

Processes of Cultdom

Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste, 2000

A report by Andrew Caine, University of Sunderland, UK

In November 2000 delegates gathered for the international conference *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste* at Nottingham's Broadway cinema. Featuring a series of international speakers, the event sought to examine one of the increasingly important areas of popular cinema within the academy - cult movies. The conference provided an opportunity for those involved to discuss the theoretical definitions surrounding the processes of cultdom, besides considering the historical, cultural and economic forces responsible for the production and consumption of such artifacts.

From the sessions which I attended three overlapping thematic threads dominated the conference, each of which deserves attention in this summary. First, historically and culturally specific case studies dealing with the production and consumption of certain films at particular moments. Second, several papers considered the discourses within critical and fan communities, which involved some negotiation with the theoretical concepts related to socio-cultural distinction. Finally, several contributors offered theoretical re-appraisals concerning the applicability of existing work on cult movies, in several cases making interesting suggestions for future surveys.

First, many papers investigated the historical and cultural impact of particular films. Contributions in this area included a survey of the changing cultural status of *Get Carter* from Stephen Chibnall, an account of the late 1960s LSD film from Harry Benshoff and the papers from Leon Hunt and Julian Stringer on Kung Fu movies. Andrew Willis provided an informed history of Spanish horror movies during the 1960s and 1970s, while the papers on the 1960s beach movies from Bill Osgerby and myself raised the subject of youth culture. Specific directors ranging from art-house favourites like David Lynch to the soft-porn oeuvre of Doris Wishman offered diverse areas of scrutiny, while socially and culturally marginal cinema was recognised via studies of underground filmmaking, the European art house and blaxploitation. Such a contrasting scope of papers offered a very positive sign of the benefits of studying cult movies. A wide range of films and directors were discussed as legitimate vehicles for study, with many papers offering an insight into the historical and social complexities involved within this area of cultural distinction.

The second main area of the conference revolved around presentations explicitly concerned with the issues of socio-cultural distinction and readers' interpretations of particular films. Two Nottingham Ph.D. students, Nathan Hunt and Rebecca Feasey, provided informative and theoretically interesting discussions about the political and ideological context behind respective discourses on science fiction and Sharon Stone. Equally, issues related to questions of taste, cultural distinction and critical reception figured prominently in many other papers, most notably the contributions by Harmony Wu and Ernest Mathijs on Peter Jackson and David Cronenberg, which provided impressive accounts of the changing cultural prestige of these directors. From the papers that I saw, such presentations were of a high standard.

However, from my own observations, the conference lacked a paper that actually utilised original primary research from ethnographic or survey based audience studies. Given that many delegates expressed a concern in the subject of fans and critics and their cultural preferences, the absence of such studies did appear highly conspicuous.

The seemingly automatic acceptance of certain theoretical concepts concerning taste and distinction among many contributors was the other slightly disappointing aspect of the conference. The influential theories of Pierre Bourdieu on cultural taste and Jeffrey Sconce's pioneering work on cult movies operated as often unspoken influences upon many talks. These ideas offer rich and exciting insights into the operation of cultural distinction, but their flaws remained largely unmentioned. For example, too many delegates seemed to accept Sconce's previous work on cult films without thinking about its applicability and relevance to their own studies. The prevailing assumption that cult products and fans are automatically anti-mainstream or rebelling against "good taste" became slightly infuriating. Equally, very few participants actually discussed whether their chosen area really deserved classification as "cult" rather than mainstream products. Also, apart from the presentation on television by Sara Gwenellian-Jones and Roberta Pearson and the contributions linked to popular music/youth culture, few participants sought to apply work on cult movies to other areas of popular culture. This might have provided another interesting angle that the conference could have explored in a little more detail.

Several interesting critical positions that differed from the consensus at the conference did emerge. The third key area of the conference occurred with papers dealing with the theoretical definition of the cult movie phenomenon. Mark Shiel's contribution proved rather controversial among certain sections of the audience. Principally talking about *Easy Rider*, Shiel asserted that the academic desire to embrace movies as cult products risked ignoring the historical and cultural context in which particular films originally circulated. The extensive historical examples offered by the conference seemed to partially disprove Shiel's fears about the analysis of cult films representing a de-politicised form of cultural analysis. However, overall the paper provided a provocative and informative contribution that offered a welcome warning against treating "bad" movies as a post-modern joke. Similarly, the presentation by Joanne Hollows and Jacinda Read received some complaints for being too reductionist. Their talk explored the "masculinity of cult", offering some interesting insights into how cult values often seem associated with male tastes. For example, they argued that the sleazy "twilight" zone of cult movie theatres during the 1960s and 1970s were generally located in marginalised places that perhaps seemed dangerous to women's personal safety. Although some of the accusations that Hollows and Read's offering tended to ignore the values of actual male fans contained a degree of truth, they still provided an interesting perspective that differed from the dominant positions of the conference.

Significant theoretical suggestions concerning cult movies also emerged in the closing plenary session addressed by Jeffrey Sconce, author of the definitive article on the subject, "Trashing the Academy", and conference organiser Mark Jancovich. Both dealt with the issue of teaching cult movies to students. Sconce offered a brave defence of the uses of cult films for academic study, suggesting three interesting points about such movies that might reinvigorate film studies from theoretical and historical perspectives. First, referring to issues of narrative theme, content and performance, Sconce maintained that "faulty construction can lead to critical insight" among students: the technical failings of "bad" movies enables scholars to appreciate the ideological meanings evident on screen, permitting further investigation into the dominance/absence of particular characters and themes. Second, the

technical failings of cult movies, particularly with regards to continuity editing and cinematography, possibly provides a more accessible avenue into the techniques of filmmaking than the canonical art cinema traditionally privileged in film studies. Third, cult movies are often inter-textual with regards to their generic status. Films in this category often feature "the plundering of narrative devices" which disrupt genre expectations and conventions. Sconce gave a thought-provoking and interesting contribution, albeit one that requires further detailed study. Some delegates commented that the deployment of his thesis might appear self-indulgent to students: the subcultural capital and cultural expertise of the tutor and their students would inevitably differ. Also I suspect that Sconce's ideas privilege certain types of cult movie over other areas. Just as my own contribution argued that "Trashing the Academy" arguably fits uncomfortably with pop musicals and cult artifacts not originating from the low-budget, exploitation market, it remains possible that Sconce's latest work places too much emphasis on films that derive from outside the commercial mainstream. Could his thesis prove sufficiently flexible to cover expensively produced cult films that originate from inside the Hollywood studios, featuring big stars and a high level of technical competence? Would Sconce's agenda disqualify films/television shows such as *The Phantom Menace* and *Star Trek*, both mentioned at the conference, from consideration as cult artifacts? However, this paper provided an exceptionally strong contribution to the conference that should encourage further valuable research on cult films and their audiences. His final suggestion that the middlebrow marks the next significant area of study for scholars of popular culture provided an intriguing coda to his discussion that might prompt investigations into this long derided form.

Jancovich's contribution largely reiterated the main themes of the conference, besides stressing certain interesting points relating to cult movies and audiences. First, he explained that the terms "fandom" and "cult movie" might actually disguise the reality that there are many diverse audiences who not only may differ in their views about particular films, but also fans themselves arguably possess varying levels of enthusiasm for particular films and stars. Second, Jancovich stressed that students of cult movies should be encouraged to critique, support and reject appropriate evidence. He did not fully elaborate upon this position in conjunction with detailed examples, although his first point succinctly expressed the main finding of the conference as a whole.

In conclusion, the conference offered an often illuminating, yet entertaining insight into the latest thinking on cult movies and their audiences. Many of the best papers provided detailed consideration of current documentary and audience research that testifies to the range of issues that emerge from a study of films previously derided as "trash" or ignored by the academy. The overall standard of the presentations was highly impressive and augurs well for any proposed book collection or journal articles that might result from the conference. Particularly significant was the quality of contributions from younger delegates at the start of their research careers, which surely offers hugely encouraging signs for the future. Finally, the conference organisers, Mark Jancovich and Antonio Lazaro-Reboll of the University of Nottingham and the staff of the Broadway cinema deserve great credit for developing the idea of the conference and ensuring the successful organisation of the event.

References:

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Millennial Momentum

Society for Cinema Studies Conference, 2000

A report by Sean Griffin, Southern Methodist University, USA

What a difference a year makes. It is not groundbreaking to acknowledge that academics are not separated from the culture which they study and analyze. Yet, the general attitude (towards society, media and academia) expressed at both last year's Society for Cinema Studies Conference and this year's exemplify how cultural trends can imprint themselves upon academic discussion. In contrast to a downbeat *fin-de-siècle* assessment of cinema studies at 1999's conference in West Palm Beach, much of what transpired during this year's four-day conference in Chicago seemed to call for and envision the "dawning of a new millennium" in film and media studies. Focusing on the future (of genres, of the industry, of concepts of nation/race/class/gender/sexuality, of theory, of the discipline, and of cinema itself) was a consistent theme, whether in individual papers, whole panels or workshops, or various group caucus meetings.

One of the most memorable aspects of the last meeting of SCS was the plenary on the "State of the Discipline," which seemed mired in looking backward. One of the central tenets/concerns of last year's plenary was the dire foreboding of "the end of cinema." In the face of a seeming avalanche of new media luring audiences away from film theatres, as well as digital technology poised to replace conventional definitions of cinema, the 1999 plenary (as well as other papers presented) feared the worst: that "cinema studies" was rapidly moving from being a new and lively discipline to one that in effect studied a dead language.

Those concerns had not necessarily disappeared with the new year. Yet, this year's plenary speakers actively took up the discussion with eager appetites instead of wringing hands. Celebrating a discipline of inclusion, most of the speakers welcomed new media technologies and the challenges that such developments pose to theory and criticism. Reflective of this, a marked increase in papers and panels on new media technology graced the conference, discussing digital media, computer systems and the booming internet industry, virtual reality texts, and a panel on "Video Game Theory." Many of those presenting took from established ideas (on gender, race/ethnicity and nation, for example) to dissect these new forms of media. Yet, as the last panel demonstrates, the discussions complicated and began re-thinking central issues, such as representation, spectatorship and identification. The affect that video games, computers and the internet have had on the "older" medium of cinema was reflected in the number of panels devoted to the science-fiction genre, panels that specifically acknowledged the ties to millennial popular culture. Symbolic of the growing recognition of new media within SCS, papers and panels on television continued to grow, and the SCS Television Caucus announced plans to organize a conference in the near future.

The 1999 and 2000 plenaries differed not only in the attitude towards "the end of cinema," but towards the state of theory in film and media studies. Last year, certain speakers cast an almost nostalgic picture of the "high moment" in film theory (ca. the late 1960s and 1970s),

and practically bemoaned "the end of theory" in cinema studies. While making some strong points about how cinema studies has become more institutionalized and regimented, the 1999 plenary focused mainly on where the discipline had been and said precious little about where it was headed. Such grumbling seemed to galvanize many attending the 1999 plenary, who wanted to point out the vibrancy and promise that recent currents in film and media studies held.

The 2000 plenary seemed almost a rebuttal to the glum warnings of disciplinary apocalypse and instead attempted to look towards new roads of pursuit. This is not to say that this year's plenary "put on a happy face" about the state of the discipline. All of the speakers grounded their comments in a welcome pragmatic approach to what opportunities there are currently in the academy. This was structured into the plenary from the start. In planning the plenary, it was announced that, "While the previous plenaries considered substantive issues in method and research, the current plenary addresses the status of the field 'Film and Media Studies' in the new century: What is the place of the field within the contemporary Academic structures? Who are we educating and to what purpose? How has the 'crisis' in academic hiring impacted the discipline?" (Wyatt, et. al., 2000) The concreteness of these topics grounded the plenary in materialist concerns, working to offer specific suggestions about working within "the academic industry" as well as tying these work issues to theoretical concepts and areas of research. As such, many of the speakers acknowledged the institutionalization of film studies (if not media studies in general) in the academy. Rather than desiring a return to the halcyon days of being "cutting edge," the 2000 plenary examined how to function within a more established discipline. This was nowhere better displayed than in the announcement at the plenary that SCS was working with other academic bodies to gather information to battle the growing trend by college and universities in hiring adjuncts over tenured positions.

Tied to this pragmatic outlook, the members of the plenary--Jennifer Holt (UCLA), Catherine Benamou (University of Michigan), Jenny Kwok Wah Lau (Ohio University), Patty Zimmerman (Ithaca College), Mark Reid (University of Florida) and Virginia Wright Wexman (University of Illinois, Chicago)--represented a wider cross-section of backgrounds and identities than last year's plenary, and used the occasion to speak about issues of race, class, gender and sexuality in both concrete career terms as well as theoretical potential. For example, while Teresa de Lauretis at last year's plenary found queer theory to be potentially interesting but ultimately underwhelming, Zimmerman argued that queer theory had been too quickly relegated to issues of sexuality, rather than seeing the potential (a la Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick) in drawing connections between gender studies, race/ethnic studies and other currently separated enclaves. Many at this year's plenary welcomed not only a cross-fertilization of examining multiple media structures, but encouraged a cross-fertilization of theoretical models and areas of study, to not see concepts such as queer theory or interdisciplinary programs as lacking but as not sufficiently given their due.

With such ideas helping to inaugurate the conference, it was intriguing to examine what was being presented throughout the rest of the weekend, to see if and how such forward-looking and cross-fertilization was being accomplished. A number of panels did show the fruits of examining the interlacing of multiple discourses, such as panels that discussed the conceptualization of global stars and industries, the cultural/industrial connections between current US African-American cinema and Hong Kong cinema, and the links between issues of race/ethnicity and of class stratification in both media production and representation. Yet, such intersections also possibly brought on attendant concerns. The Lesbian/Gay/Bi/Transsexual Caucus meeting provided a good example. Those who attended

noted the relative lack of specific panels devoted to queer studies (although a panel on "Lesbian Space in Film & TV" was one of the more well-received at the conference). In noting that a number of individual papers within panels were devoted to issues of sexuality, those present raised questions about the pros and cons of "integrating" larger issue panels vs. organizing visible but "segregated" panels devoted exclusively to issues of sexuality.

Panels and workshops on issues of race and of gender were much more plentiful than individual panels on sexuality (or class, for that matter). Particularly strong were the number of panels and workshops devoted to examining African-American participation/representation in media, which seemed in part due to the vital work done over the year by the Black Caucus in fostering communication among scholars. As this development displays, though, most of the papers and panels tended to emphasize US film and media, even in those panels that were devoted to trying to problematize concepts of nation and national identity (a situation probably unsurprising to those who regularly attend SCS conferences). Still, the conference maintained a decent representation of work done on other national film industries, including a stimulating panel devoted to re-examining conventional histories of Japanese cinema from the 1910s to the Shochiku Nouvelle Vague.

Throughout the conference, it seemed that panels, workshops and papers were constantly looking towards a "brave new future" (one notable example: a panel applying a "green," or environmental, cultural studies model to media studies). A number of panels looked to the future in examinations of youth and media. Presentation subjects included teen fandom of texts, industrial targeting of youth markets, and representations of childhood and adolescence. Often these same presentations tied their analysis of youth to the growth of new media, yoking increased study of the cultural construction of concepts of childhood, adolescence and, by implication, adulthood to the need for new media theories.

This is not to say that there were no presentations that adhered to traditional models or areas of study. Studying gender, race, class or sexuality in media is of course not a stunning new turn in the discipline. Panels commemorating and evaluating the work of Alfred Hitchcock, Luis Bunuel, Stanley Kubrick and Andy Warhol also appeared. Ironically, as last year's plenary looked back fondly to the high theory moment of the 1970s in film studies, this year saw a marked increase in work done on 1970s media--but "Salvaging the Seventies" (as one panel title put it) in terms of its popular cultural texts. Such a re-focusing also posits the ongoing potential of studies into film and other electronic media: certain conceptual frameworks (feminism, race/ethnic studies, materialist theory, psychoanalysis, queer theory) have yet to discover what they can bring to previously considered texts, genres, auteurs, industrial practices, technologies and historical moments. Nowhere was this more amply demonstrated than in the amount of work presented at the conference on women and silent cinema. Armed with analysis of newly discovered works, untapped historical research and cogent theoretical application, these presentations pointed out that even films made over a century ago can still light a beacon to the future of both cinema and cinema studies.

References:

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Rethinking the Categories

Film Stars in the Nineties Conference, 2001

A report by Cynthia Baron, Bowling Green State University, USA

The two-day conference held in April at the University of Sussex was organized by Thomas Austin (University of Sussex) and Martin Barker (now at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth). The conference's workshop environment provided a useful opportunity for participants to discuss, debate, and reconsider the interlocking forces of influence currently shaping the dynamics of film stardom.

In the original call for papers, Austin and Barker had asked participants to address two central questions: in what ways are the economic setting and social/cultural functioning of film stars in the 1990s distinct from those of earlier decades; and second, what new academic paradigms are needed to consider the commercial and symbolic significance of film stars in an era of proliferating inter-media connections? These questions--one about the context in which audiences now encounter film stars, the other about critical frameworks adjusted to accommodate changing circumstances--set the agenda for the conference's on-going discussions. Austin and Barker's opening questions asked participants to think about what has and has not changed in audiences' relationships to film stars, and to consider what has and has not changed about film stars' place in the entertainment industry? As framed, their questions invited participants to examine the effects of new media and new corporate configurations, to study fan participation in the nineties, and to move toward "rethinking the categories" that have structured critical and theoretical writing about film stars (to borrow a phrase from Christine Geraghty's essay in *Reinventing Film Studies* cited several times by conference participants).

Not surprisingly, conference papers revealed that participants conceptualized film stars and film stardom in often fundamentally different terms. Some participants designed their studies to describe the personality created by an actor's appearance in a series of films; for example, Ewan Kirkland illustrated the way a collection of films featured the "man-child persona of Robin Williams." Other presenters looked at how reviews in the press had discussed the performances and personal lives of individual film stars. Using that approach, Rebecca Feasey examined the career of Sharon Stone, and Tamar Jeffers analyzed the post-*Clueless* career of Alicia Silverstone.

Departing from established models of star study, some participants explored the possibility that film stars are not necessarily individuals whose highly-publicized private lives authenticate and enrich stereotypical characterizations in many films, but that today film stars include any (even animated) film figure that becomes the subject of fan attention. Moving toward that position, Paul Wells argued that analysis of *Toy Story*'s central characters Woody and Buzz could prove useful for star studies because there is common ground between the terms used in analyses of the two animated characters and those used in studies of film stars; in both cases, questions about mass culture, marketing, cultural meanings, ideological values,

and emotional reactions arise. Building on similar assumptions, Matthew Hills examined the implications of *Star Wars* fans' clearly expressed loathing of *The Phantom Menace* virtual star Jar Jar Binks to illustrate, among other things, the reason scholars doing star studies should re-examine their consistent "restriction of affect to affection."

Breaking with dominant approaches to star studies but moving in an entirely different direction, Peter Kramer indicated in his study of Jodie Foster's career that analyses of film stars should recognize that stars are nothing more and nothing less than actors who play leading roles in films. As a balance to long-standing interest in stars' ideological function in society, Kramer and *Screen Acting* co-editor Alan Lovell proposed that scholars should now direct attention to better understanding the working lives of these and other industry professionals.

The existence of such disparate positions led conference participants to the candid recognition that with the central term, "film star," in dispute, one cannot even begin to make sweeping statements about film stars and society. Second, the existence of the conflicting perspectives prompted participants to discuss and take home with them questions such as: what is it about the economic, cultural, and technological setting of the nineties that would lead interested observers to such different positions; and second, what features of long-standing or emerging critical frameworks in film studies, media studies, and cinema studies inform scholars' markedly divergent assumptions about what it means to do star studies?

Many papers presented at the conference demonstrated that the proliferation of venues for industry publicity and audience activity makes audience studies an especially rich area of inquiry for star studies. Several papers addressed questions about how the role and function of film stars might have been changed by corporate and fan internet activity in the nineties. While some studies suggested that new internet venues have created new modes for fandom, studies such as Paul McDonald's provided evidence for the position that established, corporate-driven patterns continue to define fan activity even in cyberspace.

Using a range of approaches, papers offered valuable information about audiences in the nineties. Ian Huffer presented an interpretative analysis of a small sampling of detailed responses in his study on Sylvester Stallone fans. Maire Messenger Davies and Roberta Pearson outlined the preliminary findings in their quantitative study of questionnaires completed by audiences who attended selected productions of *The Ride Down Mt. Morgan* and screenings of *X-Men*, both productions featuring actor Patrick Stewart. Other audience studies underscored the fact that in the nineties, movies are just one of several media forms containing material that falls under the purview of various fan constituencies. Nathan Hunt's work on "the ridicule and redemption of Keanu Reeves" revealed that film stars often become important only after they have appeared in movies of particular interest to existing fan constituencies. Geoff King's study of Will Smith emphasized a slightly different point, for it showed how a star like Smith, who has successful careers in commercial film and popular music, is perhaps "the perfect star for an era in which the major studios have become part of global multimedia corporations."

Developing lines of investigation diametrically opposed to audiences studies, other conference participants sought to describe and analyze the effects of actors' performance styles, voice qualities, and physical features. Setting aside expectations created by celebrity biographies and stars' assumed connections to certain genres or performance venues, Alan Lovell used Jodie Foster's performance in *The Silence of the Lambs* to demonstrate how the

features of a specific actor's physical instrument (face, body, and voice) could be brought into the characterization created in a particular film. With a shared emphasis on actual film performances, Christine Geraghty used existing notions about British "ladies" and American "dames" as a point of departure in her analysis of selected performances by Emma Thompson, Kate Winslet, and Gwyneth Paltrow which illustrated how specific details of the actress' different performance styles were linked to genre conventions and assumptions about national character. Studies such as these seem very productive, for in the same way that audience studies promise to illuminate the role and function particular film stars have had for certain audiences, studies of star performances promise to analyze details that perhaps contribute to the responses certain audiences have had to specific performances.

It is possible to see limitations in all the papers presented at the conference. That, however, should be expected; a study can only effectively address a limited number of questions. What was especially productive about the conference as a whole was that it provided a forum for testing and assessing different approaches to star studies, it dislodged a collection of assumptions, and it unearthed a constellation of unanswered questions. By the close of the conference it was clear that concerted effort can and should be given to developing avenues of inquiry that have not as yet been central to star studies. In his closing remarks, Martin Barker proposed that more studies of the contractual agreements and business arrangements entered into by corporate executives, specific actors, and their agents, attorneys and managers are needed. He called for more meta-industry studies to examine the award venues, award categories, and genre/production budget hierarchies that have been established and maintained by the Hollywood film industry in particular. Studies such as these which examine the economic decisions of individuals working in the film industry and the ideological-material features of categories sustained by the industry could, Barker proposed, enrich the field of star studies by providing concrete evidence about the infrastructures of contemporary film stardom.

Additional areas warrant consideration. Star studies should investigate international film stardom. At the conference, Julian Stringer's analysis of Asian and Asian-American stars underscored the fact that film stars do not always originate in Hollywood. Comparative studies also look promising. Studies of national/regional stars and star systems could create a much more detailed picture than we now have. Studies that compare contemporary film stars to current media stars prominent in fields such as sports, music, television, business, crime, or politics could help to clarify the patterns that pertain more specifically to film stars. Studies that consider distinctions between the circumstances surrounding, for example, a theatre star such as Sarah Bernhardt, a film star such as Greta Garbo, and a television/internet star such as Sarah Michelle Gellar could shed light on the theoretical paradigms that have been used to frame discussions of film stars.

A final note: the conference's productive environment emerged from its design and from the tone of collegial respect set and sustained by its organizers. Austin and Barker elected to hold a small conference with sessions attended by everyone. They asked participants to complete drafts of their papers in advance, then prior to the conference they circulated a CD-ROM containing the papers so that participants could enter into sustained dialogue. The conference hosts created opportunities for on-going conversations by making arrangements for meals and convenient lodging. Thanks are owed to Thomas Austin and Martin Barker; one hopes that their plans for an anthology and for another film stars conference become a reality.

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The *Movie* Tradition

Style and Meaning in the Cinema Conference, 2000

A report by Peter Harcourt, Carleton University, Canada

From the 17th to the 19th of March 2000, the Department of Film and Drama at the University of Reading organized an international conference on Style and Meaning in the Cinema. Specifically designed to address issues of textual analysis, interpretation, and mise-en-scène, the conference consisted of a number of presentations and workshops, plus three keynote addresses given by V.F. Perkins of the University of Warwick, George M. Wilson of John Hopkins University, and Laura Mulvey of Birkbeck College at the University of London. Consisting of five parallel sessions for all but the keynote addresses, there was too much going on for any individual to encompass the entire conference. Nevertheless, both the keynote addresses and the main-line events scheduled in the major theatre space may indicate the bias of the conference as a whole.

The tone was set by Victor Perkins, the opening keynote speaker. Expressing dissatisfaction with conventional accounts of cinematic narrative that stress the linear impulsions of cause and effect, Perkins suggested that a more profitable procedure for understanding narrative might be to relate elements within the fictional world of cinematic narratives to the actual worlds that are referenced by the films. An awareness of social space while experiencing cinematic narratives could lead to more meaningful interpretations than simply dealing with narrative events. A compassionate and thoughtful presentation, it nevertheless engendered some opposition from the audience.

Sam Rohdie's question about how such an approach could deal with the more complexly structured films of (say) Godard or Pasolini reminded me of a comment I once made about Perkins' *Film As Film* when it first appeared in 1972: as much as I admired the book, I felt then as I feel now that Perkins's approach to cinema, valuable though it is, privileges performance the aesthetics of Cole Porter over those of Mozart which is to say that all theoretical approaches to cinema work better for some films than for others.

George Wilson offered us very much a work in progress. Because of the exemplary exactitude of his study of filmic point-of-view in *Narration in Light*, I was looking forward to meeting Professor Wilson and to seeing how his thought had developed since his book. I was disappointed on both counts. Possibly too busy to be part of the conference, he appeared for his address but then disappeared; and his presentation on the late films of Josef von Sternberg with Marlene Dietrich represented nothing really new. Full of speculation about the conditions of their production and about how both von Sternberg and Dietrich inserted themselves at different moments into their own texts, Wilson was at pains to suggest how, in this way, they constitute a cinematic avant-garde. Perhaps--for Hollywood in the 1930s; but for someone who looks like Andy Warhol and comes from the country of Stan Brakhage, Bruce Baillie, and Hollis Frampton, the term avant-garde could have been more scrupulously defined.

Laura Mulvey also presented us with work in progress. Interested in the way that new media like VCRs and DVDs are altering the way we work with cinema, she contrasted the visual quality of VHS and DVD copies and suggested that the freeze-frame capabilities of these media introduce the dimension of death into the living flow of cinema. Having access to DVD and Avid editing facilities, Mulvey offered us a reworking of a moment with Marilyn Monroe from *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953) which was itself an example of video art. Although it was not clear where this type of research will take her, the session was presented with a fine appreciation of the nuances of the filmic moment and, inevitably, with great authority.

The conference, of course, displayed a diversity of offerings, only a few of which were actually attended by me. Bo Florin of the University of Stockholm presented an analysis of Victor Sjöström's *Name the Man* (1924) which was screened in its entirety with Russian inter-titles; John Adams of the University of Bristol examined the meaning of landscape in Edison's *Rescued from the Eagle's Nest* (1907); Laura Hubner, a graduate student at the University of Reading, wrestled with the narrative ambiguities that haunt the closing moments of Bergman's *Persona* (1966); and Mikio Kiro travelled all the way from the University of Kyoto to illustrate the effect of the absence of action/reaction shots in all but one sequence in Mizoguchi's *The Story of the Late Chrysanthemum* (1939); and I offered a brief account of the late films of Jean-Luc Godard.

Of the sessions I attended (or of the papers I have been able to read), only Jonathan Wright of the University of North London drew upon the theory that has dominated film studies for the past twenty-five years. Dealing with notions of representation and of historical positioning in Isaac Julien's *Looking For Langston* (1989), he was at pains to analyze the tensions that arise in the depiction of gay/black cultural spaces and was anxious to discover the presence "of social history in the text."

Although I am of that generation that has felt somewhat silenced by theory over the years, the virtual absence of theoretical concerns actually astonished me. While I welcome the return to a focus on films themselves and to the role that style must inevitably play in the production of meaning, I had assumed from the wilderness of Canada that this return would be *informed* by the theoretical work of the past. Judging from this conference, however, it has simply been *jettisoned*. Furthermore, apart from the items mentioned above and a couple of presentations on British cinema, nearly all sessions addressed themselves to Hollywood.

Most astonishing was a workshop chaired by Alan Lovell of the University of Staffordshire, which examined in detail that great achievement of cinematic art, Steven Spielberg's *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982). So determined to establish the importance of sound that he wants us to substitute all references to *spectators* with references to audience, Gianluca Sergi, also of the University of Staffordshire, made us sit through the opening sequence of the film without sound and then sit through it again with the sound-track intact. Although I would hesitate to inflict such simplicities on a class of eight-year-olds, the silent experience made me realize how clumsy Spielberg can be in his sequencing of images, how little rhythmic integrity the sequence possessed independent of the narrative relays referenced by the sound.

This exercise was followed by Peter Krämer of the University of East Anglia also making us sit through, complete with sound, the saccharin manipulations of the ending of the film. Because eight-year-olds around the world, from all classes and cultures and genders, weep at that sequence, Krämer claimed that the film possesses the profundity of universal

significance. Perhaps it does. But missing from Krämer's analysis was any notion of ideological conditioning, of the global control exercised by the Hollywood cinematic machine, the seizure of world-wide distribution outlets after two world wars, and the generations now of Disney-think films that have *taught* eight-year-olds how to respond to such moments in a Steven Spielberg film. We have all been conditioned to blush with Thumper, to experience true love with Snow White, and to apprehend the ethnic Other through Pocahontas. This is how the system works. That is how Hollywood maintains its cultural hegemony, soliciting everyone's consent even that of instructors at British universities.

Whatever happened to ideological issues? Whatever happened to feminism? To race and class analysis? Apart from Jonathan Wright's presentation, where was the concern for minority voices, for innovational cinema, for a cinema of struggle? As such questions have never been asked let alone answered within the pages of *Movie*, they were neither asked nor answered at the conference. The conference was, in many ways, a celebration of the critical position of *Movie* indeed, of the work of Victor Perkins. Although I can share in this celebration and so really enjoyed the conference, I felt that a number of valuable attitudes had been deliberately pushed aside. What is needed, it seems to me, in whatever country of the world, are systems of analysis that can deal with each nation's indigenous production, however varied it might be, and that can suggest alternatives to the dominant cinema of the world which is increasingly the dominant television and which is also at the same time the dominant ideology. Buy! Consume! Emote! Don't think! Chill, man! Be cool! Dig *E.T.*!

Let other voices speak. Let many approaches inform the study of film. Valuable though it has been, *Movie* has never been nor should it ever be the only game in town. Perhaps the next conference might seriously re-examine the achievement of *Framework* and of *Screen*.

