthetic concepts from Russian modernism (such as, dialectic montage, constructionism, and synaesthesia) are still useful in developing our own era of digital multimedia. The basic conception is still sound and challenging, but we don't have the resources to produce it.

By the time we published *Transmedia Frictions*, the academic world of game studies had already developed its own trajectories. Of course, there were exceptions like Bill Viola (who attended the original Interactive Frictions conference and had an installation in our IF exhibition). Later, in collaboration with specialists in our Interactive Media Division, he developed a game about a journey of Buddhist enlightenment. Although he originally proposed a collaboration with *Labyrinth*, we didn't have the resources to develop it at the time. We were moving in the opposite direction toward museum installations, particularly because we had had such a difficult experience with the *Montage* game at the heart of Russian Modernism.

*There's a recurring interest throughout the essays, in both parts of the book, in issues of cultural memory, the archival, and the documentary. What new models have emerged over the past decade for thinking about the relationship between the digital and our collective understandings of history?*

One of the new models that has emerged over the past decade is the genealogical search for family and cultural roots. We can find it in the growing popularity of a website like *ancestry.com* and in the television shows hosted by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *African American Lives* (2006) and *Finding Your Roots* (2012), where he helps celebrities discover the truth about their roots. We can also see it in the current fascination with Selfies and with the impulse to upload your own home movie fragments on YouTube. And one can also find it in new works on home movies – in a marvellous book like Patricia Zimmerman's *Mining the Home Movie*, and in the extraordinary films of Hungarian media artist Péter Forgács.

In 2000, *Labyrinth* embarked on a collaboration with Forgács to turn his sixty-minute, single-channel film, *The Danube Exodus*, into a large scale, multiscreen, immersive installation, which opened at the Getty Center in 2002 and continued to travel worldwide until 2012. It was one of our three projects in the "Future Cinema" show, and is discussed by Stephen Mamber in the anthology. Largely as a result of this exhibition, Forgács received the presti-



gious Erasmus Award, for an artist in any medium who has made an exceptional contribution to culture in Europe and beyond.

Having been aired on European television in 1997, Forgács's film provided intriguing narrative material: a network of compelling stories, a mysterious river captain whose movies remain unknown, a Central European setting full of rich historical associations, and a hypnotic musical score that created a mesmerizing tone. Now that we had 40 hours of footage to draw on, there was an intense struggle for narrative space: between the European Jews who were fleeing the Third Reich in 1939, attempting to get a ship in the Black Sea to take them to Palestine; and the German farmers who were returning home to Germany in 1940 after the Soviets had confiscated their lands in Bessarabia; and the Hungarian river captain who ferried both groups into history by documenting their journeys on film.



Video 6  
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to watch the video  
or go to: <https://vimeo.com/54496004>

As in Forgács's other films, the home movies enriched or contradicted what we thought we already knew about history. Sometimes the home movie footage was juxtaposed with excerpts from official newsreels, but it always introduced an alternative vision. To see the fragile home movie footage displayed on television is one thing, but to see it projected in a museum on five large screens (each 6ft x 8 ft) is something else. This is the way superheroes or villains (like Napoleon or Hitler) are usually displayed, not domestic home movies with their humble characters and banal events.

This collaboration was the first time Labyrinth had actually designed an installation from the get-go – as opposed to making a DVD-ROM that was later included in a museum exhibition. Of course, there were several DVD-ROMs included in the show, plus a related website (produced by a group in Europe), and a related exhibition of maps and artifacts from the Getty Collection. We began to think of this work as a “transmedia network,” one that linked several spaces and many collaborators together.

Intrigued by the use of vintage home movies and the richness of what could be gleaned from their visuals and physical gestures, we were inspired to do another transmedia network for our next project. Titled “Jewish Homegrown History: Immigration, Identity and Intermarriage,” it consisted of a

museum installation which premiered at USC in October 2011 as a Vision and Voices event



and then ran for several months in 2012 at the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles. The exhibition featured three large screens, even larger than those we used in *The Danube Exodus*, on which we projected home movies of Jews living in Los Angeles.



Video 7  
Flash the QRcode  
to watch the video  
or go to: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=vv\\_xNhr38vU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vv_xNhr38vU)

There was also a bank of computers with the website, which enabled users to upload their own family stories and photos and to hear histories of others. The home movies displayed on the large screens and the website all addressed the subthemes of immigration, identity, and intermarriage, which were also emphasized in quotations that were posted on the walls. Mainly derived from 8mm and Super 8 footage, the home movies were collected in a series of "home movie collection days," which enabled us to form productive collaborative relations with those contributing the footage.



Video 8  
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video or go to:  
<https://vimeo.com/117317378>

After interviewing members of the family, we edited the footage and added sound. In the exhibition space we also screened a series of short documentaries about Jews in Los Angeles, a display that evoked a comparison between these two forms of non-fiction.



Video 9  
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the video or go  
to: <https://vimeo.com/63505569>

Both of these installations made me think of Patricia Zimmerman's inspiring statement, which was prominently displayed on the walls of the exhibition: "Amateur films urge us all – scholars, filmmakers, archivists, curators – to re-imagine the archive and film historiography. They suggest the impossibility of separating the visual from the historical and the amateur from the professional.... We need to imagine the archive as an engine of difference and plurality, always expanding, always open."

## MARCH 14, 2015 – PART FOUR

*Since the conference, you and your co-editor Tara McPherson have gotten deeper into work around the digital humanities. I'd love to hear you talk about the visions underlying these projects and the somewhat different agendas for digital humanities they each embody.*

One of the goals shared by Labyrinth, Scaler and Vectors, is to make the digital humanities embrace visual and audio culture as equally important to the word. We all are involved in making multisensory works that are as intellectually rich, rigorous, and subtle as any traditional essay or book.

Another shared goal is to encourage and validate collaboration both among humanities scholars and with artists, scholars and scientists from other fields. Although we have different models for the scope and range of such collaborations (partly based on issues of scale, funding and who is involved), we all recognize its importance and realize that it's always a touchy subject. While most academics and administrators are usually willing to support collaboration verbally, the

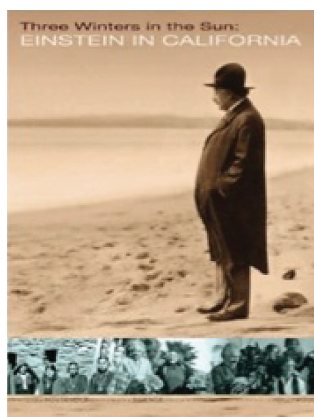
problem arises when it's time to make decisions on promotion and tenure. Suddenly issues of credit (who's doing what) become insurmountable problems.

Labyrinth's collaborations usually involve a small team of theorists, scholars, artists, programmers and designers who (with the help of student assistants from Cinema) make a specific database narrative that provides a new model of digital scholarship. Each work requires a different collaborative team and individual funding. Sometimes we include interns from other nations and cultures, or volunteers from other departments or schools. The team is tailored to the specific project. These goals are narrower than those of Vectors and Scaler, which, through the development of unique user-friendly software, enable humanities scholars from across the nation to produce their own individual digital projects.



Video 10  
Flash the QRcode to  
watch the video or go  
to: [www.youtube.com/  
watch?v=\]2eb8u9uEII](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=]2eb8u9uEII)

In developing different signature genres (e.g., digital city symphonies, interactive memoirs, archival cultural histories, health-science education), Labyrinth engages in an on-going process of reframing. For example, although its first science education project, *Three Winters in the Sun: Einstein in California*, was an installation in the Skirball Cultural Center's major exhibition on the famous scientist, it combined an interactive memoir (Einstein's complex relations with six different communities) with a digital city symphony (Los Angeles in the early 1930s).



Though it told us more about the contradictions in his life than about his scientific discoveries (which were covered by other installations in the Skirball exhibition), it led the way to Labyrinth's next signature genre – the health-science-education project.

Produced in collaboration with molecular scientist Dr. Jean Chen Shih from USC's School of Pharmacy, *A Tale of Two MAO Genes: Exploring the Biology and Culture of Aggression and Anxiety*, was another translational work in science, but this time designed for use in the classroom. The project used live action video and 3-D animation to cover basic molecular biology and to explain Dr. Shih's pioneering research on MAO A and B. The project's strongest elements were 3-D animations (by USC animation student Debra Isaac) of protein folding and other biological processes, visualizations that were both extremely beautiful and rigorously accurate.

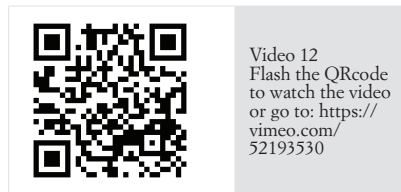


To fulfill its secondary goal of encouraging youngsters to become scientists, it includes a brief biography of Dr. Shih and interviews with several scientists explaining how they entered the field. The project was translated into Mandarin and is being used as a model both in China and Taiwan.

Both of these earlier science-education projects laid the groundwork for a video-based website called "Interacting with Autism," a collaboration with documentary filmmaker Mark Jonathan Harris that drew on an impressive list of scientific consultants who are specialists in this expanding field.



Funded by grants from AHRQ (the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality), it was launched on-line in September 2013. This bilingual website (in English and Spanish) is now being translated into Mandarin so that it can be used more productively in China. It is also being tested by an evaluative group at the Rand Corporation, who seek to use it as a model for comparable websites on other health disorders. We've had particularly good response to the brief animated film that shows what sensory overload feels like to some individuals on the spectrum.



Video 12  
Flash the QRcode  
to watch the video  
or go to: <https://vimeo.com/52193530>

While working on this website, I became very interested in neurodiversity, a key issue in the cultural debates between autism activists on the spectrum and those who see it autism simply as a disorder to be cured. We were determined to include the points of view from those on the spectrum – on both sides of the camera.



Video 13  
Flash the QRcode  
to watch the video  
or go to: <http://interactingwithautism.com/videos/understanding/voices.mp4>

While working on these science translation projects, I realized it was possible to reframe many of the issues I had dealt with in previous works within a new conceptual framework. That's the book I'm working on now, which is titled *Narrative in the Age of Neuroscience: The Discreet Charms of Serial Autobiography*.



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**Marsha Kinder** began her career in the 1960s as a scholar of eighteenth century English Literature before moving to the study of transmedial relations among narrative forms. In 1980 she joined USC's School of Cinematic Arts where she continued to be an academic nomad, with narrative as her through-line. Having published over one hundred essays and ten books (both monographs and anthologies), she is best known for her work on Spanish film, specifically *Blood Cinema* (1993); children's media, especially *Playing with Power in Movies, Television and Video Games* (1991); and digital culture (including her new anthology *Transmedia Frictions: The Digital, The Arts and the Humanities* (2014), co-edited with Tara McPherson. She was founding editor of innovative journals, such as *Dreamworks* (1980-87), winner of a Pushcart Award, USC's *Spectator* (1982-present) and since 1977 served on the editorial board of *Film Quarterly*. In 1995 she received the USC Associates Award for Creativity in Scholarship, and in 2001 was named a University Professor for her innovative transdisciplinary research.

In 1997 she founded The Labyrinth Project, a USC research initiative on database narrative, producing award-winning database documentaries and new models of digital scholarship. In collaboration with media artists Rosemary Comella, Kristy Kang and Scott Mahoy, and with filmmakers, scientists



and cultural institutions, Labyrinth produced 12 multimedia projects (DVD-ROMs, websites, installations and on-line courseware) that were featured at museums, film and new media festivals, and conferences worldwide. Kinder's latest work, *Interacting with Autism*, is a video-based website produced in collaboration with Oscar-winning documentary filmmaker Mark Jonathan Harris and Scott Mahoy. Since retiring from teaching in Summer 2013, Kinder is now writing a new book titled *Narrative in the Era of Neuroscience: The Discreet Charms of Serial Autobiography*.