Beginnings and Endings in Films, Film and Film Studies

Beginnings and Endings in Films, Film and Film Studies, University of Warwick, 13th June 2008

A report by Martin Zeller, University of York, UK

This conference, organised by Tom Hughes and James MacDowell (both of University of Warwick), examined the beginnings and endings of individual films and structures of beginnings and endings in films more generally, as well as notions of beginning and ending in film studies as a discipline. With such a wide remit it is not surprising that links between the various presentations were sometimes difficult to establish. However, the wide variety of approaches to the topic ensured lively discussions.

The tone for the day was set by the keynote paper delivered by Warwick's own V. F. Perkins. Examining beginnings and endings in the genre of 'multi-story' (or portmanteau) movies, Perkins elucidated the various methods used to make the author the focus of these multi-stranded narratives. Drawing on the literary cachet of their source texts, *Quartet*, *Full House* and *Le Plaisir* make Maugham, O. Henry and Maupassant the respective loci around which their stories revolve. Pointing out that authorial intrusions were, with the exception of *Le Plaisir*, used only at the beginnings of such films, Perkins suggested the possibility of a largely unexplored narrative technique available in returning to the author at the close of a film. However, it was Professor Perkin's call for, 'an aesthetics of the quite good, of the satisfactorily effective, as well as the extremes: the abject and the sublime,' that seemed to resonate most with the delegates and to become a touchstone for the day's later discussions.

The first panel had the daunting task of examining the notion of beginnings and endings in the disciplines of film and television studies. Andrew Klevan (St. Anne's College, Oxford) examined the tendency of Stanley Cavell to return, over and over again, to the same moments in his writings on film. Suggesting that such an openness to the surprising, easily overlooked moments in cinema might lead us to unexpected places, Klevan cautioned against the tempting shortcut of over-arching theory. Avoiding the trap of necessarily false beginnings and endings, he advocated returning again and again to those moments in films which might unlock their secrets to us.

Next, Charlotte Brunsdon (Warwick) examined the relatively new phenomenon of television 'bingeing'. Made possible by DVDs and digital recording devices, this sort of viewing usually consists of prolonged periods of viewing a single serial text. Brunsdon rejected the easy negative characterisation of 'bingeing' and its return to the 'addiction metaphors' which have often plagued analysis of television viewing. Her paper used as its focus the seminal British series *Law and Order*. Soon to be released on DVD, it constitutes potentially binge-able material, but Brunsdon questioned whether a text so dependent upon being viewed over a prolonged period of time would be accessible to 'binge' viewers. Ultimately, the crucial effects of the beginnings and endings of such older programmes, she suggested, were likely

to have their impacts lessened by the blurring of narrative boundaries inherent in television bingeing.

The second panel focused more narrowly on the notion of beginnings and endings in film as a medium. Paul Cuff (Warwick) discussed the director Abel Gance and his failed transition to sound in the film *La Fin du Monde*. Cuff situated Gance's film in its historical context, explaining its origin and its failure in Gance's idiosyncratic views. Michael Pigott (Warwick) suggested that the oft-noted (and oft-lamented) influence of video games on films did not begin and end with this simple exchange, but was best characterised as a feedback loop. Drawing on *Children of Men* and *Cloverfield* from the cinema as well as the *Call of Duty* series and *Half-Life 2* from the world of video games, he made a compelling case for a mutually supported cycle of influence moving between these media.

The keynote address, delivered by Michael Walker, focused on the endings of Steven Spielberg's films, sketching a path from *The Sugarland Express* through *Empire of the Sun* and *War of the Worlds*. Arguing that Spielberg's endings were characterised by an increasing tendency towards what he called 'the rhetoric of an ending' or 'self-consciousness about the ending *as* ending', Walker offered Spielberg as an exceptional practitioner of the characteristic 'Hollywood' ending which draws the viewer out of emotional engagement and into 'aesthetic contemplation'. Professor Walker's auteurist approach to the topic did not find favour with those delegates for whom the terms 'Spielberg' and 'aesthetic contemplation' seemed mutually exclusive. However this disagreement led to one of the liveliest plenary discussions of the day.

The day's final panel consisted of three short papers. The first, by Lucy Fife (University of Reading), examined the way George A. Romero engages his audiences through the tone of his films *Dawn of the Dead* and *Day of the Dead*. Comparing the openings of both films, Fife suggested that Romero sought to position his viewers so that they shared the vulnerability of his heroines. Tom Brown (Reading) examined Fellini's *Notti di Cabiria*, challenging Bazin's assertion that the film lacked *enchainment dramatique*, and suggested that the ending's famous moment of direct address resulted from an emotional logic running throughout the film which required the film to burst through the normal constraints of (neo)realism. Stuart Henderson (Warwick) queried the idea of closure in the classical Hollywood narrative in the current climate of sequelisation and multi-media adaptations. Examining the most recent instalment in the *Rambo* franchise, Henderson asserted that, although each of the *Rambo* films have attained narrative closure within themselves, each subsequent sequel has required a knowledge of the earlier films for full access to its emotional and narrative threads, to the extent that the final shot of the most recent film echoes the very first of the series. Henderson argued that a financial and historical understanding of films and their sequels would be a necessary adjunct to the textual if this trend were to be fully explored.

Perhaps inevitably for a conference with such a variety of topics to cover, this one left more questions than answers. Several papers hinted at a breakdown of traditional textual boundaries caused by a variety of new media practices. Others sought to re-examine older films from newer approaches. Yet while all of the presentations offered something of interest, it was difficult to find ways to draw them together in the panel discussions afterwards. The conference particularly struggled to address the broadest ideas in its remit: those of beginnings and endings within the disciplines of film and television studies. At their best, the papers on offer dealt with one or two films, drawing on those small examples to

make broader points. The more theoretical, less grounded pieces were intriguing but left the delegates waiting to be convinced.

Music and the Melodramatic Aesthetic

Music and the Melodramatic Aesthetic, University of Nottingham, 5 – 7 September 2008

A report by Serena Formica, University of Birmingham, UK

The Music and the Melodramatic Aesthetic conference was part of an AHRC-funded project, under the auspices of MOSS that aims to respond to the lack of academic studies on the role of music in melodrama. Over the period of one year, the project has seen the collaboration of scholars and graduate students from a variety of disciplines (music, drama and film), and has explored melodrama as 'a performance process' and has investigated its legacy, spanning theatre and film. The project has included a study day, various workshops and a British silent film festival panel held at the Broadway Cinema and Media Centre in Nottingham. The conference was hosted by Nottingham's Department of Music, and its papers were divided into nine panels exploring music and the melodramatic aesthetic including music as text, mediator, recitation, voice and technological transformations.

The panel dedicated to the exploration of 'music as text' investigated the function of music in the early melodramas. Kate Astbury's (University of Warwick) paper 'Performance, the press, and the rise of melodrama in France' explored the role of music in early French melodramas through an examination of Guilbert de Pixérécourt's plays.

Astbury's paper considered how Pixérécourt dramas were reflective of the French political situation of the time. Victor, described as the 'first historical melodrama' was written in 1789 and can be understood in some senses as enacting the Revolution. Although music plays a central role in Pixérécourt dramas, Astbury pointed out how theatrical critics of the time were initially dismissive of it. This attitude resulted on the one hand from the fact that Pixérécourt preferred to employ theatre composers instead of established ones, and on the other hand from the fact that music composed for melodrama was generally held in low esteem. However, noted Astbury, 'not all the critics remained silent' and some highlighted the overlaps between music composed for melodrama and for opéra comique. Astbury's talk encouraged music scholars to undertake further research on the 'role of music in the origins of melodrama'. In the lively question and answer session that followed, Astbury highlighted the lack of original scores of Pixérécourt's plays, and pointed to the role of music in shaping the audience's reaction.

During the conference, the delegates had the rare opportunity to experience the screening of Frank Lloyd's silent film *Within the Law* (1923), in a theatre with live piano accompaniment. Philip Carli's performance was one of the highlights of the conference, and, in accordance's with the conference's aim, enabled us to appreciate the fundamental role of music during the silent film period. Carli's changes of tempo and mood guided the reaction of the audience to the situation developing on screen, either building the suspense preceding a revelation, or creating a more relaxed atmosphere during the less tense moments of the film.

The centrality of music to silent cinema came to the fore during Polly Goodwin's (London, Independent Researcher) paper 'Acting Suspicious: Exemplification of silent film acting technique(s) in Hitchcock's early crime ralkies'. Goodwin examined actors' difficult transition from silent to sound films through the case studies of two of Alfred Hitchcock's pictures: *Number 17* (1932) and *Blackmail* (1929). Goodwin illustrated how in these early talkies the actors significantly drew from silent performing techniques giving the audience the same visual markers familiar from silent movies. This often resulted in a stilted performance with almost comical effects. Goodwin argued that these Hitchcock films would have worked better as silent movies, and demonstrated her point by firstly showing a sound clip of *Number 17* and then muting and having it accompanied by a live performance at the piano by Philip Carli. Goodwin highlighted the excessive 'response time' during dialogues, and emphasised the lack of musical support during the film. Interestingly, while the hesitant performance of the actors during the first clip provoked some laughter, the second viewing was received with a respectful silence, thus reinforcing Goodwin's point of the necessity of reintroducing music accompaniment in Hitchcock's early 'talkies'.

Goodwin's paper brought to the fore the idea that texts belonging to different media can share melodramatic qualities, or, as Jacqueline Waeber, keynote speaker of the conference put it, there are 'invariant traits of the melodramatic'. In her paper 'Music-image-text: searching for the melodramatic', Waeber pointed out the difficulty of 'defin[ing] the melodramatic in music', and explored different case studies of melodrama as a genre (crossing boundaries with theatrical melodrama), as a technique (in opera and also pantomime) and as an aesthetic ('marked by redundancy, abrupt juxtapositions and discursive breakdowns'). Waeber illustrated the different traits of melodrama and focused on music's role in negotiating between different worlds or spaces. She explained, for example, how the dialogue in the George Anton Benda (libretto by J.A. Brandes) *Ariadne auf Naxos* (1775) is a masqueraded monologue, in which the music marks the difference between Ariadne's dreamlike situation and the reality lived by Theseus.

Waeber continued by comparing the 1832 and 1855 versions of Hector Berlioz's *Lélio, ou Le Retour à la vie*. Berlioz's play is divided into six tableaux (Le pêcheur. Ballade, Chanson de brigands, Chant de bonheur – Souvenirs, La harpe éolienne, and Fantaisie sur la 'Tempête' de Shakespeare) and while the first version is focussed on the present time, the 1855 version presents variations between the different times and introduces Lelio's imaginary voice, in which the melodramatic has a 'transitory function, creating footbridges between the real and the unreal, the present and the past', and the recurring musical theme, or 'idée fixe', representing the beloved, becomes an autonomous object.

Interestingly, the tableaux structure of Berlioz's melodrama is also identifiable in another case study presented by Waeber, Alain Resnais' film *L'Année Dernière a Marienbad*, in which the protagonist Albertazzi's voiceover has a 'melodramatic status' recalling memories (or imagining them?) of the previous year. It accompanies the camera panning over the characters, who remain motionless and speechless – as they would be in tableaux vivants.

During the conference, to put it in Sarah Townley's (University of Nottingham) words, 'delegates explore(d) one central idea through many others'. Townley's paper ''O wicked, wicked voice, violin of flesh and blood!': the resistance of material form and the role of the melodramatic aesthetic in Vernon Lee's supernatural tale *The Wicked Voice*', explored the contrast between the Wagnerian aesthetic, characterised by 'an extreme slowness of vital tempo',that devitalises the listener, and the 'spontaneous and emotively-charged cadenza' of

Lee's Zaffirino, the Venetian castrato singer who 'revitalises the listener by resetting the link between aesthetic value and formulaic expectation'. In her paper, Townley illustrated how Magnus, the protagonist of Lee's work, is at first haunted by, and then becomes enamoured with Zaffirino's voice, in a novel that defied the 'publish-or-perish print culture of late-Victorian literary life'.

The function of voice was also explored by Louis Bayman (King's College, University of London) in his paper 'The operatic expressivity of Italian melodrama'. Byman reinforced a view shared by several delegates: the difficulty of defining melodrama. With examples from Italian films of the 1940s, he illustrated 'how Italian melodrama translated an operatic way of constructing drama into film'. Bayman highlighted how the Italian word 'melodramma' means both opera and melodrama, and argued that, in Italy, melodramma entered cinema not through theatre but rather through 'the operatic stage'. This is reflected in the operatic techniques present in the Italian films, in which 'fast movement and sensational effects' are downplayed in favour of an emotional expressivity of the voice, linked to the body. The operatic sensibily of Italian cinema, argued Bayman, is not a step backwards to pre-cinematic days, but rather is a 'tensely climatic use of cinema', which influenced post-war Italian directors such as Luchino Visconti.

Music was also examined during the conference in its function as 'mediator'. Ceri Higgins's (Trinity College, University of Wales) paper 'Composing the Comedia Ranchera: image and music in the Mexican musical melodrama'. Higgins examined 'the melodramatic aesthetic through the relationship of sound and cinematography in the early Mexican film genre', with a discussion of the Mexican musical melodrama, *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (Fernando de Fuentes, 1936). Higgins underlined how the music of the film is all diegetic and 'is produced entirely by the characters present on screen'.

Martín and Francisco, the two protagonists of the film, are rivals in love. Martín also questions Francisco social position in the hacienda, and the two engage in a singing duel that becomes the narrative climax of the film. Interestingly, the song becomes a vehicle to express the protagonists' politcal stands and emotions, conveyed more effectively through music than through simple dialogue. Figueroa's cinematography highlights the difference between the characters 'privileging José Francisco and emphasising his central position and role within the hacienda community and the narrative'. Higgins underlined how the film is more complex than the critics suggested, and discussed the 'lack of connection between the study of sound and image in film', recommending 'a synthesis of critical approaches to enable a more syncretic appreciation of both elements'.

Although music and melodrama were the central focus of the conference, the rich and various academic backgrounds of the delegates meant that different perspectives were adopted, and different approaches emerged in discussion. While musicologists and music scholars concentrated their attention more on the relation between the scores and the librettos of the various plays and dramas discussed (which, regretfully, can not all be included in this report) film scholars added the cinematic dimensions of image and sound, rendering the conference truly interdisciplinary. In his paper 'Tearing Speech to Pieces: Voice Technologies of the 1940s', Jake Smith (Nottingham) explored the significant impact that 'talking machines' – the voder and then the sonovox – had in Hollywood cinema of 1940s. These new devices amazed audiences with their ability to simulate human speech, and were soon employed to create cinematic special effects. Interestingly, Smith points out that these machines were almost exclusively operated by "female enunciators", and the use of this device was inflected by

notions of gender at every point in its implementation'. The paper analysed the use of sonovox in the Hollywood melodramas (or 'woman's films') *Possessed* (1947) and *Letter to Three Wives* (1949). In *Possessed*, the sonovox acts as an 'equivalent to a subjective camera', exteriorizing Joan Crawford's anxieties. 'Bringing to life the 'career' of sonovox', argued Smith, 'illustrates the importance of sound and the performance of the female voice in film melodrama'.

The conference's organisers chose to have all the papers in the same conference room, to avoid overlapping panels. This gave the delegates the chance to follow and enjoy every talk, and participate in lively debates during the question and answer sessions. This atmosphere continued in the coffee breaks, and encouraged the exchange of ideas on the study of music and melodrama within different contexts and across different genres.

Making television for young children: Future prospects and issues

Making television for young children: Future prospects and issues, The University of Westminster, 12th September 2008

A report by Alexandra Cochrane, University of Ulster, UK

As the all-out ban on broadcasting advertising for junk food on dedicated children's channels drew closer, he University of Westminster held its conference on children's television. It was to be a timely look at the industry in a time of enormous change, both in terms of its funding and the consumption habits of its audience. The second industry conference of the AHRC-funded research project, 'The Changing Production Ecology of Pre-school Television in Britain', it focused on the changing relationships between broadcasters, producers and the young audience in the digital age.

The conference was opened by the University of Ulster's Professor Màire Messenger Davies, who took a trip down memory lane. Speaking about watching television with her own children, she recalled wondering what young viewers make of the often surreal worlds that their favourite characters inhabit. Historically inaccurate, dreamlike and sometimes downright bizarre (to adult eyes at least), what do children gain from viewing television?

As Messenger Davies analysed short sequences of programmes spanning more than thirty years, it was apparent that given the right mixture of ingredients, preschool children can be both informed and entertained by programmes produced for their age-group. A tradition of emphasising learning through play, as well as an affection and respect for the young audience make it unsurprising that even several decades after we finish watching children's television shows, we recall them fondly with family, friends and even total strangers: children's television is a shared experience.

But, are we damaging that experience for future generations because of an over-reliance on merchandising thanks to the industry's grim financial situation? Professor Jeanette Steemers, the conference organiser from the University of Westminster, referred to a British commentator who remarked: 'Children's TV shows are just giant toy ads.' Steemers looked at the tension between artistry and industry, stating that without the £800 million in revenue brought into the preschool children's production industry through licensing and merchandising, the television programmes simply could not be made.

Although children's television has a long history of licensed products, dating back to Muffin the Mule toys sold during the 1950s, these were off-shoots of the television programme, rather than carefully planned elements of it, according to Steemers. Now, producers pitching a show must have a recognisable team of characters, who live in a highly characterised universe with 'toyetic qualities'. This set the tone for Lynn Whitaker's (research student, University of Glasgow) informative discussion of two such 'universes' with immediately

identifiable characters and paraphernalia: *Balamory* and *LazyTown*, each hit shows for BBC Scotland.

However, only a handful of shows experience massive success and as Greg Childs (secretary of Save Kids TV and director of Childseye Consulting) emphasised in the second session, 'Children's Media in a Multiplatform World', provision needs to be made for those that bring in less money. Such programmes are still valuable in terms of influencing children's perception of themselves and society. Although children's changing media habits can be tapped into in order to bring more money into the industry – through, for example, the development of websites - there is still a need for television which stretches the imagination and challenges the intellect.

Laura Turner Laing's (vice-president of the Global Digital and Music department of Entertainment Rights) explanation of the commercial opportunities available to her company underlined the extent of children's use of the internet and video games. She reported that within the next twelve to eighteen months, video game sales will exceed CD sales in the shops. While teenagers play video games and online games, younger children play software games. There is great potential for the gaming industry and the preschool television industry to work together.

However, while younger children have yet to be targeted by online games industry, Lizzie Jackson's (post-doctoral researcher at the University of Westminster) paper revealed that the under tens are well catered for in terms of virtual worlds on the internet. Màire Messenger Davies and Kaitlynn Mendes presented their research on the BBC children's news programme *Newsround*, highlighting that the relationship of children's programming with its audience is changing and it must adapt to continue to engage with its viewers. But, although children appreciate and value having a current affairs show dedicated specifically for them, research found that they did not use the *Newsround* website. The primary school children sampled said that their favourite source for news was the television.

Presentations given by Phil Davies from Astley Barker Davies (the London-based company that produced *Peppa Pig*) and Leonora Hume from Hit Entertainment (the company that is modernizing classics such as *Thomas and Friends* and *Fireman Sam*) provided fascinating insights into the industry. They addressed one of the key conference questions on how producers apply creative and technical innovation to production.

Davies and Hume each highlighted the variety of methods used to produce programmes for preschool children, from keeping every element of the process in-house, to audience testing to ascertain viewers' opinions on the show's colour scheme. For researchers who may be unfamiliar with the day-to-day business of creating a programme, this input from industry professionals was fascinating and instructive.

Of equal interest was the presentation given by Josh Selig and Heather Tilbert (president and supervising producer respectively of Little Airplane Productions). The media professionals indicated that theirs is an industry very much aware of the need to innovate and take risks to attract its audience. The discussion given by Jocelyn Stevenson of TT Animation took a similar vein.

The audience was entertained with clips of new preschool programmes created by these companies, including the new 'photo puppetry' technique used to animate a hamster's trip into

space, and an ant interpreting a baby's responses to a breaking news story about a child learning to do tumbles. Each presentation impressed on the audience that children's television producers are using cutting edge technology to create shows that are experimental, original and hugely entertaining.

The final session, 'Broadcaster and Co-Producer Perspectives – From Home and Abroad', saw CBeebies controller Michael Carrington highlight how much material the BBC provides for children. US educational advisor Dr Mary Ann Dudko provided an interesting counterpoint, as she pointed out that much of the UK children's programming, although didactic, does not make the educational content explicit enough to meet US standards. In America, each preschool show must meet certain strict curriculum goals and the educational content must be organically placed within the stories.

The conference was concluded with Ann Brogan's account of 'The Challenges of Co-Production in the Context of making *Big and Small*'. Discussions given throughout the day by industry professionals consistently highlighted the need to economise and make money stretch as far as possible, something which does not look set to change in the future. One such way is to enter into co-production, as Brogan and her colleagues did with *Big and Small*. Although producers must overcome different cultural perspectives if they are based in different countries, in addition to the difficulties inherent in working in different time zones, Brogan said that this method of production can result in a bigger, better show.

In summary, the conference fostered a sense of community – in a relatively new research area, it offered a good opportunity for those in the field to discuss their work. The friendly atmosphere was conducive to promoting academic dialogue during the breaks between sessions. It brought together researchers based all over the UK, as well as industry professionals, united by an interest in the development of preschool children's television in the digital age.

All too often, the financial crisis suffered by children's television industry dominates any discussion of it. This conference took the bold step of examining what the industry is currently doing in the face of these concerns and also its future outlook. The papers demonstrated that although the industry is indeed experiencing financial difficulties, these have hindered neither the innovation nor the imaginative content of new shows.

Emergent Encounters in Film Theory: Intersections between Psychoanalysis and Philosophy

Emergent Encounters in Film Theory: Intersections between Psychoanalysis and Philosophy, King's College, London, 21st March 2009

A report by Davide Caputo, University of Exeter, UK

As its name suggests, the goal of this event was to explore possible points of intersection between philosophical and psychoanalytic approaches to film theory. The specific need for such a conference emerges in the wake of the recent theoretical trend toward philosophy, as exemplified by D.N. Rodowick (*The Virtual Life of Film*, 2007) and Daniel Frampton (*Filmosophy*, 2006). The conference wished to address what effect such a turn might have on psychoanalytically based theory. It specifically posed the question of whether philosophical and psychoanalytical approaches are by definition mutually exclusive, or if this recent shift has constructed intellectual walls that inhibit cross-pollination between the two disciplines.

The conference was a one-day event organised by King's College London (specifically by Davina Quinlivan, Markos Hadjioannou, Ruth McPhee and Louis Bayman). The keynote speakers were Professor Steven Shaviro (Wayne State University) and Dr. Vicky Lebeau (University of Sussex), who began the morning and afternoon respectively with a one-hour plenary session. Each plenary was followed by three parallel panels consisting of three different, but thematically connected, twenty-minute papers. In these panels, a variety of international academics took up the challenge outlined above.

One of the recurring themes in the papers presented was the concept of absence, which will also, as it turns out, be reflected in this report. Due to the parallel nature of the panel sessions, I was only able to attend two of the six on offer (one in the morning, one in the afternoon). As a result, my comments on the sessions I did not attend are simply quick summaries based on the abstracts provided at the conference.

Starting the day was Shaviro's talk, a preview of a work in progress entitled 'Post-Cinematic Affect', which includes sections on the Grace Jones video for *Corporate Cannibal*(2008), Richard Kelly's *Southland Tales* (2006) and Olivier Assayas's *Boarding Gate* (2007). Shaviro's appearance at King's marked the end of his UK tour with this paper, and was limited to the section on *Boarding Gate*, in which he discussed the film in terms of *mapping*, as opposed to representing, non-visible space. Shaviro suggested that the director is diagramming (in the Deleuzian sense) the essentially unrepresentable phenomenon of globalised capitalism. In so doing, the film transduces the forces of finance onto the screen in a manner reminiscent of Deleuze's discussion of Bacon, in which impalpable forces (not just their effects) are rendered visible through mapping, not mimesis. Related to this process, Shaviro also proposed that *Boarding Gate* demonstrates the changing nature of the any-space whatever, moving beyond Deleuze's description of any-spaces formed via destructive forces,

to those equally 'any' any-spaces being formed by the constructive forces of the now-global minimalist aesthetic, as typified by five-star hotels and hotel-like luxury flats around the world. Shaviro argued that Assayas shares Bazin's idea of cinema rendering the reality of the world; but since the world has changed, suggests Shaviro, so does the way we render it need to change. (For more information, see Shaviro's blog, *The Pinocchio Theory*, on www.shaviro.com)

Following the Shaviro session, attendees had to choose between three separate panel discussions. In 'Status Unknown? Conceptualising New Formations of Identity', Dr. Pat Brereton (Dublin City University) presented a paper entitled 'The Talking Cure and Nature as Therapy: Framing a Study of Representations of Suicide in Irish Cinema.' This paper explored portrayals of male self-destruction in *On the Edge* (John Carney, 2000), *Disco Pigs* (Kirsten Sheridan, 2002), and *Garage* (Mark O'Halloran, 2007). Dr. Corin Depper (Kingston University, London) then discussed Godard's *Eloge de l'Amour* (2001) in a paper entitled 'States of Love: Godard, Badiou, and the Inaesthetics of 'Non-Cinema''. And Dr. Richard Letteri (Furman University in South Carolina) presented his paper 'History, Silence, and Homelessness in Wang Xiaoshuai's *Shanghai Dreams (2005)*', which analysed the film in Heideggerian and Freudian terms.

In another panel session, 'Bodily Interfaces: Sensate Screens and Visceral Pleasures', Dr. Jinhee Choi (University of Kent) presented a paper entitled 'Sense and Sensibility: A Corporeal Turn in Film Studies', which took a cue from Vivian Sobchack's concept of the 'phenomenological experience' of cinema to further the discussion of spectatorship. Adriano D'Aloia (L'Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan) examined the philosophical and psychoanalytical implications of water and drowning with his paper 'Film in Depth: Drowning Bodies in Contemporary Cinema.' Finally, Dr. Tina Kendall (Anglia Ruskin University) dealt with cinematic 'unpleasure' by analysing the physical experience of watching *L'Humanité* (1999) and *Twentynine Palms* (2003) in her paper 'The Forces of Shock: The Thinking Cinema of Bruno Dumont'.

The third session, 'New Geneologies in Film Theory', was the one I chose to attend. In the first of three papers, Dr. Tarja Laine (University of Amsterdam) examined the broken heart, affect, obsession and our troubled relationship with Lynch's diegesis in 'Affective Telepathy, or the Intuition of the Heart in *Mulholland Drive*'. For Laine, *Mulholland Drive* (2001) describes a theatre of love in which obsession renders space and time chaotic, and life and death interchangeable. Laine's paper drew a fascinating parallel between Diane/Betty's crumbled psyche and the way the spectator is betrayed by the film's narrative structure. Diane/Betty's inability to make sense of the world (and ultimate suicide) mirrors the way the film denies the spectator narrative satisfaction. In this manner, the film does not only depict affect (i.e. Diane/Betty's psychosis), but causes a similar affect in the puzzled viewer.

Carla Garcia (King's College, London) presented a portion of her ongoing research with her paper 'Rethinking the Cinematic Apparatus with Bion's Theory of Thinking', in which she delineated a conceptual model that connects infantile frustration to cinematic spectatorship. Garcia's paper accessed Bion's theory of early recognition of absence and its effect on thought creation and applies this framework to the similar 'frustration' that occurs when one watches a film. One of the key advantages of the application of Bion's theory to cinema, Garcia argued, is that it allows the discussion of spectatorship to move beyond the pleasures of mastery and scopophilia, as espoused by Laura Mulvey and Christian Metz, and includes 'unpleasure' into the fold.

Ending this panel was Peter Matthews (London College of Communications), who presented a sample of the work being conducted by a recently formed research group - an assembly of film theorists, filmmakers, cognitive psychologists and biochemical experts called Cinema and Psychosis. In his paper 'Karl Jaspers: The Missing Link?' Matthews identified the philosopher-psychiatrist as a model for the type of interdisciplinarity the conference was meant to address. Matthews described Jaspers as a figure who embraces the 'concrete' whilst not forcing us to dismiss psychoanalysis. Like those that preceded it, the key to this paper is the sensory experience of art. 'Art fascinates us because we are poised on the brink of revelation,' Matthews asserted, describing the way cinema can offer perceptual traces of absent, invisible, and inaccessible reality, and thus sets the stage for transcendence. To illustrate, Matthews pointed to iconic images such as Norman's twisted smile at the end of *Psycho* (1960) and *Citizen Kane*'s (1941) Rosebud, as well as Bresson's work as a whole, as examples of how the screen can serve as cipher to the enigma of the totality of being (i.e. Jaspers's 'encompassing').

Starting the afternoon was the second plenary session in which speaker Vicky Lebeau gave us a preview of her forthcoming book *The Arts of Seeing: the cinema of Michael Haneke* (Reaktion). Part of Lebeau's work focuses on Haneke's use of absence and duration in his ubiquitous lingering shots, which Haneke himself has suggested (echoed by Lebau) are not so much meditations on death, but unlived lives. Lebau illustrated by examining the opening sequence of *The Seventh Continent* (1989), in which the camera is fixed in the back seat of a car, looking forward through the windscreen as the vehicle travels through a car wash. In her analysis of this scene and Haneke's work in general, Lebeau evoked Donald Winnicott's discussion of infantile gazing and the horror of the reflection-less specular image, and ultimately challenges us to consider cinema itself as a form of aural and visual thinking.

As in the morning session, attendees had to pick between another three panel sessions. In one session, 'Thinking about a Philo-Psychoanalysis', Dr. David Sorfa (Liverpool John Moores University) presented his paper 'Romantic Comedies and Psychoanalysis: Bad Objects in Film Studies and Philosophy', which applied Melanie Klein's concept of 'good and bad objects' to a discussion of film theory's seeming dismissal of the romantic-comedy, comparing this resistance to philosophy's often equally dismissive attitude to psychoanalysis. Dr. Mattias Frey (University of Kent) then presented the paper 'The Limits of Spectatorship: Towards a Theory of Walking Out', which examined what occurs when the suture fails and spectators are compelled to leave the cinema. Concluding this panel was Dr. Maria Walsh (Chelsea College of Art and Design), who suggested that a Deleuzian approach may be a productive way of reading a gallery piece in her paper 'The Poetics of Becoming Other in Sutapa Biswas' Film Installation *Birdsong*'.

In a parallel session, 'The Medium Walks the Red Carpet: Theorising Film Form Today', Dr. Elizabeth I. Watkins (University of Bristol) presented 'Images Dissolve: *Don't Look Now*', an examination of the dissolution of the familiar in Nicolas Roeg's 1973 film. Dr. Michael Goddard (University of Salford) then discussed recent shifts in film theory caused by digital technology in his paper 'The Virtual Life of (Entre-)-Images: Modes of Film Theory after the Loss of the Filmic Object in Rodowick and Bellour'. Finally, Oisin Keohane (London School of Economics) looked at what the spectral dimension of cinema tells us about the ontology of the medium itself, in his paper 'A Question of Timing: Stanley Cavell and the Commerce of Ghosts'.

Of the three afternoon sessions, I attended 'Same Difference? The Legacy of Lacan and Freud'. First to present was Dr. Greg Tuck (University of the West of England), who offered a re-consideration of Todd Solondz's 1998 film in his paper 'Good Lacanians and Bad Hegelians: Sexual Difference and the Dialectic of (Un)*Happiness*.' In this paper, he describes a world 'made miserable by sexual desire'. Tuck argues that notwithstanding the film's unblinking portrayal of sexuality, its message is surprisingly conservative, seemingly trying to push the anti-masturbation hysteria of the century before into the next. For Tuck, the film sets up a Lacanian binary of feminine stoicism and male skepticism, in which women accept the impossibility of fulfilment through sex as a fact, whereas men simply keep trying (affirming Lacan's sentiment that 'there is no sexual relationship').

Next on the panel was Anna Cooper Sloan (University of Warwick), who presented her paper 'Representative Men: Masculinity, Psychotherapy and Moral Perfectionism in *Good Will Hunting*', a Cavellian dissection of Gus Van Sant's 1997 film. Sloan's paper demonstrates that the type of male 'moral perfectionism' described by Cavell was alive and well in 1990s Hollywood cinema. For Sloan, *Good Will Hunting* is an inheritor of the Western, in which the male protagonist, Will, achieves self-actualisation (i.e. moral perfection) and, quite literally, rides off into the sunset. Sloan's paper made the case that this film and the rest of the nineties 'Harvard Cycle' served as a means of men reclaiming the (masculine) territory of the Western, much of which was being lost at this time by a cinema of male melancholy. Her paper also stressed the significance of Will's relationship with his psychoanalyst, which Sloan suggests 'allow(s) Will – and through him all men – to embrace an old-fashioned America'.

Ending this session, as well as the conference, was Patricia Di Risio (University of Melbourne) and her paper '*Thelma & Louise*: A Reconfiguration of Gender and Genre'. Moving beyond traditional models of spectatorship offered by the likes of Laura Mulvey and Mary Anne Doane, Di Risio convincingly employed Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome to discuss the type of gender-bending that takes place as co-protagonists Thelma and Louise commandeer the road-movie genre. Her approach thus allows us to consider shifting identities in a more fluid manner than conventional (binary) notions of gender, which tend to divide behaviour into the 'phallic' and 'emasculated'. Di Risio's paper also examined the film's rape scene, which both drives the film and raises the problematic nature of the rape-revenge fantasy that it evokes.

Although it is difficult to conclude that this conference proves or disproves that psychoanalysis and philosophy can be reconciled in film theory, the papers presented demonstrate that merely addressing the issue opens up fruitful new modes of thought. So fruitful, in fact, that many of the ideas presented proved difficult to contain in the short time allocated; motivating me, for one, to devote more thought to the various points of overlap and conflict that connect these two disciplines so dear to film theory.

The Wild Eye Symposium of Experimental Film Studies

The Wild Eye Symposium of Experimental Film Studies, De Montfort University, Leicester, 4th March 2009

A report by Phil Smith, University of Plymouth

The Wild Eye Symposium – which is part of a wider initiative including an e-forum and plans for a publication – represents a first move in an ambitious attempt to re-shape the ways and means by which film is projected, addressed, re-narrated, re-viewed, critiqued and enjoyed in the context of Film Studies. The remit of The Wild Eye initiative is 'to break what Robert B. Ray defines as the 'path dependency' of contemporary film studies' and proposes the *necessity* for 'new or reinvented forms of writing'. The organisers – I. Q. Hunter (De Montfort University) and Mark Goodall (University of Bradford) - quote Bela Balazs in support of such a renewed critical writing; neither contemplative nor instrumental of other discourses, but rhetorical, practical, strategic and evangelical, to 'fire the imagination of future seekers for new worlds and creators of new arts'.

Given the ambition of the conference, it is perhaps not surprising that most papers addressed these challenges in more modest ways. A head-on assault on a dominant, 'path dependent' critical and theoretical practice – secured by continuing practice and refinement – perhaps daunted most presenters. Indeed, when Hunter, in the final plenary session, challenged the, to him surprising, and perhaps disappointing, verification of work presented at the symposium within the theoretical structures of the 'usual suspects' he provoked an impassioned defence of the academic's 'right to theorise without embarrassment' from the keynote speaker, Ben Noys (University of Chichester).

Perhaps, then, it is significant that it was in the most marginal or eccentric (in the literal sense of standing out from the others) papers – papers that were characterised partly by an empiricist modesty, by their relation to a personal practice and by the spectre of a theory never quite addressed, beguiling by its absence – that the ambitions of the organisers were most nearly articulated.

In her paper, The Flâneusie of cinematic writing, Maria Walsh (Chelsea College of Art and Design) drew upon the journeys of the female wanderers of Lynne Ramsay's *Morvern Callar* (2005) and Agnes Varda's *Vagabond/Sans toit ni loi* (1985) – neither free spirits nor lost souls, but characterisations resistant to critical categorisation, nomads by appearance, but flâneuse-like in their ambivalent looking-upon and taking-in certain kinds of spectacular experience. Walsh drew upon both the poignant instabilities of these identities and the mobility of their narratives to drive her own 'cinematic writing', her literary response to the a-literariness of these particular movies. Walsh's writing is about the 'movement' of writing rather than its narrative linearity or diffusive powers of allusion or representation. Rather than affecting a literary equivalent to the visual grammars of Varda's and Ramsay's movies, Walsh's writing is a denuded, dependent motion of writing, writing reduced to motion,

images that are mobile not metaphorical. Rather than fixing or relocating the films this writing dissolves them in the writer/reader's mobility, in movie as journey, dismantling the authority of their reproducibility by making it beside the point, subjugating it to the transitory, to the unnecessary.

Poet Simon Perrill (De Montfort University) introduced and projected his own poem/programme for his Poetry and cinema: *Nitrate: Director's cut*. The familiar screen architecture of a phantasmagorical early screen was subjected to the limitations of a simplistic software that allowed the arcane landscape to be panned across in a series of weirdly robotic passes. The baroque, Méliès-like visuals were made banal, predictable and industrial. Just as Maria's Walsh's prose had slowed the sensual switchback of montage to a pedestrian pace, so Perrill's writing/programming had a similar drag. In contrast to the diffusive theorisation of papers like Noys' 'Profaning images' or Vera Cuntz's (Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz, Germany) paper on Zack Snyder's *300* (2006) 'This is madness: reading *300* as surreal slash fantasy', in which their subjects were split and redistributed in novel assemblages (even if in Noys' case in a descending and self-diminishing spiral), Perrill and Walsh – by their strictly disciplined reduction of their subjects to the walk of prose or of slow pan – suggested a kind of anti-reading of their movies, a writing them out of memory/out of corporeal reception. A *via negativa*.

In contrast to this approach – which had not been entirely un-signalled by Noys' keynote negations - Andrew Webber (Chatham Grammar School for Girls) gave a sensual, corporealized and autotopographical account of his cinematic predilections in My movie-going life and me, a 'life' that emerged as discreet from that of his everyday of work and family; solitary, immersive and site-specific. What united this paper with the contributions of Walsh and Perrill was the way in which the on-screen architecture disappeared, somehow levered out between Webber's 'life' and his 'me'. Removing the object of criticism allowed Webber to make a series of descriptions (but not of movies), layering attendance upon attendance, linking these by place or some coincidental occurrence, rather like the indexing of and matrix-like narrations between the notes to Daniel Spoerri's *Anecdoted Topography of Chance* (1962) where the artist logs the accidental contents of his breakfast table (but never manages to get round to telling up about their production). No clear picture emerged of a set of criteria for Webber's movie choices – a mixture of mainstream and arthouse fare. There was nothing extreme in content nor exceptional about the sequence or prescience of his viewings, subjected to the vagaries of provincial cinema programming and work routines. What did emerge, however, was a passion – disconnected from justification or authorisation – a description of movie-going as an ecstatic, perverse, contemptible, disruptive practice in itself, a practice likely to 'fire the imagination of future seekers for new worlds'.

A broad hint of a suitably paranoid, but constructive critical framework for such ecstatic cinematic writing (and writing about cinema), was given in 'Helter Skelter historicism', a paper given by K.J. Donnelly (University of Southampton) which built upon a web of conspiracy theories concerning the deaths and replacements by doubles of Paul McCartney and Mick Jagger and the significance of such a process of ciphering for such movies as *Sympathy For The Devil* (1968), *Gimme Shelter* (1970) and *Performance* (1970). Again there was the abolition of subject, but not the iconoclastic clearings away of Webber, Walsh and Perrill. Instead Donnelly achieved a thinning out for the veiling/unveiling of a conspiratorial cinematic-historiography – not dissimilar to Walsh's cinematic-writing in which what looked like effect and then cause melted into thin air, again and again and again. Clearly something

was both happening and being done, but both (corporeal and industrial) were now part of a spectacularized economy, immune to (and partly dependent upon) exposure and revelation.

I.Q. Hunter's vented frustration at the genuflections to theory was both necessary and understandable, but there had been hints at The Wild Eye Symposium of other centres of attraction, of the gravitational masses that might navigate for the kinds of radical 'writing' that Hunter and Mark Goodall had hoped to make ground for – tentative, for sure, and fragile and vulnerable. There were hints of a writing that could turn out to be self-denying, pedestrian and site-specific, corporeal and ecstatic, anti-spectacular and oriented not to a realisation in theoretical authorisation, but in a journeying back to projection of and immersion in the pleasures and precious difficulties of seeking out movies, the active 'movie-going life' separate from 'me', a writing that might one day produce and consume itself, slowing and savouring the parts of its objects of desire: place, light, title. And that might be enough 'reinvention'. But for now, these shoots will need careful provocation.

Making and Remaking Television Classics: A One-Day Symposium

Making and Remaking Television Classics: A One-Day Symposium, University of Warwick, 20th March 2009

A report by Matt Crowder, University of Reading

As part of the fiftieth anniversary of the *Screen* journal, the University of Warwick and the Midlands Television Research Group hosted a one-day symposium on 'the television classic'. The papers could be summarised as falling amongst several trends; discussions of the theories associated with the classification of classics; investigations of the how classics are or might be created; proposals for certain texts to be accepted as 'classic'. This variety was reflected in Dr Rachel Moseley introductory comments, where she emphasised both the significance and the nebulous nature of 'the television classic' in television studies.

Christine Geraghty's keynote address, 'Classic television: a matter of time' opened the day by considering how the idea of 'classic' has been represented and researched in relation to television and 'time'. She explored several meanings of the classic, first addressing quality and longevity, where the quality of a text is proportional to its longevity. She pointed out that although this schema has usefully been applied to film, television's often contemporary focus and low cultural value means that it fits awkwardly into this definition. Another critical definition of the 'classic' offered was that which is 'typical of the medium'. *Screen* gave significant attention to exploring the specificity of television in relation to time during the 1970s and 80s, focusing on notions of flow, glance, scheduling and grounding work in study of the audience and uses of television. During this period the soap opera came to be regarded as 'classic' television in that it was seen to be indicative of television itself. She pointed out that television's gradual shift from stable broadcast scheduling to viewer's self-scheduling via recording technology has changed this clear relationship.

Geraghty closed by raising further problems with temporality that complicate the evaluation of television. Much television is only intended be temporarily meaningful, making later judgements a partially historical endeavour; DVD box sets allow entire series to be watched outside of schedules; YouTube favours the viewing of short decontextualised clips and the sheer volume of television programming makes a 'complete viewing' very difficult and time-consuming; these factors beg the question of *how* one should watch television before one can even claim it is 'classic'

Geraghty's focus on the theme of time was expanded upon by Helen Piper in 'Routine longing and the popular classic', using a more colloquial definition of the 'classic' as 'memorable' or 'typical *and* exemplary'. She looked at the use of old television in schedules, where programmes such as *Dad's Army* or clips of Morecambe and Wise are repeatedly deployed as cultural landmarks and at significant occasions, such as Christmas, often nostalgically. Piper mused on the result of broadcasting a narrow selection of archive television, whether it acted as an escape from the present, create a useful relationship with the past or construct a history

that is fragmentary. She closed by turning to the use of YouTube as a way of enjoying, often in small groups, a vast variety of archived television and film ephemera. She hypothesised that watching these old clips resulted in nostalgic remembering, and that the study of television classics should pay attention to different forms of nostalgia instead of different texts.

Other papers discussed the ways in which classics are or could be constructed. Robin Nelson made a tentative claim that the problem of subjectivity in the academic evaluation of television could be solved by the adoption of normative values. His paper, 'In search of firm ground and a principled position: the 'classic' and 'the canon' in post postmodern times' opened by arguing that the relativistic trends associated with postmodernism have undermined constructive discussion of television and quality. Nelson said that this has resulted in an avoidance of evaluative judgements in favour of subjective discussion. He identified this postmodern subjectivity in the BFI's publishing series on classic film and television, where each book makes a case for its subject's classic status and also contains a personal authorial response. Citing Squires (1993), he rejected the relativism of 'strong' postmodernism in favour of a 'weak' postmodernism that still allows for a 'principled position' and the possibility of shared values. Nelson argued for debates about classic texts and critical canon that do not avoid terms such as 'quality' and 'value'. He speculatively hoped for classics and canon to emerge from debates based on agreed criteria that would rescue it from relativism and mere personal taste. The discussion was lively, and Nelson said that his main purpose was to argue against 'classic' becoming synonymous with 'what one likes'. It was however suggested that any 'normative study' of television might be equally destructive, creating only hermetic discussion.

Arguing from an analogous position, John Caughie's 'Loose Canons' opened by stating that judgements about the quality of television were important and required an elitist criticism that set out to identify that which is aesthetically valuable and culturally important. Referring to the use of stills in his own writing, Caughie argued that the aesthetics of television is rarely discussed but that it was important in order to establish television as a medium that allowed for beauty and artistic skill. He discussed the potential density of the television text that allowed comparison with Frank Kermode's definition of the modern classic text as posing an 'infinite set of questions' (1975, p.114). He closed by expressing the personal value that great art provides and wondered if it were possible not just to ask if there could be classic television but if television could begin to be seen within the canon of high culture itself.

Akass and McCabe's 'It's not TV but is it a classic?' set out to explore the pragmatics of classic creation, focusing on the subscription channel HBO. They argued that HBO's production of self-declared 'TV classics' is the result of deliberate business decisions made in response to changes in the television institutions, technologies and markets of the USA. They explored how HBO's 'classics', such as *Sex and the City*, *Deadwood* and *The Wire* are defined by combining established US TV genres, a strong authorial voice and distinctive visual style, accompanied by a discourse of originality. The paper explored how the strong branding of HBO and repeated comparison with high culture in the popular press created a discourse around HBO that immediately labelled part of its output as classic. They asked what the critical response should be to the production of a 'classic' that is so dominated by self-legitimising textual and extra-textual practices.

Rebecca Barden, Head of BFI Publishing, gave a presentation on how the demands of publishing for academic and popular readers affects the way that its *BFI Television Classics*

series has been commissioned. The process began by consulting academics and BFI staff, resulting in demands for programmes of historical significance, presence on the syllabus, availability on home video, innovative and successful. This produced a list of potential titles that was further influenced by the BFI's internal decisions. The paper usefully explained the tensions involved in the process of planning such a series, from the as-yet unfulfilled intention to cover a wide range of genres to the fact that many of the published titles were more the result of the enthusiasm of writers than their presence on the list of desired titles.

Enthusiasm for programmes shaped a number of papers that argued for a programme's classic status. Jason Jacobs made a case that HBO's *Deadwood* was, while not necessarily a classic, an artistic achievement. Situating it in the history of television and the development of the drama serial, Jacobs described *Deadwood* as television's incorporation of the cinema's revisionist Westerns and creating a self-consciously revisionist television Western that effectively dramatised the emergence of community, civilisation and capitalism from its savage origins. Other papers responded to the television canon's emphasis on drama and made a case for examples of classics in other genres. Glyn Davis admitted that reality television stands as a widely derided genre but made that case that *America's Next Top Model* prompted us to consider how these shows represented the process of making judgements. Using clips, he explored how the show itself represented different aesthetic judgements and asked if this could also be applied to television and its many genres. John Corner opened his paper, 'Classic factual', by stating that the notion of the classic seemed to collapse around factual television; compared to drama it often difficult to view more than once and does not generate the same space for creative critical work. He argued however that the characteristics of factual television classics could be identitified; formal originality; theme or scope; profile or size of audience; and impact of the programme. He made the case for Michael Grigsby's *Living on the Edge* (ITV 1987) as a factual classic that skillfully combined visual lyricism, political critique and insightful observational footage of everyday people.

Lez Cooke offered three lost classics, long neglected TV texts, to remedy the paucity of work on early British television. He discussed *Anastasia* (BBC 1953), a critical success at the time and one of the few pre-1954 plays that exist; *Torrents of Spring* (BBC, 1959) the only surviving work of the Langham Group, an experimental group remarkable for their formal innovation and also featuring Wilfred Bramble and Harry H. Corbett; and *Three Ring Circus* (BBC 1961), a play that experimented with rapid stills montage and seen as responsible for bringing James McTaggart to the BBC. Cooke closed by stating that existing canon of television drama was merely the tip of an iceberg.

While Cooke's paper involved an aesthetic evaluation of the three plays it also made a case for their significance in the history of television. A similar case was made by Sarita Malik for *King of the Ghetto* (BBC 1986), a four-part drama by Asian writer Farukh Dhondy that resulted in both critical acclaim and significant protest from British Bangladeshis about the negative portrayal of some Bangladeshi characters. The series reception relied upon the authenticity provided by Dhondy's Indian nationality and his claims that the drama was based on personal experience but it was also criticised for inaccurate and distorted representations. The conflict between the personal opinion of a writer and the interests of community being represented relates to debates about the 'burden of representation' and Malik argued for *King of the Ghetto* as a classic example of the conflicting discourses that can arise when ethnic minorities are represented in fictional narratives, providing a vital case study for the relationship between television and individuals.

The conference unsurprisingly failed to provide an agreed definition of a 'television classic' but collecting a wide range of papers together provided a chance for some of its contours to emerge more clearly. That television can be valuable and should be evaluated was never contested; it perhaps remains for the different criteria of value to become more distinct and not lost in a phrase that can evoke so many diverse critical responses.

References

Kermode, Frank (1975) *The Classic: literary images of permanence and change*. London: Faber and Faber.

Squires, Judith (ed.) (1993) *Principled positions: postmodernism and the rediscovery of value*. London: Lawrence & Wishart.

International Film Festivals Workshop

International Film Festivals Workshop, University of St Andrews, April 4th 2009

A report by Yun-hua Chen

The workshop was held at University of St Andrews, and comprised part of the 'Dynamics of World Cinema: Transnational Channels of Global Film Distribution' project funded by the Leverhulme Trust, a two-and-a-half year project researching international-film distribution and exhibition. Led by St Andrews Prof. Dina Iordanova, the International Film Festival workshop addressed the realm of film festivals, which have proliferated all over the world over the past twenty years. Taking the form of a roundtable discussion among discussants and participants, the workshop enabled a productive conversation directly addressing the issues of festival programming, distribution, funding, digitisation/new media, cultural policy, and case studies of specific festivals, while drawing a clearer map of film festivals studies as a sub-field.

Attending the International Film Festivals Workshop, like travelling around for different film festivals, was a transnational experience itself. Whereas international film festivals bring cinema from Iran or Hong Kong alongside big production from European and American centres, the workshop joined together people from different professions, disciplines and nationalities whose paths don't necessarily cross one another very often but who all work on or for international film festivals. This innovative event invited academics (including Stuart Cunningham, Marijke de Valck, Lindiwe Dovey, Ruby Cheung, Janet Harbord, Skadi Loist, Lucy Mazdon, David Slocum, and Núria Triana Toribio), journalists (Michael Gubbins, Richard Porton and Nick Roddick), and a festival programmer and film industry insider (Irene Bignardi) as discussants. Participants include academics in England and Scotland, and practitioners from Glasgow Film Theatre.

In the morning session 'The Field of Festival Studies' moderated by Dina Iordanova and *Cineaste* editor Richard Porton, discussion centred on the disciplinary formation of the field, film festival studies, and the challenges faced by researchers. Marijke de Valck (University of Amsterdam) and Skadi Loist (Universität Hamburg) pointed out the trend in film studies to move away from film texts to the institutional and organisational side of cinema, and the necessity to demarcate an overview of the field. Professor Iordanova pointed out the importance of working both vertically and horizontally in this interdisciplinary discipline, integrating aspects of discourse and political and economical issues in the field. This interdisciplinary field has the potential of deploying methodologies in terms of city-planning, tourism management, place marketing, social and anthropological studies, human resource issues, narratives of festivals, local cultural studies and international relations. The challenge lies in defining the intersection of this discipline systematically and distinguishing revealing elements from others. It was generally agreed that management theories might be a good point of intersection for studying issues of festivals. When it comes to how expansive the term 'film festival' can and should be, opinions diverge. David Slocum (Berlin School of Creative Leadership, Steinbeis University) and Lucy Mazdon (University of Southampton) stressed the importance of identifying and defining lenses and filters of disciplinary formation

in conducting research. De Valck and Loist, on the other hand, posited that film festival studies is composed of several objects in constant change and that it is exactly the unstable and fluid use of the term 'film festival' which engenders and will engender more dynamic discussion. They think that instead of working out a rigid definition that requires constant renewal, leaving free space for the term and contextualising the social, political and economic situations of film festivals would be advantageous to the field. This brought the discussion forward to the possible research subjects of film festival studies. The changing variables include audience, economic structure, narrative, representations and political messages of film festivals, mediation of journalism. The main difficulties, as discussants raised, lie in the fact that the basic data of film festivals are rigidly controlled and hardly accessible, because of the competitive nature of film festivals. Also, the crossover between festival scholars, journalists and professionals is not always straightforward, and it is festival scholars' task to convince the practitioners of festivals that the time would be well spent on the dialogue between the two.

The session on 'Festivals as Distribution and Exhibition Networks' moderated by Stuart Cunningham and Nick Roddick started with a clip showing *Caramel* at film festivals on YouTube, exemplifying how Nadine Labaki's good command of languages and glamorous presence create a different layer of narrative in film festivals. Roddick started the discussion by questioning what we meant by film festivals as distribution networks, bringing to attention the fact that many sales agent have resources to hold only one festival copy and that commercial handling of sales lies rather in an independent business network. Professor Cunningham, focusing on the conceptual and theoretical framework, argued that film festivals are not as strong a distribution network as the film industry itself. Festivals rely on 'strange' economics driven by complicated private and public funding schemes and all the networking effects which are invisible. This complex mixture of input characterises film festivals. Festivals' time constraint, as live events of an asynchronous nature, reinstitutes life to film. The phenomenological meditation on the relationship between film festivals and time has stimulated dynamic responses from discussants as well as the audience. Janet Harbord (Goldsmiths, University of London) agreed that film festivals work in an odd sense of time. Time, impossible to be managed and controlled, is planned and regulated from the film industry in the exhibition site of film festivals. Moments in film festivals seem atemporal and contained in a time capsule outside of time. Films thus become an event in its context. Mazdon re-stressed the importance of introducing historical dimension as film festivals develop and change their narratives over years. She thought of film festivals as definitely live exhibition networks, opening up to a broader circuit of images with spatial specificity. Professor Cunningham added that the liveness phenomenon of film festivals, regarded as a place-marking strategy by diverse towns and cities, make it important to study them as a whole range of cultural phenomenon. De Valck posited that screening is always time-based and that what makes film festivals different from normal screenings is the collective setting with festival audiences and a short lifetime organised in a certain way. Citing various festivals as examples, John Orr proposed the film festivals are at the same time an irreplaceable experience and a micro-version of modernity taking place with collective participation. Slocum proposed the possibility of film festivals as an archive especially in economically less privileged countries. This temporary circuit of exhibition and preservation has to be contextualised, according to Lindiwe Dovey, Saër Maty Bâ and Emily Munro, in terms of ideology, spectatorship and publicity. New modes of exhibition with the advancing technologies on the web also broaden the possibilities of film festivals.

The final panel, 'New Directions in Festivals and Festival Studies,' moderated by Ruby Cheung and Michael Gubbins highlighted some directions of future research. The main focus lay on whether film festival studies should be established as a field and if so, what this field might actually be. It was agreed that more studies need to be done in this direction, but discussants' opinions diverged when it came to the establishment of film festival studies as a discipline. Some, like Iordanova, de Valck and Loist, clearly identified an area of study that emerges from the field of transnational cinema, integrating film, culture and politics, anthropology, cultural policy, city-planning and management studies. The panel stressed the necessity of contextualising international film festivals in terms of political dimensions, national culture, local engagement and alternative statuses in contrast to Hollywood. The field could grow laterally as well as horizontally and in depth. From a pragmatic point of view, establishment of a field is also essential when it comes to funding opportunities. Some signalled the danger of losing gaps and challenges with the stabilisation of a clear notion of the field.

Discussion then turned to the horizon of film festival studies. Various routes of future research in the field of film festival studies were raised. Participants noted the need to locate a range of players, commit to finding input, examine methodologies, prioritise various tasks, and enhance the dialogue between academics and practitioners. Journalists, as practitioners, have an important bridging role. They can be the mid-point agent to soften the line between practitioners and the others by enhancing mutual understanding and appreciation between academics and practitioners. Important themes concerning festival studies, proposed by De Valck, include: digitisation and distribution flows, the relationship between exhibition and distribution in festivals, programming and identity politics and festivals in relation to creative industries. Mazdon suggested that a specific case study tracing changes of film festivals in relation to local culture and political changes with the aid of diverse methodologies and provides a historical analysis would be productive way. Slocum raised the importance of understanding film festivals as economic functions in relation to culture and politics. Roddick reminded us to observe how the credit downturn influences film festivals in terms of funding and audiences.

The workshop helped establish the parameters of film festival studies and to prepare the ground for research in a working network among people from different perspectives and geographical bases. The international film festival as a time-compressed live event experienced at different speed in different contexts is an important area and it is vital to carve out a niche by taking into consideration at the same time the interaction between political values and people, historical facets, new energies and new modes of production. To continue the spirit of the workshop, a film festival research network, established by Loist and de Valck, aims to unite scholars in this field and encourages exchange and interaction in cyberspace.

Website of Dynamics of World Cinema: www.st-andrews.ac.uk/worldcinema/

Film Festival Research Network:
http://www1.unihamburg.de/Medien/berichte/arbeiten/0091_08.html