Cinematicity 1895: Before and After

Cinematicity 1895: Before and After, The University of Essex, 24-25 March, 2006

A report by Paul Elliott, University of Essex, UK

The University of Essex Cinematicity conference was presented jointly by the Centre for Film Studies at Essex and the British Comparative Literature Association and sought to bring together some of the world's leading commentators on early cinema and cinematic prehistory. The conference intended to present a range of different papers that would explore the meaning and influence of early and pre-cinema, in both technological and cultural terms, as well as offer a forum for what this might mean for the wider aspects of twentieth century cultural life. Topics to be discussed, amongst others, included: pre-cinematic devices and toys, literary anticipations of the cinema in writers such as Dickens and H.G. Wells, spectators in the pre-cinematic era, filmic prose and poetry, and early cinema and literary modernity.

The conference was started by one of three keynote papers given by Professor Ian Christie of Birkbeck College, London. Professor Christie's paper was entitled 'The Wonder of the Age etc: Taking Intermediate Technologies Seriously' and provided a powerful set of ideas with which to start proceedings. Professor Christie outlined a set of methodological considerations and mechanisms that could offer an alternative to the traditional trap of teleology in film history (a trap that sees technology as unerringly progressive, leading to some form of pre-determined end point). By 'taking intermediate technologies seriously' (intermediate technologies in this case consisting of mechanised visual toys such as the zoetrope and the filoscope) film historians can, the paper asserted, avoid the trap of historical, teleological determinism and instead examine how technology both shapes and is shaped by the cultural episteme.

The first two sessions of Day One were entitled 'Procinematic Ways of Seeing' and 'Cinema and Other Arts I'. The latter group consisted of papers given by Miriam Hess (Princeton), Nico Baumbach (Duke) and Paul St. George (London Metropolitan). All of these papers dealt with cinematicity and the visual arts and based their expositions on a wide range of texts: from early Lumière photographs to the processes involved in animated images. All three papers developed the theme that cinematic thinking was inherent in the art and thought of the nineteenth century and that progress in scientific and technological notions of vision enabled the kind of thinking that would eventually lead to cinema as we know it today. Nico Baumbach's paper, especially, stressed the point that such scientific representation in art (art that would eventually be influenced by the experiments of Muybridge) was resisted as being unaesthetic and unappealing to a public more used to accepted (although scientifically incorrect) representations.

The afternoon sessions consisted of two sets of papers dealing with 'Industries and Institutions' and 'Cinematic Subjects'; the latter featuring papers by Andrew Shail (Oxford), Keith Williams (Dundee) and Paul Elliott (Essex). This panel attempted to detail the change in literary and psycho-social conventions that occurred towards the end of the nineteenth

century. Andrew Shail and Keith Williams both delivered well-received papers on the work of H.G. Wells and the extent that he anticipated and was influenced by cinematic thinking. Despite never writing specifically on early cinema, Wells did show remarkable insight into the fledgling technology, especially in his short stories that feature many tropes and images of time travelling, spatial disjointedness and psychical transformation. Both papers traced notions of early cinema within Wells' writing and succeeded in contextualising the burgeoning nineteenth century interest in popular scientific discourse. Paul Elliott's paper sought to place this within the wider context of the cinematic subject, arguing that it was at precisely this time that the discourses of vision and subjectivity were combined and that this leads to what we now know as the cinematic spectator.

Day One of the conference ended with a screening and announcements.

The second day of the conference began with two panels consisting of papers on 'Precinematic Arts' and 'Literary Cinematics / Cinematic Literatures'. The second of these panels offered papers on 'Victorinoir: Late Victorian Fatal (e) Progeny' by Julie Grossman (LeMoyne), 'Style and the Silent Screenwriter: The Rediscovered Scripts of Eliot Stannard' by Ian M. Macdonald (Leeds) and 'The Variety Format of D.H. Lawrence's Lost Girl' by Christina Maria Neckles (Vanderbilt). Each of these papers offered a perspective of the growing place of cinema in twentieth century cultural life. Julie Grossman's paper posited a connection between the female figures in novels such as Dickens' *Great Expectations* and the image of the femme fatale in films such as *The Big Sleep* and *The Maltese Falcon*; asserting that each represented a manifestation of underlying patriarchal concerns about the changing role of women in society (female suffrage, war work etc). Christina Maria Neckles' paper dealt with the influence of variety theatre (and cinema) on the structure of D.H. Lawrence's novel *The Lost Girl* – a work that can be seen as both indicative of and a reaction to the literary modernity of the time. Her paper not only established the links between literature and the newly forming cinematic arts but also examined some of the points of resistance.

The morning session was concluded with the second of the keynote speakers: Tom Gunning and his paper called 'The City, the Beacon, the Voice: Urban Surveys from the Magic Lantern to Film Noir'. This paper was an engaging and informative examination of the links between the metropolis and the rise of cinema. Adding an extra dimension to Walter Benjamin's assertion of the increasing opening out of visual spaces in the nineteenth and early twentieth century cities, Tom Gunning's paper postulated a dialectic of that which is seen and that which is purposely hidden. In New York, for example, (as in London, Paris and many other cities in Europe) the developing sense of the making visible (that formed the basis of Benjamin's *The Arcades Project*) was complemented by the building of large sewer networks, increasing subterranean working and a rise in the use of night shifts that added an unseen element to city life. It was suggested that this could easily be seen in the reflections of New York in the Noir films of the 1940s and 50s. It was also proposed that this was reflected in the very subject matter and visual style of these same films.

The afternoon session of day two consisted of two sets of papers: 'Intermedial Approaches' and 'Cinema and Other Arts II'. The former of these two panels featured papers by Pierre Chemartin (Montreal) and Bernard Perron (Montreal), 'The Early Cases of Alternating Scenes: The Space of the Page, The Space of the Screen', Lance Rickman (Essex), 'How a Horse Ought to Go: Chronophotography and Sequential Art' and Joe Kember (Exeter) on 'Institutionalised Risk in Early Film'. The first two papers dealt with the influence of early comic strip animation on film and vice versa. Using Muybridge as a main text, Lance

Rickman asserted that developments in visual technology altered the representation of movement in all forms of comic strips produced at the turn of the century – with artists and animators incorporating knowledge of animal locomotion into their work. Pierre Chemartin and Bernard Perron's paper offered a consideration (amongst other things) of how temporality and space were co-joined in early comic strips through the use of a gutter (the space between individual frames of comic action) and how this prefigured early attempts at continuity editing in cinema.

The last of the keynote speakers, Marina Warner (Essex) presented paper 'I Promise to Raise the Dead, and I Will Raise Them: Pandemonium at the Pictures' which attempted to trace the rise of cinematic representation through image of showman Etienne Gaspard Robertson and the use of the phantasmagoria – an early prefigure of cinema and a subject upon which Marina Warner has recently written. The paper focused on attempts to present images of the afterlife by both pre-cinematic and cinematic means and established links between eighteenth and nineteenth century visual amusements and twentieth century blockbuster cinema.

The conference ended on Day Two after farewell comments.

The University of Essex's 'Cinematicity 1895: Before and After' conference sought to examine what cinema means and what exactly constitutes its history. Many of the papers asserted that cinema was not, as some think, merely a product of technological teleology but was a process of cultural discovery, one that is arguably still continuing. Many of the papers attested to film's importance in the creation of the twentieth century, noting that it not only influenced thinking (in terms of art, literature, philosophy etc) but also provided a kind of objective correlative to changes in the way in which we began to view the world – both literally and metaphorically. The conference itself was a success, thanks in a large part to the two main organisers Karin Littau (Essex) and Jeff Geiger (Essex) but also in the free exchange of ideas and thoughts between the delegates and the atmosphere of shared academic debate.

Hollywood / Babylon?

Hollywood and the Culture Wars, De Montfort University, 1 March 2007

A report by Alec Charles, University of Bedfordshire, UK

It is a truth universal acknowledged, by the literati and the glitterati, that the United States of America is, these days, fundamentally and irretrievably rent asunder by an unbridgeable ideological schism – and indeed that the entire world is similarly divided – as divided today as it once was between the superpower blocs that dominated international politics from the end of the Second World War till the fall of the Berlin Wall. It was this assumption, one common within the realms of academia and of the media alike, that was to be addressed, examined and challenged by speakers at "Hollywood and the Culture Wars".

Held at De Montfort University in Leicester on 1 March 2007, this timely and highly stimulating one-day conference focused on Hollywood's relationship with the cultural battles which are generally perceived to be raging within America, against the broader context of the cultural and military conflicts in which the United States is currently engaged on a global scale.

Conference organiser James Russell (De Montfort University) opened the event by proposing that 'the term "Culture Wars" suggests that America is a fundamentally divided nation.' He argued that the perception of a 'staunchly religious' middle America flanked by 'a pair of liberal, tolerant but also perhaps unrepresentative coastal areas' is in reality somewhat questionable. These contrasts, he said, 'while they may be crystallized in the media, are not of burning importance to most Americans.'

The first half of the conference was devoted to papers discussing how the United States views its role within the world, and how that view and role are negotiated, represented and produced by the mainstream mass media. The conference's second part concentrated upon the ways in which specific American media institutions and texts have looked inwards upon their nation itself. This was then followed by a general discussion as to the nature of the assumptions which America, academia, the creative industries and the rest of the world make about the United States.

Joseph Conrad proposed in *Heart of Darkness* that the reason why the imperialist adventurer constantly carries his own world with him is that 'to live in the midst of the incomprehensible […] is detestable.' Citing, among other examples, the representations of U.S. military conduct in Oliver Stone's *Platoon*, Stuart Price (De Montfort University) argued similarly that American service people in action overseas have chosen to customize their equipment and uniforms with such 'deviant symbolic resources' as Nazi regalia and the body parts of their vanquished enemies precisely 'in order to create a point of view or perspective that allows them to function in an extremely hostile environment.' These symbols, almost like elements of a Bakhtinian carnivalesque, reveal complex, problematic and essential structures of perception which cannot find expression within the official narrative of military-political events. The deviant, Price suggested (in his exposition upon "Deviant Symbolisation:

Symbolic Resources, Visibility and War"), is directly provoked by the official, in so far as 'the official is a very tightly controlled semiotic environment which cannot provide motivation for the armed forces to fight.' By penetrating and to some extent dissolving the 'permeable barrier' between cultural practice and political rhetoric, this deviant symbolism exposes underlying motivations and belief systems: it permits the slippage of the private into the public in ways which Freud might have called uncanny.

If, however, the deviant is disturbing and revelatory, then it might also be argued that its very status as 'otherly' posits and reinforces the sense of an acceptable norm. In his exploration of "The Benign Metanarrative of U.S. Power in Hollywood War Films", Matthew Alford (University of Bath) proposed that the majority of mainstream Hollywood productions present American foreign policy and military conduct in terms which refuse or fail to deconstruct their shared ideological foundations. Alford applied and adapted the theories of Noam Chomsky to argue that such texts 'generally provide support for U.S. power, even if they do so in liberal terms.' He suggested that Hollywood cinema has continued to represent its figures of American military authority as informed and motivated not by political or material interests, but by such moral absolutes as its own notions of freedom or democracy. He added that these films invariably offer greater sympathy and support to the victims of America's enemies than to the victims of the United States itself or of its allies. Even a movie as apparently anti-hegemonic as David Russell's *Three Kings* does not represent 'a massively radical challenge' to U.S. imperialism – indeed, as its all-American heroes 'sort out the problems of people who cannot sort out their problems themselves' (in this case, the people of Iraq), it ultimately subscribes to what Alford dubbed 'the benevolent metanarrative of U.S. power.'

My own paper ("The loss of distance: reporting from Ground Zero to Hollywood, via Iraq") proposed that this metanarrative or worldview is a global rather than an exclusively American phenomenon – although an American perspective represents the dominant element within the mix – which has transformed in recent years from a self-proclaimingly benevolent (though homogenizing) melting pot into an overtly hegemonizing crucible. The events of 11 September 2001 did not, however, as Jean Baudrillard has (uncharacteristically) appeared to suggest, represent an act of resistance which reignited a stalled historical process; they were, as Slavoj Zizek has emphasized, aspects of a 'deviantly' extreme expression of the prevalent discursive perspective. This is reflected in the cinematic spectacularity not only of 9/11 itself and of its aftermath, but also of its reportage, and of the mass-mediated actions, assertions and motivations of the protagonists on both sides of the war on terror.

Peter Krämer (University of East Anglia) opened the second half of the event not by proposing that (post)post-modern (post)history can be seen as subsumed to the perspective of the Hollywood media – but conversely by suggesting that the life, opinions and career of one particular cinematic figure could be extrapolated as a model for the relationship between Hollywood culture and post-modern American history. That figure, said Krämer, was none other than Jane Fonda.

In a presentation devoted to "A Veteran of the Culture Wars", Krämer portrayed Fonda as a figure who at once represents acute ideological divisions (critics' views range from celebrations of Fonda's embodiment of empowerment to proclamations that she should be sentenced to death for her treasonous activities during the Vietnam War) and who yet at the same time may be viewed as a 'figure of integration'. Krämer pointed out that, despite her brushes with political controversy, Fonda has remained for the majority of Americans 'an

uncontentious mainstream figure… a cultural icon… even an exemplary figure.' This stalwart star's enduring popularity – and the apparent irrelevance of her political positioning to this popularity – demonstrates that (as empirical studies have also shown) it is not in fact the case that the United States is split between two extremes of the political spectrum: 'what most Americans think about these matters is firmly located in the middle ground.'

Thus Krämer argued that 'the Culture War is a public debate about core values which is carried out by members of elite groups who often claim to represent those whose positions they do not in fact represent.' This conflict is an invention of the media, of academia and of political institutions: the people themselves do not display such radical polarization.

If it is therefore the task of the media to polemicize and to proselytize – on behalf of a woefully unpolarized populace – then, as Chandler Haliburton (University of Sussex) and James Russell (De Montfort University) demonstrated (in their presentations on Emilio Estevez's *Bobby* and Gabriel Range's *Death of a President*, and Andrew Adamson's *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, respectively), Anglo-American cinema's political positions can veer from 'messianic' liberalism all the way through to evangelical moralism.

In a paper entitled "Pass the Popcorn to the Left", Haliburton located a Democratic fundamentalism in *Bobby* ('subtlety evidently isn't Estevez's strongpoint'); and pointed out that, while Gabriel Range had asserted that *Death of a President* was not an exercise in liberal fantasy, 'this is true only to the extent that it is an exercise in liberal nightmare.'

With a similarly eschatological flourish, Russell revealed, behind *The Chronicles of Narnia*'s production company, Walden Media, the towering and moralizing media mogul, evangelical Republican and ill-considered erstwhile associate of British politician John Prescott, Philip Anschutz: 'Anschutz has been keen to present himself as a devout figure within the movie business... he suggests the media is corrupt and corrupting and somehow needs to be fought.'

In his consideration of "Narnia as a Site of National Struggle", Russell stressed that, for Anschutz, the decision 'to adapt C.S. Lewis's famous Christian allegory was emblematic of this agenda.' The film has posited itself as a 'selfless intervention' against an increasingly prevalent 'moral decay'. Lewis's tale comes therefore to be seen as an allegory not only of Christianity but also of the apocalyptic role of evangelical neoconservatives within an apparently divided America, and indeed of American crusaders within an apparently divided world: 'the children engage in a fraught battle for the spirit of the nation – which results in many years of benevolent rule.'

It is not inappropriate to ask whom these deceptive perceptions of stark ideological divisions serve. They serve the media (not only in so far as they may reflect the political agendas of certain powerful individuals within the industry, but also in terms of the simple fact that the representation and propagation of conflict help to sell media products); they serve politicians desperate to distinguish their positions and themselves; and they also serve to sustain and validate a predominantly liberal academic community.

It is therefore – as the conference's closing discussion crucially recognized – essential that these issues be re-envisaged within the academic perspective: that it be understood that any simplistic oppositional model which attempts to invent a moral distance, to synthesize a cultural conflict based upon a set of false ideological or perceptual distinctions, between, say,

political rhetoric and military practice, between America's victims and its enemies' victims, between liberal and conservative America, between moral crusades and moral decay – as indeed between America and its 'terrorist' adversaries – only works to reinforce these misleading, unrepresentative and brutally dangerous positions.

Thus, to assume a simplistically pro- or anti-American (or pro- or anti-Hollywood, or even pro- or anti-Bush) stance may be to adopt the very ideological structures (founded upon mistaken assumptions of polarization) which any such position is purporting to oppose. Enlightenment may have to come at the cost of the disavowal of a naïve and outmoded dialecticism – to permit a more ambivalent or pluralist perspective, to move on from Adorno and Horkheimer to Benjamin, Baudrillard and beyond.

As Peter Krämer commented during the conference's closing debate: 'America stands out as the only highly developed country in the world that is still highly religious. If you're living in a culture that firmly believes in the end of the world, you have a good grounding in telling fantastic stories.'

That is not to say that we are obliged to embrace what Krämer described as a system of 'apocalyptic religious belief'; but it is to admit that if we learn to accept, to enjoy and to begin to understand these fantastic and fantastical narratives, and to question and challenge them on their own terms, we may yet defer (or at least avoid contributing to) – though we may not eventually be able to avert – this gradually ongoing media apocalypse.

Marketing the Movies: Promotion, Advertising and Film Studies

Marketing the Movies: Promotion, Advertising and Film Studies, Humanities Research Centre, University of Warwick, 24 February 2007

A report by Catherine Wheatley, University of Southampton, UK

Introduction by Stella Bruzzi

For many audiences, the film viewing experience starts well before entering the cinema. Trailers, teasers, posters, fan magazines and critical discourse all influence our perceptions of a film, to the extent that they may even decide whether or not we see the film in the first place. In the face of a historical tendency within the academy to treat the film text as a hermetically sealed object, Warwick University's Marketing the Movies conference provided a welcome consideration of film's industrial discourse, while retaining a theoretical slant which prevented any reduction of film to 'mere' business.

A one-day event with only 12 speakers and an audience of about 50, the conference was an intimate and egalitarian affair, in which PhD students and industry experts spoke alongside academics of international standing – and to give them their due credit, all delivered excellent papers. After a warm welcome from Warwick's Head of Department of Film and Television Studies, Stella Bruzzi, the conference kicked off with a panel on reading promotional materials, which constituted an introduction of sorts of what was to follow, with Sarah Street, Vincenz Hediger and Jonathan Driskell discussing the various methodologies they have drawn upon in the course of their research projects.

Hediger, a world expert in the study of promotional materials, detailed the ways in which we can consider the cinematic trailer as a film text in and of itself, offering some strategies for analysis. Driskell and Street meanwhile offered more tightly focussed papers on key moments and figures in the history of film promotion. Together, they set the tone for a collection of papers which spanned the breadth of cinema's history, from the silent period to the digital age: while Driskell discussed the magazine publicity of French and Hollywood stars in the 1930s, and Street the role of Esther Harris in preparing trailers at the National Screen service from the 1920s right through to the 1970s, Hediger looked at what he termed the five stages of the Hollywood film trailer's historical development, from its inception to its present incarnation.

The three papers also picked up on a concern with how promotional strategies differed across nations, with Street in particular giving some intriguing insights into the way in which *A Night to Remember* was trailed in different manners for British and Stateside audiences. This concern with film promotion in transit was developed in the following panel, which, using the buzzword of the moment focussed on transnational promotional practices. Here, the focus shifted from the previous panel's Franco-British-American triangulation to an examination of

international film traffic. Dina Iordanova gave a general introduction to recent developments in the study of film festivals which was informative, if somewhat at the perimeter of the conference's concerns. Christopher Gow and Chi Yun Shin, on the other hand, presented detailed case studies of the promotion of, respectively, Iranian and Asian cinema in the UK. All three panellists raised important questions pertaining to the accessibility of these films, as well as the politics of promotion and perception in various contexts.

The notion of what we term 'art cinema' raised its head upon numerous occasions throughout the ensuing discussion (and doubtless the lunch break too), and so a panel on the promotion of alternative made for an apt follow-up. The 'alternative' here entailed recent US documentary, as discussed by Thomas Austin, and artist's film and video, examined by Julia Knight. Deputy Head of Distribution and Exhibition at the UK Film Council Stephen Perrin considered the potential of the new Digital Screen Network to alleviate what Knight saw in particular as a rather pessimistic situation, particularly within the provinces. But what emerged most strongly from the session was perhaps that 'alternative' is an extremely amorphous term, and while the DSN might offer broader distribution for films such as Fahrenheit 9/11, there is little hope to be had here for more aggressively anti-narrative film. One was left wondering how it would ever be possible to create a situation where instead of a division between Hollywood and the all-encompassing 'alternative', Hollywood becomes one in a series of alternatives, none of which is dominant.

Nonetheless, to Hollywood once more we turned in the final panel of the day, on new technologies and media marketing, coming full circle, so it seemed, as the panellists returned to the study of the trailer. Paul Grainge, Keith Johnston and Ian London offered original and somewhat unexpected perspectives on the subject however. Grainge's unique take on cinematic branding was a consideration of how this most visual of mediums is used to sell sound, taking the example of Dolby's cinematic audio trailers. Johnston and London subsequently looked beyond the theatre towards home and mobile technologies. London discussed the use of digital information-clearinghouses to turn potential audiences into global communities, while Johnston's case study of how recent 'episodes' in the Star Wars franchise were sold to its audiences took in not only the film's online presence, but its extension to phones and MP3 players too. If Hediger had discussed the trailer in its classical stages, these three speakers accounted for more recent developments – and indeed at future ones, as Johnston and London speculated on how new forms of technology would continue to serve film as a vehicle for publicity in coming years.

That the conference ended on this forward-looking note was typical of a programme that had clearly been well considered and carefully constructed. Each session segued into the next fluidly, so that rather than a series of discrete panels the event had the feel of being one continuous workshop, albeit with plenty of breaks for coffee. Key themes raised themselves in various permutations throughout the day, with one particular, but not overwhelming, concern apparently being the need to develop marketing strategies for non-Hollywood product that would allow them to thrive in the global marketplace (although if there was one complaint I might level the conference, it would be to do with its sweeping bias towards Western markets). There are precedents for this, as Chi-Yun Shin's paper highlighted, but Tartan's Asia Extreme collection seems currently to be the exception that proves the rule. Whether the digital technologies that are serving Hollywood so well at the moment can be harnessed for the benefit of other cinemas was, however, a question left unanswered. Perhaps the overwhelming feeling of the conference, then, was a sense of

potential for this as yet underdeveloped area of research, which raises a number of intriguing, and even imperative, questions.

MeCCSA with AMPE Joint Annual Conference 2007

MeCCSA with AMPE Joint Annual Conference 2007, Coventry University, 10-12 January, 2007

A report by Frances Eames, University of Nottingham, UK

This was the first conference event from the newly merged Media, Communication and Cultural Studies Association (MeCCSA) and the Association of Media Practice Educators (AMPE). The new body recognizes the role of practice in teaching and research in media, communications and cultural studies, whether in arts, humanities or social sciences departments.

As the leading conference in media and cultural studies field, the breadth of papers at MeCCSA / AMPE did not disappoint. Over three days 127 papers were presented across 27 panels by some of the leading scholars in the field, together with a healthy representation of emerging postgraduate researchers. The relevance of our discipline was highlighted; several papers responded directly to 'media events' such as Hurricane Katrina, and the political importance of media research was emphasised with work on News 24, and jihadist media; several papers engaged with the contemporary issues of pedagogy and the academy's relationship with public bodies and media organisations, and other panels dealt with the future of television in the UK: all pertinent and valuable areas of study. As a consequence of the huge amount of papers and panels this conference report can only hope to provide a representation of the academic work being undertaken and cannot unfortunately comment on every paper, but only discuss a few papers in detail.

The strength of the MeCCSA/AMPE conference lay in its emphasis not only on research but also on professional practice and development with visiting speakers from the BFI, Newsfilm Online, BBC News, ESRC and the AHRC. Advice for new academics was a welcome feature with a series of 'All you wanted to know' seminars, including, for example, 'All you ever wanted to know about - getting published', which worked to make a large conference more accessible and welcome to first-time participants. Practical guidance was given in workshops such as 'All you ever wanted to know about – working together: the Academy and Creative Industries' and 'Working with Sound'.

The conference began with an electrifying speech on 'The War on Terror' by the renowned scholar, Cees Hamelink, University of Amsterdam. Hamelink talked about the media production of the 'Terror' message, focusing on the mental mapping of 'the victim', the media and political cliché of the 'clash of 'ideologies' between the East and West and its dependence upon socio-political positioning. He also talked about the use and abuse of information surrounding 9/11. Hamelink ended with an impassioned plea for media lecturers and practitioners to focus upon the education of young people to enable them to negotiate the complex media landscape.

Parallel sessions on the first day (beginning in earnest in the afternoon) included 'The Active Audience, PR and Branding Strategies', 'Media Policy, Media and Society', and 'News Frames'. Such a broad spectrum of interesting papers was maintained across this session and the 'Media Policy' panel (on which this author presented), seeming to appear as the ugly sister of the panels, in fact provoked lively discussions on the implications of policy. The thematic concerns of each of the papers on this panel addressed the pragmatic links between policy and practice, focusing on regional film and regional television news, funding bodies, textual and political implications, and the nature of 'the region'. Paul Smith, De Montfort University, Leicester, argued that contemporary debate over the future of public service broadcasting, and the BBC in particular, is best understood in the context of interrelated technological, ideological and party political pressures for change. Jack Newsinger, University of Nottingham, analysed the structure and organisation of film production in the region, as well as some of the films produced, to address this debate in terms of the wider trajectory of regional film policy and practice that has been characterised by a retreat from progressive politics and questions of social change. Paul Long, University of Central England, scrutinised the meanings in the regional of this contemporary industriousness, asking, to what extent, if any, is the policy and activity in regional film about the identities and cultural meanings of the local? What is the relationship between the cultural benefits of regional film production and the region as presented *in* and *by* the films there produced? Paul addressed the interface of national and regional expectations through a case study of film production at SWM and in, around and about Birmingham.

Day two; the morning session included panels on 'Contemporary Social Debates', 'Transnational Mediations: Media Practice as Social Commentary', 'Higher Education and Creative Industries Development', 'Camcorder Cultures: Media Technologies and Everyday Creativity', 'Women, Ageing and Media', 'Contesting News Narratives', 'Film, History and Society', 'Audiences for TV and Film', 'Practical Media Pedagogy', and 'Framing Gender'.

Of these, the 'Contemporary Social Debates' panel saw some original research as Stephen Cushion and Justin Lewis, Cardiff University, discussed 'The 'Foxification' of 24 hour news channels in Britain. Their paper focused upon an analysis of market driven and publicly funded news coverage and developed the first in-depth, comparative analysis of 24 hour news channels carried out in Britain (Lewis, Cushion and Thomas 2005). It examined the content of the two main UK rolling news channels; *BBC News 24* and *Sky News*, and focused upon the kinds of stories the channels cover, the range of reporters and sources used, the style of reporting and the role of 'breaking news'. Developing their previous research, Lewis and Cushion investigated the differences between public service and commercially driven 24 hour news content. The paper was based on a new data set and compared it to their 2004 study, and argued that *News 24* – the only public service provider of 24 hour news in the UK – provided a different kind of news service compared to *Sky News*. The nature of this coverage, they argued, is different to Sky's commercial news operation: the news agenda, for instance, is more 'broadsheet', tackling issues international in scope. In addition, the nature of 'breaking news', they argued, is markedly different on the public service channel, aiming to inform rather than entertainment as is the presentation of news which is more objective, and less sensational in style and tone. They suggested, finally, that there are signs that *Sky News* is adopting a similar approach to journalism as *Fox News*. While not suggesting Sky is anything like as partisan as *Fox News* they suggest, instead, that there is an increasing commercialization of 24 hour news in the UK, highlighting the importance of a due impartiality in broadcast journalism and by ensuring public service news provision remains.

This panel also saw a paper entitled '*Yahoo! News* and the two-photo controversy concerning the depiction of different group of victims in the aftermath of the Katrina hurricane' presented by Farida Vis, The Open University. The paper discussed the publication of two photographs of victims in New Orleans on the website *Yahoo! News*. Farida documented the debate surrounding the use of language in the captions which questioned the use of the term 'looting' referring to a black man carrying items in the water and the term 'finding' used for a white couple seemingly engaged in the same activity. The paper traced a link between issues of representation, responsibility and accountability within the different media reporting such events. Farida argued that the Yahoo! images were part of a much wider representation of the aftermath of the hurricane but that within this body of discourse the American media fell back on and readily recycled well-established myths of black criminality and chaos seen to have been unleashed onto America in undiluted form. She also highlighted the issue of responsibility as *Yahoo! News* is not a producer of news in the way that network television is, for example, and is part of a website that offers a multitude of different unrelated services.

After the break six panels ran concurrently up to the lunch interval. These included 'Contesting News Narrative', 'Film, History and Society', 'Audiences for TV and Film', 'Practical Media Pedagogy', and 'Curating the Nation's Film and Television Collections'. The audience at each panel were responsive and discussions following the papers often took interesting directions; for example following the 'Curating' panel, debate became impassioned about academic access to archives. Patrick Russell and Steve Bryant, both Senior Curators, outlined recent developments at the BFI National Archive and described their plans for a reinvigorated relationship between curation and research at the BFI, and highlighted their readiness to engage with researchers in Higher Education. They described key areas of the collection, in fields such as post-war documentary and advertising, and debated how the resulting improvements to quantity and quality of available material and associated interpretations has potential implications for the historiography of British non-fiction filmmaking. Russell and Bryant described the way that the BFI are facilitating research, for example with the Channel Four project, by offering free access to archival holdings and simultaneously improving documentation of those holdings. This panel brought up pertinent issues of access – and the difficulties from a scholarly position - that must be discussed if academia is to properly engage with moving image archives.

The afternoon session saw panels on 'Media, Culture and Identity', 'TV Histories', 'Shifting Media Pedagogies', 'Texts and Theories', and 'Representing Sexualities'. The 'Media, Culture and Identity' panel saw "Be Wary of Muslims Playing Paintball': Aesthetics and Reception of Internet Jihadist Video' by Mark Gallagher, University of Nottingham, which analysed the aesthetics of recent and widely distributed videos in order to understand how Internet users receive jihadist videos, which range in context from lengthy, direct-address speeches to grainy, handheld footage of car and truck bombings to the notorious footage of kidnapped western civilians being beheaded. Gallagher's case study was a recent video released by an American extremist group called the Young Muslims, which includes handheld footage of masked men playing paintball at a rural Alabama site, with the images overlaid with Arabic language music. The video prompted a prominent conservative blog to issue the cryptic warning: 'Be wary of Muslims playing paintball'. Through this case study, Gallagher argued that the videos' formal devices contribute to particular responses and that the videos' construction according to globally familiar narrative and formal conventions aids their legibility both within and outside radical Islamic viewership.

Other papers on the panel were equally as interesting and broad ranging. "These two are speaking Welsh on Channel 4': Welsh representations and cultural tensions on *Big*.

Brother 7 by Bethany Klein, University of Central England, and Claire Wardle, Cardiff University, analysed the discourses surrounding the representation of Welsh speakers on BB7, arguing that reality television can represent populations often rendered invisible by mainstream media, and that they reveal cultural tensions that might otherwise go unaddressed. One of the most colourful presentations came from Simon Cross, University of Lincoln, who undertook a very convincing and physical performance of 'madness' in his paper, 'Mediating Madness: Historical Images and Contemporary Stereotypes. Simon interrogated both historical and contemporary cultural representations and developed the analytical point that historic transformations in the social management of madness / mental distress has profound implications for the ways in which the mad / mentally distressed are represented across media forms and genres in different historic periods.

Extra-curricular activity on the Thursday evening came in the shape of the Networking Supper. Other groups managed to network successfully at different times and perhaps different venues. Unfortunately the pre-dinner drinks reception was delayed as the location of the food was unknown. Guests were left for a few long minutes staring ravenously at an art installation based upon the theme of cooking and eating. But, soon the food was located, the guests were moved and peace and wine were restored.

Friday was a short day, finishing with lunch and the plenary, 'The Research Councils Unplugged'. The panels across this session ended the conference with a flourish and demonstrated the rich diversity of the research being conducted. The panels included 'Specialist Genres and Formats', 'Transnational Mediations: Media Practice as Social Commentary III', 'Serendipity Versus Anticipation: Why Local Public Service Television Requires Broadcast Spectrum (Roundtable)', 'New Media and Convergence', 'Teaching Media Literacy', 'African Media and the Digital Public Sphere', and 'Women in News and Current Affairs: The BBC Experience'.

Following the conference the Coventry i-blink film festival ran from the afternoon of Friday 12 January to Sunday 14 January. It was the first international film festival to be hosted in the city. The showcase event was a screening of short films made by new filmmakers shortlisted from the i-blink scriptwriting competition. As part of the prize-giving event, Pratibha Parmar talked about her latest film, *Nina's Heavenly Delights*. The festival included screenings of shorts and feature films produced by new talent, workshops and discussions, at a variety of venues in Coventry.

In summary, the MeCCSA / AMPE conference was a great success. Combining research on sound and image, theory and practice, film, television and new media, audience reception and textual analysis, it demonstrated a high standard of contemporary research whilst remaining welcoming to new academics.