

# The Changing Faces of Television

Goldsmiths College, University of London, 15 March, 2003

## A report by Kate Coyer, Goldsmiths College

This conference, organised by Jonathan Gray, brought together researchers in the UK whose work engages with the question of what is new around television and television studies. As Gray asserted: with new technologies of delivery; increasingly strong global currents of consumption and production; new policies and economic trends; new patterns of audience behaviour; developing and emerging genres, forms, and formats; and new interconnections between media geographies and localities, television is a rapidly changing medium. And as an everyday practice, television reflects this. Through the *Changing Faces of Television*, researchers who work among these paradigms in different ways came together and we were afforded the space to consider intersections and transgressions among work not always examined side by side.

Over the course of three panels, we went from the context of global television and mental mobility, to questions of genre and format primarily rooted in the British and American experience, to the world of contemporary fandom, cult TV, and fan fiction. Of the core common threads found among the presentations, one is that the changing face of television has as much to do with the *local* as it does the global, and all the spaces in between, "virtual" or otherwise. At times, some academics get caught up in the current language of globalisation, with all its hybridised forms of expressing very real phenomenon, to the extent that the significance of local production and consumption as a product of community needs and interests gets neglected. Another recurring theme throughout the day was the importance of making distinctions between formal and informal sources of information and readings of texts. These threads led to a rich discussion of how to better re-conceptualise the active audience in a way that reflects both the multiplicity of how people engage with television, and the political economy of the media industry.

### Global Flows

The first panel began with Daya Thussu (Goldsmiths College), who unpacked the broad issues of transnational media flows. In his presentation, he emphasised the importance of satellite television in allowing people who have migrated to new countries, or live among multiple spaces, to feel connected. Thussu specifically cited the example of *Zee TV*, satellite television from India, which affords Asian viewers in the UK direct access to news, information, and cultural programming from India. In arguing that the changing face of television is in deflecting shifts and flows, Thussu emphasised the shift in passive consumption of limited choice of content and timing, towards a more dynamic model in which viewers gain greater control over their viewing experience.

On the same panel, Tarik Sabry (University of Westminster) presented his research study of young Moroccans interacting with the text of English language television programming. Sabry spoke to forms of "mental migration" and gave evidence to ways in which young

Moroccans migrate to the west without actually making a physical journey through their interaction with texts. Out of his preliminary research emerged a fascinating dialogue about what it means to be a young Moroccan living among cultural influences within a Muslim country and within many western texts. Noureddine Miladi (University of Westminster) then addressed the changing nature and face of Arabic broadcasting and the role of *Al Jazeera* television in fostering an Arab global public sphere.

In making the transition from questions of the global and diasporic media to country-specific broadcast organisation, Rosser Johnson (University of Westminster) discussed the strange role of the infomercial in New Zealand television. As Johnson described, broadcast policy has come a long way in New Zealand from the odd days when the tourism department would write radio news. There are, among other issues, still considerable concerns around the lack of regional and local content, concerns not dissimilar to those with regards to transnational satellite television. The question, then, is not just the global flows of local content across the wireless world, but local consumption of local content as well.

## Genre and Format

In the next discussion, aspects of format and genre were considered both in terms of a more informal dissemination of information and the political economy of structure. To begin, Annette Hill (University of Westminster) outlined her present project on audience reception of popular factual entertainment programmes. Her interests pull from Ellis's work on the scheduling power of television and specifically, how it is the viewing community who bring understanding to a genre. In her presentation, Hill also raised important questions of how to research informal ways of learning, when the formality of an interview does not represent how we actually live. In seeking to authenticate that audiences access news and information from informal sources like popular factual programming, she addressed what she sees as a higher level of engagement and reflexivity on the part of audiences.

The research Des Freedman (Goldsmiths College) presented asked us to think through the significance of television formats and asserted the need to revisit arguments of cultural imperialism, and revisionism around cultural imperialism. In doing so, he reflected on why the British government is so committed to expanding the sale of British television formats for an international audience. For the reality addressed, is, among other things argued, one in which the British government saves US industry millions of dollars in research and development by selling tested program concepts to American broadcast companies rather than finished products. Freedman further problematised how the export market veers away from the original significance of the *Britishness* in British programming, and led back to the question of what constitutes a local program in the first place.

Jonathan Gray (Goldsmiths College) then offered his own variation in a discussion of television as a porous medium in which people come and go within the text and of how that shapes the way viewers make sense of things. Gray used the example of television parody to support this claim arguing that through critical intertextuality, there are often contradictions between "official" or intended meanings of a text and how viewers actually read them, so that, for instance, ad, news, or sitcom parody from the *Simpsons* might inflect and infect the interpretation of those genres. The text, then, becomes less of an object and more of a process or experience. Gray also substantiates parody and comedy as places of informal learning, following along similar lines to Hill's argument around factual television.

## Contemporary Fandom

Matt Hills (Cardiff University) began the last panel by "theorising television fandom through and beyond cult tv", as his paper was titled. He defined the genre itself as one based on audience investment, arguing it is fans themselves who designate whether or not a program is worthy of fan culture. Hills went on to argue that this culture of discourse exists in naming works upon which to confer value, for example, through the logic of exclusion (hence *Buffy the Vampire the Slayer* is cult tv, but *Dawson's Creek* is not). Thus, where the previous panel investigated the inner workings of genre and format, Hills offered a clear illustration of how the very notion of the generic boundary is constructed and patrolled by fans, academics, and fans who are academics.

Bertha Chin (Goldsmiths College) then detailed the rich world of online fan fiction through her case study of *X-Files* fans. Fan fiction are stories written by fans of a particular program using characters and plots from actual episodes, and creating sometimes entirely different narratives around them. This too exemplifies a much higher level of engagement with television texts, Chin argued, as it demonstrates how, within fan communities, some go so far as to create their own text within a text. Lastly, Will Brooker (Richmond University) examined how multiple television texts "overflow" into other media platforms, so that one's interaction with a given text can occur across television, official and unofficial internet sites, chat rooms, and so forth. Brooker's presentation challenged us to rethink both the ontology of the text and the location of the televisual audience.

## Conclusion

In a communications era where cynicism demands our attention, especially with regards to media ownership, cultural imperialism and the glut of quantity over quality programming, it is important to have occasions like this to take stock of the clever, and often unintended, interpretations and uses of texts people actually come up with. Community and alternative media are also significant areas not directly addressed in this conference but critical for inclusion if we are to sketch the totality of television's changing faces. Such multifarious discourse cannot be fully unpacked in any one conference. But like all conferences, conversations continue at the pub and beyond.

# Dreaming Someone Else's Dream: Traversing the Spaces of the 13th Annual Screen Studies Conference

Organised by the journal *Screen*, 4-6 July 2003, Glasgow University

**A report by Michael S. Duffy, University of Nottingham,  
United Kingdom**

The 2003 Screen Studies Conference was initially announced to have a particular focus on film and television production and set design throughout film history. While this remained true throughout the conference, panels and their respective themes touched on a wide variety of debates surrounding, among other things, queer performance and stardom, Deleuzian perspectives, and the Latin American "good neighbour" policies of Hollywood. There were also panels on three national cinemas in need of more attention: Spanish, Turkish and contemporary South Korean. Many eras were also brought into focus through these panels, ranging from the distant past ("Set design: studios and performance in [Early] European Cinema") to the tremendously current ("Technological aesthetics: the role of special effects"). Most interesting was the final panel itself, which nicely tied up past and present and the larger debates of the conference.

An early panel on set design in European cinema (mentioned above) featured Ben McCann (University of Bristol) speaking on "'A discreet character?' The performativity of 1930s French poetic realist set design." This panel proved a great insight into Marcel Carne's film, *Le Jour se leve* (1939), its "performative décor," and the overarching arguments of Andre Bazin. McCann here noted that "décor should cooperate as much as the actor" (see Bibliography). McCann dutifully pointed out that the set and architectural design were defining features of this film and many others of the period, which thus gave into an "appeal to popular memory" which helped to argue McCann's notion of "architecture as resonator." Also on this panel, Sarah Street (University of Bristol) discussed set designer Lazare Meerson's work with directors Rene Clair and Jacques Feyder in French poetic realism and British cinema of the 1930s. Street spoke of Meerson's authenticity and impressionism, and that the sets in these films often created an "idealisation" and "artistic memories" of places, rather than the reality of the day. Street demonstrated this argument with Meerson's work on Feyder's 1937 film *Knight Without Armor*, and in particular the stunning sequence featuring star Marlene Dietrich waking one morning to discover the "frozen world of imperial Russia" - her mansion empty, all her servants abandoned. Finally, Sue Harris (University of London) spoke on "The End of the Affair: the 1930s studio aesthetic in postwar French filmmaking," in which she detailed the "nocturnal characters" and "aesthetically damaged spaces" of Carne's 1946 film *Les Portes de la Nuit* (*Gates of the Night*).

Elsewhere, in the much more modern but no less important panel, "Postcolonial Spaces: Hobbiton and New Zealand," Bronwyn Beatty (Massey University) outlined some of the pros and cons of current New Zealand film and government policy. Beatty delved into a brief

history and contextualisation of the New Zealand film industry, discussed its status as a "film-friendly nation" and concluded by arguing for the need to establish an agenda that encourages private investment in the film industry. Taking a cue from Beatty was Thierry Jutel (New Zealand), who debated "landscape and the geography of the virtual in *The Lord of the Rings*." Jutel seamlessly intertwined complicated notions of history ("we become what we have always been") and New Zealand's "exotic otherness" with director Peter Jackson's complex relationship with both *The Lord of the Rings* franchise and New Zealand itself. Using tourist advertisements, websites and news and magazine articles, Jutel outlined the potential meanings and consequences of "Brand New Zealand," and how the "morphing relations" in both film and landscape indicate a "process of the virtual" is taking place, that is allowing "multiple states to emerge" out of the continent.

The "Technological aesthetics: the role of special effects," panel was highlighted by Aylish Wood (University of Kent), who gave due attention to Japanese director Mamoru Oshii's underseen *Avalon* (2000/ UK release 2003). Filmed with a Polish cast, *Avalon* is a brave and technologically astute film, at different times enigmatic and pointed in its trajectory, from a director whose previously been known in the west for intelligent feature-length anime such as *Ghost in the Shell* (1995). Wood argued that *Avalon* differs from many similar-themed films about the nature of reality, because in this film "the state of realities that the characters inhabit are not the subject of debate." Humans playing a vast computer game begin the film already "knowing the world through a more distributed network" but by its conclusion, "independent agents become agency-distributed." The arrival at a "Class Real" level in the game/film adds a new thread to the Avalon myths that that the film so generously engages with, both in theme and music.

To compliment the "Space, time and public service" panel, Sean Cubitt (University of Waikato) delivered a smart study of *Edge of Darkness* (Martin Campbell, 1986) a BBC television film broadcast during heavy debates over the legitimacy of public service. Cubitt explained in his abstract for the conference that he hoped to indicate some possibilities of how to integrate political economy analyses with textual interpretation, a line of questioning as yet underdeveloped in media studies. As always, Cubitt's work and ideas are both creative and useful, and he delivered essential points for thinking about new ways to consider and interpret films. Also on this panel, Helen Wheatly (University of Reading) and James Bennett (University of Warwick) debated the limits of television presentation by breaking down the productions of *Blue Planet* and *Walking With Beasts*, respectively, and asked questions about what kind of public service the BBC is trying to provide.

In "Affective strategies and the past," speakers debated the filmic re-creations of distinct eras of history in feminine literary costume dramas like *The Governess* (Sandra Goldblacher, 1998), "heritage" films such as *Jude* (Michael Winterbottom, 1996) and Wong Kar-Wai's *In The Mood For Love* (2000). The latter paper by Gary Bettinson (University of Kent) was primarily concerned with the affectations of vocalisation in the film, the characters failure to connect (often neither in shot or voice) and the film's technique of "closing multiple roads to emotion."

The closing plenary on "Researching design -- methods and futures" offered a similarly engaging conclusion to the weekend that any attendee should have been satisfied with.

Emma Sandon (University of London) used fascinating audio and video clips to detail her continuing work researching set and production designers in the early days of the BBC,

where she has discovered that early programs seemed to be developed out of a mixture of live production and documentary techniques. Conversely, Damian Sutton (Glasgow School of Art) delivered an extremely well prepared visual and oral presentation on "The DreamWorks effect: the case for studying the ideology of art direction." Sutton used various DreamWorks (the studio co-founded by Steven Spielberg) productions such *Gladiator* (Ridley Scott, 2000) and the *Band of Brothers* HBO mini-series (2001) to illustrate the changing technologies of the colour-timed image, and to debate "what is expected versus what is achieved." Traditional colour-timing has long been a part of post-production on most films, where a film's scenes are measured to equal each other in light and atmosphere. A new form of digital colour-timing, however, has now become just one part of the larger process called "digital grading," a significant new chapter of post-production in which computer technology is used to modify whole elements of a shot or sequence. In *The Lord of the Rings* film series, for example, digital grading was performed on 70% of the shots in the film(s), with director of photography Andrew Lesnie present during the entire process. He notes, "[Digital grading] is basically taking a negative...and scanning it into a digital format. With a huge variety of tools...you can make it brighter and darker; you can affect the colours, highlights and shadows. You can manipulate the image in any conceivable way." ("Digital Grading" section on Disc 4: "Appendixes, Part Two: From Vision to Reality." *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring. Special Extended DVD Edition*. dir. Peter Jackson, 2002.) Digital grading is in fact an important new chapter in the filmmaking process (as Sutton noted at the conference), and deserves further investigation in its own right. While Sutton's presentation was focused on Dreamworks studios' non-fantasy-based films (though one could easily make the argument that *Gladiator* contains as much fantasy as *The Lord of the Rings*), his ideas are transferable to any genre of film now incorporating this process. Historical events in these films present themselves as a "particular realism," Sutton noted, and he concluded by making the larger argument that changes to CGI (computer-generated imaging) in cinema are "conceptual rather than fundamental." This blend of past and present, traditional and modern reflected the conference's aims perfectly, while also indicating potential new directions in many areas of film studies. In other words, cinema is still based largely on the element of choice -- an inspiring and ideal way to end any conference.

## **Bibliography**

Bazin, Andre (1967) *What is Cinema? Volume I*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, and London: University of California Press, LTD. (Bazin discusses *Le Jour se leve*, among other films, in the chapters "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema" and "In Defense of Mixed Cinema.")

# 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 those 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 *Meshes 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.

# New Ground and Familiar Faces

"New Myths?: Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror", The 5th Annual Conference of the Department of Arts & Media, 3rd May 2003, Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, High Wycombe

## A report by Lincoln Geraghty, University of Nottingham, UK

Out of the twenty-two papers presented at "New Myths?" eleven were media based discussions of science fiction, horror or fantasy film and television. Such a wide range of papers meant that delegates were not disappointed when it came to choosing which panel they should attend, there was something for everyone and everyone had something to say.

The first two panels were entitled "The *Buffy* Mythos and Beyond" and "Film and Television Myths." Both were aimed at deconstructing the myths and histories behind some of the most popular and significant science fiction/fantasy texts of the last few years. In the *Buffy* panel, Lorna Jowett's (University College, Northampton) paper "Happy Family/Horror Family: Parents and Family in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*" discussed the effects of parental absence or neglect on the nuclear family myth, drawing connections with similar anxieties produced in teen horror and slasher films. Jowett regarded the characters in the show as a *pseudo-family*, able to offer a supportive environment through which the patriarchal structures of the traditional family could be resisted and notions of the serial form were emphasised. In "Playing *Buffy*: Interactivity, Remediation and Mythic Resonance in the videogame version of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*" Tanya Krzywinska (Brunel University) examined the possibilities of the *Buffy* family in the digital world as she discussed how the *Buffy* game has given its players a certain autonomy and determination that is characteristic of the new model family analysed in Jowett's paper. Krzywinska stressed that such control of the *Buffy*-verse through video gaming both typifies and extends the show's symbolic operation. In the opposite panel mythic symbols were also discussed with regard to popular science fiction texts such as *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976), and *Independence Day* (1996). In particular, Sabine Thuerwaechter's (University of California, Riverside) paper "From July 4th to September 11th: Roland Emmerich's *Independence Day* -- A Second-Order Semiological System?" examined the mythic potentials of *Independence Day* and how it fulfils Roland Barthes' definition of modern myth through the use of 104 separate, iconoclastic, patriotic, and subversive signifiers designed to make the film stand as a historic text. Thuerwaechter's illuminating and insightful paper drew new connections between *Independence Day* and America's sense of mythic destiny, offering a "patriotic worst-case-scenario" of national destruction long before the very real event of 9/11.

As the conference progressed, papers began to discuss more horror texts, specifically the combination of the male, monstrous, and technology. In the panel "Monstrous Men?" Anna Claydon (Edge Hill College of Higher Education) and Colin Odell and Michelle Le Blanc (Independent Scholars) discussed the monstrous and the masculine in conjunction with misuses and uses of technology. The fusion of the body with the machine was a common motif within their papers. Claydon's "*The Projected Man: The B-Movie and the Monstrous-*

Masculine" analysed the Cold War British B-Movie *The Projected Man* (1966) and stressed that the film used mythic templates first highlighted by Barbara Creed in her book *The Monstrous-Feminine* (1993) and turned them around to emphasise the collapse of patriarchal ideologies. The male monsters in these sorts of film were a reaction to the stronger female characters. The monstrous forms of future man were also discussed in Odell and le Blanc's paper "Long Live the Flesh" intimating that the fusion of body and technology in the eyes of directors David Cronenberg and Tsukamoto Shinya was the inevitable next step in the evolutionary process. Cronenberg's films are not just about trying to shock the audience (however graphic they may be) but they are manifestations of future mythical creatures, monstrous and fantastic at the same time. The new bio-tech hybrid provides a new mythology through which ideas of the creature and its relationship to the collective psyche can be exposed and translated. The third paper in this panel discussed ideas of the monstrous masculine in a different sense, in particular, how homosexuality is often read into science fiction but is not actually present. Chris West's (University of Brighton) "Yesterday's Myths Today and Tomorrow: Problems of Representation and Gay (In)Visibility" highlighted the misconception of homosexuality in science fiction, touching upon debates such as the absence of a gay character in *Star Trek*, and concluded that science fiction has reduced homosexuality to the level of myth since it is often discussed but never clearly denoted in fiction. New readings by West of previously regarded gay science fiction stories showed just how much the myth of "queer contamination" is prevalent in such ambiguous literary texts.

The third of the day's panels, "Technology/Culture/Myth", produced the most fervent responses; perhaps not only because the papers were quite contentious but the presenters were a little misunderstood in their approach. The first paper by Greg Singh (Birkbeck College), "CGI: A Future History of Assimilation in Audiovisual Media", was a comparison of James Cameron's films and his use of CGI effects as an "assimilative technique/technology" and also an analysis of DVD as an interactive medium. Singh posited that the young audience of today's gaming and DVD culture has developed the ability to modulate between the "assimilated/assimilating" -- read the CGI text as computer generated rather than filmic -- and therefore changed the way blockbuster films have been marketed. New strategies have been developed, especially focused on the potentials of the DVD, which concentrate on the development of CGI and showing how the effects were accomplished. This paper created a debate around Tom Gunning's concept of "cinema of attractions" as many in the audience pushed Singh to explain where his paper sat in relation to film spectacle and technological development. It was particularly felt that the paper had ignored (or avoided) the idea that CGI effects are a technological extension of Gunning's theory.

The second paper in the panel by Gordon MacNeill (University of Liverpool), "Science Fiction, the Media, and the Myth of Democracy", was introduced as a twofold analysis of democracy's multiple concepts and how science fiction exposes democracy's frailties and the failures of elected representatives. However, it became apparent halfway through the twenty minute paper that it was not MacNeill's intention to combine a detailed analysis of SF texts as originally laid out, but rather to use the panel as a platform for his own political agenda. His argument concerning three forms of democracy, the third corrupted by politicians and the media, was highly charged at points and examples taken from the British local government elections (held two days previous) showed that his paper had potential as a political statement for the hustings rather than an academically neutral critique. Little time was left for MacNeill to introduce let alone discuss the SF texts he had mentioned and therefore his claims about the myth of democracy fuelled by the media were unsubstantiated. The third paper, "*Babylon 5* as the *Dream Quest* of Francis Fukayama" by David Murray (Independent Scholar),

brought the panel back on course with a discussion of *Babylon 5*'s actualisation of Fukuyama's notion of liberal democracy as the ultimate form of human socialisation. The series' political universe was contrasted with *Star Trek*'s liberal humanitarianism and Kennedy era political order, showing that *Babylon 5*'s mythos is partly constructed from the continuing struggle between capital and labour under the control of a corrupt and despotic future federal government. However, a large part of its mythos is also based on the conflict between the series' "bad guys", The Shadows, and the human-led coalition. The former represent Friedrich Nietzsche's loathing of the liberal pursuit of "perpetual peace" which is at the heart of *Babylon 5*'s conception of an interspecies space station.

The final session of the day was brought to a close by two very divergent papers. Tristram Hooley's (University of Leicester) "Visions of a New Jerusalem: Predictive Fiction in the Second World War" looked at how myth was not only a retrospective process aimed at placing the war at the centre of British culture, (i.e. notions of the People's War, the Blitz, *Dad's Army*) but was a major tool of leftist thinkers during the war who dreamt of a political and social utopia which would follow the end of the conflict. According to Hooley's paper, taken from his recently completed PhD thesis, some people wrote predictive fictions that saw Britain as a futuristic paradise transformed by war; others saw the war as only part of a Nazi grand plan, which would lead to the invasion of Britain and the creation of an Aryan state across the Channel. These were just a few of the kinds of stories that were being written during the war, all of which contributed to and challenged the public narrative of the post-war reconstruction and the many myths that have come to embody the British view of WWII.

Unfortunately, due to the inevitable lack of time at the end of a busy day of papers, Oluwatoyin Vincent Adepoju's (University of Kent at Canterbury) paper, "H.P. Lovecraft and Paradoxical Convergence," did not get the full range of questions and discussion it deserved. The paper focused upon two quite different artists, the horror and weird fiction writer H.P. Lovecraft and the painter Vincent Van Gogh. Adepoju compared both of their literary and artistic styles and theorised that their quite arduous and poor lives trying to make a living from their talents accounts for the similarities in their work. Lovecraft's investigation of the true and horrific capacities of mankind as explored through stories, such as "The Colour Out of Space", "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward" and "Arthur Jermyn," parallels Van Gogh's period in an insane asylum where he produced many of his famous works such as "Starry Night" and created a style that reflected a more profound understanding of man's position within nature and the universe. Indeed, some of the links that Adepoju brought to the fore repeated many of the issues that had been raised in previous panels concerning visual representations of myth in science fiction film.

The "New Myths?" conference was replete with many papers that offered tantalising new paths and new directions for many familiar topics. A broad range of papers both overall and within each panel meant that links were made between films, literature, and art that might not have been raised in another academic forum. The combination of science fiction, horror, and fantasy myths created a quite stimulating atmosphere where those who presented papers could share their ideas, and, as one might expect from science fiction devotees, receive valuable and imaginative feedback without being overwhelmed. Fascinatingly, without intention, one particular myth that was exposed and set straight during the day was the perception that science fiction scholarship has no place in today's current academic arena -- that SF is not academic enough. It was manifestly obvious that the study of science fiction, in all of its forms, is not only relevant to the study of society and culture today but is integral to the continued intellectual understanding of humanity.

# Tripping the Dark Fantastic: Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Film and Television at ICFA

The Twenty-Fourth Annual International Conference for the Fantastic in the Arts, March 19-23, 2003, The Ft. Lauderdale Hilton, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida

## A report by Jeffrey S. Smith, Ohio University, School of Telecommunications, USA

Science-Fiction, Fantasy and Horror writers, scholars, professors and students presented, read, discussed and rubbed elbows at this year's ICFA, entitled "What Might be Going to Have Been: Dark Myths And Legends." There were thirty-three separate presentations and one discussion panel on the subject of "Fantastic Film or Television" across twelve sessions. For a conference traditionally rooted in literature, this was seen by many as a significant demonstration of the organisers' growing appreciation of non-literary forms of Fantastic representations.

Presentations from masters and doctoral students, professors, and other media scholars, covered a wide variety of topics ranging back across the history of film and television. The initial cinematic presentation for the conference was a panel of three papers discussing the works of horror master John Carpenter. Each took a different yet complimentary perspective. The three presentations, "The Bogeyman Will Get You: The Origins of Evil in the Films of John Carpenter" by B. R. Smith, "Invasion of the Individual: John Carpenter's Modernisation of the Myth of Identity Theft in *The Thing*, *Prince of Darkness*, and *They Live*" by Shea G. Craig, and "One Piece of the Formula: The Hawksian Women in the Films of John Carpenter" by J. Robert Craig, each set the tone for what would follow over the next three days; one of critical insight and a scholar's affection for their subject matter.

The Carpenter panel delved deeply into their selected films from a variety of theoretical perspectives, including basic textual analysis, mythic analysis, feminist and queer theory, and historical analysis. The resulting discussions found Carpenter's work remaining largely consistent through the years, to the satisfaction of the presenters. Still other film and television presentations used semiotic, thematic and critical cultural analytic methods as well. Of particular interest was the third paper's look at the influence Howard Hawks had on John Carpenter's vision of how women should be portrayed, and how "Hawksian femininity" was utilised and altered to fit Carpenter's particular brand of horror.

While it was impossible to attend every session, as many were scheduled opposite one another, several of the presentations in sessions that I did attend seemed to stand out. In a session entitled "Fantastic Fact/Fantastic Myth: The Mothman in Fact and Film", Rob Faleer's "Spring-Heeled Jack: Mass Hysteria and the Popular Imagination" examined the historical and psychological basis for the myth of the legendary British villain who attacked women in Victorian times by scratching and stabbing them with iron-clad fingers, only to

leap away in great bounds. Jean Lorrain's "Love Saves the World: The Nontraditional Family in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*" explored creator Joss Whedon's familiarity and exploitation of the unorthodox type of familial connections presented in his world. Finally, Annette Pratt's "The Pure, the Turned and The Daywalker" examined Wesley Snipe's role in *Blade* (1998) as a racially-charged figure, embodying the social status of the tragic mulatto. Although presented in separate conference sessions, each seemed to bring with it a combination of humour, insight, research and critical review.

Also significant for its quiet humour, as well as its scholarship, was a truly delightful panel, cajolingly titled "Historical Perspective in Fantastical Film -- The Geezers Speak" featuring Norman Stroh from Angelo State University, Carrol L. Fry and J. P. Telotte from the Georgia Institute of Technology. Each of the presenters on the panel have been associated with the conference for some time, and their comments on topics ranging from Stroh's "Mars in Modern Cinema", to Fry's "Angels and Ministers of Grace Defend Us: New Age Spiritualism in Film" to Telotte's "Making Tele-contact: 3-D Film and *The Creature From the Black Lagoon*" were both entertaining and critically insightful. Fry, currently at Northwest Missouri State, chronicled how the Fantastic has shifted its approach to New Age subjects and attitudes in the last decade, away from a more traditionalist western Christian stance.

One of the highlights of the conference was the panel discussion entitled "The Horror Film in 2002". Chaired by IAFA Fantastic in Film and Media division head J. Robert Craig, and featuring Carrol L. Fry, Kenneth Jurkiewicz and Allison M. Kelly, this panel would have been informative and entertaining in its own right. The icing on this particular critical cake, however, was noted horror author Ramsey Campbell, who agreed to sit in on the panel as its respondent, lending his unique introspections to the discussion. The general consensus of the panel was that 2002 was not what some might call a "banner year" for the horror genre, at least not in Hollywood. Much of the discussion fell to international film, with Campbell offering up insight on little-known secondary films that American audiences might have missed.

Interestingly, as compared to other I have attended, at ICFA there was a real sense of camaraderie exhibited by all the attendees. Everyone was approachable, from those who organised the event to the volunteers who handled the hour-to-hour session issues, from the academics to the authors, from the students to the professors and other professionals. There was no cause for hesitation when walking up to talk to ones favourite author, or waiting after a panel to speak with a presenter. Every participant I have encountered in my three years involvement with ICFA has been friendly, open, and quite willing to engage in a dialogue on any number of issues.

While it was a tremendous thrill to meet such authors as Peter Straub and Stephen R. Donaldson, it should be noted that this conference is heavily slanted towards literary works, much more so than filmic or televisual guests and analysis. In the history of ICFA, there have been very few film-related special guests, only five in the twenty-four year history of the conference: Ray Harryhausen in 1986, Vivian Sobchack in 1987, Roger Corman in 1991, David J. Skal in 1994 and Douglas Winter in 1995. This is compared with over fifty-five guest writers and artists that have graced the conference's literary divisions.

To say that literature and film are intricately tied together is not an unreasonable statement, but this conference would be well suited to opening up more of itself to the filmic and televisual side of the Fantastic. This seems especially appropriate in light of recent smash

Fantastic films based on literary and comic book sources, such as *Spiderman* (2002) and the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001, 2002 and 2003), and highly-successful television series' such as *Charmed*, *Angel* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. There were numerous authors readings at ICFA, something of a staple for the conference, but only one Fantastic film presentation, a late night showing of various Japanese anime films, which was not sponsored by the Fantastic in Film and Media division, but by the Popular Culture and Visual Arts division. Perhaps if a director of Fantastic film, someone like George Romero, Dario Argento, or Peter Jackson, for example, could be brought, there could be a daytime screening of his latest film and a discussion of the production, in addition to late-night film screenings of other work.

On the whole, this conference is very successful at blending a casual, friendly atmosphere with insightful, rigorous academic criticisms of the Fantastic. This rigor is found throughout its various speciality areas, and especially so in the Film and Television division. While still a moderately-sized conference, ICFA has been growing slowly but steadily since its inception in 1979. While the conference historically leans more toward the literary side of the Fantastic with regard to its content, the level of scholarship in the Film and Television division was generally high. Even those presentations which were more of a critical review than a critical analysis were still done seriously and helped contribute to the overall feeling of depth and substantive investigation regarding subjects more often treated with light and casual consideration.



# American Cinema and Everyday Life

Commonwealth Fund Conference, University College London, 26-28 June 2003

## A report by Rebecca Feasey, Bath Spa University College, UK

In 1988, The Commonwealth Fund Conference on American History was devoted to Hollywood and its spectators. As an extension of that discussion, the 2003 Commonwealth Fund Conference focused on the theme of American Cinema and Everyday Life. The original call for papers stated that 'studies of the reception of cinema in recent years have extended our knowledge of the nature of filmic exhibition, the social and economic constitution of movie audiences, and the physical and social contexts of moviegoing' (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/history/cf2003/call.htm>). However, we are also told that 'thus far, much of this work has concentrated particularly on moviegoing in large cities and during the period c. 1905-1915 when the first permanent movie theaters were established in the U.S' (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/history/cf2003/call.htm>). From this perspective then, the organizers of the 2003 conference made it clear that they wanted to encourage work that would expand an understanding of the social history of filmgoing in areas that have been comparatively understudied, including 'rural settlements, smaller cities and towns, itinerant exhibition, and non-theatrical and non-commercial exhibition' (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/history/cf2003/call.htm>). After attending the three day conference and making notes in over 20 of the 60 papers being presented, I would suggest that the conference was more than successful in its desire to address a range of issues related to the history of the social experience of moviegoing.

The presentations were divided into the Commonwealth Fund Lectures and those sessions that allowed delegates to choose between a range of panels that ranged in themes from 'Non-Theatrical Exhibition' to 'Race and Hollywood Audiences.' In terms of the Commonwealth Fund Lectures, the audience were treated to a range of papers including Richard Abel's (University of Michigan) 'Patching Together a Map of Early Weekly Movie-Going 1911-1913,' Richard Maltby's (Flinders University) 'Look at Me and Love America: Hollywood in the World,' Jane Gaines' (Duke University) 'The White in the Race Movie Audience' and Barbara Klinger's (Indiana University) 'Cinema's Shadow: Reconsidering Non-Theatrical Reception.' Although some of the papers were more entertaining than others, all of the speakers were well-considered and thought-provoking, providing useful points of reference throughout the conference. Although one might suggest that renowned film theorists such as Maltby and Klinger would obviously provide an interesting area of debate and discussion, I would suggest that some of the most illuminating papers actually came from the smaller panel sessions.

I was particularly interested in listening to Janet Staiger's presentation on collecting and arranging Hollywood images. Expectations were rising high due to the fact that Staiger has previously penned two of the most influential texts on film reception in the last decade, namely *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (1992) and *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception* (2002) respectively. Expectations

may have been high, but I was not disappointed as Staiger offered a fascinating account of three collectors as a way of negotiating recent debates on fan behaviour. Staiger paid particular attention to Carl Van Vechten, Joseph Cornell and Jane Smoot and found that:

To begin to comprehend the significance of these residues of cinema in the everyday lives of people requires respect for potential differences and will aid scholarship in moving to general conclusions about the functions of fandom for individuals and within social formations.  
(<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/history/cf2003/321papers/Staiger.doc>).

While Staiger's paper will undoubtedly begin a fascinating debate on the study of collecting, the panel session entitled 'Configuring Audience Spaces' must be seen as an interesting point of entry for future research concerning the relation between local politics and global culture. I was fortunate enough to present Paul Grainge's paper on 'Warner Village, Brand Space, and the Local Everyday' as part of this panel. Even from where I stood, Grainge's paper was both enlightening and entertaining as it took issue with Time Warner's motto 'The World is Our Audience.' Grainge made a powerful argument concerning the ways in which the conglomerate attempted to develop a vision of global connectivity that figured the restructuring of national media industries, and the development of a global media market, in terms of an emerging and borderless world order  
(<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/history/cf2003/321papers/Grainge.doc>). Grainge's paper tied in with the panel more generally as Charles Acland referred to American exhibitors and Mark Jancovich took issue with American exhibition, local politics and the construction of the Urban Entertainment Centre.

The conference was organised in such a way so that the papers were made available to the delegates beforehand. In this way the audience came to each session with an idea of the work in mind, allowing the speaker to extend the debate from their papers for an already informed audience. Although delegates had access to all the papers, those who did not attend the conference will not have access to such work. With this in mind then, I can only recommend that those interested in areas of debate such as 'Censoring the Cinematic Everyday' and 'Hollywood's Foreign Audiences' wait patiently for the publication of these fascinating articles. My only concern with the conference was the fact that Robert Allen delivered a paper to the conference speakers the night before the conference itself commenced. Throughout the following three days of papers, each speaker in turn made reference to this seemingly seminal piece of work. However, the fact that those delegates who were not presenting were not privy to such a paper made for a sense of frustration and a clear distinction between those who had and those who had not been welcomed on that first evening session.

# Animated 'Worlds'

July 9-10th, Farnham Castle, Farnham, UK

## A report by Aylish Wood, University of Aberdeen, UK

The Animated Worlds Conference was held at the rather plush Farnham Castle International Conference Centre close to the Animation Research Centre at the Surrey Institute of Art and Design. Though the organisers limited its scope to seventeen presentations, this had the virtue of every paper being heard by all the attendees, enabling a wide-ranging discussion both within and without the sessions. The multinational participants, with papers from Canada, Germany, New Zealand, Switzerland, the UK, and the USA, included practitioners and archivists as well as scholars, the latter drawn from both animation and film studies. In the event, the papers mainly addressed American, British, and Japanese animation including Len Lye, the Brothers Quay, Fleischer Bros. and Daniel Greaves. There was also some material on American television animations such as *The Simpsons* and *King of the Hill*.

The call for papers posed the question: what do we mean by the term 'animation?' What are the methods, terminologies, and languages used to describe what is seen on the screen? Given the call for papers also included a question about the effects of digital technologies on animation, the digital was present in a variety of ways. The strongest digital presence emerged in papers addressing digital animation drawing on live action influences such as *Final Fantasy* and *The Flight of Osiris* segment of *Animatrix*. Much of the discussion, via papers and from the floor, centred on the failure of the film. Despite this negativity, the approaches were generative in the sense that they aimed to draw out what these perceived failures revealed about animation more generally. In the opening plenary, Vivian Sobchack (University of California at Los Angeles, USA) argued that 'live-action' animation provokes a changed scale of evaluation. That is, as animation comes too close to live-action it is evaluated in terms of 'realness' rather than animatedness. Carole-Ann Poole and Alex Jukes (Edgehill University College, UK) also sought to address the question of evaluation through phenomenological categories of expressiveness and emotional affectivity in performance and characterisation. In arguing that the makers of *Final Fantasy* were unable to generate enough emotional cadence to engage viewers, Poole and Jukes also suggest that audience expectation needs to be considered. Many live-action animations draw on game conventions and not narrative film conventions, so viewers unfamiliar with games might not recognise the cues. A question that emerged directly from these papers, and the discussions around them, was one of iconicity. Sobchack commented that while C.S. Pierce's definition of iconicity as physical resemblance has become familiar, the sense that live-action animation makes too much of resemblance provokes a need to return to his less well known formulation of icon as diagrammatic structure.

Although much of the discussion about digital animation did revolve around live-action animation, others aimed to introduce different questions. Karin When (University of Leipzig, Germany) provided an overview of potential Internet resources, including websites and web-animations such as flash, brick, and machinima. Kristin Thompson (University of Wisconsin, USA), who gave the final plenary paper, discussed the distinction between digital animation

and digital manipulation of the images in *The Lord of the Rings*. Two further papers focussed on the productive intersection of animation technologies with philosophical questions around creativity and documentary. Rachel Kearney (University of East London, UK) considered the application of Romantic philosophy to a spectator's encounter with digital animation and Paul Ward (Brunel University, UK) the combination of oral documentary material with animation techniques. While Kearney posited the computer as a synthetic imagination, Ward addressed how the animation techniques of digital rotoshop and claymation, while multiplying the affective dimension of the voice in films such as *Snack and Drink* (1999) and *Going Equipped* (1989), also eroded the epistemological certainty of the documentary material. Though quite different papers, Thompson, Kearny and Ward's pose interesting questions about how animation (digital and non-digital) reconfigures other modes of expression.

A second strong strand within the conference was the relationship between stillness and movement, or life and death, and the Uncanny. Richard Wiehe, (University of Witten/Herdecke, Germany and Switzerland), in a plenary paper on the Brothers Quay, worked with the Tales of Hoffman to consider how puppets draw on a spectator's fascination for movement and affectivity. Laura Mulvey (Birkbeck College, UK), in the third plenary paper, also addressed stillness and movement, but through Martin Arnold's manipulation of images from live-action Hollywood films. Papers from Mark Langer (Carleton University, Canada) and Heather Crow (University of California at Berkeley, USA) took these concerns in different directions. Langer's presentation on 1930s Betty Boop cartoons argued that mapping movements from rotoscoped recognisable figures such as Cab Calloway and Louis Armstrong onto animated figures introduced a discomfiting co-presence of organic and technology into the animations. This doubling effect was also at the heart of Crow's paper on the Brothers Quay where, through the repetition of gestures between animate and inanimate figures, subjectivity is dispersed. Taken together these papers represent a rich vein within animation studies, of inanimate objects not only given movement, but also somehow brought to life. The fascination of this bringing to life not only allows ideas about the uncanny to be brought to bear on animation, but also suggests an essential element of animation: the illusion of life.

One of the aspirations of Animated 'Worlds' was to provide a platform for exploring different approaches to animation. For instance, Paul Wells (University of Teeside, UK) looked to British modernist literary criticism to suggest a model for a language of animation. Moving through Empson, Woolf and Eliot, Wells proposed the idea of a 'subjective correlative' as means of articulating the ideographic logic of animation and the presence of an auteur. Miriam Harris (Unitec School of Design, New Zealand) also invoked modernism by discussing Len Lye's *Trade Tattoo* in the context of literary avant-garde poetry. She suggested that rather than seeing words as overlaid additions to the images, text and image instead form a dynamic coupling, with the words a kind of kinetic energy of scratches and colour whose jitters establish rhythmic variations in conjunction with the images.

Working with more contemporary theories, Livia Monnet (University of Montreal, Canada) and Thomas Lamarre (McGill University, Canada) meshed individual animations with particular theoretical paradigms to explore how animations offered a way of thinking through their concerns. Monnet's paper discusses the spiritual energy of *Final Fantasy* and reading it through the work of Brian Masumi argues that *Final Fantasy* presents a version of Masumi's biogram that re-invokes a political body. Lamarre used the anime *Chii Awakens* to explore the Lacanian view of perversion based on relationships beyond the other. Part of this argument presented the central couple relationship as one that reconfigures gendered

difference. The question of gender was also central to Suzanne Williams-Rautiola's (Trinity University, USA) paper on masculinities in *The Simpsons* and *King of the Hill*.

While many of the papers worked with narrative content, movement of figures, and the technologies used in animation, two specifically looked at the use of space. Pedro Sarrazina (Surrey Institute of Art and Design, UK) addressed the ways in which space can be used as a narrative tool. For instance, in relation to *Killing of an Egg* (1977) Sarrazina discussed the ways in which the multi-layered and extended space played with the viewer's expectations of the spaces of the animation. Aylish Wood (University of Aberdeen, UK) also addressed space in animations by Daniel Greaves, suggesting that the shift between homogeneous and heterogeneous spatial organisations is a means of confounding a viewer's perceptions of space.

The overview of the conference stated that "animation studies also needs a language that can be specifically used in critical and theoretical writings on animation film." This conference certainly supplied a number of ways of approaching animation. But whether or not it produced a language *specific* to writings on animation film remains to be seen. At several points in the conference the point was made that 'animation' is not a straightforward term as there are many ways of animating. Creating a language, a "well-made language," will surely require a cautious specificity, otherwise it will become little more than a gloss that loses any substantial purchase on its object. Hopefully some of the ideas from *Animated Worlds* will fulfil their potential by beginning to generate this language.

# Multimedia Histories

'Multimedia Histories' Conference, July 21-23, 2003, University of Exeter

## A report by Mark Fremaux, University of Exeter, UK

Set in the landscaped grounds of Exeter University and overlooking the city, the splendid Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies (IAIS), was the primary venue for a three-day conference entitled "Multimedia Histories". This wide-ranging conference spanned topics from medieval tapestry, through Victorian optical toys, to re-mediated DVD material and modern computer games. This was a joint venture organised by the AHRB Centre for British Film and Television Studies (Birkbeck, University of London), The Bill Douglas Centre at Exeter University and the Film Studies section of the School of English at Exeter University. Although many people were involved in organising and running this informative and highly successful conference, Laura Mulvey, Duncan Petrie, James Lyons and John Plunkett, deserve mentioning for their imagination, determination and hard work in getting such a variety of experts together to present over fifty papers, and for providing a platform for the interchange of ideas and the opportunity for discussion and debate.

Laura Mulvey introduced Richard Grusin, from Wayne State University, and started the proceedings with the first plenary session; an absorbing paper entitled, "Cinema of Interactions: DVDs, Video Games, and the Aesthetic of the Animate". This set the tone for the conference in that it demonstrated the complex intertextuality of different mediums and the unique characteristics of each, which when put together, can offer an experience greater than that provided by any one individual element. For example, the video game of *The Matrix* offers additional plot information that is not available in either the theatrical release of the movie or on the DVD version. Grusin also pointed out that DVD production can start before work on the movie - this means that in some cases DVD is no longer 'second order' material, that position being occupied by the movie itself. The variety of treatment offered by DVDs was also fascinating - David Lynch, for example, electing not to offer any extra material and, indeed, eliminating the standard DVD option of chapters, in order that his work be viewed in its original form.

I feel that I must point out that having previously attended the majority of the excellent papers from those based at Exeter University, I took this opportunity to hear from other speakers.

Alison Griffiths, from CUNY, provided a chronological starting point for the conference with her examination of medieval tapestry as a precursor to IMAX. The size and sheer vibrancy of these tapestries, she suggested, must have had a similar effect on their contemporary audiences as IMAX does today with modern moviegoers. Peter Hamilton, of the Open University, presented a paper on the fascination generated by wide-angle views entitled, "Wide: the Panoramic Photograph and Modern Visions of the World". Lauren Rabinovitz, from the University of Iowa, compared the early 'rides' of Hale's Tours, usually filmed from a railway train and exhibited in a 'carriage', to modern motion simulation rides.

Sara Gwenllian Jones, of Cardiff University, surprised a lot of her audience by describing the complexity of modern computer games. She used, *Morrowind: The Elder Scrolls III* as her example and explained that it can easily take four years to 'complete' the game, and that the game is different for each person who plays it. Lisa Purse, from the University of Reading, followed this with an examination of game characters, such as Lara Croft, that have made the transition from video game to the big screen. Our apparent obsession with multimedia, in educational situations, was challenged by Kit Messham-Muir, from the University of Sydney, who suggested that pressing a few buttons in front of some sort of screen in a museum, or watching a multimedia presentation, was often a poor substitute for a tactile experience. He pointed out that 'touching' a somewhat grubby piece of Moon rock provided a longer lasting and more satisfying experience, for many museum visitors.

Roberta Pearson, from Cardiff University, gave the second plenary session. Her paper was entitled, "'Never Dreamed of Motion Pictures": The Legal Status of a New Medium'. By examining the legal situation in New York when movies first appeared and the various challenges to existing laws of the time, Pearson made the point that 'any' new medium is the subject of existing legal restrictions - whether they are appropriate or not. Martin Lister, Seth Giddings and Jon Dovey, all from the University of West of England, are three of the five authors of *New Media: A Critical Introduction* and they provided a brief summary of the topics raised in their book. Lister discussed what media does - and for whom. He talked about virtual reality and stated that 'immersion' removed the 'frame' that we are accustomed to with other visual forms of representation. Giddings examined questions of the real and realism - using animated films as his example and Dovey provided an examination of the terms and definitions associated with the ideology of interactivity. It was evident that their work, while strongly individual, was linked together by common themes and issues.

For the final session of the second day of the conference, I chaired a session, which comprised of papers by Russell Richards of the Southampton Institute and Amy Sergeant from Birkbeck. The first speaker's subject was, "The Origins of a Digital Aesthetic: Hogarth and his Legacy" and drew attention to the curving spiral compositional element that Hogarth considered to be key to the visual aesthetic. Sergeant's paper, titled "From 'The Wonders of Derbyshire' to Wookey Hole", examined the importance of light and scale as exemplified in the painting, *Coalbrookdale by Night*.

For the third plenary session, Susan Hayward introduced William Body, from CUNY. Body was one of the few people who considered sound in his paper, which was entitled, "'Margin and chaos': Early Wireless and Multimedia History". The issue of sound was discussed in the closing session and although opinions varied, the consensus was that sound, in itself, is often overlooked when considering multimedia although, by its very nature, multimedia is an audio-visual medium.

On the final day I attended a group of papers, which started with Hyon Joo Yoo Murphee, from Syracuse University, talking about, "Signifying the Digital Space: Contestations and Possibilities" and questioning, among other issues, if the 'right to hack' was part of the American Constitution. Jeanette Monaco, from the University of Bristol, gave a paper titled, "Since *The Sopranos* is not a soap-opera: Debates over meaning and fan performance in Sopranoland.com". For many of us, I suspect, the extent of involvement by fans of the television series, and the intensity of their feelings regarding other contributors to the web site, was quite a surprise. Michelle Henning, from the University of West of England, offered a paper, which suggested that the Curiosity Museums, particularly those from the Victorian

era, equated to the World Wide Web. The specialist and, sometimes bizarre, material available on the web being not dissimilar to the collections that were kept in the earlier Curiosity Museums.

In one of the final three sessions of papers, Tatiana Rapatzikou, from the University of East Anglia, presented her paper, "Virtual Technologies and Interactive Communities" and pointed out that networks connect 'people to people' and not 'machines to machines'. She did raise the interesting question of what will happen when artificial intelligences (A.I.s) link up to the Internet. Jaeho Kang, from the University of Cambridge, then gave his paper, "The Panorama and the Media-Spectacle: Walter Benjamin and the Experience of the Entertainment Industry". Kang showed a picture of the Kaiserpanorama in Berlin and several people in the audience remarked how similar it looked to a modern Internet café. Priya Virmani, from the University of Bristol, provided an insight into multimedia outside Western society, and in so doing, reminded us that there is a vast area of potential study that is, as yet, hardly examined. In her paper, "Indo-Murdochisation - a study of the implications of the birth of Star (Satellite Television Asia Region) in India", she discussed how the indigenous culture initially rejected Rupert Murdoch's 'western' offerings. This led to the cultural change of style of Murdoch's programmes and his company's subsequent rise to the number one position in Indian satellite broadcasting.

Ian Christie (Birkbeck) was the final plenary speaker and his paper was entitled, "Toys, machines, instruments". He placed an emphasis on these early examples of multimedia being 'contrivances' and how the actual word used to describe the various items linked to their cultural value - an 'instrument' having scientific connotations, for example, whereas a 'toy' was associated with pure entertainment.

This was followed by a discussion in which all the keynote speakers, namely Richard Grusin, Roberta Pearson, William Boddy and Ian Christie, faced questions and comments from those present. The overall feeling was that tend to be either very specialised - or too large and broad in scope. It was felt that this conference had managed to maintain a somewhat intimate atmosphere without being restricted to a narrow subject area. It had successfully combined a wide variety of specialised material and had inspired many of those present to re-examine their work, taking into consideration some of the issues raised by other speakers. Because multimedia is such a comparatively new topic for academic investigation, it was felt that we are still searching for the actual 'question' that we should be asking and only then can we relate our work to that line of inquiry.

For those wishing to be similarly inspired or challenged, it is hoped that a book containing an edited selection of the papers will be published later in the year.

A list of the conference speakers is available at

<http://www.bftv.ac.uk/events/mmhists.htm#speakers>



# Past, Present and Future: The Many Faces of SF

"Speculating Histories: Remembering Yesterday, Experiencing Today, Predicting Tomorrow", the 34th Annual Conference of the Science Fiction Research Association, 26th - 29th June 2003, University of Guelph, Ontario, Canada

**A report by Rebecca Janicker, University of Nottingham, UK**

From looking at the list of panels at the start of the conference it was immediately evident that, out of thirty panels, only five were concerned primarily with science fiction in the media. The overwhelming majority took literature, whether classic or contemporary, as their basis. Despite this discrepancy, there was an intriguing range of papers; from television series to blockbuster movies, science fiction was examined in a variety of forms. Later, the very fact of the conference's predominant focus being on literature rather than media proved to be the source of a thought-provoking debate pertaining to the future of science fiction.

An early panel consisted of three inter-related papers examining suburban life in Cold War America. Focusing on the theme of survival narratives, the first paper "Official Fiction: Cold War Strategy and the Narratives of Survival" effectively set the scene. The conflation of fact and fiction was shown to be especially characteristic of the media of the time and Patrick Sharp drew on editions of *LIFE* magazine to illustrate his arguments about emotive journalism. He argued that as city centres would likely be lost in the event of nuclear attack, suburbia was seen as key to saving the human race. Suburban science fiction was thus the true voice of Cold War survival (since those who would survive annihilation would be the winners). Lisa Yaszek's paper "Unhappy Housewife Heroines, Galactic Suburbia, and Nuclear War: A New History of Midcentury Women's Science Fiction" provided a feminist perspective describing 'housewife heroine' stories, where women were portrayed as integral to the maintenance of the suburban status quo. This was especially true in the event of an emergency where their role of keeping their men away from Communist spies brought them to the fore of resisting an invasion of feared values. Doug Davis examined *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) as a prime example of suburban horror/science fiction in "Running into the Future: Containing the Horror of Suburbia". His interpretation of the film was as a comment on suburban American citizens of the Cold War era, rather than upon the Communist threat, as typically supposed. It was argued that the film essentially reflected *domestic* rather than *foreign* paranoia. The pods symbolised modern America, popular psychology and suburbia. Much was made of the helplessness of protective institutions such as the police, FBI and health departments within the film, as the narrative shows that these bastions of the American way of life are themselves trying to 'pod-ise' the protagonist. The film was thus misdirected in its employment as a propaganda tool, and this paper showed that it actually sought to reflect a shift in Californian living at the time. Based on the novel *Sleep No More*, it was a wake-up call as to what the US was doing to itself. No invasion was ever intended, and the film thus tells the audience a great deal about Hollywood's politics in the Cold War era.

One panel combined papers on *Star Trek*, *Babylon 5* and *Star Wars* (1977) and their impact on popular culture and fan behaviour with perspectives on the nature of science fiction fandom. Scott Duchesne's "Boldly Playing!: The 'Profit' of performance within the Liminal frame of the Con(vention(al))" began with descriptions of how the traditional Klingon death wail was recently performed at *Toronto Trek* in honour of a departed regular convention attendee. This led into a discussion of customs, ritual and costumes adopted by fans and utilised to make a performance in their celebration of their favourite science fiction characters. Argued from the perspective of a scholar of drama, this paper showed how fan culture is created and sustained by close attention to the details of a character's costumes and faithful copying by fans. They literally enact their devotion to the original text, reinforcing their own sense of community as they do so. The word 'convention' thus describes their emphasis on tradition, as well as the actual events at which such performances are made. This paper aptly complemented Gary Westfahl's "Science Fiction is the Simplest Thing". Here, he made a personal argument for the case that science fiction has shifted from being a forum enjoyed alone by isolated enthusiasts to one shared by more sociable community-minded ones. Reiterating the theme of fan communities, he stressed the importance for individual fans in coming together to share their love of SF socially and to create communities in so doing. Mark McCutcheon, in "I'm gonna send 'im to outa space': The Feedback Loop Between Rave Culture and Science Fiction", further emphasised the notion that communities based upon a shared love of a particular form of expression allow ideas to flourish. He argued that popular films such as *Star Wars* and *Superman* (1978) provided trance music DJs with instantly recognisable signature tunes that enhance their reputation on the rave circuit and the ravers' familiarity with the original movie text. The SF community merges with the rave community; best exemplified by the lyrics in *The Prodigy's* hit "Outer Space".

The panel-led, yet also open to the floor, exploration entitled "The End of SF?" comprised Farah Mendlesohn, editor of *Foundation* and plenary speaker, Geoff Ryman, author and guest of honour, as well as several American academics. This session raised key issues about the future of science fiction as a mode of expression and about what constituted suitable subject matter for academic inquiry. Focusing primarily on whether science fiction in media is as worthy a subject of study as it is in literature, this produced heated and emotional debate. As the conference included a number of author readings and plenaries there was considerable support for the argument that literature is the appropriate subject for scholars of SF. However, a significant number of those from the audience responded with the argument that certain media-based science fiction forms cannot be dismissed simply on the basis of their popularity. Rather, they deserve equal analysis not least because they enjoy enthusiastic fan followings.

Finally, another panel saw discussions of *Star Trek*, *Stargate: SG-1* and the use of wormholes to propel plot narratives in media-based science fiction. The three papers complemented one another well, linking ideas about how and why popular televisual science fiction perpetuates itself. "'Poles Apart': Future Time, *Deep Space Nine* and *Enterprise's* 'Faith of the Heart'" compared *DS9* and the latest series from the franchise, *Enterprise*, with Lincoln Geraghty describing how the former looks forward whilst the latter looks (somewhat naively) back into the past. This has the crew effectively looking to the future by looking back, concentrating on accepted modes of *Star Trek* lore such as transporters. Labelled 'ret-conning', the new series continually strives to re-establish continuity, e.g. the *Enterprise* episode "The Andorian Incident", which reintroduces alien characters from the original sixties series. The new series is constantly building up stories that reference *Star Trek* 'facts' which are well known to fans. This paper showed how *Enterprise* seeks to appeal to fans old and new alike by being very

past-oriented, harking back reassuringly to *Star Trek's* heyday, especially in light of recent tragic world-events. It has become conservative and reactionary rather than forward-looking. "Looking Through the Stargate: Learning our Past to Save our Future" took as its premise the notion central to the show, namely the idea that mythology may have a basis in fact. The series sees aliens coming to Earth in the distant past, thus creating a basis for terrestrial legends. Becky Davis argued that it explains human history by exploring the idea that myths are real and that they have relevance for our futures as surely as they did for our past. The paper "Wormholes: Interstellar Highways, Time Machines, Weapons" sought to account for the prevalence of wormholes, defined as tunnels through space-time that 'warp' time or lead to hyperspace, in shows such as *Star Trek* and *Stargate: SG-1*. Such devices are exploited to propel narratives and provide convenient plot-devices, e.g. by allowing rapid inter-stellar space travel, however unrealistic it might be. *Sliders*, *Babylon 5* and *Farscape* were further examples given by Brent Stypczynski of science fiction television series where wormholes are used to create opportunities for exploration, thus providing greater scope for the stories that appeal to the audience. The paper also propounded that other familiar science fiction themes, such as time machines, are typically another way of creating wormhole-like devices for innovation and exploration. They can also be used as weapons of mass destruction, as in *Farscape* and *Stargate*.

Overall, the conference proved a lively and stimulating melting-pot of ideas. The chosen emblem of the event was Gar, a three-headed gargoyle looking simultaneously to the future, past and present. Representing as he did one who looks speculatively at the human condition within a context of future visions, history and the now, he both inspired and symbolised the variety of papers.

# Scoperama

Widescreen Cinema Conference, Sheffield Hallam University/National Museum of Photography, Film and Television, 10-13 July 2003

## A report by Paul McDonald, University of Surrey Roehampton, UK

When Twentieth Century Fox premiered *The Robe* in September 1953, the occasion showcased the CinemaScope widescreen process which the studio had just spent the last ten months perfecting. Paramount quickly followed with VistaVision and, by 1955, Todd-AO had arrived. Amongst the errors which arise in film history is the frequently stated argument that the launch of these widescreen formats in the mid-1950s resulted from elements of the cinema industries, particularly the Hollywood studios, attempting to combat the growing popularity of television. While television was a contributing factor to this industry trend, as John Belton's (1992) work in this area has demonstrated, the search for big screen entertainment preceded television and existed from the earliest years of cinema. In the case of the post-WW2 boom in widescreen processes, the array of formats that arrived were driven as much by intra-industry rivalry between the studios as they were by any inter-industry battle for media differentiation between cinema and television.

This range of developments was the focus for "Widescreen Cinema", the conference co-organized by Sheffield Hallam University and the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television in Bradford. Held in the year of the fiftieth anniversary of CinemaScope's debut, "Widescreen Cinema" was bigger and broader than just an academic conference. Alongside a four-day line-up of panels and keynote presentations, the event also scheduled a whole film program of widescreen presentations. This event was therefore equally a mini film festival and an academic conference, covering the whole range of '-scopes', '-ramas' and '-visions', which have come to represent widescreen.

Widescreen is a valuable point of departure for tackling the variety of inputs and influences which make up the complexity of cinema, for it encourages attention to the technology, economics and aesthetics of film in equal measure. Accordingly the conference saw a diverse collection of papers approaching widescreen from many perspectives. Panels were organized to draw together papers around the development and implementation of formats, technological innovation, industry commercial practices, authorship and style, genre and various national cinemas. The line up of papers included work on MGM's *Knights of the Round Table*, colour in *Il Deserto Rosso*, a history of VistaVision, successive releases of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, prestige women's films of the 1970s, and the adoption of Hammerscope in the UK.

To pick out just a few papers for mention. With his paper "Cinerama in Britain in the 1950s", cinema historian Allan Eyles led the first panel with a very effective introduction on the national dispersal of this landmark technology. Marshall Deutelbaum's (Purdue University) "Basic Principles of Anamorphic Composition" raised a considerable amount of interest and discussion through its segmentation of images in an attempt to arrive at a compositional logic

at work in CinemaScope and early Panavision framings. Working with differently releases of *The Robe*, Sheldon Hall's (Sheffield Hallam University) "Alternative Versions in the Early Years of CinemaScope" raised questions about Fox's practice of making simultaneous productions of not only of that particular film but also as a more general strategy to guard the studio's interests as it attempted to introduce a new format.

A rich collection of feature films and demonstration films were seen in the screenings over the days. Benefiting from the Museum's Cinerama facility, the only one of its kind in the UK, the event was able to project the famous *This is Cinerama* promotional film, together with *How the West Was Won*. Interruption of the former by a technical problem necessitated screening of the recovery reel featuring the globetrotting newscaster Lowell Thomas desperately filling time to allow technicians to repair and restart the complex multi-projector system. While I believe this interlude was the result of a genuine hitch in the proceedings, it did actually serve the interests of the event quite well, for the showing of this reel offered an insight into the contingency planning behind the launch of the system.

With screenings of Raoul Walsh's *Battle Cry*, Otto Preminger's *The Cardinal* and James Clavell's *The Last Valley* amongst other titles, all the main U.S. formats were on display. These were accompanied by examples of the international formats Tohoscope (with Kurosawa's *Kakushi Toride no San-Akunin (The Hidden Fortress)*) and Franscope (Godard's *Le Mépris (Contempt)*). By combining screenings with papers, the event was perfectly placed to integrate debate with its very subject. Across the papers and the screenings, the overarching concern which seemed to bring together the whole event was an interest in what Belton's study describes as 'film ... changing its shape'.

A few observations on the organization of the conference. As previously commented, the diverse papers were clusted in panels to address widescreen from many different perspectives. What this enabled the conference to achieve was a respect for the many conditions that constitute widescreen cinema, while also maintaining a very strong focus across the days. Sessions departed from the convention seen at so many of running several break-out panels simultaneously. Instead each session comprised a single panel, and with both the conference and the screenings held in the excellent Pictureville Cinema at the Museum, a context was created for a more focused form of debate than is usually achieved by dispersed panels. It was a simple choice but I feel the single panel format, together with the theme focus of the conference, combined to give a fuller sense of a shared discussion at work between delegates than is sometimes seen at conferences.

Inevitably the conference saw papers and keynotes of differing standards and many sessions suffered from the perpetual conference sin of keynote presentations or papers over-running, in some cases to an alarming degree. At times question and answer sessions also tipped over into arguing the minutiae of aspect ratios, which while valuable in determining the finer points of history, did appear to leave many in the audience rather cold. In both these cases, panel chairs could have done more to rein in speakers and their questioners. These criticisms aside, in a conference, which saw papers approaching widescreen from so many different directions, there emerged a very real sense of tackling the focus in a thorough, concentrated manner, which enabled the event to achieve considerable range and depth in its investigation. This came as a welcome initiative after attending so many recently where the scattering of ideas and points of interest does not serve to interrogate or expand the horizons of the subject field but rather leaves at least this delegate asking 'what was all that about?'

Widescreen brings colour, light, space and spectacle to the screen. By creating a forum in which to contemplate and reflect on these matters, the conference and its screenings was not only concerned with exploring a few films and some moments in history but with the larger examination of some of the very things which make cinema exciting.

### **Bibliography**

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