

# Cine-Excess

Cine-Excess, Apollo West End, London, 3 – 5 May, 2007

## A report by Rebekah Smith, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, UK

To celebrate the launch of the world's first MA in Cult Film and TV, the Cult Film Archive at Brunel University joined forces with the annual Sci-Fi-London Film Festival to create *Cine-Excess*, an international conference dedicated to global cult film traditions. Although conference organiser Xavier Mendik situated the event alongside the explosion of critical interest in cult film genres over the last decade, there have actually been very few academic conferences dedicated to global cult film cultures. The key academic precursor to *Cine-Excess* was the *Defining Cult Movies* Conference organised by the University of Nottingham in 2000. By inviting organiser Professor Mark Jancovich as one of the keynote speakers to *Cine-Excess*, Mr Mendik clearly signalled his event as expanding upon what the previous conference had sought to achieve. However, what made *Cine-Excess* quite distinct was the way in which it brought academics, filmmakers and distributors together, fitting the organiser's aim to create not only an academic conference but also a 'film festival for theorists and the cine-literate.'

*Cine-Excess* contained a total of 12 panels ranging from cult case studies, cult auteurs and icons, fandom, audience research and cult TV, art and videogames. There was also a strong emphasis on national traditions of cult film at the conference, with panel sessions such as 'Continental Cults' (which was heavily dominated by Italian trash cinema), 'Cruel Britannia' and 'New World Nightmares' (which included papers on Turkish and Latin-American cycles) being big draws for the delegates.

Alongside academic papers, *Cine-Excess* also featured an array of international cult film directors, such as John Landis (*An American Werewolf in London* [1981], *The Blues Brothers* [1980]), who opened the event on May 3rd 2007 and participated in a Q & A in which he pointed out the responsibilities of cult filmmakers and theorists developing new ways of understanding each other's working practices. Also present were Stuart Gordon (*Re-Animator* [1985]) and Brian Yuzna (*Society* [1989]), who discussed their back catalogue as well as their new project *House of Re-Animator* (which stars William H. Macy as a re-animated George W. Bush). Alongside these and other filmmakers present at *Cine-Excess*, delegates also had the opportunity to watch the UK premieres of three exciting new cult films; *The Last House in the Woods* (Gabriele Albanese, 2006), *Taxidermia* (Gyorgy Palfi, 2006) and *Edmond* (Stuart Gordon, 2006). The latter was introduced by the director himself and remains a personal favourite of the author.

By the end of its 3 day run, it was clear that *Cine-Excess* was a very successful event and that the potential danger of bringing academics, filmmakers and distributors together was not realised. In fact, one of the strengths of the event was that it brought cult film researchers and industry professionals from a broad range of perspectives together. It was probably more successful as an academic event than as an exchange of ideas between academics and film

makers. However, the Distributing Excess panel (chaired by Howard Martin from Hem Productions) and featuring representatives from Metrodome Entertainment (Giles Edwards), Tartan Films (Sam Dunn) and The Haapsalu Horror and Fantasy Film Festival, Estonia (Sten-Kristian Saluveer) did open up an important debate concerning the circulation of cult film at festivals as well as on DVD. This discussion initiated a potentially productive dialogue between academics and film distributors as the lively and slightly heated Q & A session afterwards demonstrated.

In terms of initiating this important dialogue between theorists and cult practitioners, it was also fascinating listening to John Landis address the academic crowd in such an interesting and often provocative fashion. All of the film-maker's contributions significantly added to the conference, as somehow their input made everyone feel closer to the world of cult film. This was a well organised, friendly conference and most importantly it was attended by the right people. Equally, the organisers had a special surprise treat in store for delegates, which was a specially filmed interview with Roger Corman, which was screened on the Friday evening of the event. Corman was unable to attend the event this year but during the interview he confirmed he will be opening *Cine-Excess 2008*, much to the joy of all the delegates.

Dr. Matt Hills' (University of Wales, Cardiff) opening plenary successfully framed the conference with some background theory, which speculated - what is it that makes a movie a cult?, what qualities should it have?, and do the audience make a movie a cult film? This proved to be an insightful discussion as he set out both the 'genre' and 'fans' definition of cult. Dr. Geoff King's (Brunel University) 'Leaving-out and putting-in: Dialectics of narrative inclusion and exclusion in the cult status of *Donnie Darko*' was one of the highlights as he offered an analysis of how a film becomes a cult film through a revealing analysis of the strategies and tactics employed by the film-makers. King discussed the director's cut of *Donnie Darko* which was released three years after the original version. Part of King's presentation focused on what the alterations made to the original film text revealed about director Richard Kelly's intentions to make his film achieve a cultish cutting edge quality.

Andy Willis' (University of Salford) paper from the Cruel Britannia panel (chaired by Julian Petley) 'The Lost World of Twemlow and Kent Watson: Mancunian exploitation film in the 1980s and 1990s' effectively engaged the audience and almost brought back a degree of nostalgia to the delegates as he and his colleague C.P. Lee had re-discovered these long forgotten films (including *Eye of Satan* and *GBH*) and discussed how they had developed a unique cult following among fans of low budget British Cinema. Willis and Lee also showed how these little gems offered an exciting opportunity to theorize the production, exhibition and consumption of British exploitation films.

Out of all the panels I attended the 'Beyond Asia Extreme: New Asian Cults' had the most significant presence, as these three papers offered fresh and original research into this particular aspect of National Cinema. Daniel Martin (University of East Anglia) examined the cult reputation of *Battle Royale* in Britain and focused on the relationship between the film's marketing and critical reception. He discussed how Tartan Films' 'Asia Extreme' brand boasts that they offer widely provocative films. Due to the extreme controversial violence in *Battle Royale*, critics were confused as to who the films intended audience were suppose to be. Martin argued that this was exactly what Tartan wanted and that through their marketing campaign they aimed to position the film as being 'alternative'. Martin then gave a close, in

depth illustrative analysis showing how *Battle Royale* is actually a specific kind of Japanese cult film and its British reputation represents a specifically English type of cult appreciation.

Martin's close attention to detail was complemented well by Steven Rawle's (York St. Johns University) presentation on Miike Takashi; 'DOA? The 'other' Miike Takashi'. Through an incredibly sharp and convincing series of textual analyses, Rawle demonstrated the 'other' Takashi who no one has paid serious attention to. Rawle opened his presentation explaining that Takashi has been situated under the 'Asia Extreme' label, (Tartan again) yet he is not the simplistic shock horror director the industry perceives him to be, and that several of his other films which Rawle focused on (including *Dead or Alive 2: The Birds* and *The Bird People in China*) are incredibly diverse and artistic and reveal themes of loneliness, alienation and childhood. This urged the audience to think of Takashi as a serious artistic international auteur as opposed to the narrow, stereotypical tag he has been unfairly allocated with.

The final paper of this strand from Annie Manion (University of Southern California) discussed the reception and cult convergence of a little known South Korean film called *Volcano High*. Manion's approach was different to Martin and Rawle's, but through a detailed and well researched history on South Korean cinema her paper introduced to the audience this irresistible little cult oddity and its equally interesting appreciative fan base. Manion also discussed how the film had been overshadowed by its American 'gangster' re-make.

Although the quality of all of the papers was outstanding and had the potential to expand the parameters of current cult film research, there was an over-representation of horror and exploitation cinema and no discussions on cult cinema classics such as *The Sound of Music*, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* and *Casablanca*. All of these films have developed massive cult followings which may have suggested that most people at the conference thought of cult as primarily being about textual / generic aspects. There was also nothing concerning cult soundtracks either. A few more plenary discussions (especially at the end) should have been factored in, so that we could have exchanged ideas and consider the state of the field. There also perhaps needed to be discussions (or even a workshop) on methodology, the key theoretical issues and new perspectives within the field.

The most productive and exciting session from the conference was the closing panel 'Cult and Cut', chaired by *Empire Magazine's* legendary Kim Newman. Prof. Martin Barker (University of Wales, Aberystwyth) and Prof. Julian Petley's (Brunel University) papers brilliantly demonstrated a genuine interaction between academics and policy makers. Both were extremely powerful and provocative, highlighting the potentialities for a productive dialogue with the industry / Government. Barker's presentation discussed his collaboration with the British Board of Film Classification. The BBFC were particularly interested in how the cuts they had made to five films (*A Ma Souer!*, *Base – Moi*, *Irreversible*, *The House on the Edge of the Park* and *Ichi the Killer*) had impacted on audience perceptions and responses. Barker examined the film which caused the most difficulty out of the five; *The House on the Edge of the Park*. Petley's paper was concerned with pornography; he explained that the Government intends to extend the offence of possessing obscene or indecent images of children to what they classify as 'extremely violent pornography'. Petley's research explored the reasons behind this proposed measure and the threat it poses towards cult film lovers.

This panel was strongly opened with Shaun Kimber's (University of Winchester) 'Revisiting British Genre Fandom & the Regulation, Censorship and Classification of Film Violence in Contemporary Britain.' Kimber thoroughly analysed this complex relationship with a series of detailed and insightful empirical examples. It was a shame that Barker didn't get to deliver his paper properly due to tight time constraints (which was no fault of the organisers) and that there was no time left either for a discussion or even a plenary in which the conference's themes could have been brought together and some conclusions reached. Despite this criticism, *Cine-Excess* proved an ambitious and ultimately successful event that was distinguished by the presence of such industry and academic luminaries. There was also a real sense of community at the event, a genuine atmosphere conducive to academic dialogue with very approachable people and impressive organisation by Xavier Mendik and his team. All of the delegates left feeling satisfied and like myself looking forward to *Cine- Excess 2008*.

# From the Blank Page to the Silver Screen: Re-adaptation

From the Blank Page to the Silver Screen: Re-adaptation, University of South Brittany,  
Lorient, France, May 31 – June 1, 2007

## A report by Joyce Goggin, Universiteit van Amsterdam, Netherlands

This year's conference on film adaptation at the University of South Brittany, Lorient, was well organised by Ariane Hudelet (Université de Paris III– Sorbonne Nouvelle) and Shannon Wells-Lassagne (Université de Bretagne Sud). The papers presented at the conference tackled the topic of re-adaptation in its many forms and explored aspects of re-adaptation that have given rise to the kind of openly self-referential films to which contemporary viewers have become accustomed, many of which announce their serial nature with titles such as *Spiderman 3*. Aesthetically, re-adaptations constitute a sort of self-conscious, *mise-en-abyme* of the practice of film adaptation and ask viewers, implicitly or explicitly, to think about the economics and dynamics of contemporary film production.

Over the two days of the conference, speakers investigated questions such as what might motivate screenwriters, directors, and production companies to re-adapt already adapted literary works. What makes a text, an author, or even a character endlessly re-adaptable or, on the contrary, speak more clearly to one generation than to another? Much of the work presented at the conference also addressed the relationship of contemporary re-adaptations to previous film adaptations of literary texts, as well as how past cinematic versions of literary works influence the conception of new films. Conference participants took on these questions as a means of analyzing what a new film version might add to our cultural conceptions of familiar narratives in political and aesthetic terms, and how they communicate with new generations of viewers.

The first session dealt with the question of re-adapting notions of horror, as these notions change over time along with ideological conceptualizations of the self and the human. The speakers in this session addressed the development of constructions of sexuality, desire, hysteria, death, and the erotic in five productions of *The Phantom* (Xavier Daverat, Université de Bordeaux IV); the monster as a metaphor of artistic creation, and the role of fragmentation and reintegration in Branagh's neo-feminist re-adaptation of *Frankenstein* (Laurent Mellet, Université d'Artois); and ideological constructions of 'the enemy' and how these can be retraced through various adaptations of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (Gene Moore, Universiteit van Amsterdam).

The following session of the opening day dealt with the question of ideology in gangster and crime films, and their re-adaptations. The first speaker, Hélène Charlery (Université de Paris XII) examined representations of multiculturalism in the 1971 and 2000 versions of *Shaft*, which included an investigation of violence and how it intersects with notions of race and gender. In his examination of adaptations of *The Postman always Rings Twice*, Gilles

Ménégaldo (Université de Poitiers) addressed the style in which cinematic sexuality is represented, focusing on the 1980 version which avoided questions of morality and used a hand-held camera to heighten the effects of realism. The session closed with an intervention on *Scarface* in which the Dominique Sipièrè (Université de Paris X) elucidated how directors have approached adapting *Scarface* and, in the case of De Palma, re-adapting the text as a kind of documentary of interracial relations in the USA, thereby mobilizing notions of authenticity through which past directors as well have presented themselves as experts on gangster hierarchies and the underground trade of psychoactive drugs.

The second day of the conference opened with a session on the economics of re-adaptation in which Nathalie Dupont (Université de Boulogne) addressed the financial history and demographics of the Hollywood blockbuster. In the second paper, Joyce Goggin (Universiteit van Amsterdam) focused on the *Ocean's Eleven* films as an example of what she called "the aesthetics of finance", or the aesthetic expression of a particular genre of serialized Hollywood film that thematizes money with the unabashed, self-conscious goal of creating wealth.

Anne Bellas (Université de Paris XII) followed with a discussion of adaptations of the events surrounding the arrest and incarceration from 1931–1937 of a group of young black men, falsely accused of raping two white women. The Scottsboro Nine, as the accused came to be known, have been the subject of a variety of films from *To Kill a Mockingbird* to TV dramas and, as the speaker explained, their story continues to be a popular topic for film adaptation as it embodies strong oppositions (male/female, black/white, north/south) while affording directors an opportunity to address racial tension and political conflict.

But perhaps the highlight of the conference was the keynote address given by executive film producer Roger Shannon, whose recent documentary *Lost in Adaptation* records interviews with writers, producers and directors working on film adaptations. In Shannon's fascinating talk, he explained how brand recognition, that comes with adapting an already-familiar text, can play a key role in the search for funding, and he then treated those in the audience to a wealth of practical information on how adaptations get made. Shannon's talk ended with the provocative assertion that film adaptation will increasingly look to a "promiscuity of sources", including personal blogs, comic books and video games, which will affect niche markets and move film adaptation far beyond the transposition of the novel into film. What this ultimately means is an accelerated cultural exchange between film and story sources as contemporary culture is increasingly dominated by intertextuality and sampling. This development ultimately begs the important ontological question of where adaptation begins and ends.

The closing sessions included a stimulating discussion of the transference of myth from oral tradition, to text, to screen. Papers included Phillipe Ortoli's (Université de Corse) contribution on re-adaptations of *The Odyssey* and narratives of heritage, wherein the hero comes to reflect a national myth and thus serves as a sort of *mise-en-abyme* of figurative power, mobilized at moments which are epistemologically loaded junctures in a given nation's history.

Sarah Hatchuel (Université de Paris I) discussed the transference of Cleopatra, as legend and character, to the screen in a series of films that have functioned as the repetition of mimetic desire, enhancing the mythologisation of this powerfully erotic female figure. As Hatchuel showed, this process has mirrored the strategy of classic Hollywood remakes, which relies on

its ability to incite in viewers a constant desire for new versions of familiar stories. As such, the remake relies on the return of the not-quite identical, and the notion of cultural unfinished business.

Similarly, Françoise Barbé-Petit's (Université de Paris IV) analysis of Angela Carter's feminist re-reading of *Little Red Riding Hood* demonstrated how the reworking of a fairy tale can powerfully redirect the politics of the gaze. In turn *The Company of Wolves* further investigated this territory and provided a yet more dramatic reversal of gendered roles in beast-beauty fables, while avoiding the temptation to turn Carter's text into a standard horror movie, by upsetting the pre-scripted, pre-gendered predator-prey relationship.

The conference concluded with Sébastien Lefait's (Université de Corse) reading of Orson Welles' *Don Quixote*, which asked how the film was able to preserve the reflexive nature of the text. According to the speaker, Welles accomplished this by self-consciously and ironically owning up to the impossibility of his task, while cleverly drawing our attention to how film has effectuated a shift in the relationship of truth to reality, paralleling the historical narrative shift from the epic to the novel.

The final paper of the conference, presented by Marie Pécorari (NYU / Université de Paris IV) examined how Sirk adapted *Imitation of Life* without reading the novel or viewing the 1934 Hollywood adaptation. As a result, the film ironically moves further and further from both the life and the novel that it adapts, as the film has all but cancelled out the text, thereby assuring itself the last word.

In short, this year's *From the Blank Page to the Silver Screen* conference provided those who attended with a great deal of food for thought. The rich programme covered a wide range of topics from myth to money, and from gangsters to heroes. At the same time, papers addressed a broad range of theoretical approaches to the question of why re-adaptations are made, bringing together feminism, deconstruction, semiotics and economic criticism.

What is more, the conference boldly addressed an area of film studies that continues to be sadly neglected, based on nostalgic, romantic notions of originality or the fear that remakes and re-adaptations are somehow more trite and commercial than other products of the film industry. Whatever the case may be, this conference proved that re-adaptation is a rich area of investigation that most certainly bears a great deal more meditative investigation. And indeed, if Roger Shannon's predictions for the future of the industry are correct, the aesthetics and economics of film re-adaptation will become an increasingly significant aspect of our cultural experience.

# Queer Screens: Screen Studies Conference

Queer Screens: Screen Studies Conference, University of Glasgow, 6 - 8 July 2007

## A report by James Aston, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK

This year's Screen Studies Conference continued to build upon the extended facilities made available last year in providing an extensive programme that included almost 40 panels and well over 100 speakers. The conference was book ended by two highly anticipated sessions, the opening plenary featuring Lisa Henderson (University of Massachusetts) and Patricia White (Swarthmore College) chaired by Screen editor Jackie Stacey (Lancaster University) and the concluding plenary featuring B. Ruby Rich in conversation with Richard Dyer. Other prominent speakers over the weekend included Harry Benshoff (University of North Texas), Christine Geraghty (University of Glasgow) and Ellis Hanson (Cornell University). Although there was a strong focus on queer screen studies in the conference the programme still managed to retain an eclectic range of research topics indicative of both the diversity of the Screen journal and of the topicality of both student and academic interest and research. In particular, attention was given to the national cinemas of South Korea and China which augurs well for research and teaching into this popular area.

The opening plenary on Friday evening mapped out many of the issues and approaches currently being advanced within queer theory and queer screen studies. Lisa Henderson's paper 'Queer Relay' concentrated on the production and promotion of Liza Johnson's short film *Desert Motel* (2005) as an exploration of queer identity and representation "between dominant and non-dominant cultural forms and contexts." Henderson forwarded an ethnographical analysis combined with an account of the production history of the film not to forward a reductive *queer vs. mainstream* model but rather to re-examine the "sexual, cultural and economic" associations in order to position the queer short film as an "interstitial form" that provides new encounters between "artworld and mainstream market formations." Patricia White's paper 'Lesbian Minor Cinema' continued the theme of lesbian filmmaking by analyzing the "intersection of girl culture and queer cinema (studies)" in the form of minor lesbian cinema. By drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of minor literature with Alison Butler's (2002) modification of their concept as a way of reworking cinematic conventions, White explored the various ways the "lesbian is linked to the 'minor'" in terms of gender representation, festival programming, audience reception, new mediums of queer representations, and the increased contemporary demand for films with a lesbian content.

The Saturday panel 'Queer(ing) American Independent Film Through the Decades' continued many of the salient points raised in the opening plenary. The panel commenced with Andreas Jahn-Sudmann's (University Of Göttingen) paper '*The Watermelon Woman* (Cherly Dunye, 1996): Queering Authenticity, History, Identity'. Made by one of the few openly lesbian filmmakers operating in American, Jahn-Sudmann situated Dunye's controversial and provocative film about interracial relationships within a social and historical context in order to explore the "the dialectic relation of queer screens and screening queerness." In doing so,

Jahn-Sudmann stressed the film's oppositional position with regards to African-American documentaries and Hollywood representations of race and gender with reference to Karen Hollander's (1998) work on the contemporary female friendship film. Thus, Jahn-Sudmann pertinently identified how the film implemented a documentary aesthetic in order to expose and work through the absence of the African American lesbian from mainstream cultural representations. Markus Brunner's (University of Hannover) paper, '*Pink Flamingos* (John Waters, 1972): Queering Perversions', stood as the only paper to significantly address the representation of gender in Waters' films and how queer analysis can be applied so as to work through some of the contradictions evident within his films. Even more controversial than Dunye's film in its treatment and representation of identity, Brunner argued that the 'shocking' impact of *Pink Flamingos*, in particular Divine's grotesque behaviour and subsequent depiction of transvestism, does not singularly undermine and challenge "hegemonic ascriptions, positions, and forms of [queer] representation" and sexual orientation. Contrary to existing conceptions and understanding of the films of Waters, Brunner concluded that *Pink Flamingos* in fact oscillates between subverting dominant gender identities and upholding "'classical' forms of representation." In doing so Brunner provided a socio-psychoanalytical critique that advanced the limited academic perspective of one of the most celebrated 'queer' filmmakers.

Harry Benshoff's final paper, '*Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2005): A Quasi-Independent Queer Critique of White, Western Heteronormativity' analyzed the hybrid nature of this enormously successful film both in terms of its representations of heterosexuality and homosexuality and of its dual position as an American independent film existing within the confines of the Hollywood system. In analyzing the film in this way, Benshoff emphasized that *Brokeback Mountain* is able to "queer heteronormativity while simultaneously mainstreaming that critique to mainstream (presumably heterosexual audiences providing a radical treatment of gender discourse and human sexuality).

Later on that day, in a panel entitled 'Ethics', two papers critically and insightfully reappraised the celebrated yet controversial Austrian filmmaker Michael Haneke. Catherine Wheatley's (University of Southampton) paper 'The Ethics of Aggression: Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* (1997)' outlined the film's use of 'cinematic pleasure and unpleasure' found within its narrative formation. Relating the film to Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen's definition of alternative cinema, Wheatley sought to radically reposition spectator meaning as emanating from an ethical relationship rather than that of politics or ideology. In this sense, Haneke's device of cinematic unpleasure (most evident in the extended ten minute single take sequence and in the many self-reflexive scenes) serves to implicate the viewer on the levels of reason and emotion by "rap[ing] the viewer into autonomy" through the direct and aggressive mobilization of negative emotions, such as "discomfort, embarrassment, anger and guilt." However, Wheatley concluded with concern over how Haneke's project of 'cinematic unpleasure' would be undermined or even discontinued with his own upcoming Hollywood remake of *Funny Games* (2007) starring Naomi Watts and Tim Roth.

An issue that was further explored and contested within the concluding Q&A session. Lisa Coulthard's (University of British Columbia) paper 'Ethical Violence: Suicide as Authentic Act in the Films of Michael Haneke' served as an illuminating companion to Wheatley's position elucidated in the previous paper. Coulthard addressed the violence in Haneke's films as a more active expression forcing the spectator to confront the reception of such acts along the lines of alienation and unresolved feelings and emotions. Using the Lacanian concept of the authentic act along the contours of the political and ethical formations in films such as

*Caché* (2005), *The Piano Teacher* (2001) and *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance* (1994), Coulthard suggested that Haneke offers "viewers critical and ironic documents of psychological disaffection, alienation and interpersonal abuse that resist easy absorption or consumption." Therefore, for Coulthard, Haneke provides a radical critique of the ethical and political debates surrounding the "impossibility of intersubjectivity and the emptiness of contemporary bourgeois Western society."

The importance of the national cinema of China and South Korea was addressed in two timely and well received panels on the last day of the conference. Chaired by Marsha Kinder, the panel 'Sexual Representation as Social Change in China' commenced with Chun-Chi Wang's (University of Southern California) paper 'New Wave in a Queer Way' which significantly focused on queer identity and subject matter within Taiwanese cinema as there exists limited academic scholarship within mainstream debate and research despite Taiwan's vibrant national cinema. Therefore, in highlighting both Taiwan's indigenous filmmaking and the centrality of queer filmmaking, Wang brought clearly to attention the importance of Taiwanese cinema for both film studies in general and queer screen studies in particular. Wang outlined how recent successful queer Taiwanese films such as DJ Chen's *Formula 17* and Zero Zhou's *Splendid Float* (both 2004) drew on the legacy of the New Cinema Movement led by the directors Edward Yang and Hou Hsiao-hsien to situate queer representation at the "center of the cinematic imagination and construction of Taiwan." Zhipeng Xu's (University of China) paper 'Big Girl in the Small Screen: Chinese Reality Show *Super Girl* and Cultural Change' looked at the Chinese equivalent of *American Idol* in terms of the success of its 2005 winner and how this engendered new viewer relationships along the lines of fan based culture, the mass media, star/celebrity culture and sexual representation. Rather than this dynamic merely imitating Western popular culture and gender representations, Xu argued that the enormous popularity of the show and its audience reception has provided new ways in which to analyze China's burgeoning youth culture. In doing so, Xu's analysis of *Super Girl* provided a social and historical anchor in delineating contemporary social change in mainland China.

South Korean cinema was addressed in one of the latter panels on Sunday entitled 'Re-imagining the Past: Strategies of Remembrance in South Korean Cinema'. All the four papers in this panel dealt in various ways with the often controversial and contested past of Korea and its contemporary re-presentations and re-imaginings in cinema. In particular, Sueng Woo Ha (University of London) and Dong Hoon Kim (University of Southern California) presented papers which critically evaluated recent South Korean cinema along the axis of empire and nation in order to delineate how modern audiences make sense of and receive representations of the past. Ha's paper 'Beyond the Logic of Multiculturalism in a New Global Era: *Rikidozan: A Hero* Extraordinary (2004) and *Blood and Bones* (2004)' aptly focused on how concepts of the nation are constructed through the past that has profound ramifications for Korea and its position in a "new global order." Ha analyzed the conflicting visions of contemporary South Korea filmmaking that either "tend[ed] toward [a] shocking and fearful...representation of the past" paradoxically reinforcing a "passionate attachment to the nation" or a countervailing position that exposes the hypocrisy of the new global order. The latter being the fragility of an egalitarian multiculturalism that a film like *Blood and Bones* exposes as limited and repressive by highlighting the tensions between the Japanese and Korean residents living in Japan.

Kim's paper 'The Crash of *Blue Swallow*[2005]: The Influence of the Nationalist Historiography on the Contemporary Film Spectatorship in South Korea' similarly dealt with

the construction of nation in that it focused on "how the nationalist historiography on the nation's colonial past influences and even dictates the contemporary film spectatorship in Korea." Examining the audience reception to contested history, in this case, of the life of Korea's first female aircraft pilot Park Kyong-Won and the historical relationship of Japan and Korea represented in *Blue Swallow*, Kim highlighted how representations of the past are necessarily contingent on social and historical events. In the case of *Blue Swallow*, which in employing a "revisionist historical perspective" to underplay Kyong-Won's collaboration with Japan, was met with "social denunciation" and box office failure due to a resurgence of "postcolonial nationalism" in Korea. Both these papers offered new approaches and directions for studying the past on film that provided pertinent analysis of this embryonic yet complex strand of film studies.

Due to the scale of the conference and the running of concurrent panels it was impossible for delegates to attend a majority of them. However, there were plenty of occasions that helped facilitate the sharing of ideas and research throughout the weekend. That aside, other noteworthy panels that do not feature in this report due to the mentioned downside of such large conferences include 'Postwar Queer New York and the Queer Avant-Garde as Cultural Formation', 'The Aesthetics of Violence and Violation in Queer Chinese Cinema' and 'Falling in Love Again: Romantic Comedy in Contemporary Cinema'.

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# Televising History: Memory, Nation, Identity

Televising History: Memory, Nation, Identity, University of Lincoln, 13 –15 June, 2007

## A report by Lin Feng, University of Nottingham, UK

Held at Lincoln University from 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> June 2007, this three day postgraduate conference was part of the AHRC-funded research project of 'Televising History 1995-2010'. Looking at the past and present history on television mainly through "non-fiction" programming, this project seeks to examine the different genres employed by TV producers and track their commissioning, production, marketing and distribution histories. As the project statement declares, the key focus of the project is to evaluate the relationship between 'public history' and academic history, and to explore the role of the 'professional' historian and producer / directors as mediators of historical material and interpretations. Focusing on the representation of the past on the TV screen, this project also deals with an emerging new academic field of 'memories studies', as claimed by the project director and one of the principal conference organisers, Professor Ann Gary (Cultural Studies, University of Lincoln).

As the second conference related to the project, Televising History: Memory, Nation, Identity focussed on how audio-visual works can be seen to shape and re-shape people's comprehension of the past. The conference was planned for postgraduate students, media professionals, education professionals, historians and other scholars with an interest in the field. Although it was a small conference in terms of delegate numbers, it attracted media scholars and professionals from other European countries beyond the U.K., such as the Netherlands and Spain. Alongside four panels for postgraduate papers, the conference also featured four sessions of plenary speeches, two presentations of 'early career' papers and three workshops.

After a short introduction to the project and a welcome speech by Professor Gray, Andrew Hoskins (Department of Sociology, University of Warwick) presented the conference's first keynote paper "Ghost in the Machine: Television and Memory". He claimed that people's memory of the past is being effectively re-assembled and re-appraised through the extensive contemporary media network. He argued that different media selectively presents, repeats or recycles different aspects of past events, which makes it possible for audiences to create their own history in contrast to more traditional TV mass memory. Accordingly, there appears a limitless appetite for the documentation of the past through television, including film dramatisations, commemorations of historical 'markers' (e.g. monuments and anniversaries), and a growing heritage and museum culture. In addition to introducing the emerging field of memory study, Hoskins particularly addressed the technology and emotional issues in the interpretation of past events, a topic which turned out to become one of the key debates in the conference.

After a short coffee break the first and only parallel panels for postgraduate papers commenced, covering the topics of "The Englishness of Robin Hood: British Identity and the Mythical Hero in the History Classroom" (Sarah Moody, University of Lincoln), "Constructing 'the North' on ITV1" (Barbara Sadler, University of Lincoln), "RFK Funeral Train: the Cultural Life of Memory Text" (Francisca Fuentes, University of Nottingham) and "The Beginnings of TV Production in Spain: How did TVE Learn to Make Entertainment?" (Enrique Guerrero, University of Navarra, Spain). Aside from Guerrero's paper, which dealt with the industrial history of the Spanish public television network (TVE) between 1956 and 1975, the other three papers were all dedicated to the concern of how TV programmes (re) mediate regional / national identity.

The afternoon session started with a second panel of postgraduate papers. Amy Holdsworth from the University of Warwick presented her research paper entitled "Television Resurrections: Television, Memory and the Museum". Through some examples of nostalgia programming on recent British television, such as *Dr. Who* (1963- ), Holdsworth addressed the concept of television as museum and explored the question of how these exhibitions and programmes employ both individual and wider cultural memory to reinvent nostalgia on the British TV screen. The paper given by Natalie Edwards (University of Nottingham), "'A Sign of the Times': Tipping the Velvet and the Performance of History" engaged with the discourse of gender identity on the British small screen. Investigating the sexual design and gender narratives in the BBC's costume drama, Edwards explored the contemporary understanding of British lesbian history and the shifting of value judgement on gender diversity. This panel ended with my own paper "The Birth of a TV Star: Chow Yun-fat, Typecasting and Hong Kong Modern *Xiaosheng*", in which I examined Chow's early career in the Hong Kong TV industry and argued that his star image as a modern *xiaosheng* was created as a result of the negotiation between the studio's conventional typecasting practice and the Hong Kong audience's perception of the local social change in the 1970s.

The paper from the second keynote speaker, Angela Piccini (Department of Archaeology & Anthropology, University of Bristol), was the final formal academic paper on TV historical / heritage programming presented on the first day. In her paper "The Stuff of Dreams: Archaeology, Audience and Becoming Material", Piccini effectively engaged with statistical research on audiences and the popularity of antiques and heritage programmes. Establishing a range of programming viewing figures, Piccini argued that screen-based archaeologies are "at the heart of active community building and social experience", and that viewers "are drawn towards content that provides the 'affect' of excitement and the 'spectacular'. In this respect, Piccini's paper was similar to that presented by Hoskins, who raised the consideration of emotional impact on the consumption of historical programmes, while Piccini also urged our attention towards the affective power of television archaeologies.

The postgraduate panel held on the second day included the papers "The Western Front on Television: History and Popular Memory" (Ross Wilson, University of York), "Triggered by TV: Hunting the KGB Colonel William Fisher" (Vin Arthey, University of Teesside) and "Revising Media Globalisation: The Case of Television" (Priya Virmani, University of Bristol). While Wilson argued that the popular memory of historic affairs on British screen is a positive cultural choice, he also pointed out that popular memory is not merely shaped by those cultural forms but also by the acceptance and popularity of certain forms of representation. In a similar vein to Wilson, Arthey also argued that the representation of past events on the British screen is inadequate. Studying the follow-up programme on a KGB professional, Arthey argued that the understanding of the documentary report on the history of

spies and spying has to be *always* questioned by other methodological "tools", such as living memory. Although Wilson and Arthey dealt with different subjects, both their papers were concerned with the selective representation of the past on the TV screen and the viewer's active participation in the public memory. Unlike the first two papers in the panel, Virmani took a different approach when investigating the class representation on Indian TV screens. Examining the operation of STAR TV in the Indian market, Virmani argued that contemporary globalisation does not act as a cultural homogeniser but rather as an organiser of difference.

Of equal interest were two plenary speeches given by media professionals, Wolter Braamhorst (the Erasmus University of Rotterdam, Netherlands) and Helen Weinsten (BBC, University of York) on the second and third days respectively. As a director, producer and presenter of TV programmes, Braamhorst explored the inside story of making the historical documentary *Tracing the Mummy* in his paper "The Wonderful World of History Television". More importantly, Braamhorst raised the question of "how much are we willing to change history to make it more appealing to a large general audience?"

Similarly, Weinsten explored the question of how the individual consumes the past and the decision making process of major historical TV programmes made by the BBC. Both Braamhorst and Weinsten's papers explored how those historical programmes employ 'emotion' and (re) create the visual 'spectacle' to attract an audience. A series of detailed and insightful empirical examples given by these two media professionals also instigated a hot discussion regarding the ethic concern of media product, archive footage and historical programming in the Q&A time.

The conference also created a real sense of community. Three workshops provided postgraduate students with the chance to discuss their research methodology, thesis writing and career development. Extra-curricular activities on the Wednesday and Thursday evenings offered delegates another chance to continue the discussion of their research in an informal way. The networking suppers in these two days also saw the development of personal relationships among the delegates. The only criticism on the networking activities is that the first day networking supper started rather late, which led to a late finish time, and caused many delegates to feel rather tired on the second morning. In summary however, this was a very successful and well organised conference with a very approachable and friendly conference team lead by Professor Ann Gray and her team members, Erin Bell, Sarah Bell and Barbara Sadler.