

# Grand Hotel: The Sopranos and Set Design

Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS), 6-9 March 2003, Minneapolis, Minnesota

## A report by Benjamin McCann, University of Bristol, UK

In her welcome to delegates, SCMS president, Lucy Fischer reiterated the importance of this meeting: unlike other conferences, she argued, which devoted occasional or token sessions to the study of the cinema and visual media, SCMS was one of the few to devote four days of its entire roster to these topics. Indeed, this was no idle boast. Visiting my first SCMS conference, I was overwhelmed not just by the sheer volume of delegates, academics and visiting speakers, but by the rich variety of papers and pre-constituted panels. With up to a dozen panels running concurrently, one had to be necessarily selective in choosing where to go, and also inevitably disappointed to miss something equally as enticing.

The overriding theme of the 2003 gathering was "Performance and the Image", and to this end the conference was highly successful in fusing together various branches of "performance". Given that Minneapolis as a city had a strong history of performance, (the Mary Tyler Moore show was set here, the Guthrie Theatre and the Minneapolis Institute of the Arts are famous cultural institutions, and the city claims to be second only to New York in the total number of museums, theatres and music venues), the backdrop to the conference was rich in heritage and topicality. Perhaps the key unanswered question over the four days was "how do we define performance?" There were explicit definitions: papers on Marlene Dietrich, Pamela Anderson and Tommy Lee's stolen porn video, and blaxploitation heroines - as well as more oblique, though no less relevant references, such as the performativity of set design (the use of built space to critique or qualify the dominant narrative trajectory) and film soundtracks and music as a way of structuring audience response and star quality.

The Plenary Session on Thursday 6 began the proceedings and set the tone for the eclecticism of the conference. James Naremore (Indiana University) gave a fascinating paper on the use of CGI and special effects in films. Whereas in post-WWII Hollywood films, actors with war injuries or disfigurement would have to fake them with judicious use of bandages or actually be disfigured themselves, Hollywood films now (like *Forrest Gump*, 1994) could use CGI to create "real life" injuries. The curator of the Guggenheim museum, John Hanhardt, looked at performative practice in film and video installation, arguing that the layout and presentation of these installations was crucial in maintaining meaning. Michele Wallace (City College of New York and CUNY) concluded by looking at Blackface in Photography and Film, suggesting that casual racism and a lack of historical material was indicative in the way these early black actors and performers had been represented. All three papers differed wildly in their individual definitions of performance, and yet the examples and film clips they use to illustrate their arguments merely underlined the fact that performance and the image could never really satisfactorily be pinned down to a simple monological concept.

Afterwards, at the Awards Ceremony, Noël Burch accepted the Honorary Lifetime Membership Award. He received a standing ovation after talking about the increased burden that now needed to be placed on teachers and academics during the run-up to war. It was a

sobering, thought-provoking speech that brought home to many of the delegates the need for the younger generation to be educated and enlightened. Burch's espousal of a globalism that was not based on impersonality or division but on mutual interest and boundary transgression was curiously reflected in some of the panels, many of which concentrated on the ways in which regional cinemas were bleeding across boundaries and becoming increasingly transnational. Examples of this included a joint paper by Sujata Moorti and Sangita Gopal (Old Dominion University) called "Dancing to a Different Beat: The Bollywood Idiom as a Transnational Trend" and a preconstituted panel, led by Barbara Selznick (University of Arizona), entitled "Transnational Circuitry: Genre, Reception, and Representation".

The Plenary evening was concluded with a series of exhibition events were offered in collaboration with the Walker Arts Center. This included an archival screening that focused on the work of historic women filmmakers. Little-known work by Alice Guy Blanche (*A Fool and his Money*, 1912) and Lois Weber (*The Blot*, 1921 and *The Unshod Maiden*, 1932) was well-attended, although it was a shame that the "screenings" of rare Middle Eastern cinema at the conference amounted to little more than a video and a battered projection screen.

Some of the pre-constituted panels took full advantage of the wide-ranging remit of the conference title. "Made in China and Japan, Remade in Hollywood, or vice versa 1: Cross-over Films" considered image translation and remaking across national boundaries within a historic duration, with special attention to the criss-crossing transactions between Hollywood and Asian cinema. Especially compelling was the reading by Gerald Sim (University of Iowa) of the similarities between US westerns and Japanese crime thrillers. In "The Man Who Re-Shot John Wayne: Kitano Takeshi's Search for a Globalist Vision", Sim convincingly demonstrated a nuanced reading of the two. "Viewing Spaces: Comparative Exhibition" explored the relationship between viewing spaces (i.e. cinema houses, small-town theatres, drive-ins and multiplexes) and American film culture. All four papers combined historical and material approaches with theoretical work on spectatorship and the gaze. Highly prescient was the panel "Representations of War 1", which argued that recent films like *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) and *Black Hawk Down* (2001) and the proliferation of CNN- and Fox-dominated war broadcasts from Afghanistan had triggered debate for a reappraisal of media representation of war.

Alongside these debates on visual representations of conflict were several papers and panels dominated by the images and media coverage of 9/11. There was a workshop on "Teaching 9/11," predictably packed to the rafters by mostly American scholars. More stimulating was the "Images of Suffering" panel. Both Mikita Brottman (Maryland Institute College of Art) and David Sterrit (Long Island University) gave interwoven and complementary papers on the events of 11 September. Brottman's "The Fascination of the Abomination: Images of 9/11" examined the ways in which websites and unscrupulous photographers and eye-witnesses had collaborated to offer previously censored images of 9/11 (suicide jumpers, charred body parts), and democratised the abomination of that day by making these images freely available. Sterrit developed this point in "Representing Atrocity: 9/11 Through the Lens of the Holocaust". Recalling the documentary footage of the concentration camps and Ophuls's seminal *The Sorrow and the Pity* (1971), Sterrit seems to be suggesting that little had changed -- that documentary footage was still a vital way to project and explicate atrocity.

"Reconsidering French Cinema" was another highly stimulating panel which combined occupation cinema, 1950s polars, Bresson and *Amélie* (2001). "The Fabulous Destiny of French Cinema: Orchestrations of Performance" (Dudley Andrew, Yale) argued that *Amélie* was a conscious attempt to reconnect modern French cinema back to the Golden Age of the 1930s through the "lure of the surface". By comparing Jeunet's film with Truffaut's *Nouvelle Vague* works and André Malraux's call for all Paris buildings to be cleaned and aestheticised in the 1960s, Andrew suggested that the "performance" aspect of *Amélie* lies as much in its presentation of an idealised Paris as in its charming narrative. In "What Did You See in the War Daddy (and Mummy)?", Christopher Faulkner (Carleton University, Ottawa) cogently argued that there needs to be a distinction made between the films that were produced during the Occupation (1940-44) and these that were actually seen. By demonstrating that many films thought to have been banned in 1940 were still visible on 1942/3, Faulkner re-ignited the debate over clandestine film culture and questioned the level of cultural blackout imposed by the Germans. Faulkner concluded that new work needed to be conducted on this highly fruitful, though frequently misinterpreted area.

"Out-rage-us? Readings" was perhaps the most iconoclastic of the panels. Chaired by Janet Staiger (University of Texas), whose own paper, "Sophistophobia: *Mulholland Dr.* as Remake of *Meshe of the Afternoon*" proposed interesting and thoroughly innovative connections between Lynch's masterpiece and Maya Deren's avant-garde classic, the three speakers all challenged conventional readings of melodrama, stardom and high/low culture. Walter Metz (Montana State University) seemed especially animated when comparing and contrasting the narrative and thematic structures of Aphra Behn's play *The Rover* and the Britney Spears vehicle, *Crossroads* (2002). That several audience members were unimpressed with both the overall conclusions reached by the panel and the deconstruction of previously take-for-granted truths was presumably the whole point of the panel. Metz was keen to respond to criticisms of shallowness and populism by arguing that it was highly appropriate for teachers to use contemporary Hollywood teen movies to illustrate and elucidate theories of feminism, issues of patriarchal control and female road movies. By relating the dilemmas of Britney Spears to a 17th century narrative, he argued that art was endlessly cyclical, its story arcs forever prone to re-appropriation.

Other workshops were also useful for budding academics and film studies lecturers. The workshop on "Getting it Published: Your First Book" was a well-attended meeting in which both academics and publishers offered important advice on developing projects, finding the right publishing deal and working with the publicity and marketing departments. Although most of the representatives and the audience were American, the professional pointers were easily applicable to all those present. Other stimulating workshops included "Teaching Film Studies in High Schools", "Preparing Yourself for the Job Search" and "Cultural Analysis of Media Industries". As the workshops were not strictly bound to the theme of "performance", these were much more general forums for debate about cinema, and provided an interesting insight into the US bias towards film and film culture in educational establishments.

Some of those present may have balked at the sheer volume of people and panels in the Minneapolis Hilton, and indeed, a certain element of anonymity and distance existed (not helped by the conference being spread across two labyrinthine floors). Even the legendary bookstalls seemed less energetic and more distanced from the proceedings. Yet this is a minor complaint within a great success. Lucy Fischer calls SCMS a "niche market" -- in 2003, the organising committee was canny to realise that "performance and the image" was so wide a remit that this niche could be both eclectic and informative, entertaining and

thought provoking. Next year's conference is in Atlanta, while the 2005 meeting is projected to take place in London. Both have a lot to emulate.

# High Theory

Figuring Addictions/Rethinking Consumption conference, 4-5 April, 2002, Institute for Cultural Research, Lancaster University

## A report by Bruce Bennett, Lancaster University, United Kingdom

"I've spent a lot of money on booze, birds and fast cars. The rest I just squandered." -- George Best

Perhaps the most striking feature of this conference was its interdisciplinarity. Papers were delivered by speakers from fields as diverse as art theory, film studies, behavioural psychology, health studies, sociology, history, cultural studies, philosophy and marketing, and the conference even offered the intriguing prospect of a paper on Scottish temperance by one Rowdy Yates (Clint Eastwood's character in the TV Series *Rawhide*).

The conference brief was fairly broad, inviting speakers to address the relationship between consumption and addiction from various perspectives and this conjunction of terms was understood in a wide range of ways. Topics addressed by the papers I attended included: representations of addiction in fine art photography; recreational drug-use and utopian club culture; Freud's fatal addiction to cigars, which he regarded as essential to his work; narcissism, self-addiction and the me-generation; shopping and women's work; and, in the introductory talk by Scott Wilson, footballer George Best's paradoxical Bataillean logic of consumption in which to use money cautiously and responsibly is to waste it.

The opening plenary by Robin Room, an international authority on drug addiction and alcoholism, addressed the role of drug use in relation to "performance enhancement" and the performance of identity. Suggesting that performativity underlies the structure of addiction, Room argued that drug use is a form of (un-)conscious performance. This is as much the case with an alcoholic attempting to act "normally" while drunk, as it is for an athlete taking drugs to improve his/her performance or a "dionysiac" drug-user who makes great play of the effects of the drugs s/he consumes.

Also addressing the relationship of drug-taking to performative identity, Nicole Vitellone suggested that the needle and hypodermic syringe could be considered a prosthetic extension of the user's identity. This paper, based on her work with drug users in Manchester, sketched out the grounds for a biography of the syringe which acknowledges the central importance of the syringe for drug users, both as the focus of ritualized exchanges such as needle sharing, and also as an object constitutive of the subject's self-identity.

One key area that was explored in relation to the nexus of addiction and consumption was that of advertising and marketing. Papers on this subject approached the topic from a wide range of perspectives. Anne Cronin's paper, which drew on interviews with advertising professionals, raised questions about the efficacy of advertising, which were later picked up

by the second plenary speaker, Mica Nava, in order to suggest that advertising has very little impact on the sales of a particular product.

At the other extreme was an extraordinary paper about "subliminal" or secondary messages in print adverts, which are supposedly registered by the viewer unconsciously. Jim Hagart claimed that, like the apocryphal Satanic messages inserted in Judas Priest records by back-masking, ads in mass circulation contain obscene or morbid images and words buried in the textural detail of an image: the letters S, E and X inscribed in the fur of a rabbit in a Marlboro ad, for example, or a map of Wales resembling a face smoking a cigarette/phallus reflected in the fuselage of an airliner in a Rothmans ad. Hagart's belief that the examples he had identified were not simply chance formations or anthropomorphisms was borne out by research on groups of students, and the refusal of beer and tobacco firms to respond to his inquiries.

Two papers also addressed the marketing of drugs. Riitta Oittinen (one of a surprisingly large number of Scandinavian attendees) delivered an entertaining paper on the advertising of ludicrous patent medicines, such as health tonics, girdles and electrical devices, in pre-war Finland. Nathan Greenslit's paper on "direct-to-consumer" advertising highlighted the disturbing continuity of the practices identified by Oittinen, which would otherwise have seemed laughably naive. Greenslit discussed the way that Prozac, among other licit drugs, is currently being marketed in the USA directly to the public, exploiting patient activism in order to sidestep medical institutions, and encouraging the development of a patient/consumer hybrid whose relationship to medicine is a relationship not to chemicals but to advertising images. Among the revelations of this paper was the importance of design in the development of new drug products in order to ensure that there are "no symbolic mistakes," and thus, for example, Viagra pills are dyed blue in order to code them as safely masculine. Again, the issue of identity was raised as Greenslit suggested new forms of citizenship emerge around drug use so, for instance, the makers of Prozac published adverts after the attack on the World Trade Centre exploiting the collective anxiety about the attack to position and pathologize the reader of the ad as a member of this drug-consuming American community.

Josephine Brain's paper on anorexia followed the conference brief superbly, exploring the ways anorexia is defined alternately in terms of consumption -- the autophagic consumption of one's own body, the over-consumption of (ideal) images bound up with gendered assumptions about women's disordered reading practices which render them especially vulnerable to influence from images of femininity -- and addiction -- the (psycho-)pathologizing of anorexia as a disease in which hyper-control comes to be seen as loss of control. Brain noted usefully the way that discussion of addiction and consumption tends to depend upon a binary opposition of self-control and compulsion.

Paula Saukko similarly discussed anorexia as addiction in relation both to the chemical high of starvation and to cultural context, mentioning Princess Diana and Karen Carpenter and screening a rare sequence from Todd Haynes's film, *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story* (1987), which uses Barbie and Ken dolls to tell the story of the Carpenters.

Shaun Hides addressed the theme of pathological consumption and hoarding. Touching on questions of uselessness, waste and fetishism, Hides's suggestive paper drew together episodes from the BBC TV series *Life Laundry* (a make-over programme in which an expert/therapist arrives to help incompetent individuals clear their houses of rubbish and

reclaim their lives) and *Life of Grime* (a documentary focusing on a local council's attempt to clear Edmund Trebus's house and garden of the incredible quantities of belongings/junk he had gathered during years of "poetic accumulation"), and Michael Landy's performance art stunt "Breakdown" in which he publicly destroyed everything he owned.

Mark Seltzer's delivery of the final plenary talk was preceded by his appearance in an interesting documentary, *Murder by Numbers* (2001), screened the previous evening. Directed by Mike Hodges (who made the recent crime-thriller, *Croupier* (1998), which dealt, appropriately, with gambling, seduction, self-control and writing), the documentary explores the cultural fascination with addictive murder or serial killing and the representation of serial killers on film and features interviews with academics, detectives, filmmakers and actors. Brian Cox (who plays Hannibal Lecktor in his first cinematic incarnation in *Manhunter* (Michael Mann, 1986)) tellingly likens an actor's attempts to get into character by establishing his/her character's motivation to the work of a forensic psychologist attempting to generate a profile of a murderer.

Seltzer's talk, which developed ideas from his book, *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture* (London: Routledge, 1998), suggested that the spectacle of serial killing throws into question categories of normality (since serial killers are typically characterized as excessively normal), boundaries between fact and fiction and between public (reality) and private (fantasy) spaces. This confusion is epitomized for Seltzer by the ambiguous fascination with the "Robin Hood Hills Murders" in the U.S., which has led to a proliferation of media texts including an internet database for support groups and fans of the case, and an Emmy award-winning documentary, *Paradise Lost: The Child Murders at Robin Hood Hills* (Joe Berlinger, Bruce Sinofsky, 1996). Significantly, the director, Berlinger, went on to make *Book of Shadows: Blair Witch 2* (2000) the sequel to the fictional documentary *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick, Eduardo Sanchez, 1998) which further blurs the boundary between truth and fiction.

Seltzer noted the way that the spectacle of bodily violence associated with serial killing lends itself particularly well to cinematic representation -- the term "serial killer" was coined by FBI behaviourist Robert Ressler to refer in part to Saturday morning adventure serials -- and that this cross-over also demonstrates the nature of serial killing as symptomatic of contemporary American "wound culture" in which, he suggested, mass mediation is experienced as violent and traumatizing. The actual serial killer is an empty assemblage of clichés, statistics and FBI profiles whose crimes are devoid of motive (since these are "normal" people, just like you and me) and are instead driven by a reproductive logic in which the murders take on a bland significance through repetition.

In conclusion, the conference offered an intense and engaging two days of papers and questions. The conference themes of addiction and consumption were approached from a much wider range of disciplines than one would normally encounter at an academic conference. In some cases this led to bemusement, as with the panel on "Representations of Addiction." This brought together speakers from philosophy, health studies, marketing, media studies and art history, and highlighted the potential difficulty faced by disciplines attempting to find a common language in which to speak to one another. More often such contrasting and divergent perspectives produced intriguing and stimulating debate.

# Hot and Cold: Film and Television Studies at the PCA/ACA in Toronto

32nd Popular Culture Association and 24th American Culture Association Annual Conference, March 13-16, 2002, The Toronto Sheraton Centre Hotel, Toronto, Canada

## A report by Dennis Cutchins, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, U.S.A

With nearly 500 sessions over the course of four days, hundreds of which focused on film, television, music, and new media, the annual PCA/ACA offered plenty of both depth and breadth for media scholars. Media-specific area studies included "Film," chaired by Donald Palumbo, "Film and History," chaired by Robert Fyne, "Horror Fiction and Film," chaired by Philip Simson, "The Internet: Music & Culture," chaired by George Lewis, "Media Bias and Distortion," chaired by Don Stewart, as well as panels on radio, soap opera, television, and theater. Many other areas, such as the "Shakespeare in Popular Culture" panels, were often exclusively focused on film and television adaptations.

The conference also sponsored several special events of particular importance to media scholars. The National Film Board of Canada, winner of this year's American Culture Association Governing Board Award for Outstanding Contributions to American Culture, continuously screened several of its more important documentaries on American culture. These included *My Father's Camera* (a documentary exploring the film clubs and amateur film makers of the '30s, '40s, and '50s), *McLuhan's Wake*, *Cinema Verite: Defining the Moment*, *Packing Heat* (a film on women and guns), and *Video McLuhan* (a three-hour edited compilation of Marshall McLuhan's television interviews taped throughout his career). A Canadian theorist, McLuhan became somewhat of a focus for several sessions of the conference. His work rose to prominence in the mid-20th Century for its explorations into the ways media affect epistemology. A few of his book titles include: *The Global Village*; *The Gutenberg Galaxy: the Making of Typographic Man*; *Counter blast*; *The Medium is the Message*; and *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man*. I particularly enjoyed this last presentation since in these interviews McLuhan explains many of the concepts from his works in language designed for a popular audience. This video collection would make a valuable asset for any course on media studies (though I do not recommend watching all three hours at one sitting). Stephanie McLuhan Ortved, McLuhan's daughter, attended the conference and gave a special presentation on her father and his videotaped interviews. Other film makers, including Kevin McMahon, director of *McLuhan's Wake* and Karen Shopsowitz, director of the delightful *My Father's Camera*, were also present at various sessions to discuss their works. Jacques Bensimon, the Government Film Commissioner and chair of the National Film Board of Canada, accepted the Ray and Pat Browne Award for Outstanding Contribution to American Culture and spoke about the NFB's commitment to popular culture documentaries.

Some highlights of the regular conference sessions included Donald Hoffman's "Not Dead Yet: Monty Python and the Holy Grail in the 21st Century." Hoffman provided a funny and



insightful perspective on how the famous British comedy team managed to capture the spirit of traditional Arthurian romance while spoofing its excesses. Patrick E. White's "Beyond Tough and Smart: Women Leaders in American Films" demonstrated how *Norma Rae*, *Country*, and *Erin Brockovich* all display women leaders working hard at building grass roots support to promote their causes. He points out, however, that Hollywood tends to emphasize the "grandstanding" behaviors of these female protagonists (who can forget Norma Rae's protest on the assembly line?). In "And I Brought You Nightmares: The Play of Horror in Hitchcock's Films," Diana and Carl Royer argued persuasively that the critical emphasis on Hitchcock's mastery of suspense has obscured his deft use of horror, particularly in the chilling *Shadow of a Doubt*.

There were, in fact, several important papers delivered on Hitchcock's filmography. Harvey Hecht's "Mission Impossible 2: A 'Notorious' Remake" argued convincingly that John Woo's film owes a great deal to Hitchcock's *Notorious*. Raymond Forey's "Hitchcock and Truffaut: A Cinematic Collaboration" suggested a much closer relationship between the two directors than commonly believed, and Dennis Perry's "Inexplicability in Poe's 'Ulalume' and Hitchcock's *Spellbound*" turned the tables somewhat and explored one aspect Edgar Allen Poe's influence on Hitchcock.

Other sessions of the conference seemed focused on radically reinterpreting "classic" film texts. Donald Levin's "Deconstructing Mary," for instance, argued that a major subtext of Disney's *Mary Poppins* works to upend staid British imperial culture through Dick Van Dyke's "Burt" character. The Reverend H. Edward Sholty's "Walt Disney: Frustrated Wizard" looked at the somewhat subversive ways Walt Disney's own artists portrayed him in films like *Fantasia*. Sholty points out that Disney was often lampooned in his own films, without his knowledge, of course. One panel on "Slapstick Comedy" even explored the use of myth and the supernatural in the films of the Three Stooges, and the role of Zeppo in the films of the Marx Brothers. Another African American literature panel was devoted to the representation of black characters in more recent films and included papers on *Baby Boy*, *Get on the Bus*, *Bamboozled*, *Dangerous Minds*, *Conrack*, *Lean on Me*, and *Beloved*.

Perhaps the best sessions of the conference were those focused on Western American films and literature. These sessions included papers on *The Virginian* in film, Sergio Leone's westerns, and at least one session devoted entirely to John Ford's *The Searchers*. Ray Merlock's paper on *The Searchers* was a particularly interesting one exploring the film's influence on other, later film makers including George Lucas and Martin Scorsese. Merlock found evidence of Ford's style and themes in *Taxi Driver* and *Star Wars*, though his discussion of *Taxi Driver* was by far the most insightful. I also enjoyed Helen M. Lewis's "Guns of Glory, Guns of Grief: Ageing Protagonists in Westerns" and its thoughtful treatment of Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven*.

Some of the best attended sessions of the conference were those on television, including one panel with the dry-sounding title of "Corporate Sponsorship & Early Television." The papers in that session included treatments of *Perry Mason* and a lively discussion of Desilu Productions with plenty of video clips. *The Journal of Popular Film & Television* sponsored a special panel honoring Michael Marsden and Jack Nachbar, the journal's founding editors, to celebrate their award for contributions to the study of American culture. Other sessions included papers on contemporary "reality" programing like *Survivor*, and *Robot Wars/Battlebots*.

By focusing specifically on sessions dealing with film and television I have perhaps not given a very accurate picture of this conference. The PCA/ACA Conference this year was broad enough to have sessions on literature, film and television, and folklore, as well as sessions on graveyards and cemeteries, comic books, and architecture. Peter Quaife, co-founder of the Kinks, even attended the conference and read from his upcoming novel *Veritas* (a story which looks suspiciously like a fictionalization of his own rise to pop stardom in the '60s). Although this level of diversity might seem problematic to those specifically interested in the study of film and television, the variety is actually quite stimulating. Because of the popular culture movement's core interests in media there are few sessions in which television and film are not at least mentioned.

Despite its widely ranging topics, the conference had a very "practical" feel since most papers dealt with what real people do every day: the television programs and movies they watch; the video games they play; the advertising that constantly surrounds them. These pop culture roots, along with the exceptional friendliness and insightful critique of audience members, are part of what made this a very enjoyable conference to attend. If, however, there is a general critique of the conference it is that the quality of the papers and the level of theoretical sophistication was uneven. Some papers were truly outstanding, scholarly, and insightful, while others, like the paper on *The Red Green Show*, were merely "appreciations."

# Places and Spaces in Women's Cultural Studies

The Women's Studies Symposium: University of Memphis, October, 2001

## A report by Sharon Monteith, University of Nottingham

Among those who contributed to the forum organized by the Center for Research on Women (CROW) were theorists and practitioners across the arts and social sciences. CROW was founded in 1982 to promote and disseminate research on women and issues of inequality. Barbara Ellen Smith, conference organizer and Director of the Center, described the conference as "an opportunity for women scholars across a variety of disciplines and in a variety of contexts to come together to discuss cultural studies and community activism." Presentations were followed by discussion in an open workshop environment, allowing for participants and delegates, both male and female, to exchange views and to debate the forces that currently shape women's studies in fields of expertise as different as film and TV, dance, popular music, and immigration studies. Presenters addressed two main areas raised by the conference: new theoretical directions in cultural studies; and issues of praxis, most particularly how to tackle inequalities in social policies and programs.

Among a range of speakers, Sharon Horne spoke powerfully about the toxicity of internalized homophobia. She explored identity development and issues of self esteem from within her expertise of Counseling and Psychology, citing suicide rates for teenagers and exploring the pernicious effects on young people of growing up lesbian and gay without adequate support networks. She outlined how her research stretches to encompass women's groups and at-risk gay youth and spoke of contexts as different as schools in the American South and non-profit crisis agencies in former Soviet Bloc countries including Russia, Romania, and Kosovo. Holly Lau presented on dance history and choreography. Dance is an art form centered on the body and dominated by women. Lau located dance in a space between becoming and representing, linking this idea to issues in women's studies and exploring the ways in which dance has been represented on stage and screen. Marcela Mendoza, an anthropologist and expert on how new immigration is changing the American South, explained a collaborative project that examines Latino immigration. The project, "Race and Nation: Building New Communities in the South," combines community-based research with popular education. CROW joins with the Southern Regional Council based in Atlanta and the Highlander Research and Education Center in New Market, Tennessee. These are two of the oldest civil rights organizations in the South; founded in 1919 and 1932 respectively, they participated intensely in the Civil Rights Movement and continue to foster multi-ethnic and racial collaborations. One of the goals of the Race and Nation project is to identify areas of potential conflict as well as potential collaboration among different groups. In her talk, Mendoza focused particularly on "The New Latino South" and issues around the experiences of Latina women living in and around Memphis, a majority black and predominantly working-class city.

The keynote presentation was delivered by Constance Penley, Professor of Film studies at University of California, Santa Barbara and co-founder of the film journal *Camera Obscura*, whose work on pornography and representation earned her the distinction of being named one of the eight most dangerous professors in America by *Rolling Stone* in 1998. Penley delivered a lively multi-media presentation entitled "Melrose Space: Art, Politics and Identity in the Age of Global Media." Fulfilling Michel de Certeau's idea of media as story, and promoting public TV as a forum for art, Penley explained her involvement in a two-year collaboration between artists and makers of primetime TV. The fruits of that collaboration have since been exhibited in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. The GALA production team (made up of participants from Georgia--GA and California--LA) contributed to the creation of 200 new examples of artwork and inserted examples into over 45 episodes of Aaron Spelling's soap opera *Melrose Place* on Fox TV. As part of the GALA project, artists and film theorists explored topics like violence and the sources of violence, sexual politics and safe sex, poverty and disease, and environmentalism, on the small screen. After a while *Melrose Place* became something of an ailing host for what Penley terms the "benign viral infection" of primetime TV that the project represented. The long-running show was axed in 1998 but not before GALA's product placement had provided a controversial and creative intervention into popular culture and intrigued the soap's fan base. The Melrose Space website continues to pull in the fans, as exhibited through new and continuing projects reviewing and overwriting episodes and the collection of favorite scripts. The site also includes scenes of the most telling instances of product placement.

Overall, the two-day symposium created an environment in which participants succeeded in testing approaches to Women's Studies against those of other disciplines. It drew together scholars from Anthropology, English, Counseling and Film and Communication studies and, as one participant acknowledged, "allowed us to see that theoretically and practically we have much in common."

## References

GALA Committee at [http://www.arts.ucsb.edu/projects/mpart/about/about\\_frames.html](http://www.arts.ucsb.edu/projects/mpart/about/about_frames.html)

Examples of art in Melrose Place at  
[http://www.arts.ucsb.edu/projects/mpart/artguide/artguide\\_frames.html](http://www.arts.ucsb.edu/projects/mpart/artguide/artguide_frames.html)

Southern Regional Council at <http://www.southerncouncil.org/comm/soch/sc233-pships.html>

Highlander Research and Education Center at <http://www.hrec.org/>

Center for Research on Women at <http://cas.memphis.edu/isc/crow/>