Media Comes To Miri

Media and Identity in Asia, Curtin University of Technology, Miri, Sarawak, Malaysia, 15 – 16 February 2006

A report by Nandana Bose, University of Nottingham, UK

It was with a sense of excitement and anticipation that academics and media practitioners from Australia, New Zealand, Asia, Europe and America gathered in the idyllic town of Miri on the tropical island of Borneo, for a two-day conference on the media in Asia. Situated in the province of Sarawak, "the land of the hornbills", the venue was the sprawling campus of the Curtin University of Technology, named after the former Australian Prime Minister, John Curtin (1941-45). It was organised by the Media-Asia Research Group (MARG) based at Curtin University of Technology in Perth, Western Australia and dedicated to the advancement of interdisciplinary research on Asian media. The explicit aim of this inaugural conference was to provide a forum for people working in the area to meet, exchange ideas and network as well as to re-visit the role the media plays in shaping national, political, local, ethnicised and gendered identities in the changing mediascape of the 21st Century.

Attended by 150 delegates from eighteen countries, the conference featured an ambitious line-up of parallel sessions traversing a range of media that included advertising, radio, television, cinema, magazines, internet and corporate communications. In fact, each of these parallel sessions such as 'The Press in Asia', 'Advertising in Asia' and 'Television in Asia' could have been the focus of an entire conference. Some of the thematic strands across the sessions were the contested representations of racial, religious, ethnic and indigenous minority identities in trans/national discourses within Asia, the tensions between the local and the global, the media in Indonesia and Malaysia (having two sessions each) and the changing media representations of Australia(ns) in Asia and of Asia(ns) in Australia.

After the ceremonial opening by the guest of honour, the Deputy Chief Minister of Sarawak, and the presentation of souvenirs, the day began with a keynote plenary session by Graeme Turner (University of Queensland, Australia), whose topical paper entitled "Borders of the Cosmopolitan Nation: Representations of Muslim-Australians in the Australian Media" set the tone for the conference. Addressing the gradual political and media demonisation of Muslims post-9/11, he initially focused on one particular instance when the Australian media, through the evening current affairs programme Today Tonight, incited reaction against them, thereafter exploring the possible ways for Muslim-Australians to articulate a sense of belonging to the Australian nation-state.

The first day's parallel sessions were typically broad-based and heterogeneous: 'Revisiting the Media-Imperialism Debate', 'Media and Gender', 'Corporate Communication', 'Popular Media', 'Ethnic and Indigenous Identities'. 'Asia & Asian Identities outside Asia' was one such diverse session that began with an engaging analysis of the media portrayal of the new, economically successful Chinese immigrants in Hungary by Pal Nyiri (Macquarie University, Australia). This was followed by Md. Abdur Razzaque Khan's (University of Chittagong, Bangladesh) study of the "process of othering" of Canadian Muslims, post 9/11, by three

major Canadian newspapers which tied in rather neatly with the keynote address by Turner. The penultimate paper by Jo Maree Coghlan (University of Wollongong, Australia) offered a fascinating comparative analysis of the print media framing of the Australian political figure Pauline Hanson and the former Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri that drew on their nations' masculinized past. Per Stahlberg's (Stockholm University, Sweden) "Brand India" was the final paper appraising the new representation of India as an emerging economic super power in European news and Indian mass media.

After the afternoon's plenary panel on 'Multi-Cultural Broadcasting: Models for Asian National Identity' delegates dispersed for sessions exemplifying the diversity of the participants, academic institutions and the complexity of issues informing contemporary Asian media. These included Nik Norma Nik Hasan's (University of Canterbury, New Zealand) paper on "Framing Environmental News in the Malaysian and New Zealand Press", Birgit Brauchler's (University of Munich, Germany) research on the role of the internet in the Moluccan conflict (1999-2002) between Christians and Muslims in Eastern Indonesia, Bronwen Robertson's (University of Melbourne, Australia) lively presentation on the role of new media in affirming a collective identity between Iran and exilic Iranian communities through Persian pop music and Jane M. Ferguson's (Cornell University, USA) fieldwork amongst the ethnic nationality of the Shan villagers in the Thai-Burma borderlands and the ideological implications and interpretations of popular media consumption by them.

The first day ended on a lively note with an interactive forum led by political commentator and talk show host Wimar Witoelar, focusing on the role of the media in reporting and shaping perceptions of Australia in Asia that generated heated debates and exchanges between delegates.

The following day began with another packed schedule of parallel sessions that addressed 'Racial and Religious Identities', 'Health and the Media', 'Advertising in Asia', 'Television in Asia', 'Region and Culture', 'Media and Sexuality', 'Internet, Culture, Race and Identity', 'Theorizing Media/Media and National Identity', 'Media Law and Regulation', 'Magazines in Asia', 'Radio and Community' and 'Education and the Media'. This was preceded by keynote speaker Indrajit Banerjee, the current Secretary-General of the Asian Media Information and Communication Centre (AMIC), Asia's premier media research, publication and documentation centre whose paper entitled "Media and Cultural Identity in Asia: Changing Landscapes and Dynamics" argued that the Asian media industry was witnessing a renaissance with the recent emergence of media content production centres and the powerful growth of local content industries in Korea, Japan, China and India. It was followed by the second keynote speaker Ahmad Murad Merican's (Universiti Teknologi Mara, Malaysia) study tracing the continuity and transformation of Malay journalistic media.

Subjects covered in the morning's sessions ranged from the cultural consumption of celebrities in advertising literature (Vincent Tao-Hsun Chang, National Chengchi University, Taiwan, Republic of China) to the "Media Coverage of HIV in Asia" (Trevor Cullen, Edith Cowan University, Australia) and the cultural impact of viewing *Sex and the City* on Taiwanese women (Ya-chien Huang, Loughborough University, UK).

'Indian Cinema/Media in India' was the focus of a panel featuring four distinct papers: Adrian M Athique's (University of Wollongong, Australia) "Transnational Audiences for Indian Films", this author's "the Cultural Politics of Matrimonial Representations in Popular Indian Media", Balakrishnan Muniapan, Anbalagan Krishnan (Curtin University of Technology),

Arivalan Ramaiyah's (Wawasan Open University, Malaysia) "The Role of Tamil Film Song for the Development of Human Values" and Beena Giridharan's (Curtin University of Technology) "Critical Language Styles in Indian Media". Athique's research offered an insight into the consumption of Indian films in Sydney and how cultural practices surrounding these films were "structured both by the social and cultural topography of the city itself and by a complex series of transnational exchanges". A flamboyant joint presentation of the content analyses of a popular 60's Tamil song was followed by Giridharan's paper on the linguistic practices adopted by vernacular and English newspapers.

Of particular interest was the afternoon's session on 'Media and Sexuality', which featured two excellent papers by Sun Jung (Melbourne University, Australia) and Nikhila H. (Pondicherry University, India). Entitled "Consuming Korean male star sexuality in Asia: Who is that little Boy in a Man's Body?" Jung's paper argued that the newly created hybrid sexuality of Korean male stars as embodied by Bae Yong-joon was transcultural and encouraged foreign consumption, particularly by middle aged Japanese women. The broadcast of the contentious 1996 Miss World Beauty pageant in Bangalore formed the basis of Nikhila H's succinct presentation. Revisiting the debates that raged during the run-up to this contest, she examined how these controversies revolved around what constituted Indian womanhood as femininity was configured in terms of 'Indian culture' whilst the contest/western culture was seen as a threat.

Invariably on completion of presentations, they inspired a convivial and engaged dialogue that continued well into the tea breaks in the foyer of the Harry Perkins lecture theatre. Over the two days delegates indulged in the generous hospitality and multicultural cuisine of the Malaysians under the aegis of the Sarawak Tourism Board, co-sponsors of the conference. The welcome reception at the scenic poolside of the Marriott hotel and the cultural programme and dinner at the Sarawak Grand Ballroom provided the ideal ambience for interaction with participants, as did the daily bus ride to and from the campus.

Looking ahead, the organisers could consider narrowing the focus of the conference to give greater depth to fewer media, being more selective in accepting abstracts to reduce the uneven quality of papers, extending the conference by another day and thereby allowing more time for each paper, as fifteen minutes seemed inadequate and scheduling fewer papers per session. One of the many stand-out aspects of this conference was the opportunity to have the conference proceedings on a CD-ROM and web-based versions of all the papers on the conference website (address below).

Finally, it should be said that having travelled half way round the world for a two-day conference this author returned with the feeling of having been involved in a uniquely enriching academic and cultural experience. MARG, its director Dr. Krishna Sen and particularly the conference convenors Dr. Denise Woods and Dr. Thomas Jayaprakash Yesudhasan deserve the highest praise for organising a meticulously planned, well co-ordinated and vibrant inaugural conference.

For further references, visit the Media and Identity in Asia Conference website
http://mediaandidentity.curtin.edu.my/

National Postgraduate Conference Creative Arts, Film and Media

National Postgraduate Conference Creative Arts, Film and Media, University of Portsmouth 26 - 27th November 2005

A report by Julia Peck, University of Wales, Newport

The National Postgraduate Conference, organized by the University of Portsmouth, was a unique opportunity for different research strands within media and the arts to gather and discuss their research. Hosted over two days with three concurrent strands, there were many diverse areas. Interestingly, film and television had the most significant presence, with the other arts being sparsely represented. This gave the proceedings some difficult organizational and conceptual difficulties; the chairs of each session sometimes struggled to locate convergences and strategic differences between papers primarily because they had little in common with each other. It also meant that locating common areas of interest for some participants was fraught. However, the conference's aims were broad, and instead of prioritizing academic commonality, the training and grooming of students for a potential future career in the University sector was addressed. The majority of student interaction focused on the presentation of papers and networking across universities and disciplines, and despite vastly different subject areas these were by far the most exciting sessions of the conference.

Prof. Philip Esler, Chief Executive Officer of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), delivered the opening plenary speech. The content of his talk focused on the relatively recent availability for funding research in the arts. What became clear under Prof. Esler's presentation was that the present government is motivated to fund the arts because it is a key area of current economic growth in the United Kingdom. However, there are priorities that are expressed as part of this growth. For example, cross-council collaboration will not only be expected but actively promoted with research days bringing the sciences into the arts. This was likened to Keats musing on science in his poetry, but whether Keats was strategically positioning himself to a funding council was not discussed.

Perhaps more important was the definition provided as to what constitutes research; an anxious area indeed as a divide has arisen between practitioners and practice-led researchers. For the AHRC, research for the arts include addressing questions or problems, an examination of why these questions/problems are important and the methods with which they might be addressed. Esler also stressed that there would be seminars on developing practice-led research, which may assist with practitioners bridging the gap between practice and research. What remains striking, at this distance from the conference, was the disparity between the papers delivered by postgraduate students and the tone set for the conference by Esler; the stresses between maintaining academic ideals and providing a facility for the government to feed creatively into science and industry feels at odds with a discussion of Benjamin and Deleuze, unless of course a broader curriculum is reinstated which facilitates critical interaction with media dissemination.

The first session, chaired by Laurie Ede, saw Kevin Wisniewski (Cecil Community College) questioning the emergence and development of the *Dangerous (M)other* and Craig Batty (Bath Spa University) exploring the role of minor characters in screenplays. They were accompanied by Peri Bradley's horrifying account of *The Swan* (a reality TV programme on the digital channel 'Living TV') where women undergo a drastic physical intervention as part of a beautifying process. However, it was perhaps disappointing that two papers apparently concentrating on issues of femininity were not accompanied by a third paper also touching on such a theme, especially as this would have generated discussion that crossed papers and media; something that was generally missing from this conference. However this did not happen, even though papers such as Nandana Bose's, if it had been included in this session, (see below) would have facilitated this discussion.

Wisniewski's paper primarily examines how feminine stereotypes have evolved from Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) to Ridley-Scott's *Alien* (1979). The later *Alien* films, Wisniewski argues, offer a development of the stereotypes around the feminine subject, although he notes they are not able to fully escape their "culturally inscribed bodies". Arguing that Ripley (the lead character in *Alien*) should be seen as hybrid, Wisniewski misses the potential reading that the woman, although still physically feminine, is becoming increasingly masculine. Although Wisniewski's paper was situated within feminist discourses, it would be interesting to see further development around Irigaray's musings on femininity and feminism; elsewhere she has argued that the woman does not have to become a man or subjected to masculine position within language, in order to achieve autonomy (Irigaray, 1993: 29-36). It is a potential inference from Wisniewski's paper that women will remain stereotyped physically while becoming more masculine, and it would perhaps be more idealistic to see a separate model developing for "future feminities".

Batty's paper, as relevant for television as for film, examined the ways in which minor characters in screenplays can have significant impact on narrative or plot development. Batty positions his analysis within the existing theoretical work on the minor character and expands upon it considerably to propose that the minor character can "instigate, illuminate, imitate and innovate" within the screenplay. This is convincingly argued through a series of case studies; Batty's paper could have a positive addition to make to the teaching of constructing characters within a screenplay.

The afternoon, with Sue Harper in the Chair, saw Serena Formica (University of Nottingham), discussing Peter Weir's *Witness* (1985) alongside two other papers on film. For delegates with an interest in film, this was a particularly rewarding session, with an opportunity to muse on the different mechanisms for reading across and through film. Formica's paper, which links various Dutch paintings to the "visual look" of Peter Weir's film *Witness*, argues firstly that Weir as director is not solely responsible for the visual styling of the film and that it is rather the product of a team collaboration with the cinematographer, camera operator, art director, lighting director and the costumier. Formica's second argument is that there is visual continuity between Dutch paintings exhibited in an Exhibition *Dutch Masters*, which was in Philadelphia at the same time the film was being shot, and the visual style of the film itself. This is established through lighting, costume and visual construction of the scene (which includes camera position and composition).

Formica's approach to film was different to Pietri Kaapa's (University of East Anglia) paper, presented in the same panel. The paper concentrated as much on the symbolism of the film as the visual and practical construction of the scenes. Kaapa's intention was to complicate the

dominant Finnish interpretation of Kaurismaki's films being 'national' and instead examines the films for global influence and changing national identity. Kaurismaki's films were successfully positioned within the unsettled economic and political landscape of Finland in the 1980s and 1990s which saw significant economic and cultural change resulting in a destabilized and mutable national consciousness.

Simon Lovat's paper examined the notion of 'suture' and how this could be applied to *The Blair Witch Project* (1999). This paper examined the ways in which the film is constructed to deny epistemological suture; that is, the status of the film as a coherent documentary film and the deliberate attempt of the film *not* to stitch the viewer into the narrative (the viewer is not able to experience visual plenitude between shot and reverse shot). Lovat's argument, however, is based on an acknowledgement that the Blair Witch is a *faux* documentary, something which is contested by some internet sites. The 'horror' of the film, in Lovat's terms, comes through the denial of knowledge, outcome and resolution within the film. However, this reading, it seems will be contested by those who want to believe and maintain that the Blair Witch existed.

Although the three papers above did form an exciting concentration on film, the subsequent question and answer session was disappointing. It is likely that the more in-depth discussions were held in coffee and lunch breaks. As a training event, it would have been appropriate to see a stringent mechanism of reply to the papers, or an alternative way which encouraged specific participation in the content of papers. However, the breadth of this conference prevented such measures being established.

The late afternoon session was focused on training. Its aims were to discuss "research and research-through-practice in creative arts, film and media" was commenced. One session focused on narrative and telling the story of the PhD, the other was ostensibly set up to discuss "historical method and performativity". Delegates who attended the first section returned with positive feedback on the discussion and content of their session, but having attended the latter, I was at a loss to define quite what it had meant to be about. I received some good advice on how to progress from PhD candidate to lecturer, which the two chairs seemed comfortable in providing, but this came after an elaborate and confused statement from the chairs. The overall impression was that the two were not clear in their aims and intentions. The discussion, as a result, didn't really result in any particular direction being taken.

However, the most disappointing aspect of the conference was the evening session. Very few delegates stayed to participate in Nuala Gregory's (University of Auckland) session via video link to New Zealand, which was beset with technical difficulties. Unfortunately, breaks in communication raised questions about using a video link for a formally delivered paper. Indeed, reading the paper prior to the discussion would have been much more satisfactory, and then conducting the discussion through the video link appropriate. However, the content of the paper addressed important issues facing candidates in practice-led PhDs, and with that in mind, I hope Gregory's findings will feed into the AHRC's examinations of methodology, despite the geographical distance. Gregory argued for methodologies which account for the specific and different needs of practitioners within the creative arts.

The second day commenced with a decrease in the number of delegates, and this was unfortunate, given that the first session's papers were again of substantial interest to film candidates. Commencing with Emma Dyson's (University of Portsmouth) paper on Zombies,

then Nandana Bose's (University of Nottingham) work on censorship in Hindi cinema and then thirdly with Sarah Godfrey's examination of the representation of fathers in nineties British cinema. There was an exciting overlap in the feminist overtones in Bose's and Godfrey's papers and these delegates clearly had much dialogue about their respective work. Dyson's paper on zombies was interesting for its examination of a cultural studies model for the study of film: its content, intent and audience participation (especially pertinent for this genre of film which has a significant fan base). The relevance and value of studying popular culture was repeatedly questioned during the conference, and it is interesting to see that although cultural studies has made its mark within the university system, it has not dislodged those seeking to maintain a hierarchy in the arts. In the meantime, Dyson's paper examined the critique of society and loss of identity within mass consumerism evident in Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* (1978). It was fascinating to see that examinations of identity were possible within this genre.

Bose's work on Hindi cinema examined the controversial censorship as acted out by the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), which restricts or permits the circulation of all Hindi film. The rise of the far right political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has ensured the CBFC adopt a protective and restricting policy on the representation of women and their sexual agency. It is now claimed by the BJP and CBFC that any public reference to sex and sexuality in relation to a woman within a public sphere is denigrating to women and potentially disturbs the social equilibrium. As well as tracing actual laws and examples of censorship, Bose locates examples of where censorship has cut or changed the way women are represented, including *Khalnayak* (1993), where there was a blurring between the "bad vamp" and "good heroine" resulting in the more provocative scenes being replaced. Another example includes withholding documentary information on the mistreatment of women, as well as denying their sexual agency. Bose then demonstrates how censorship relates to other types of film making such as the documentary *War and Peace* (2002), which examined the rise of political extremism.

This was followed by Sarah Godfrey's examination of fatherhood in films such as *The Full Monty* (1997) and *Brassed Off* (1996) where she traced the changing roles for men associated with unemployment and the expectations surrounding the "new" man. In examining the depictions of masculinity in these troubled scenarios, Godfrey argues that masculinity is troubled but not undermined. Godfrey also positioned this stance in relation to feminism and carefully situated troubled masculinity against the demise of the masculine hero.

The later morning session included papers by Andrew Wilford (University College Chichester), Emanuele D'Onofrio (University of Manchester) and Ronnie Close (University of Wales, Newport). D'Onofrio's paper used Walter Benjamin to examine the Italian political cinema, drawing literal and metaphorical parallels between Benjamin and 1970s film (at the process and very structure of film). Ronnie Close's presentation contextualized his practice-led research into the existing parallels of martyrdom between Irish Republican and Iranian cultures. He concentrated on providing the context at the expense of fully showing and discussing his short film productions. However, it was clear that there is an unexpected cultural cross over, which even includes the Iranians taking an interest in the Republican cause and recycling its history, representations and names of Republican martyrs. The discussion at this session was also impeded by technical difficulties, making it fractured and interrupted. Although there was one final session of papers, none of these included film; Prof. Graeme Harper closed the day with a brief conclusive speech.

Overall, the most satisfying aspects of the conference were the networking opportunities and the participation in a shared academic culture through the delivery and interaction with papers. The political and economic developments surrounding the AHRC were important to hear, but were not reflected in the event itself.

Reference:

Irigaray, Luce (1993) *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*. London: Routledge

Viva Vancouver

Society for Cinema and Media Studies, 2 – 5 March, 2006, Sheraton Vancouver Wall Centre, Vancouver, British Columbia

A report by Liza Palmer, University of North Carolina Wilmington, USA

The Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS) continues to broaden its reach --and its appeal -- to film and media scholars worldwide. Building upon the success of last year's conference at the University of London, SCMS 2006 achieved a program that was rigorous yet manageable, easily enhancing what has become the pre-eminent film and media studies conference in the field. Indeed, Stephen Prince, SCMS President, noted in his welcome letter to attendees that this year's number of paper proposals topped that of even the London conference, with 845 submitted and 592 accepted (or a rejection rate of 30%). In order to accommodate this increased interest, SCMS worked hard to produce a schedule that not only satisfied demand, but also addressed some criticisms from the London conference -- namely, that there were too many concurrent panels and too much content competing for attendee attention. Subsequent 2006 program modifications included: adding more time slots, reserving a daily lunch break, extending the regular schedule until late evening, reducing the average number of panels during a time slot from seventeen (as was the case in London) to fifteen, hosting two Plenary sessions instead of the usual one (a diplomatic, more inclusive decision that at once maximized attraction and options by offering a film-centred lecture on Thursday and a media-centred lecture on Saturday), and expanding the number of film screenings (a total of sixteen slots altogether). All in all, these new additions to the proceedings demonstrated moderate and thoughtful growth, helping SCMS to remain a scholarly conference of note.

Recently, the SCMS organizers have become particularly adept at locating the conference. Year after year, they select places that have some current connection to film or media culture. Looking back, there was Atlanta, the centre of news journalism in the United States and then London, certainly a thriving nexus of all things cultural and artistic. And now there is Vancouver to add to this list of distinguished locales. Vancouver is one of the top five largest film production centres in North America, and is home to Lions Gate Studios and Vancouver Film Studios. The 2005 production list from the British Columbia Film Commission is impressive, noting over 200 projects, ranging from features to television pilots that were based in the area. Recent highlights of the production schedule include: *Underworld: Evolution* (2006), *X-Men: The Last Stand* (2006), season three of *The L-Word* (2006), and season five of *Smallville* (2005). Despite this abundance of media activity in Vancouver, however, there was very little reflection of it at SCMS. No special studio tours or location visits were arranged for or promoted to conference attendees, which seems like an unfortunate, missed opportunity not only for them, but also the city and film commission.

With Vancouver, SCMS resumed the more traditional and familiar format of situating the proceedings in a conference hotel complex. Indeed, last year's experiment in London -- undoubtedly out of necessity -- with a decentralized hotel and meeting room set-up was

something of a barrier to a full and satisfying engagement with the SCMS conference. So it was a welcome return to form at Vancouver, with the location of the Sheraton Vancouver Wall Centre proving to be comfortable yet stylish, convenient to the city centre, and -- most importantly -- accommodating for panels. And with well over 200 panels this year, this was certainly an important consideration.

Asian cinema and media was a popular topic at SCMS 2006; indeed, a cursory glance at the program finds at least eight panels on some aspect of this area. One such panel, "Media Asia': Transmedia Interactions in East Asian Cinema', co-chaired by James Udden (Gettysburg College) and Jinhee Choi (Carleton University), offered some interesting perspectives on the state of Asian media production. Co-chair Choi, in her paper "(Impossible) Romance of Their Own? Korean Romantic Teen Pics and the Guiyeoni Syndrome", explored the recent phenomenon within Korean cinema of bringing serialized teen literature to the big screen, focusing on author Guiyeoni particularly. Looking at the source material for these recent films, Choi made a compelling argument for the interconnectivity of the two media -- highlighting, for example, Guiyeoni's trademark use of emoticons within her written texts and how this appeal to the audience is incorporated into the film versions. And while these teen novels are more geared toward a female readership, and capitalize on extensive merchandising (Choi displayed sample items, including a pencil case), Choi demonstrated through a selection of clips how the films were strategically composed so as to maximize impact with male viewers, often featuring intricate fight scenes like those typically found in Asian action films. Ultimately, Choi delivered a good paper on a cutting-edge topic; it is to be hoped that she pursues this thesis and develops it further, unique as it is in the literature at the moment.

Hiroshi Kitamura (College of William and Mary) delivered a fascinating account of post-war film activity in Japan in his paper, "*Eiga no tomo*, Hollywood Fandom, and Post-World War II Japan". Looking at several film magazines designed to tap into the flowering Japanese fan culture in the aftermath of the war, Kitamura noted how these publications were overwhelmingly concerned with American film product as opposed to native film productions. Thus, he suggested that they reflected -- and promoted -- the Japanese consumption of American values in the wake of defeat and occupation. Kitamura further argued that, as evidenced by his research, Hollywood entertainment and its concomitant influence were not always constructed solely by the studio heads, but also by politically minded leaders -- both American and Japanese -- who saw Hollywood films as a way to facilitate the post-war reconstruction of Japan.

Rounding out this panel was co-chair James Udden's paper, "Brink of Extinction: Can Taiwanese Television Save the Local Film Industry?" Udden painted a bleak picture of the current state of Taiwanese film production. He revealed that the box office for Taiwanese films within Taiwan is steadily declining for a number of reasons. These include: (1) a film market saturated with Hollywood products; (2) American-owned multiplexes that seek to undercut local cinemas; (3) and -- most intriguingly -- the lack of a formal film program in Taiwan to educate, train, and support budding filmmakers. Udden saw a glimmer of hope, however, in the form of Taiwanese television, which serves as an outlet for low-budget Taiwanese film projects. But whether television can remedy the situation single-handedly remains to be seen.

A panel in a similar vein was 'Asian Cinema and Film Theory', chaired by Priya Jaikumar (University of Southern California). Jaikumar and panelist Yuriko Furuhata (Brown

University) are to be commended for following through with their presentations despite the unfortunate absence of two of their colleagues: Donald LaCoss (University of Wisconsin, LaCrosse) due to illness and Ben Singer (University of Wisconsin, Madison), who opted not to present when faced with technical difficulties. Furuhata's paper "The Problematic of 'Actuality' in Japanese Film Discourses of the 1950s and 1960s" -- in particular -- stood out for its consideration of film theory and its relevance to Japan. She predicated her argument on the idea that theory is not native to Japan, but is rather a product of the West. This has interesting ramifications for the Japanese documentary mode, as Furuhata's paper revealed.

Jean Ma (Bard College) chaired an absorbing panel entitled, 'Rethinking Shock Value: Contemporary Representations of Sexuality'. Susan Ericsson (Northwestern University), in her paper "Libidinal Disillusionment: Youth Sexuality in U.S. Cinema", examined several film texts -- both documentary and narrative, in form -- that were remarkable for their frank depictions of adolescent sexuality, including: *What a Girl Wants* (2000), *Middle School Confessions* (2002), and *Kids* (1995). Invoking Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*, she interrogated the idea of children -- predominantly female -- revealing their sexual experiences on camera as a kind of confessional, and thus a source and display of power. Ericsson, in her concluding thoughts, questioned the fact that: (1) many of the films offered no contemplation of youthful desire and, indeed, did not respect the subjects enough as agents acting on their own desires; and (2) males were very often left out of the discourse entirely. As this paper was the result of a larger work -- Ericsson's dissertation -- it is to be expected that she will produce more scholarly output in this area; it is an engaging topic, to be sure.

Chair Ma, in her paper "Discordant Desires: *The Piano Teacher*", supplied a cogent analysis of the challenging yet transcendent 2001 Michael Haneke film. She noted with interest the juxtaposition of the classical music soundtrack with scenes of sexual perversity. Drawing upon Deleuze, she also deftly investigated the relationship and the resulting power dynamics between a composer and a performer and how that is replicated on-screen in the character of Erika (Isabelle Huppert), delineating in writing her sexual demands, which are then enacted by Walter (Benoît Magimel). All in all, a compelling contribution from Ma.

The final panelist, Jonathan M. Hall (University of California Irvine), in his paper "Birth of the Precocious Adult", turned his attention to the Jonathan Glazer film *Birth* (2004) and the controversy surrounding it upon its release. The scene which caused this critical backlash involved Nicole Kidman (Anna) sharing a bath with Cameron Bright (Sean), believing that he is her reincarnated husband, intent on preventing her impending remarriage to Danny Huston (Joseph). Using film clips and a definition of pedophilia from the American Psychological Association, Hall concluded that the furor was not entirely justified. Respondent Tim Palmer (University of North Carolina Wilmington) provided the necessary overarching context for the three papers, ably addressing each of them as well as the major arguments and themes surrounding sex and cinema. He noted that the current trend -- particularly within European cinema -- is a knowingly frank depiction of sexual acts as a vehicle for garnering critical attention and reception. The resulting dialogue inspired by the four panelists was, not unexpectedly given the contentious nature of the topic, thoughtful and engaging. The audience participation and feedback suggested that this is a complex area of cinema that will continue to challenge, captivate -- and bewilder -- film viewers for a long time to come.

A final panel of merit among many this year was "Varda + Demy", sponsored by the French Francophone Special Interest Group and chaired by Kelley Conway (University of Wisconsin, Madison). Claudia Gorbman (University of Washington, Tacoma), in her paper

"Place Settings", explored Varda's notable use of place within her films. Gorbman suggested that Varda's "stories […] emerge out of their settings", arguing that place "compensates for the fictions" within Varda's texts. In other words, what Varda lacks in narrative sophistication she more than compensates for with her evocation and sculpting of recognizable locales in France. While a worthy topic, Gorbman was slightly distracted from her thesis by some travel films that were contemporary with *La Pointe-courte* (1956) and *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1961). These travelogues were certainly interesting; but given the short window of presentation time and the ample material supplied by Varda's own films, Gorbman's deployment of the secondary texts was misguided.

Richard Neupert (University of Georgia) offered an excellent and clearly well-researched paper entitled "Color and Individual Style: *Umbrellas of Cherbourg v. Le Bonheur*". It is a rare SCMS paper that accomplishes exactly what it proposes to do in the time allowed -- and Neupert did just this. He was particularly interested in comparing Demy's and Varda's shot compositions and staging options, given the fact that they shared the same house and crew on these films. Drawing upon extensive critical and shot-by-shot analysis of *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* (1964), Neupert noted that Demy resists shot reverse-shot compositions, choosing instead to devise strategies to escape conventional set-ups for conversations, like using camera tilts and mirrors. Alternatively, *Le Bonheur* (1965), according to Neupert, utilizes long takes and tracking shots, in addition to disorienting montages and jump cuts. Varda, he argued, relies on shot reverse shot simply to convey narrative information. And where color, for Demy, "reinforces discontinuity", color, for Varda, is associational, working to emphasize connections between characters (i.e. François' [Jean-Claude Drouot] second wife, Émilie [Marie-France Boyer], wearing the colors favored by Therese [Claire Drouot], his first wife) and narrative concurrences. Neupert's paper was a fascinating one; hopefully, it will be realized more fully in a future article or book.

The third panelist, Rodney Hill (Georgia Tech/University of Kansas), argued that New Wave and "tradition of quality" styles converge in *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* and *Les Demoiselles de Rochefort* (1967). "Reconciling the French New Wave and the Tradition of Quality: The Musicals of Jacques Demy" related an interesting thesis, but more could have been offered in the way of evidence, particularly where in-depth analysis of clips was concerned. The final paper, "Cleo at the Ciné-Club", from chair Conway ended the panel on a strong note. Utilizing archival research and personal interviews with Varda, Conway gave an intriguing account of ciné-clubs in early 1960s France and how Varda used them strategically to preview *Cléo de 5 à 7*. Conway, offering a brief overview of the ciné-club scene, described the role of animateurs, who served as discussion leaders after the screenings; interestingly enough, this is how André Bazin got his start. She then shifted focus onto *Cléo de 5 à 7* and the questionnaires that were distributed to ciné-club participants in 1961. Two thousand people took these forms home and submitted them to the journal *Arts* within an eight-day period; eighty six of them remain today in Varda's papers. *Arts* reported, as a result of these questionnaires, that 97% of the attendees liked the film. Such research highlights that even smaller productions, like Varda's, solicited and utilized formal, institutionalized feedback systems and further underscores how little we still know about a relatively recent period in cinema history. Conway finished her paper and an impressive panel with a call for further research in the area of ciné-clubs, so vital were they to twentieth-century film culture in France.

Thus concludes another successful year at SCMS. It would seem that the organization is especially motivated to continue to expand the program and, in turn, opportunities for film

and media scholars -- but not at the expense of attendees and their experiences. The past three SCMS conferences have demonstrated this mission admirably; SCMS is certainly on the right track for manageable and targeted growth. Future enhancements would certainly be welcomed, however, like a free Internet café for registered attendees and meeting rooms automatically equipped with computer technology. It will be interesting to see what is next in store for the SCMS conference in 2007, this time located in Chicago, Illinois. Bearing this in mind, the first deadline is fast approaching: July 15, 2006 is the last day to post calls for proposals (pre-constituted panels and workshops) to the SCMS Forum Page. For more information about this and future deadlines, please visit the SCMS website: www.cmstudies.org.