MIT Global France Seminar presents

Information Networks & Celebrity in Enlightenment France

Manipulating Information in the Ancien Régime: The View from the Provinces
Giora Sternberg, Oxford University (UK)

In the old regime of information – as in more modern media revolutions – centralization was only one part of the story. Studying the politics of information in the provinces, this talk argues, does not just refocus or complement the view from Paris or Versailles. It also demonstrates how peripheral actors could build and deploy knowledge-bases to subvert that view along with the designs of their ‘central’ counterparts.

Private Lives, Public Figures: The Invention of Celebrity in the Eighteenth Century
Antoine Lilti, École des hautes études en sciences sociales (France)

Celebrity is often presumed to be a very recent phenomenon. Antoine Lilti argues, on the contrary, that celebrity culture had its origins in the eighteenth century. In London as in Paris, the new conditions of urban life, the multiplication of new public media and the growing sense of an authentic self, contributed to feed the public’s fascination for the personalities and private lives of public figures. Writers like Voltaire, actors like Garrick, and even scientists and politicians became famous in new ways. But for some of them, celebrity happened to be a very painful experience, that stressed the ambivalences of the public.

Tuesday
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4–7pm
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70 Memorial Drive

gsl-events@mit.edu • mitgsl.mit.edu