MICHAEL THORN, PhD

Education

2015   **PhD in Communication and Culture** - York/Ryerson Universities
Dissertation: *Confess the Gay Away? Media, Religion, and the Political Economy of Ex-gay Therapy* (Supervisor: Paul Moore, PhD)
Major General Exam: *Subjectivity & Ethics in Communication and Culture*
Major Specific Exam: *Subjectivity & Technological Change in the History of Film Studies*
Focused Minor Exam: *The Political Economy of Canadian Broadcasting*

2007   **MFA in Screenwriting** - York University
Thesis: *Rocket Man* (Feature Screenplay) (Supervisor: Amnon Buchbinder, MFA)

2000   **BFA in Film & Video Production** (*Summa Cum Laude*) - York University

1995   **Hons BA in English and Religious Studies** (*Summa Cum Laude*) - McMaster University

Honours and Awards

2013   Finalist, York Three Minute Thesis Contest
2007   Recipient of York Graduate Scholarship
2007   Nominated for York Thesis Prize for MFA Thesis
1997/8   Recipient of two Continuing Student Scholarships
1998   Recipient of Dean's Prize for Excellence
1995   Recipient of Religious Studies Prize
1991   Recipient of Chancellor's Scholarship

Teaching and Research Interests

- Film, television, and new media as discursive and narrative forms of visual governmentality
- Ritual dimensions of film, television, and new media storytelling
- Framing of news debates about politics, politics and religion, and religion, sexuality, and gender
- Representations and appropriations of politics, religion, and psychology in popular culture
- Relations between religion and confession and psychology, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis
- The political economy of film and television production

Teaching Experience

Course Directorships

W 2017   NPF564: *Contemporary World Cinema* – Ryerson University
W 2017   CMST 3H03: *Creating Ceremonies* – McMaster University
F 2016   SOC707: *Religion, Meaning and Power* – Ryerson University
F 2016   MDST 1010: *Introduction to Media Studies I* – Lakehead University (Orillia Campus)
W 2016   CMST 3H03: *Creating Ceremonies* – McMaster University
W 2016   MPF605: *Film Theory II* – Ryerson University
W 2016   MDST 4650: *Writing Narratives for Media* – Lakehead University (Orillia Campus)
F 2015   RE220 BR: *Religion and Popular Culture* – Laurier University (Brantford Campus)
F 2015   MPF505: *Film Theory I* – Ryerson University
W 2014   SMC305H: *Christianity and Popular Culture* – University of Toronto, St. Mike's College
2008-9   MEDA 14857G: *Understanding Canadian Television* – Sheridan College

Teaching Assistantships:

2013-14   AP/COMN 1000: *Introduction to Communications* – York University
W 2013   NPF 566: *History of Animation* – Ryerson University
S 2012   AP/COMN 2310: *Media, Culture and Society* – York University
2011-13   AP/SOSC 1140: *Self, Culture and Society* – York University
2011-12   NPF 188: *Masterpieces of Literature on Film* – Ryerson University
2009-11   AP/COMN 1310: *Introduction to Communications* – York University
2006-09   AS/SOSC 2840: *Film and Society* – York University
2005-06   FA/FILM 2401: *Film, Television and Society* – York University

Teaching Experience (Continued)

Guest Lectures and Workshops:
Oct 2014   SSCI 2830U: *Justice Theory and Policy* (lectured on Bentham and Mill) – UOIT
Dec 2011   AP/SOSC 1140: *Self, Culture and Society* (lectured on psychoanalysis) – York U
Mar 2006   FA/FILM 2401: *Film, Television and Society* (lectured on LGBTQ stereotypes) – York U
2007   *Write a Feature Film in Six Months* (workshop with 6 month follow-up) – Vitality Media

Teaching Credentials:
2008   Fundamentals of Teaching and Learning Certificate – Sheridan College
2006   Teaching Foundations Courses Workshop Participant – York University
2005-6   T.A. Day Learning Workshops Participant – York University

Publications

Peer-Reviewed
Thorn, Michael. Forthcoming. "The Governmentality of Promoting Ex-gay 'Change' in the Public Sphere." *Canadian Journal of Communication*.
Thorn, Michael. 2015. "Cannibalism, Communion, and Multifaith Sacrifice in the Novel and Film *Life of Pi*." *The Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 27.1: 1-15.
Thorn, Michael. 2014. "Shifting Psychological Knowledge and Conservative Christian Media Controversies: Blaming the Judeo-Christian Tradition for Anti-Gay Prejudice in Psychiatry and Psychology." *The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society* 3.4: 51-77.
Thorn, Michael. 2011. "Confessing Our Selves: Truth and Identity Politics in the Christian Ex-Gay Movement." *The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society* 1.3: 205-220.

Non Peer-Reviewed
Thorn, Michael. 2015. "The Ex-gay Movement." *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. URL: http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/the-ex-gay-movement/
Thorn, Michael. 2010. "Television Discourse and Governmentality: Considering *Da Vinci's Inquest* and *Da Vinci's City Hall* as Citizen Projects." *CineAction* 82/83: 48-57.

Submitted for Peer-Review
Thorn, Michael. "Seeing Controversy Clearly: The Governmentality of "Apostate" Testimony in Journalistic and Documentary Exposés of Scientology."

Preparing to Submit for Peer-Review
Thorn, Michael. "The Ritualized Seriousness of Satirizing Identity Politics in *South Park* and *The Boondocks*."

Selected Conference Presentations

June 2017   *Canadian Communication Association* (Congress), Ryerson University
            Paper: "What is Communication? Discouraging Critical Thought And Encouraging Authoritarianism In The Church Of Scientology"
May 2016   *Canadian Communication Association* (Congress), University of Calgary
            Paper: "The Seriousness of Satirizing Communal Communication: Religious and Political Rituals in *South Park* and *The Boondocks*"
May 2016   *6th Annual Popular Culture Association of Canada Conference,* McGill University.
            Paper: "Reading Controversy Clearly: Trying to Understand Scientology through the Governmentality of Mediated Representations"
Jun 2013   *Canadian Communication Association* (Congress), University of Victoria
            Paper: "Earned Media and Psychological 'Truth' in Ex-gay Public Relations"
May 2013   *3rd Annual Popular Culture Association of Canada Conference*, Niagara Falls
            Paper: "The Uses and Abuses of Psychoanalysis: Oedipal Conflict vs. Christian Sacrifice in *Life of Pi* and Ex-gay Therapy"
Jul 2012   *8th International Conference on Media, Religion, and Culture*, Anadolu University Turkey
            Paper: "From Cassette Tapes to Facebook: Reassessing Foucault's Iran Writings in Light of the Arab Spring"

Selected Conference Presentations (Continued)

May 2012 *2nd Annual Popular Culture Association of Canada Conference*, Niagara Falls
Paper: "Pray the Gay Away on Screen: How the Christian Ex-gay Debate Operates Governmentally in Film and Television"
Jan 2012 *International Conference on Digital Religion*, University of Colorado
Paper: "Authority, Legitimacy and the Ex-Gay Debate in Digital Religious Spaces"
Jun 2011 *Canadian Communication Association* (Congress), University of New Brunswick
Paper: "Confessing Commercialized Identity: Advertising Ex-Gay Psychology and Theology"
Jun 2010 *Canadian Communication Association* (Congress), Concordia University
Paper: "Moses Znaimer and Religion for Profit in Canadian Broadcasting"

Academic Research

2010-15 **PhD Dissertation Research –** York and Ryerson Universities
Confess the Gay Away? Media, Religion, and the Political Economy of Ex-gay Therapy
• Interdisciplinary discourse analysis of mass media debate surrounding religiously justified sexual orientation conversion efforts that demonstrates role of confession over prayer
• Isolates role of public relations advertising and generation of pop culture "earned media," including film and television fiction, in introducing movement into the public sphere and establishing the parameters of the media debate that followed
• Highlights longstanding historical relations between Christianity and the sciences of psychology and psychiatry and analyzes deployment of scientific studies and rhetoric in the mediated debate, especially as pertaining to gender and sexuality
• Primary data includes print, broadcast and online news, film and television narratives, advertising and press releases, mental health studies and reports, and legal documents
• Contextual data includes sociological studies of participant observation, medical and psychological studies of efficacy and harm, and media studies of public relations rhetoric

2011-12 **Contract Research Assistant** – Ryerson University
• Searched for, compiled, and analyzed articles, blogs, and online posts on visual media for Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council project headed by Prof. Bruno Lessard

Committee Work and Memberships

2015-Pres **Member of** MCC Toronto Refugee Strategy and Fundraising Advisory Committee
2010-Pres **Member** of the Canadian Communication Association
2011-12 **Executive Committee Member** – York/Ryerson Communication and Culture GSA

Film, Television and New Media Production and Writing Experience

2010-14 **Writer/Story Editor/Associate Producer** – *Propagator* (Web Series), Propagator Media
2009 **Story Editor** – *The Last New Year* (Feature Film), Fokos Films Ltd.
2007 **Writer/Associate Producer** – *Secret Planes* (Television Documentary), Eureka Media
2007 **Assistant Promo Producer** (contract) – CityTV, Chum Ltd.
2006 **Writer/Director/Editor –** *Rob Fox is a Terrible Buddhist* (Short Video), Thornographic Prod.
2005-2006 **Editor/Story Editor** – *Cerealized* (Web Series), Rocket Ace Moving Pictures
2005 **Director's Personal Assistant –** *Whole New Thing* (Feature Film), Acuity Pictures
2003-2005 **Editor/Story Editor** – *Dead End Days* (Web Series), Rocket Ace Moving Pictures
2002-03 **Content Packager** – PrideVisionTV, Headline Media
2002 **Associate Producer/Co-Writer/Co-Editor –** *Three & A Half* (Feature Film), Summer Pictures
2002 **Segment Editor** (contract) **–** Book TV and Much Music, Chum Ltd
2001 **Producer/Director/Editor –** *A New Brewing Concept* (Corporate Video), Trafalgar Brewing Co.

Dissertation Committee and References

Supervisor: Paul Moore (Sociology, Ryerson): psmoore@soc.ryerson.ca
Reader: Bruno Lessard (School of Image Arts, Ryerson): lessard@ryerson.ca
Reader: David Skinner (Communication Studies, York): skinnerd@yorku.ca

Publication Abstracts:

"The Governmentality of Promoting Ex-gay 'Change' in the Public Sphere." *Canadian Journal of Communication*. Forthcoming. (PR)

This article argues that, in spite of Habermas' analysis of commercial media, "earned media" showcasing the Christian ex-gay movement, which circulate as the result of a Christian Right marketing strategy, have not led to a paralysis of society's ability to debate the issue of ex-gay "change." Instead the controversy operates as "neoliberal theatre of suffering," which has backfired against the ex-gay movement. Media coverage representing as entertainment the shame of those who struggle against unwanted same-sex desire is certainly impoverished by the free-market protocols that drive it. It does not achieve the full reasoned deliberation Habermas calls for in the public sphere. However, the ex-gay debate still allows for competing governmental perspectives to intersect and modify each other in ways that extend beyond mere commercialism.

"Cannibalism, Communion and Multifaith Sacrifice in the Novel and Film *Life of Pi*." *The Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 27.1 (2015):1-15 (PR)

This article argues that Yann Martel's and Ang Lee's *Life of Pi* is a multicultural story of maternal cannibalism that resists both the colonial discourse of cannibalism and the Western opposition between reason and faith. Whereas on one level the main character's cannibalism is sublimated into a fantastic tale about a boy and four animals on a lifeboat, on another level the cannibalism represents a real and reasonable sacrifice that is also a Hindu mother's Christian sacrifice answering her son's Islamic prayers. Although psychoanalytic tools are used to unlock the alternative significance of Pi's mother offering her physical body so her son can live, the discourse of Oedipal and pre-Oedipal desire is problematized in favour of a sacrificial "communal" reading rooted in the Christian Eucharist.

"Shifting Psychological Knowledge and Conservative Christian Media Controversies: Blaming the Judeo-Christian Tradition for Anti-Gay Prejudice in Psychiatry and Psychology." *The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society* 3.4 (2014): 51-77 (PR)

Contrary to statements made in the mass media controversy over the Christian ex-gay movement, this paper will demonstrate that the declassification of homosexuality as a mental illness by the American Psychiatric Association in 1973 did not amount to an instant "born again" conversion in psychological thought, nor did it signify the power of special interest politics trumping "true" science. An analysis of statements in multiple psychology textbooks and encyclopaedias published after 1970 will show that declassification initiated a near two-decade long "debate" in which conflicting scientific studies were used strategically and governmentally, sometimes in combination with the deployment of extreme stereotypes, to influence public and professional perceptions of an event with which many professionals disagreed. However, by the time the transformation in thought was complete—a transformation that was influenced by both the AIDS crisis and an antigay Christian media campaign—it had all but vanquished those who maintained a mental illness model of homosexuality from the disciplines of the psyche. It also culminated in the blaming of the Judeo-Christian tradition for psychiatry and psychology's longstanding antigay prejudice and recognized the ex-gay movement as a contemporary problem for psychiatry and psychology.

"Confessing Our Selves: Truth and Identity Politics in the Christian Ex-Gay Movement" *The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society* 1.3 (2011): 205-220. (PR)

This article analyzes "queer" confessional practices in the Ex-gay Movement using a governmental perspective. The Ex-gay Movement is a loosely organized phenomenon that mixes ancient spiritual practices rooted in confession, prayer, and Bible study with modern psychological techniques rooted in psychotherapy and psychoanalysis. It claims to "heal" homosexuality. Although the movement accepts a queer definition of sexual fluidity, it still encourages LGBTQ people to turn towards the "truth" and change their sexual and religious orientations so as to live good "straight" Christian lives. For ex-gays living within a religiously ordained heteronormative context, however, the fluidity of sexuality is not a spectrum that opens up new possibilities—it is a situation that must be struggled against and corrected through religious and psychological work. The primary technique through which the self-deprecating queerness of this movement will be critiqued is the ancient practice of confession. This requires an examination of correspondences between aspects of this movement and aspects of the historical research of Michel Foucault, whose analyses of both modern and ancient forms of governmentality provides the basis for this paper's theoretical approach.

Publication Abstracts (Continued):

"Television Discourse and Governmentality: Considering *Da Vinci's Inquest* and *Da Vinci's City Hall* as Citizen Projects." *CineAction* 82/83 (2010): 48-57.

This article uses a Foucauldian governmental approach that borrows from political economy to analyze the obvious political agenda of Canada's *Da Vinci* series, which aired for eight years on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. A governmental approach to media is a context-specific method that analyzes media institutions, products, and discourses in terms of tactics and strategies of influence and control where power and knowledge work together to regulate, manage, maintain and/or problematize, change and resist behavioural discipline. With respect to political economy, while this paper does consider the profit-driven commercialization of the Canadian television industry as productive context for the show, the political-economic emphasis is on how the discourse of the *Da Vinci* series participates in structuring, promoting, and seeking to change real-life social relations, particularly the relations between certain governmental institutions (i.e., the Vancouver Police Department and the Vancouver Coroner's Office) and certain vulnerable populations in downtown Vancouver (i.e., Downtown Eastside drug users and sex-trade workers). I conclude by suggesting that in this case the show's political agenda operates above and beyond the desire of the *Da Vinci* producers to generate commercial revenue.