

# SCMS

SCMS, Philadelphia, March 6-9, 2008

## **A report by Drew Beard, Stephen Rust, Carter Soles, Jeong Chang, and Raphael Raphael, University of Oregon Film and Media Group, USA**

### **(1) Genre and Industry**

During this year's SCMS conference in Philadelphia, entitled "Architectures of the Moving Image," a number of panels addressed both genre and industry. Reality and science fiction television, the post-network television industry, Bollywood, radio, and animated film comprise only a portion of the themes for featured generic/industrial panels.

The Contemporary Directors panel on Thursday included rich papers by Kristi McKim on Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Dreamers* (2003) and Linda Ruth Williams on "Spielberg's Embodied Children." A highlight of the panel was Barry Langford's talk about Steven Spielberg's "Empire of the Gaze," in which he argued that Spielberg's films use formal mechanisms such as camera movement, editing, and on-screen "mentor" figures to train or "direct" their viewers how to view and interpret their content. Langford persuasively argued that Spielberg's films, especially his action blockbusters like *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) and *Jurassic Park* (1993), simultaneously teach their protagonists and their viewers to gaze at what appears on-screen (alien mother ships, dinosaurs) uncritically, uncontemplatively, and with a childlike sense of wonder and awestruck acceptance. He concluded that the cinema of Spielberg thus encodes ideological instruction in its formal structures, privileging certain (uncritical) forms of looking and ultimately "[insisting] upon empathy as a moral objective." This paper generated much talk during the Q & A portion of the panel, including mitigating comments by Lester Friedman questioning the extent to which Spielberg's formal techniques are as didactic as Langford suggested.

Among the variety of genres explored this year at SCMS, one of the most unique was certainly that of museum sponsored expedition films of the 1920s. This genre was explored in a remarkable panel that included papers by Alison Griffiths, Amy Staples, and Theresa Scandiffio. Asking the question, what is distinct about this discursive form, the panelists set out to explore how both the formal elements of these films as well as their exhibition contexts as museum exhibits (integrated into lectures or children's education programs rather than viewed as stand-alone films) contribute to our understanding of their historical role. Staples screened a film she is working on at the Smithsonian Institution, a project of recreating a lost film documenting a Smithsonian-Chrysler expedition to Africa in 1926. Her contribution to the panel demonstrated the benefits of cooperation between film scholars and those working in the museum industry as they work to understand this genre despite the fact that most of the museum films are no longer extant.

Showcased as part of Thursday's American Dream/American Nightmare panel, Carol Siegel's "Metaphoric Interiors: Architectures of Race in *Panic Room* and *The People Under the Stairs*" used both the suspense and horror genres to investigate how film has grappled with issues of urban renewal. Decades of "white flight," followed by the gentrification movements of the past twenty years, have had significant effects upon the use of domestic space in urban environments. Homes constructed for large single families were then converted for multi-family use, only to be transformed back into single-family dwellings, occupied by far fewer people than these structures were originally built to accommodate. Siegel's paper took this phenomenon and applied it to both *Panic Room* (2002) and *The People under the Stairs* (1991), highlighting how anxieties over urban housing have been reflected in film, effectively connecting these thrillers to continuing societal concerns surrounding both race and class.

Leading off Sunday's panel New Approaches to the Contemporary Hollywood Industry, Janet Wasko presented "Growing the Franchise: The Contributions of Merchandising and Tie-ins to Hollywood Film Franchises." Wasko's paper provided a detailed look at the industry and its relationship to the film franchise. Allowing for the maximizing of successful properties, the film franchise provides studios with additional opportunities for revenue, through myriad deals with soft drink companies, fast food chains, publishing, and the music industry, among others. Under this political economic perspective, the gross of a given film is only a small part of the profits generated. Here, the merchandising and tie-ins become as important (if not more important) than the film itself. Wasko pointed to the growing presence of advertising for upcoming summer releases, a number of them connected to existing, proven film franchises and poised to make money on merchandising deals even if a given film itself barely breaks even, a fate that will play a fundamental part in whether or not the franchise continues to grow (*Jaws: the Revenge* [1987], anyone?).

## **(2) Global Cinema**

Glancing back at this year's SCMS program, one is struck by the number of panels in which the primary focus was on national cinemas and their relationship to such global issues as globalization, transnationalism, and postcolonialism. A blending of such terms as national, transnational, and global demonstrates the cooperation and competition between various ways of approaching cinema today. The numerous panels devoted specifically to American (i.e. U.S.) and Indian cinema, as well as a smattering of those dedicated specifically to other national cinemas such as German and Argentinean, demonstrate the persistence of approaches to cinema through the lens of the nation. However, in a number of these panels, such as *Bollywood and Beyond*, and *Writing French Film History*, the speakers demonstrated the importance of approaching national cinemas through global understandings of the nature of film production, distribution, and reception. Several transnational panels also dealt explicitly with global issues, such as globalization and postcolonialism, as evidenced by such panels as *Cinema and the Return of the Imperial Signifier* (featuring papers by Peter Bloom, Brian Larkin, and William Mazzarella) and *Architectures of African Cinema in the Age of Globalization* (featuring papers by Sheila Petty, Victoria Pasley, and Carmela Garritano). Finally, several panels took globalization as a topic and included papers on films from across the globe. A strong panel of this type was *Globalization and Cinema of Postcolonial Societies* (featuring papers by Ruby Cheung on Hollywood Hong Kong, Reena Dube on the films of Majid Majidi, Gerald Sim on Singaporean Cinema and Renu Dube on the films of Karan Johar).

Duncan Petrie's paper, "New Zealand Cinema: Negotiating the Local and the Global," was a thorough overview of how New Zealand has attempted to form a national film industry in the face of Hollywood domination. He provided a brief history of the New Zealand film industry and discussed 1977's *Sleeping Dogs* as an example of a New Zealand film that achieved U.S. distribution. He went on to describe the New Zealand Film Commission, which was formed with the goal of financing 4-5 features a year and has produced 250 features in the last 30 years. Petrie's paper highlighted the challenges of attempting to form a national film industry. One of the major goals of the New Zealand Film Commission was and continues to be to further the project of cultural nationalism and national identity. With the Helen Clark government's policy of loosening ties with Britain and elevating Maori culture and emphasizing New Zealand's diversity, films such as *Whale Rider* attempted to integrate the rising Maori identity. The New Zealand film industry—with the exception of Peter Jackson—has the further challenge of trying to keep its filmmakers in New Zealand, as many emigrate to make films in Hollywood. In the last ten years, the goal of creating a national film industry to sell New Zealand to the world has met with mixed success. The films have had decent local success, but have not done as well internationally. Petrie also stated during the Q & A session that one of the characteristics of New Zealand films was the use of harsh light to highlight the setting and that many were thematically dark.

Friday saw one of the strongest panels in this area: "The Asian Body on the American Screen." Adrian Khactu gave a delightful talk about silent film actress Anna May Wong and her refusal to play stereotypically "chinky" roles during her tenure in Hollywood. Russell Meeuf used the transnationally produced John Wayne film *The Barbarian and the Geisha* (1958) to talk about early cinematic globalization practices as represented in "Asian-Caucasian" on-screen romances. Lisa Funnell discussed "The Disappearing Asian Body," showing how action star Lucy Liu's performances in the *Charlie's Angels* films (2000, 2003) and *Kill Bill Vol. 1* (2003) distorted and/or de-emphasized her Asianness, effectively whitening her image as her U.S. popularity increased in the 2000s. And Theresa L. Geller concluded this engaging panel with a discussion of Bakhtinian grotesque elements in *Harold and Kumar Go To White Castle* (2004), specifically arguing for an interpretation of Kal Penn's Kumar that transgresses what US audiences might stereotypically expect from a South Asian character.

### **(3) Gender and the Body**

Timothy Shary's Aging American Actors panel on Thursday featured two particularly notable and engaging papers. First, in James Morrison's "Camp Horror and Aging Stars: The Case of Shelley Winters," Morrison discussed Winters' early star text as a youthful sex symbol (albeit a reluctant and often incongruent one) but also emphasized her later career, when she starred in low-budget shockers fashioned after the success of *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962). In analyzing these films and Winters' positioning as horror-object, Morrison related her appeal to camp and the utilization of her body to evoke the perversely pleasurable abject. Morrison did an excellent job of mining the ample humor to be found in the description of a deranged Winters playing Depression-era dance tunes on a piano (badly) while co-star Debbie Reynolds danced her heart out as a Jean Harlow wannabe in 1971's *What's the Matter with Helen?* Second, on this same panel, Phillipa Gates's presentation on "Aging Action Stars" showed, through economic and textual analysis, that successful aging action film stars such as Sylvester Stallone and Bruce Willis tend to follow the "[Clint] Eastwood Model" of explicitly engaging with the fact of their advancing age in their recent on-screen roles. This engagement usually includes their taking on younger male sidekicks—such as Justin Long in

Bruce Willis' *Live Free or Die Hard* (2007)—to draw in younger audiences and render the older star's newfound role as a mentor/father figure more legible. From a promotional standpoint, this pairing of younger and older stars encourages multiple levels of address in recent action cinema, opening these films both to older viewers who would fondly remember Willis's 1980s heyday and to younger viewers who tune in to see Justin Long and the film's remarkable effects sequences.

Desiring Difference, Issues of Otherized Body and Desire was another panel exploring the complicated ways in which spectators take pleasure from abject or "Otherized" bodies. The panel explored "new economies of difference," alternate narratives that have privileged the "Otherized" body. In "Exquisite Corpse: The Surreal Desires of the Internet Fetish Community: alt.sex.fetish.robots," Allison De Fren brought attention to a small community's fetishized relations with the female robotic body. She convincingly suggests that their desire is far too complicated to dismiss as merely sexist and dehumanizing. Rather than reinforcing dominant notions of the "perfect body," members of the community appear to take subversive pleasure from the indeterminate body, in the liminal space between human and robot, rather than the seemingly docile "programmable" female body. Drawing connections with the explorations of the surrealists, she suggested there appears to be an interesting desire of the feminization of objects, a process again too nuanced to dismiss as merely dehumanizing women. Instead, De Fren appeared to suggest this desire speaks to some kind of grasping towards pleasures and identities just beyond those our present culture and "bodies" allow. Another panelist on the same panel, Ingrid Fernandez presented on "Architectures of Memory: The Evolution of the Male Protagonist in the films of David Cronenberg," in which she examined liminal bodies' ability to serve as communal maps of trauma, while in a similar vein, panelist Christopher Smit (Calvin College) in his "Desiring Difference in Browning's *The Unknown*" sought to complicate ways of reading the disabled body. Looking at Browning's strange Lon Chaney vehicle *The Unknown*, Smit explored the often overlooked space in which disability is the source of desire. Smit's work highlighted the importance of using frameworks of spectatorship flexible enough to register new ways to imagine cultural scripts of the body, and in so doing, his paper pushed the existing limits of current methodologies for exploring cinematic representations of disability.

In connection with his two special "Diva" issues of *Camera Obscura* (Part One of "Fabulous! Divas" is currently available in Volume 22, Number 2), Alexander Doty chaired a panel on Diva Love. Highlights of this panel included a paper by Melissa Bradshaw that read Bette Midler's performance in *The Rose* (1979) as a containment strategy meant to render the life of the rock-and-roll diva ultimately tragic. Bradshaw argued that the film, in stark contrast to the life of Janis Joplin upon which it is loosely based, diminishes the rock diva's agency and finally reduces her to a self-sacrificial figure, giving it all—even in death—to please her adoring audience.

Saturday's panel, Domestic Bliss, was a somewhat ironic title for two of the presented papers since it dealt with strife in the home. Elizabeth Nathanson's paper, "Birth Pangs and The Chaos of Everyday Life: Childrearing, Daily Schedules and Lifestyle Television in the Postfeminist Context," discussed how lifestyle TV works the logic of the workplace into the home. Analyzing the show *Supernanny*, Nathanson drew upon the work of Arlie Hochschild to examine how the show attempted to solve problems in childrearing by instituting strict scheduling practices and routinizing home life. At the same time, devices such as TiVo promise flexibility and efficiency in television watching that allows women to integrate TV viewing in the home, which propagates the myth that women can choose their schedules.

Rebecca DeRoo's paper on Agnes Varda's *Happiness* discussed how Varda's film adopted the image of "the serving hand" from French women's magazines to ironically critique the myth of a woman's fulfillment through domestic work. In *Happiness*, the serving hands highlight the unceasing nature of housework, the lack of fulfillment of these chores, and depersonalizes the housewife by privileging the role over individuality. Finally, Matt Yockey's paper on *The Monkees* discussed how the domestic, homosocial space of The Monkees' home celebrated the ordinariness of the exotic, the exoticizing of the ordinary, and affect to produce a simulacral uncanniness in the home of the band.

#### **(4) TV and Media**

There were a significant number of panels this year dedicated to television studies. The general sense we got in speaking to people was that any tension that may have existed between television and film scholarship has evaporated as scholars have acknowledged the importance of work in both fields, as well as television studies' continued work in developing its own formal approach to mark it as related but distinct from the work done in film scholarship.

Jesse Schlotterbeck, featured on the Looks of Television panel on Saturday afternoon, presented his paper, "What Happens When People Start Getting Cinematic: *Laguna Beach* and Contemporary TV Aesthetics." By examining the MTV reality soap opera, Schlotterbeck sought to establish the cinematic aesthetic to be found in a televised "reality drama" such as *Laguna Beach* (2004-2006). His work makes an important contribution to the discourse surrounding the question of aesthetics in dramatic television and their worthiness of study alongside the aesthetics of the cinema.

The panel Aesthetics, Quality, Value and Judgment in Television Studies explored a fundamental tension also shared between film studies and television studies: that of the appropriate attention to be given to aesthetics. The panel's aim was clearly to put "aesthetics back on the agenda."

In "Television Aesthetics as Marketing Device," using the texts *Lost* and *The Sopranos*, Roberta Pearson argued for the importance of using different kinds of regimes of evaluation for different texts. Christine Geraghty, in her "Ever-decreasing Circles: The Question of Quality in Contemporary Television Studies," examining the state of British Television Studies, argued that "quality continues to matter." While suggesting that British Television Studies has too often turned away from a deep inquiry into British texts and has been guilty of over-relying on the "American example" for inquiry, Geraghty called for a return to deeper engagement (for British scholars) with British television.

In his "Aesthetic Interpretation: Return of the Repressed," panelist David Thornburn argued for the importance of Television Studies' re-opening fundamental debates that he sees as prematurely closed at the very origin of the discipline. From its inception, with its strong ideological critique, Television Studies has been deeply suspicious of aesthetic judgment. Calling for a "contextual formalism," Thornburn argued that, without aesthetic foundations, television criticism lacks a historical understanding of the medium. He concludes that our immediate contemporary television, as the complex, rich art form that it presently is, is probably too fully embedded in present culture to be fully appreciated. Like film, he suggests, it will likely not to be fully appreciated before a process of "museumization" takes place and

a healthy dose of nostalgia for television as a lost form allows us to appreciate it once it is no longer so actively central to popular culture.

Rounding out the panel, John Caldwell, of UCLA, in his "On the Lot: Practitioner Aesthetics and the Logic of Production for Scholars and Researchers," presented his ethnographic fieldwork of the Los Angeles television industry. He presented a picture of the industry as one eager to narratize itself. Most importantly, he pointed out that this industry of contradictions—pragmatic and prone to hyperbole—is one that, while appearing infinitely elusive, actually offers multiple access points for researchers and students.

One of the most well-attended panels at the conference was Friday's panel on *The Wire*. Given the show's reputation of detailing the impact of the War on Drugs in Baltimore, it was no surprise that most of the papers focused on the show's realism and its representation of the city. Chris Hanson's paper "'A Man Must Have a Code': The Many Languages of *The Wire*" discussed language in *The Wire* and how the various vernacular languages in the show prevented institutions from talking to each other and communicating. He focused on the linguistic density of the show and how it reflected Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia. He also discussed how language was used to create the show's realism and as a marker of authenticity. David Lerner presented a paper on filmmaking in Baltimore, contrasting the use of Baltimore to express authenticity in *The Wire* and Maryland's attempt to attract Hollywood production by marketing itself as America in miniature. Lerner pointed out how cities often perform as other cities when locations are chosen for reasons other than authenticity, such as tax breaks for production and labor costs, which pits municipalities against one another. Daniel Herbert suggested that *The Wire* is an anti-allegory compared to other critically acclaimed shows such as *Battlestar Galactica*, *Lost* and *24*. The panel concluded with Marsha Kinder's paper on the dynamic between emotional attachment with characters and the systemic failures that lead to the destruction of these characters, and the device of dying after transformative moments. These emotionally affective moments are useful in contrasting it with discourses that trumpet the show's documentary realism.

One of the final panels on Sunday, New Approaches to the Contemporary Hollywood Industry, demonstrated the importance of cooperation between film and television scholars. A key component of merchandising comes in the form of television trailers for films as well as commercials for merchandise and tie-ins. Paul Grainge presented an astute reading of the use of the Channel 4 logo in the network's branding of the American television hit *Lost* for release in Britain. Grainge's paper demonstrated the importance of examining the close relationship between television and cinema in today's horizontally integrated media corporations as well as the global circulation of television.

## **(5) Spaces and Technology**

Closely tied to the larger conference theme of architecture and spacial relationships, the panel Architectures of Revolt: The Cinematic City Circa 1968 brought attention to the importance of 1968 as a seminal year of revolution and its largely forgotten history. The panel focused on the ways in which architecture and revolt intersected. Jennifer Stob of Yale in her "In Media Res: Situationist Cinematic Theory and Cinetracts" looked at the forgotten history of the situationaists and the fragmented narratives of the Cinetracts -image montages use of dominant media—ads, trailers, newsreels—for social critique. With an Althusserian bent, they sought to champion *active* architecture and film inviting active political engagement rather than consumption.

Also exploring the relationship of space and dissent, Jon Lewis of Oregon State University looked at the Chicago Convention through the lens of Haskell Wexler's *Medium Cool*. Lewis examined the importance of space in the film's claims to realism, with its use of Chicago as "city as film set," and how it makes obvious the power dynamic embedded in Chicago as urban space.

Other panelists examined the intersections between space and revolution in other urban spaces. Mark Shiel, of King's College/Princeton University, in his "On the Threshold of Revolution and the Postmodern Decline: Cinematic Representations of Los Angeles circa 1968" considered the desolation of the wasteland of late 1960s Los Angeles. Panelist Ruben Gallo, also of Princeton, examined the urban space of Mexico City 1968 in his "Cinematic Responses to the 1968 Student Massacre in Tlateloko, Mexico City." He pointed out how a utopian modernist vision of urban planning had deadly consequences during the violent squelching of student protest surrounding the 1968 Olympics. The bloody event was so traumatic for the Mexican imagination that it was not directly examined in Mexican cinema until decades later. Overall, the panel offered very engaging ways to examine the city as a space of contestation, both a site of control and always of possible resistance.

In addition to physical spaces, the "space" of sound was also a point of exploration of panels. Sound technology and new approaches to considering the relationship between sound and image was the focus of several interesting panels, such as Designing Musical Media: From Biomechanical to Bioformatic Screens, Film Sound/Film Narrative, Notes on Soundtracks, More Notes on Soundtracks, Music + Image, Histories of Sound in Cinema, and The Acoustic Image.

A theme common to the papers in the panel The Acoustic Image was an effort to challenge and reconsider Robert Altman's notion of ventriloquism as a way to understand the relationship between sound and image. Barry Salmon used the work of Benjamin to work on an understanding of the dialectical cinematic musical image through a reading of image and music in Chaplin and a clip from *The Grapes of Wrath*. Hye Jean Chung formulated an approach titled Cinema as Archeology, by exploring the Acousmatic Voice as developed by Michel Chion.

Kevin Donnelly argued that synchronization is irrational, magical, and not institutional as he explored what he described as the secret and esoteric effect of synchronization in his paper "Occult Aesthetics." Finally, Hugh Manon rounded out the panel with a paper intended to break down the binary of synchronous and asynchronous sound. Manon developed a four part approach, arguing that film sound can be 1) synchronous, 2) asynchronous, 3) hypersynchronous (synchronicity that calls attention to its own perception), and 4) dyssynchronous (a term coined to refer to bad or unnatural synchrony such as may be found in foreign-language dubs and low budget films, or used to parodic effect in overdubs). Manon's reading of a Dead Kennedys performance in which the group begins to perform in lip-synch and then slowly reveal to the audience that they are lip-synching provided an excellent application of his term to a text.

A highlight of the final day of the conference was Tom Gunning's "Invisible Bodies, Intangible Images: Cinema's Ghostly Ontology of Virtual Images and Invisible forces" on the Untimely Bodies (Towards a Comparative Film Theory of Human Figures, Temporalities and Visibilities) panel. While some of the conference panels on sound invited us to re-think fundamental assumptions about the place of sound technologies in film, Gunning invited a re-

consideration of the ways in which spectators have taken pleasure from the presence and absence of the visible.

While the dominant focus of film has been the "frenzy of the visible," Gunning's paper sought to remind us that technologies of invisibility and the absent body has been at least equally compelling and pleasurable. Drawing evidence from Melies' early work (particularly using hand-drawn sketches from Melies for disappearance tricks), Gunning's paper sought to recover the continued pleasure spectators have drawn from perception of invisibility, of traces of non-visible bodies left behind in shadows and shade. He sketched out the conversations between science and magic—and criminality—that have been part of the pleasure of disappearance and the "vision" of the invisible body.

The panel "Movies in the Digital Age" focused on the impact of digital technology on debates on the death of cinema, Hollywood industrial practices, and the status of the auteur in the age of the Internet. Asbjørn Grønstad's paper "Cinema and its Place in the Digital Era: The New Architecture of Image Studies" critiqued what he called the "mortality discourse" of those that declare the death of cinema. He criticized such positions as focusing too much on the exhibition context and pointed out that cinephilia was a culturally and historically specific practice. Harrison Gish discussed the role of digital F/X in producing, marketing, and tapping into ancillary markets for Hollywood high concept films. He noted that for movies such as *Spiderman* and *Transformers*, the spectacle of digital F/X often replaced stars as the primary marketing tool for these films. Zoran Samardzija's paper "David Lynch.com: The Auteur in the Age of The Internet and Digital Cinema" focused on David Lynch's website and focused on media change as convergence. Lynch views cinema as the medium that supplanted books while at the same time eschewing high-definition cameras because they contain too much information and enjoys the abstraction and mystery of lower definition formats. Lynch posts these movies on his website, but at the same time, users and fans can post comments on his website and contribute to the site's content, complicating discussions of authorship.

# **African Film Conference**

African Film Conference, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, IL, USA, November 9-10, 2007

## **A report by Audrey Evrard, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA**

This conference was the first of its kind organized at the University of Illinois and was the result of collaborative work between Mahir Saul, Professor of Anthropology and African Studies (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) and Professor Ralph Austen, Professor of History (University of Chicago). The two-day conference gathered scholars from the United States, Europe and Africa working in a variety of fields such as African Studies, Anthropology, Film and Visual Studies, History, and Gender Studies. The conference organisers also invited African video practitioners, distributors, producers, and festival organisers whose pragmatic approach to the industry cast a new light on theoretical assessments of African cinema.

Bringing together art and popular forms and genres, experimenting with celluloid and video formats, contemporary African cinema is not to be dissociated from deeply-rooted social and cultural practices. This conference made it clear that African cinema as an industry and an art form has been transforming itself at the same time that historical, political and economic circumstances have changed themselves. From the numerous discussions carried out over the two days, one major split emerged as prominent not only in the way the industry is structured and promoted but also in the critical discourse being produced on African cinema. The legacy of European cinema, long praised and modelled after by the first generation of African filmmakers, is now losing influence against a new type of filmmaking, embracing the fast-paced and popular orientation of large-scale industries like Hollywood and Bollywood. The professionals invested in the development of the latter have cast a jaundiced eye on the persistence of European influence through events such as FESPACO. The Festival Panafricain du cinéma et de la télévision de Ouagadougou was first organized in 1969 and gradually became the most famous and most attended festival on the African continent, often deciding which films are worthy of international critical attention. Deemed elitist by many local practitioners, FESPACO has now become synonymous with art films financed largely though foreign subsidies made essentially to please the tastes of festival-goers all over the world, not necessarily those of local African audiences. In contrast, Nollywood has become the new fast-growing center of video production for Nigeria and surrounding countries. Looking at the astonishing growth and profitability of this new economy, numerous filmmakers are producing similar video movies in Ghana, Cameroon or Tanzania. Two significantly different conceptions of African cinema are thus now competing with each other not only to gain and secure audiences and profits but also to affirm what African cinema means to itself and to the world.

Invited to give the opening lecture of the conference, Professor Birgit Meyer, Department of Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam, entitled her presentation "African Popular Cinema, Pentecostalism and the 'Powers of Darkness.'" Looking at the mediating role of early

Ghanaian videos in both popular culture and the public sphere, she clearly showed how closely interconnected religion, culture and economics are and more specifically how various religious, cultural and economic foreign influences have been competing in Ghanaian society. According to Meyer, the marginalized status and more permeable nature of video-production economic structures, compared to traditional filmmaking practices, have allowed native filmmakers to exploit a new breach and reclaim self-expressions of national traditions. In the early nineties, the growing presence and influence of Pentecostalism in Ghana played a major role in the popularization of video while taking control of movie theatres. Although not all videos produced in Ghana carry a Pentecostal message, Meyer argued that anthropologists now need to take into account the growing production of video films as well as the channels of production and distribution through which such videos are made, reproduced and circulated if they want to understand the ways in which Ghanaian popular culture has been redefining itself in the face of foreign appropriations of its traditions and public spaces. However, instead of pitting traditional film studies and popular culture analyses against each other, Meyer emphasized how fruitful and productive it would be for both approaches to inform each other. She indeed reasserted the importance of audiences and contexts of viewing, especially in the case of African films, which are often watched collectively but warned her fellow anthropologists against dismissing formal and aesthetic criteria. This last point came back over and over for the next two days.

## **FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 9**

Panel 1: The first panel of the conference brought together two major scholars in the field of African cinema, Jonathan Haynes (Long Island University, USA) and Onookome Okome (University of Alberta, Canada), who have both been paying close attention to the way Nollywood has raised profound theoretical questions about African cinema as a practice and as a field of study. One of the main concerns to arise was the manner in which current theoretical and pedagogical frameworks could accommodate or would need to be somehow modified in order to better address the growing video production coming from Nigeria, Ghana and other countries.

Panel 2: Focusing on the economic structures supporting video film production, this panel revolved mainly around two sets of questions: 1) How has video production allowed African cinema to emancipate itself from colonial and postcolonial structures? and 2) How can the various national, regional, or localized identities at play within the film industry still manage to express themselves in the face of a new monopoly, that of a Nigerian-based Nollywood? This last aspect led Joyce Ashuntantang (University of Connecticut, USA), to extend the discussion onto the role of audiences as agents and recipients. Indeed, one of her main points was that, despite the fact that Nigerian aesthetics had somehow invaded all video productions made in Ghana or Anglophone Cameroon, Nigerian videos were the first medium to be freed from state or sponsor ties, and as such have become a model for other local productions. Socrate Safo, a Ghanaian video filmmaker and producer, added striking examples of the growing discrepancy between the material supports used by filmmakers and the technologies available to audiences, forcing the former to adapt to the latter's demand. "Overwhelmed by technology," Ghanaian filmmakers were forced to abandon VHS and move to VCD and digital technologies in order to keep up with the market, at a time when local African film industries were already suffering from international economic sanctions. Samuel Benagr (University of Bedfordshire, UK), whose paper dealt precisely with the role played by digital technology in the renewal of African cinema, mentioned, for instance, the decision of the IMF to cut drastically on the availability of celluloid films for African filmmakers in the mid-

eighties, which turned out to have a decisive impact on industrial and aesthetic choices. In addition to practical consumption patterns, Abdalla Uba Adamu (Bayero University, Nigeria), Samuel Kafewo (Ahmadu Bello University, Nigeria) and Victor Yankah (University of Capa Coast, Ghana) emphasized the necessity to take into account the pedagogical function of cinema, video and film in African societies, particularly strictly reglemented religious communities such as the Hausa, or as regards the social place of women in Africa.

Panel 3: All papers presented and discussed in this panel focused on audience reception in places as different as South Africa (Michael Carlin, University of Glamorgan, UK); Tanzania (Laura Fair, Michigan State University, USA, and Jane Bryce University of the West Indies, Barbados); and Malawi (Katrina Thompson, UCLA, USA), and most notably on younger audiences. Fair and Thompson as well as Matthias Krings (Johannes Gutenberg University, Germany) emphasized the intercultural nature of many films based on foreign models, be it for genres or educational purposes. Central to the various questions raised by this panel was the definition of audiences as a category or a conceptual body through which film practices would be assessed, raising concerns about the temptation to homogenize viewers and overlook national, regional, linguistic or age variables. Furthermore, this led Fair, in particular, as well as various members of the audience, to interrogate the place of women in videos, not only as characters but also as producers or filmmakers.

Coming to the end of the first day of the conference during which discussions had been largely turned towards Nollywood, participants listened to Safo's entertaining explanations of the economics of his own studio before watching a few of his own videos. Due to endemic problems of funding, priority, he said, is always given to projects responding to market demands and to quantity rather than quality; however, this being said, the way he mapped out his own studio reflects professional organization, teamwork and division of labour that would go beyond mere or random "bricolage."

## **SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 10**

Panel 4: This large and eclectic panel addressed primarily art and FESPACO films, questioning one more time the divisions established according to aesthetic and formal criteria. The papers presented in this panel were extremely varied: Peter Rist's and Sacha Orenstein's (University of Concordia, Canada) precise and technical readings of, respectively, Ousmane Sembène's *Emitai* (1971) and Djibril Diop Mambéty's *Touki Bouki* (1973), offered a reassessment of common assumptions that African cinema is slow-paced and non-linear; Lizelle Bischoff's (University of Stirling, UK) and Audrey Evrard's (University of Illinois) papers extended the sub-Saharan African focus by looking at the work of North African as well as West African female directors and their attempts to address issues faced by women in Christian or Muslim postcolonial societies; four other papers looked at the way African films often inscribe at the very core of their aesthetics and iconography the postcolonial restructuration and redefinition of their societies. Lindsey Simms (University of Minnesota) provided a particularly insightful reading of the function of cars in these films; Patrick Devlieger and Jori de Koster's (Katholieke Universiteit, Belgium) anthropological look at metaphors of disability in African cinema raised questions not only on the singular presence of disabled bodies in such films but also on the theoretical validity of the concept of "metaphor" when looking at African cinema from a Western perspective. Finally, Eva Jorholt (University of Copenhagen) chose to look at a few Burkinabe films set in urban environments while the largest number of Burkinabe films often take place in rural contexts. Finally, Joelle

Vitiello's (Macalaster College) paper adopted a historicizing approach bringing into the discussion films produced outside of Africa by North African or African-born directors whose goal was to rewrite colonial history from a non-Western perspective.

Panel 5: The last panel of the conference extended the discussion outside of the immediate filmic context and brought in the importance of exportability to foreign audiences, alternative networks for criticism, diffusion or audience outreach. While Lindiwe Dovey (University of Cambridge, UK) looked at the shaping of transnational channels of identification with these local productions, Nicole Anderson (Jacksonville University, USA) and Vincent Bouchard (University of Montreal, Canada) discussed the role of ciné-clubs, mobile units and bonimenteurs as ways through which African cinemas would negotiate between the colonial rule and a slowly emancipating practice. Finally, Cornelius Moore (California Newsreel, San Francisco, USA), moved the discussion outside of the African borders and answered questions about the selection and the diffusion of African films for restricted but existing foreign audiences. These last interventions confirmed the growing concern from academic scholars as to how to integrate videos in a research and teaching field largely dedicated to FESPACO and art films. While this panel presented ways through which African audiences had been able to talk back to colonial discourses and audience consumption practices, it brought back to the fore the question of politics and cinema.

# Fusion Cultures: Memory, Migration, [Re]mediation, Mobility

Fusion Cultures: Memory, Migration, [Re]mediation, Mobility, A one-day multi-disciplinary conference, University of Greenwich, December 9, 2006

## A report by Colette Balmain, New Bucks University, UK

The Fusion Cultures Conference at the University of Greenwich, co-organised with New Bucks University, was a one-day conference whose remit was to examine the complex nature of the relationships and encounters between the imaginary and the real 'East' and 'West', in the present and recent past. Throughout the conference, the term 'fusion' was used as a place from which to explore the concept of interactions and exchanges beyond traditional theoretical mappings such as post-colonialism and post-modernism.

The conference began with a script reading from renowned filmmaker Sue Clayton's feature film (written in collaboration with Bhutanese writers and film-makers), *JUMOLHARI*, the first international co-production to be shot in Bhutan. Sue Clayton followed the reading, which was extremely well received, with a short discussion of her experiences working with Bhutanese people and filmmakers; the ethical questions that this raised in terms of the necessity not to appropriate Bhutanese culture and experience through Western frameworks, and new aesthetic strategies that she and her-co-writers developed to work at the interface of two very different cinematic and storytelling traditions.

This set the tone for the day and the papers that followed spanned a wide range of disciplines including video games, food, architecture, drama and film. In the panel of video games, Jessica Langer discussed the relationship between Cosplay and video game culture. This was followed by Ewan Kirkland's insightful analysis of whiteness in *Silent Hill*. In terms of the relationship between East Asian theatrical traditions and the West, Ashley Thorpe examined the political appropriation of Chinese theatre by both Brecht and Meyerhold, and Matthew Issac Cohen discussed the relationship between the traditional cultures of Java and Bali and modernist aesthetics as it pertained to touring performers. One of the most interesting additions to the field of East Asian Studies was Carol Tan's paper on Reginald Johnson and Orientalism. Imaginary geography provided the theme of Hua Li's paper on the impact of the 'European Style' on Chinese architecture, and cultural geography in a different manner provided the theme of Inga Bryden's paper on food as signifier of the mobility of identity in a global society.

Once again the relationship between indigenous culture and Western modernity provided the main focus in the panel on film – Caroline Ruddell looked at split identity in Japanese horror and Iain Robert Smith focussed on the less well-known cinema of Indonesia. Both papers raised important questions around transnational appropriation and globalisation through both marketing and filmic strategies.

A key feature of the conference was papers on literature and the representation of immigrant and migrant identities caught between East and West, as in Hui Wong's discussion of the work of Maxine Hong Kingston and Eli Sorensen's paper on cross-cultural translatability within postcolonial studies. Questions of orientalism remain important, as Sally Henderson argued in her paper on Western responses to Russia as manifest in travel writing on Russia. Migration and mobile identities again provided the focus of Liam Connell's paper on anxieties in contemporary literature. Finally, Martin Colebrook's paper examined David Mitchell's *Avant-Garde Fusions*.

Tracy Kelly's stimulating analysis of the work of Guillermo Gomez-Pena, a Mexican artist working across geographical and cultural borders, encapsulated many of the dominant themes of the conference: the relationship among capitalism, cultural tourism and anthropological fascination with the exotic other. As such Kelly raised the key question of the conference, as introduced in the opening reading and keynote speech by Sue Clayton, about the importance of utilising the term fusion as an interpretive strategy which is always conscious of the ideological pitfalls involved in approaching the discourse of the Other in its myriad forms.

The conference brought together a wide range of scholars, united by a common interest in remapping and rethinking the relationship between the East and the West. These papers demonstrated the need within the global arena to question simple understandings of Orientalism and Exoticism and to explore alternative paradigms through which the relationship between the East and West can be profitably understood as one of cultural flows - nationally and transnationally - which transform our very understandings of cultural representations, postcolonial identities and cultural borrowings.

# Italian Film Study Day

Italian Film Study Day, Queen Mary, University of London, January 25, 2008

## A report by Louis Bayman, King's College, London

Italian cinema attracts widespread and varied interest, yet the scholarship which exists on it is conducted by a more disparate and less cohesive group than some of its other national cinema counterparts. Organised by Dr. Pauline Small (Queen Mary), this conference's key achievement was to share the research and debates already being conducted into Italian cinema from a film studies perspective, aiming to form a research network across British and Irish campuses.

Although much scholarship exists on Italian cinema, the conference's main contribution to the field was to bring together Anglophone work that understands Italian cinema beyond neo-realism. Emerging primarily from film studies departments in the UK and Ireland, this work is less in thrall to upholding notions of Italy's cinematic greatness than Italian scholarship can tend to be, and less influenced by the cultural studies approaches often privileged by work originating in language departments. Instead, discussion of representation, female subjectivity in cinema, and popular cinema were the main themes of the day.

The keynote address was provided by Dr. Laura Rascaroli (University College Cork), entitled "Pier Paolo Pasolini and the notebook as film that cannot be made: a self-portrait in lack and disorder." This research forms part of her forthcoming publication on the essay film, which she defines as existing between the documentary film and the avant-garde, a film with a thesis that allows the filmmaker to jot down emerging ideas. Many leading auteurs of the sixties and seventies turned their hand to the form, including Luchino Visconti and Federico Fellini (whose *Block-notes di un regista* [1969] recreated the "open, chaotic, and tumultuous creative project" of the notebook in a careful pastiche of the form), as well as travelogues by Louis Malle, Roberto Rossellini, and Michelangelo Antonioni.

Pasolini's *Sopralluoghi in Palestina per il vangelo secondo Matteo* (1965) formed the focus of Rascaroli's address, a film of his tour of Israel/Palestine and Jordan in 1963 in preparation for his feature *Il vangelo secondo Matteo* (1964), and the first in a lifelong interest for Pasolini in the notebook film as both travelogue and a film about filmmaking. Rascaroli sees the presence of many of Pasolini's central interests in this film, including Christianity in the Arab world, the notion of the subproletariat, aesthetics, and above all the role of the artist.

Pasolini believed the "style without style that is the style of the notebook documentary" (in his words) established a democratic relationship with the audience, because its improvisatory nature is neither didactic nor pedagogical. In an example of the duality between protagonists that populate his work, Pasolini presents himself as an obsessively focussed but disordered intellectual seeker, contrasted with the dignified Don Andrea who is his travel companion. Rascaroli's point was that this contrast between order and disorder underlines a lack that is central to self-portraiture, thus linking theme to style. This lack originates in the gap between portrait and referent, or in this case between the film styles that try to capture reality and the

reality itself that it is aiming to capture. Paradoxically, in Rascaroli's view, the more successfully realist representation recalls the outside world it refers to, the more reality is effaced and representation foregrounded. Thus, just as Pasolini highlights the lack at the centre of the filmmaker's self-image, he also highlights the gap between reality and representation. Added to which the absence of the real Christ, the subject of both *Sopralluoghi* and *Il vangelo*, lack becomes a central motif in the theme and style of his film.

The abiding knowledge of Italy's cinematic heritage centres on its post-war auteurs such as Pasolini, and the attractiveness of auteur study provides a particularly popular route for research from language departments to enter into film studies, with auteur studies dominating the day. Ms. Lucy Bolton's (Queen Mary) paper "Antonioni in Hitchcock and Ramsay" approached the three directors in the light of post-war international art cinema. Antonioni has been linked to Hitchcock and Ramsay through his interest in female consciousness, and an increased emphasis on sensory stimulation over narrative development, and the paper proceeded through close textual analysis of the similarities of crucial moments of identity formation in *Il deserto rosso* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1964) and *Marnie* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1964), and *The Passenger* (Antonioni, 1975) and *Morvern Callar* (Lynne Ramsay, 2002).

Ms. Julia Brown's (University College, London) "Acoustic Hallucinations: sound and voice in *Un'ora sola ti vorrei* (Alina Marazzi, 2002)" was about an attempt through documentary for the filmmaker to get to know her mother, who committed suicide in Marazzi's infancy, and thus covered some similar conceptual ground to Bolton's and Rascaroli's papers. The film is a combination of hours of her grandfather's home movie footage of a bourgeois idyll with the troubles recorded in her mother's diary entries, given voice by Alina Marazzi herself. While this cannot enable Marazzi to really know her mother, it allows a female voice to appropriate control of the images provided by her grandfather, enabling Brown to conclude with an Irigarayan understanding of patriarchy's inability to look beyond images to gain an understanding made possible by the aural track.

Dr. Paolo Russo's (Oxford Brookes University) "Body and Subjectivity in the Films of Salvatores" provided an analysis of the film *Nirvana* (Gabriele Salvatores, 1997) as an example of Salvatores' concerns with the disillusionment of Italy post-68, through a science fiction theme about technologies embedded in people's bodies. But the large part of his paper concentrated on the challenges in conducting research into Italian cinema, which was one of the main themes of the day. He described two of De Santis' many unrealised projects, "Pettotondo", a "proto-feminist" film about prostitution and "Nostro pane quotidiano," on the agrarian question and the strife of the poor of Calabria.

Russo called for an eclectic approach to the study of Italian cinema, which was echoed by Dr. Catherine O'Rawe (University of Bristol) in "Thinking Italian Film." This was the most polemical paper, seeking to comment on the common complaint of decline in Italian cinema since its post-war heyday. O'Rawe's point was that Italian scholarship, alongside Anglophone authors such as Millicent Marcus, exhibits an obsession with Italy's auteurs and an inability to view Italian cinema beyond the parameters of neo-realism. Exhibiting a spirited hostility to this approach, O'Rawe enunciated distaste for what she called "hegemonic left-wing" criticism that she asserted privileged masculine approaches and a reliance on neo-realism as a point of reference for, in her words, a "national and perhaps nationalistic film history." In opposition to this "nationalism," she brought up the presence of American actors in neo-realism, and called for a proper theorisation of auteurism and genre in Italian cinema, which are indeed distinctly lacking in relation to Italy. O'Rawe is contributing to a special edition of

the Italian Studies journal dedicated to this end. Indeed, questions of realism and ideological criticism, which played a foundational role in Italian film criticism, were less in evidence today than may have been expected.

Dr. Daniela Treveri Gennari's (Oxford Brookes) "Researching State and Vatican Intervention in Postwar Italian Cinema" centred on the problems for research she encountered in working on her book *Post War Italian Cinema: American Interventions, Vatican Interests*. The book traces tensions between film/industrial issues, governmental factors, and the pressures of a Catholic church that was integrated into the ruling Christian Democrat party. While Church morality was suspicious of entertainment, American films were favoured for providing "soothing resolutions" considered helpful in re-establishing family values. While parliamentary debates and specialised journals, as well as interviews, have been available to her, documents relating to censorship and to trade deals have gone missing.

A strong practical element ran throughout the day, with papers angled towards the difficulties and opportunities in research into Italian film studies, ending with a discussion led by Pauline Small on the accessibility to funding for research in Italy and the availability of key written and visual materials. As a group, the papers showed that the older concerns of realism, auteurism, and art cinema of which Italy provides such alluring examples of can still offer avenues for research, alongside and sometimes incorporated into, a newer interest in popular cinema and the wider contexts in which Italians went to the cinema, albeit with the emphasis still on auteurs. The aim of the day was to provide a forum for those researching Italian cinema, and to form connections for further such events and sharing of experiences. Whilst this was planned as a small conference, the ideas generated and the attendance achieved offer proof of the vitality of interest in Italy's cinema and the developing field of Italian film scholarship.

# Literature/Film Association Conference

Literature/Film Association Conference, Kansas Union, the University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS, October 11-14, 2007

## A report by Frederick A. Holliday II, Towson University and the University of the District of Columbia, USA

According to its founder, James Welsh, the Literature/Film Association began in 1989 at Salisbury University in Maryland as an adjunct operation to the academic journal *Literature/Film Quarterly* (itself founded in 1973). As Welsh told this reporter, the purpose of the Literature/Film Association (hereafter LFA) "was to encourage and coordinate conferences for scholars interested in issues having primarily to do with film adaptation and film genre." With that mission statement in mind, the LFA has held conferences at such places as the University of Rhode Island, Arizona State University, The University of Bath in England, Dickinson College in Pennsylvania, and Towson University in Maryland. Each conference has been devoted to papers and plenary presentations focused on what might be termed the nexuses between the cinematic texts and their various literary, dramatic, historical, (and any number of other) sources. The 2007 LFA Conference, which took place from October 11-14, and was hosted by the Department of Theatre and Film at the University of Kansas, was no different. Taking as its theme "Adaptation, from Stage and Page to Screen," this year's conference featured thirty panels, two plenary sessions, and one keynote address. As Welsh wrote in his introduction to the Conference Program, "this first Literature/Film Association Conference to be held in the Midwest . . . [was] a celebration of films past and present," as well as one that sought to "cast a lingering look back and hopeful gaze into the future of literature and film studies."

In keeping with the conference's theme and LFA tradition, presentations covered issues of filmic adaptation from myriad angles, media, and methodologies. Indeed, the sheer variety of *kinds* of adaptation covered was one of the most interesting elements of this year's program. Consider just two examples of this range: KU grad student Katrina L. Bondari's paper, "Oh My God, They Killed Socrates! Teaching Aristophanes via *South Park*" argued "that the popular animated cartoon *South Park* can be used as a pedagogical tool for teaching the plays of Aristophanes," while Towson University Professor Peter Lev's paper, "*Pin-Up Girl* (1944), from Still Photograph to Feature Film" traced the transformation of the famous World War II era pin-up photo of Betty Grable into a lavish, big-budget musical comedy. Lev's paper was unique in that this must be one of a very few examples of a still image "adapted" into a feature motion picture.

There were, of course, examples of more "traditional" adaptations as well. Indeed, there were two panels devoted solely to adaptations of Shakespeare to the screen. The first of these panels, chaired by Richard Vela (UNC Pembroke) was held in the Kansas Union's "English Room," which featured a mock-Tudor interior humorously appropriate to the panel's subject. The session opened with a paper by Kanishka Sen (Ohio Northern University) entitled "Omkara: Bollywood Style Adaptation of Shakespeare's *Othello*." As this title indicates, Sen examined issues of transcultural adaptations of Shakespeare's play. Sen looked

at how the film's Bollywood conventions (though Sen argued that in many ways the film is "atypical of a formula Bollywood movie") melded with elements drawn from Shakespeare's play work to "elevate it to a polished product not usually seen in Bollywood popular cinema." Though this may be, at best, an arguable point, Sen's paper did shed light on the use of Shakespearean texts by the Indian film industry.

On the same panel, Erika Hateley (Kansas State University) delivered a paper looking at the Canadian television series *Slings and Arrows*' use of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as a kind of "metatheatrics" in which Shakespeare's play, mimicking its own *Mouse Trap*, serves as a something of play-with-a-series that underlines the series' dramatic and thematic concerns. Hateley's paper concluded that this approach sought to "engage the reader/viewer in a self-reflexive process whereby the 'value' of theatre is thematised and performed, and the consumer is positioned as the arbiter and agent of that value: complicit in its production even as they are the site of its consumption. That this is achieved televisually may mark an evolution in the ways we view Shakespeare on the box."

Genre-focused panels also constituted a significant portion of the program. In particular, a highlight of the Science Fiction/Fantasy panel chaired by Cynthia Miller was John C. Tibbetts' paper "Pictures that Fly Through the Air: Adapting Ray Bradbury's 'Icarus Montgolfier Wright.'" Tibbetts' presentation gave attendees a rare glimpse at the titular 1962 animated short, based on Bradbury's 1959 short story and "illustrated" by long-time Bradbury collaborator Joseph Mugnianni. Sharing the panel with Tibbetts was Andrew M. Gordon (University of Florida), whose paper, "*The War of the Worlds*: H.G. Wells Meets Steven Spielberg" offered a bit of a sneak preview of Gordon's then-forthcoming book on Spielberg's science fiction and fantasy films. Gordon argued that Spielberg's adaptation of Wells' novel "is a horror movie which depends upon the fear of terrorism in the wake of the trauma of 9/11 and the Iraq War."

The Conference's final session, the "American Gangster Panel," was also devoted to considerations of a single (and in this case specifically national) genre. Panel Chair Joseph Michael Sommers (University of Kansas) delivered a paper addressing Martin Scorsese's Oscar-Winning *The Departed* (2006), and its Hong Kong source film, *Infernal Affairs* (2002). In particular, Sommers examined how Scorsese's film effaced many of the more spiritual concerns of the Hong Kong original, concluding that "Scorsese chose to resolutely divorce that master narrative of the text from its spiritual center in order to reflect what he considered to be a more American construct...[crafting] a tale that he believes reflects the aggregate state of the contemporary American Gangster as one of a relatively secular, unforgivable and unapologetic nature."

The Conference's first plenary speaker, Frank Manchel (University of Vermont) was described in the program as a "Cinema Studies pioneer," and during the course of his remarks, entitled "Thank You Mr. Fuchs...", Professor Manchel amply proved the accuracy of that label. Largely biographical in nature, Manchel's speech traced his early interest in cinema and his later struggles to help establish Film Studies as a genuine discipline in American academia. Still, Professor Manchel concluded his talk with a brief sketch of the lingering effects of the Hollywood Blacklist era that, for this reporter at least, seemed toresonate almost chillingly with the political climate in the States today.

Independent scholar/author Dr. Andrew Erdman delivered the second Plenary Address. Erdman's subject was the lengthy and tortured attempts to turn the life of famed

Vaudeville performer Eva Tanguay into a classical Studio-era bio-pic. However, as Erdman humorously demonstrated, the story told in the resulting film, 1953's *The "I Don't Care" Girl*, had little to do with this compelling and complex female performer and more to with the efforts of the male filmmakers involved in bringing her "story" to the screen. While perhaps an amusing example of pre-Charlie Kaufman meta-cinema, the end result (which was screened for attendees later the same evening) also served to highlight the patriarchal nature of the Hollywood Studio system of the time. Sadly, Tanguay's story still waits its own cinematic telling.

For the Conference's keynote address, Tibbetts and Miller called upon controversial playwright/filmmaker (and Kansas alum) Neil LaBute, director of such films as *In the Company of Men* (1997), *Your Friends and Neighbors* (1998), *Nurse Betty* (2000), *The Shape of Things* (2003), and the recent remake of *The Wicker Man* (2006). LaBute's speech, "My Life on Stage and Screen," took the audience through his days as a Theatre MFA student at Kansas and the making of most of his films. Among the topics LaBute addressed were his working relationship with his frequent collaborator, actor Aaron Eckhart, the difficulties inherent in bringing his stage play, *The Shape of Things*, to the screen with actors from its theatrical run already tired of their roles, and how he works with his actors to deliver his sometimes lengthy monologues on screen. LaBute's talk covered nearly his entire career, though limitations of time (perhaps intentionally) did not allow him to address *Wicker Man*, a notorious flop, at all. The tenor of LaBute's remarks was, in many ways, similar to that of his films; acerbically witty and occasionally abrasive. And, likewise in the manner of his films, LaBute's comments seemed to divide the audience (or at least those interviewed in an unscientific poll conducted by this reporter) about evenly between those who find his attitude refreshing and honest and those who felt differently. In fairness, it should also be pointed out that LaBute's stage persona seemed markedly different from the more reserved and charming tone he adopted in his informal remarks at the reception which preceded his presentation.

As the papers, panels, and speakers described in this report (as well as those of presenters Thomas Lietch, Tina Lent, Brian Faucette, Christofer Meissner, Caherine L. Preston, Richard Vela, Carl Grindley, David Kranz, and numerous others) demonstrate, the 2007 LFA Conference ably continued the Literature/Film Association's tradition of conferences dedicated to studying issues of adaptation and genre in film, literature, theatre, poetry, and the like, as well as the varied and various translations and intersections between them all. From Shakespeare to *South Park*, from the mean streets of Boston to the alien ravaged suburbs of New Jersey, from vaudeville to video to "vidding," the LFA and its members will continue to gaze into the past, present, and future of film and literature (even as emerging digital technologies may begin to change our fundamental understanding of these terms) and share their findings with each other and the field as a whole. Indeed, in the autumn of 2008 the LFA Conference will be held at Baskent University in Ankara, Turkey, furthering the international scope of the organization.