

Colour and the Moving Image

Colour and the Moving Image, University of Bristol, 10-12 July 2009

A report by Heather Heckman, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

Between the 10th and the 12th of July 2009, more than 80 film and media scholars and archivists gathered at the Arnolfini in Bristol, UK, to savor and examine "Colour in the Moving Image." The full conference included four plenaries, a screening, two round table discussions, and twenty-five panels.

The conference opened with a plenary given by Professor Sarah Street (who, with Dr. Liz Watkins, Dr. Simon Brown, Vicky Jackson and Deborah Gibbs, organized the conference). Street's talk provided a careful historical account of the production and reception of the early two-color subtractive process Prizmacolor film, *The Great Adventure*. Street argued that the norms associated with earlier color processes and the fringing that typified the Prizma process encouraged filmmakers and commentators alike to valorize the restriction of bold color to stationary objects (with the notable exception of flames, which seemed to benefit from fringing effects).

Early color processes proved to be a major theme throughout the conference. In his plenary, Tom Gunning suggested that the history of film was marked by a suppression of color. Due to archival practice (which consisted of copying applied color silent nitrate originals to more stable black and white stock) and aesthetic prejudice (which held that color was merely a "supplement" or "addition" to silent films) film historians have understood color film history to begin with Technicolor. Instead, Gunning suggested, color was dominant during the silent period, and black and white only rose to prominence after sound. This view, according to Gunning, raises several lines of future inquiry, most prominent among them: Why did black and white emerge as the norm? And just how common was black and white during the silent period? In the second half of his plenary, Gunning moved from a historiographic to a theoretical register and argued that in film, contra Newtonian physics, black *is* a color. Black is "darkness made visible" and holds a "pre-eminence among colors in cinema"; indeed, black may be considered the "origin of all colors" in film.

The conference screening, sponsored by *Screen* as part of its 50th anniversary celebration, featured six films in color processes that were either forerunners of or competitors to Technicolor. With one exception, all prints were courtesy of the BFI. Two 1909 Pathé stenciled films—*Filettes de Bretagne* and *Grande fête du cinquantenaire de Yokohama Japanese Festival*—demonstrated the viability of digital restoration for applied color. Starevich's *Prekrasnaya Lyukanida* (1912) provided an example of a digitally restored tinted film, while Berardi's *L'inferno*, Helios Film's contribution to the 1911 glut of *Inferno* releases, featured both tinting and toning (sometimes combined in a single shot) restored via the Desmet process. The screening also featured several "natural" color processes: two-color Friese-Greene Natural Colour was showcased with a screening of two different restorations of *The Open Road*. The first was a 1980s photochemical restoration, which printed both the

green and red images on a single frame; the second was a recent digital restoration, which—with modern television viewers in mind—corrected many of the fringing artifacts that characterized the process. Dufaycolor was represented by the Humphrey Jennings film *Making Fashion*, a short documentary about Norman Hartnell's spring 1938 collection. Finally, Haghefilm Labs contributed Kodachrome amateur footage shot in 1938 and 1939. The home movies, which captured images of a traditional horse fair in Zeeland and the modernist town hall of Hilversum, won top prize at the inaugural Netherlands Film Museum Home Movie Day.

The following day, Tom Gunning led a roundtable discussion of the screenings by Giovanna Fossati (Netherlands Filmmuseum), Daniela Currò (Haghefilm Labs), Josh Yumibe (Oakland University) and Sonia Genaitay (NFTVA). Genaitay wanted to emphasize the fact that the number of digital restorations in the screening was abnormal. She went on to say that, for better or worse, funding can trump other factors in the complex interplay of preservation and cultural initiatives. Yumibe spoke about the way the color of film fragments in one's hand can diverge greatly from projected film—a fact that was also emphasized in a 1916 Kodak manual. Currò highlighted the importance and difficulty of proper color process identification. Finally, Fossati spoke about the transition from analog to digital preservation methods. She expressed her enthusiasm about digital, which clearly outperforms analog methods in the preservation of obsolete technologies, as well as her reservations, since digital constitutes uncharted territory for long-term preservation. Fossati said that the most fundamental questions in film preservation are: first, appraisal and selection; second, the "eternal problem" of recreating an image in the absence of a stable reference; and, third, (echoing Genaitay) funding.

During the question and answer portion of the round table, the discussants explained that for many films like the shorts showcased at the conference screening, alternative or ancillary distribution is imperative. In response to a question about scholarly access to nitrate originals, the panelists put forward several suggestions. All agreed that the trade-off between preservation and access will always be a concern, but all also agreed that archivists are flexible about granting access to originals when it is necessary for a research project. They encouraged researchers to ask and to clearly explain their research imperatives, to be patient since there are often physical barriers to access (many originals are stored off site, for example), and to be flexible (it may be possible to view the original on a hand rewind, but not a Steenbeck).

Issues of early color restoration were raised in more detail in a panel organized by Haghefilm archivists and preservationists, who advocated for increased collaboration among film historians, chemical scientists, and archivists. Haghefilm Account Manager Claudy Op den Kamp used versions of the same tinted scene to compare four different preservation methods: copying to a black and white internegative, copying to a color Kodak internegative, copying to a black and white internegative then "flashing" the tint onto the positive (the Desmet Method), copying to a Fuji camera negative (Fuji 64D), and digitally adding the tint to a black and white positive image (digital Desmet). The Desmet Method—a comparatively inexpensive process, and one that yields a more stable, black and white negative for preservation—reproduced color, and especially black, better than the Kodak internegative. The Fuji camera negative reproduced a remarkable degree of detail and had very faithful color; however, this method may be prohibitively expensive. The digital Desmet Method was an experiment on the part of the panel members. It reproduced the original tint with accuracy, but suffered from a significant lack of detail in its prototype

incarnation. Film Preservation Specialist Daniela Currò discussed the historical research she conducted to identify Kodak Technician Loyd Jones's two-color Kodachrome film, "Kaleidoscope" (the preservation of which was unfortunately not completed in time for the conference screening). Shot through a kaleidoscopic lens, the film positive was unique: it combined magenta with bright green, rather than cyan, to yield a brightly colored abstract image. Finally, Research and Development Manager Ulrich Ruedel argued that chemical research is also a vital component of film preservation. He presented the results of x-ray fluorescence analysis of tinted and toned films, a non-invasive process already in wide use by art conservators that can determine a given substance's chemical elements independent of its chemical matrix. Ruedel used his results to mix new dyes for restorations of his samples (an experimentally fascinating process, but one that is impractical for widescale use) and compared these to Desmet restorations.

Though major topics at the conference, "early" color and issues of its restoration were hardly the only subjects addressed. At Saturday's plenary, Ian Christie stepped in for Laura Mulvey, who was unable to make it to the conference. Christie, an admitted novice in cognitive science, nonetheless strongly endorsed the cognitivist project. Against the objection that cognitivist questions are reductive, Christie argued that scientific research is so by nature, and that previous film theory was also reductive. For Christie, very basic assumptions of film historians about color have not yet been tested. He put forward three hypotheses about the way contemporary audiences view color so that future experimentation might confirm or disconfirm them: first, that color is perceived as more realistic; second, that color is more involving; and third, that color carries a connotation of "recent" or "present" while black and white carries a connotation of "previous" or "past."

Other panels addressed perception, digital, Hollywood auteurs and amateur cinema as they related to color. In a panel called "Perceptions of Color" Paul Coates analyzed the "neutralization" of color in *Solaris*, and promoted a chaos theory approach to the study of color. Philipp Schmerheim mounted the synaesthetic argument that the presence or absence of color in film affects not only visual perception but other film-relevant perceptions, as well. Edward Branigan explored philosophical paradoxes related to color and compared perception of color to perception of sound. He suggested that color is usually perceived in an objective frame, while sound is usually perceived in a subjective frame. However, he also argued that the perception of both can only be understood in context.

Experimental video maker Simon Payne explored color in the video avant-garde. He argued that, in essence, the video signal *is* colors, and does not carry images at all. Former cinematographer Terry Flaxton explored the concept of color space from the practitioner's standpoint. He argued forcefully that immateriality does not follow from video's status as an electronic medium. He also highlighted parallels between film development and video rendering and explained that the digital video chip holds raw data containing latent, intrinsic color information. Pointing to problems like the unequal resolution of different colors in digital video, Flaxton suggested that cinematographers have failed to participate in the process of quality control for video technology as they traditionally did for film technology. Sean Cubitt presented part of a work in progress on the history of representation of shadows. He noted that digital animation algorithms do not allow for color shadows (indeed, Pixar had to go to considerable effort to add hue to shaded areas in *Cars*) and suggested that color shadow might constitute an area of future innovation on the part of digital filmmakers.

The "Hollywood Colorists" panel featured presentations by myself, Scott Higgins, and John Belton. I engaged in formal analysis of three scenes from John Ford's first Technicolor feature, *Drums Along the Mohawk*, and argued that the film wed Ford's late 1930s experiments with deep, hard focus and long take cinematography to developing norms of Technicolor design. Higgins sought to recontextualize the work of Douglas Sirk as part of a long tradition of melodramatic color design. Sirk's innovations, according to Higgins, lay in his exaggeration of craft practice, rather than in the development of radically new practice. Via close analysis of the "rainbow window" sequence in *All That Heaven Allows*, and in contradistinction to the usual Brechtian argument, Higgins highlighted the ways color *heightens* affect in Sirk's films. In a paper on color meaning in *Marnie* (a film that could arguably be subtitled "the mystery of red"), Belton analyzed the way Hitchcock "opens the gap" between color and object. Though he did not present on our panel, Steve Neale's presentation on the color design for *All That Heaven Allows* was closely allied with it. Neale advocated for close analysis as a powerful pedagogical tool, and credited Higgins's book with giving him the vocabulary to analyze Sirk's last film.

Finally, in a panel called "Travelogues and Home Movies," Jeffrey Geiger presented a paper titled "The Voyagers' Sublime: Colour in the 1930s Amateur Travelogue" on two travelogues shot by American vacationers. He pointed to the high cost of both travel and filmstock, suggested that the commercialization of Kodachrome went hand in hand with the development of empire, and demonstrated that at least some accomplished amateur filmmakers experimented with color cinematography. Charles Tepperman's paper, "'Kodacolor Unlimited': Amateur Colour Film Aesthetics in the 1930s," was even more emphatic on the last point. Tepperman analyzed the discourse around color in the publications of the Amateur Cinema League in order to demonstrate the central concern of not just commercial but also aesthetic issues to amateur filmmakers.

Televising History 2009

Televising History 2009, University of Lincoln, 22– 25 July 2009

A report by Debra Ramsay, University of Nottingham, UK

This conference formed part of an ongoing and ambitious AHRC-funded project started in 2004 by Professor Ann Gray (Lincoln School of Media). *Televising History 1995-2010* aims to explore how and why particular kinds of histories and historical meanings are created and maintained by television. It is predominantly focussed on non-fiction programming and is also intent on examining the relationship between history on television and academic history. Whilst much of the project is understandably concentrated on British television, it includes comparative research into the way history is both represented on television and taught elsewhere, including the U.S. and Europe. The project has now passed the half-way mark and has notched up a number of symposiums (including one with a similar theme to this in July 2005 and another in 2008 dealing with the broad concept of docudrama/dramadoc) while the conference team have delivered and published a number of papers, some of which will soon become available in the forthcoming collection *Televising History: the pasts on the small screen*.

Given the scope and reach of the project, it is not surprising that this particular conference featured an eventful programme, with six parallel panel sessions, five plenary speakers and six screenings. The conference also featured a colourful mix of academics from various fields as well as media professionals. David Starkey opened with a keynote speech that highlighted some of what were to become the conference's main concerns. 'Dr. Rude' (as he has become known, not least due to controversial comments such as referring to Wales and Scotland as 'feeble little countr[ies]' on the BBC's *Question Time* in April 2009) is a lively and entertaining speaker particularly suited to highlighting the role of the charismatic 'personality' presenter in history programmes on television. Starkey went on to point out that the camera has to have something to 'look' at besides the presenter, resulting in the introduction of reconstruction; an 'awful device', according to Starkey. Whilst he suggested that television is not necessarily suited to in-depth analysis of complex historical issues, Starkey also pointed out that the rigorous requirements for brevity (an hour long programme contains around four and a half thousand words at the very most) can lead to an economy of arrangement of material that academics should value. Television, he concluded, is the most popular form of history with a unique ability to reach an enormous audience and should, therefore, be taken seriously and used appropriately; a point which underscored the aims of the conference as well as the project as a whole.

A number of speakers picked up on the values or problems of the 'awful device' of reconstruction in their papers. Following on from the project's focus on non-fictional forms of history, there were few papers to deal with fictional reconstructions of the past. One such was Alison Landsberg's plenary paper, 'Waking the *Deadwood* of History: language and the "aural visceral".' It will come as no surprise to those familiar with Landsberg's work to hear that she emphasised the role of empathy as key to understanding the spectator's relationship with the past. What may be surprising is that in this paper she emphasised the importance of

sound as opposed to sight in historical re-enactments of the past. Using a particularly visceral scene from the series in which a lead character has gallstones removed as an example, Landsberg demonstrated how sound can be employed to simultaneously invite and hold off spectatorial engagement. This supports her conception of empathy as an emotional affect tempered by an intellectual understanding of difference and locates empathy once more as central to understanding what an experiential medium such as television offers spectators that cannot be obtained from written media about the past. In addition, the paper subtly underscored the point that fictional reconstructions have the ability to generate affective and intellectual relationships to the past.

In a panel that dealt primarily with documentary, Alex Graham (CEO of Wall to Wall) echoed this perspective and suggested that reconstruction may be used as an imaginative solution to particular problems in programme-making, such as the absence of archive material or the desire to engage with the emotional heart of an issue. Lucy McDowell, an independent producer, took this one step further in arguing that reconstructions can be a powerful tool for historical docudramas to evoke particular themes, even if they are rarely used in this way. Understanding the challenge this might bring to the notion of historical objectivity, she introduced instead the idea of 'subjective responsibility' on the programme maker, a point which was later taken up (albeit with a slightly different focus) in Jay Winter's plenary speech 'The Great War in history, memory and television'. Talking specifically about the difficulties of representing warfare on television, Winter emphasised the idea of the 'moral responsibility' of the programme makers to the material at hand.

The role of the performer in reconstructions of the past was not overlooked. Derek Paget reviewed some of the findings of an AHRC project run by the University of Reading entitled 'Acting with Facts' (2007-2010) which explores the creative process that actors enter into when undergoing reconstructions of events which have a factual basis. This process was highlighted as vital to understanding the impact of 'second order experience' (which in turn generates what Alison Landsberg refers to as 'prosthetic memories') for spectators of past events. Tobias Ebbrecht (HFF Konrad Wolff, Potsdam), meanwhile, saw the actors within the documentaries of Heinrich Breloer as interpreters of the past, rather than imitators, while Judith Keilbach (Utrecht University) examined the role played by participants of contemporary re-enactment shows. Their emotional engagement with the past, she suggested in her paper 'Historical Experience on Television: Witnessing and Re-enacting the Past' both allows access to the past yet also seems to question that accessibility through highlighting the artifice of re-enactment itself.

Keilbach's paper picked up on another theme within the conference, namely, an increasing focus in the 'ordinary' histories of the individual in television programmes. This emerged as part of the plenary panel session featuring Sir Jeremy Isaacs (founding CE of Channel 4 and producer of the seminal *World at War* series), Martin Davidson (commissioning editor for History programmes on the BBC), Taylor Downing (Managing Director of Flashback television) and Alex Graham. Sir Jeremy pointed to the proliferation of visual materials in the twentieth century facilitating a different kind of documentary to that highlighted by Starkey. The *World at War* was not a presenter-led series, but relied on archival material as well as oral accounts to construct history. As a result, this series did not require reconstructions and its focus was on the impact of the war on the 'ordinary' person. Martin Davidson expounded further on the development of the presenter-led type of history documentary and suggested that Simon Schama's *History of Britain* came at a time when the post-modern distrust of narrative had been discounted. Alex Graham explained that his

programmes (the *House* series as well as *Who do you think you are*) were made as a reaction to both these forms and that they started from an interest in the potential of the medium and a disavowal of the role of the historian. Rather than viewing re-enactment shows as 'cheap' alternatives to other forms of documentary, Graham convincingly argued that they are difficult to make and present unique challenges for those involved. Both these programmes certainly build on the idea of 'ordinary' histories and they provide a vivid and deliberate contrast between past and present.

Picking up on the notion of 'ordinary histories' in his plenary speech, Pierre Sorlin outlined the development of a 'new' kind of history, where major historical events (such as the moon landing, for example) become no more than background details in the drive to create personal histories based on individual testimonies or experiences. Much of the conference's focus up until this point had been with British television history, but Sorlin expanded the discussion to include European television, charting the development of both television and history as national institutions. With national histories increasingly becoming the site of conflicted identities, Sorlin argued that the notion of television as a national institution is a conceptualisation that no longer works.

Two panels challenged Sorlin's argument in their focus on the relationships between history on television, national identities and cultural memories. One was concerned with how history on Australian television seems predominantly concerned with maintaining a specific version of the pioneering spirit of the colonial past. Kylie Andrews (University of New South Wales) examined this from the perspective of the media professional, exploring the process of selection and funding to reveal how and why this version of the past (which supports the idea of the pioneering 'adventure') is given preference over any other. Both Christine Schmidt (Queensland University of Technology) and Catriona Elder (University of Sydney) explored the consequences of the romanticization of the pioneering spirit in various popular fictional series. The former discussed this in terms of shifting representations of space and geographical locations, while the latter focussed on changes in meaning and understanding in the representation of a particular time period (the nineteenth century). Picking up on the notion of the importance of popular television, Chris Healey (University of Melbourne) delivered a paper co-written with Alison Huber, 'Discovering Australia: on TV history and popular memory' which introduced the intriguing notion of television as a 'historical companion'. This paper placed television at the centre of everyday practices and therefore demonstrated how the medium was intrinsically linked to the memory of those practices. All four speakers highlighted history on national television as a crucial factor in the development of national identities and memories.

The panel on 'Race and identity' explored the role played by television in fashioning and sustaining communities and identities. Frances Eames (University of Gloucestershire) focussed on ITV and ITN's coverage of the Ugandan refugee crisis in the 1970's to explore the differences between regional and national conceptions of imagined communities. Richard Ward (University of South Alabama) showed how television may become crucial in maintaining a sense of community for a region in crisis after Hurricane Katrina. Marianne Hicks (Monash University) explored the anxieties around the impact of television on community and identity through examining the debate surrounding the introduction of television to South Africa in the 1970s, which, as a South African, is a subject close to my own heart.

All of this could certainly be taken together to suggest that history on television is, as Starkey suggested, a serious business. Indeed, Janice Hadlow's (Controller, BBC2) plenary speech touched on exactly this. Hadlow advocated the idea of history on television as a unique cultural form and suggested that 'serious history' presented a 'serious opportunity' for BBC2. John Corner's plenary speech 'Viewing, Feeling and Knowing: Some Observations on Genre and Function in TV History Programming' served to remind the conference that history on television is as much a part of the entertainment industry as it is part of national concerns with politics and identities. As such, history on television presents the past as an arena for play and fantasy and it is this which leads to what Corner characterised as 'generic hybridity' with history infiltrating numerous genres not restricted to those specifically dealing with the past (travel programmes, for example, may include aspects of historical content).

The dynamic and productive mix of academics and media professionals at this conference, each with their own critical appreciations and perspectives, was particularly suited to deal with a subject as multi-faceted as this. This blend of approaches all served to highlight that history is, in Martin Davidson's words, 'a method, not a thing' and as such, is open to a variety of interpretations and applications.

Researching Cinema History: Perspectives and Practices in Film Historiography

Researching Cinema History: Perspectives and Practices in Film Historiography, University of Portsmouth and the British Universities Film & Video Council Geological Society 6-7 July 2009

A report by Stacey Abbott, Roehampton University, UK

The University of Portsmouth's *Researching Cinema History* symposium, which took place at the Geographical Society in London from 6-7 July, was distinctive because of its focus upon the methodology of historical research. The invited speakers were asked not simply to present their most recent work but to openly discuss their methods. The speakers were chosen to represent a range of approaches to research and also to the dissemination of their work beyond the academic monograph. It is not often, as film historians, that we gather and reflect upon our methodology, partly because it is assumed that our methods are tried and tested, but reflection upon our own practices is a useful critical tool -- or so we tell our students-- and the results of the two-day symposium were illuminating.

The opening keynote address by Professor Robert C Allen (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill), "What is/Was Cinema? Re-Imagining and Researching the Historical Experience of Cinema", did prove to be one of the highlights of the symposium. Allen not only presented a fascinating paper about his work charting the 'experience' of cinema going in North Carolina between 1896-1930 but also established one of the key themes of the conference, namely the use of digital technologies to facilitate historical research. Allen began his paper with the question 'what is cinema', or perhaps more precisely 'what is cinema studies' in a changing world where celluloid is quickly being replaced by digital formats. He proposed that researching cinema history should not be limited to the study of the film industry and/or film texts themselves but should concentrate upon the history of the experience of cinema-going, a collection of things and events that includes but is not limited to film. As evidence of this approach, he introduced the audience to his digital library project 'Going to the Show', launched on the 1 July 2009 and available at the following address: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/gtts/index.html>. Through this project, Allen has digitised, annotated, and made available detailed Fire Insurance maps of 45 towns and cities in North Carolina from 1896-1922 that chart both the growth of these towns and the development of cinemas within these evolving urban environments. By literally 'mapping' cinema developments onto both small towns and larger cities, Allen's project provides a vivid picture of the evolving significance of cinema within these communities. While much of cinema exhibition history often focuses on major cities such as New York or Chicago, this project draws particular attention to the role cinema played in small town America. Furthermore, through the clear labelling of 'Negro' cinemas on the original maps, the practices of racial segregation -- a hidden history of cinema experience -- are made visible. This was a fascinating and enlightening presentation.

Additionally, Allen's opening address laid out a new means of conceiving and disseminating historical research, that is through the online database. This approach was similarly addressed by Karel Dibbets (University van Amsterdam) in his paper "Cinema in Context: Disclosing Cultural Heritage" which outlined his database project to make data about the history of film culture in the Netherlands available to cinema researchers online (www.CinemaContext.nl). Finally, Julia Hallam (University of Liverpool) also demonstrated, in her paper "Film and Place: Exploring Liverpool's Urban Landscape and the Moving Image", how she is currently developing a database of over 1700 film and video recordings made in and about Liverpool that will facilitate an analysis of the relationship between film and the city. Based upon her own experience of working with colleagues within her university's Architectural department, she also urged cinema historians to consider working collaboratively with other disciplines to develop a more complex understanding of cinema history. Collectively, the thrust of these papers was that the cinema historian should be less focused upon charting the history of specific films, individuals or industrial developments, but should be extending his or her research to a much broader spectrum of cultural histories and disciplines. These approaches were met with varied responses among the delegates of the conference and yielded extensive debate about the future of cinema research.

Continuing with this theme, Linda Kaye (British Universities Film and Video Council) offered a fascinating proviso to the focus upon digital resources and research methods. In her paper "Mohammed and the Virtual Mountain: The Film Researcher and Academic Digital Literacy", Kaye walked the audience through the varying methods employed by the film researcher both before and after the digital revolution. This was not to instruct us in 'how' to conduct research but rather to highlight both the advantages and limitations of digital resources for the film researcher. While there is an increasing amount of primary material available online, often making long distance journeys to libraries and archives unnecessary, there are limitations to exclusively using these methods. In particular she eloquently demonstrated what had become apparent in some of the other presentations, which is that in developing these resources choices are being made about what information is provided to the user. This is of course understandable as resources for providing these types of online materials are not unlimited. The issue is that the parameters and limitations of the database are not always transparent to the user. As a result, the researcher may not realise that sources are not comprehensive and that further information could be acquired by using more conventional methods. Furthermore, as was pointed out by one conference delegate, the focus of these sources is often on content rather than the original materials themselves which are of historical significance in their own right. This fact should not be lost in the move toward efficient digital researching methods.

This is not to say that the future of cinema research lay exclusively in digital sources. What Kaye's paper effectively communicated was that a balanced approach to research which includes traditional archival methods is the most productive. This was supported by a number of papers at the conference that demonstrated exciting research using a wide range of more traditional archive methods. Phil Wickham (Curator of the Bill Douglas Centre for the History of Cinema and Popular Culture, University of Exeter), in his paper "Scrap Books, Soap Dishes, and Screen Dreams: Ephemera, Everyday Life and Cinema History", echoed Robert Allen's suggestion that cinema historians move beyond the film text by exploring what cinema ephemera – documents, pictures, promotional materials and collectibles – tell us about the role that cinema plays in our everyday life. In this Wickham's tangible archive materials – which included postcards, posters, Laurel and Hardy lollipops and a rather

frightening Marilyn Monroe soap dish - dovetail nicely with Allen's digital resources as means of developing a much broader understanding of the experience of cinema. Andrew Spicer (University of the West of England) also highlighted the importance of archival materials in his analysis of the unrealised project, *Green Beach*, by independent film producer Michael Klinger ("Understanding the Independent Film Producer: Michael Klinger and New Film History"). Spicer's research is largely based upon the personal papers of the producer, alongside other materials including but not limited to oral accounts, memoirs, and popular journalism. These are key sources for unearthing the details about the operation of the film industry and yet are increasingly neglected in favour of more easily accessible digital materials, particularly when it comes to funding. While digital sources often provide us with data that has been pre-packed, these types of materials, like Wickham's ephemera, are often raw and open for our own interpretation and usage. What therefore emerged from these discussions at this conference is that while there is an increasing wealth of material now available to us digitally that makes our jobs much easier, the cinema history researcher must be cautious. While it is easy to be seduced by the lure of the digital, we must remember that it is one tool – a good one at that – but only one tool alongside a range of others.

While the conference began with Robert C. Allen asking the question "*what* is cinema?", the closing plenary session asked "*why* research cinema history?". This began a thoughtful discussion involving all of the conference presenters as well as many of the delegates. It quickly became clear that in the current economic crisis where research funding is shrinking and increasing emphasis is being placed upon the impact of research rather than knowledge for knowledge sake, that this is a question that is of concern to many scholars. What was somewhat surprising, however, was the hesitancy with which many of the presenters responded. We seem to be entering a phase where once again we feel the pressure to justify our study of cinema. What emerged from the papers presented at the symposium, however, is that cinema history does not need justification, or at the very least it shouldn't. For the study of cinema, whether we use the term to describe celluloid film prints, digital projection, downloadable clips or simply 'going to the show', is the study of people, lifestyles, economies, cities, industries, technologies, cultures, and – dare I say it – the study of film as an art form.

Screen Studies Conference: Screen Theorizing Today

Screen Studies Conference: Screen Theorizing Today, University of Glasgow, July 3-5, 2009

A report by Su-Anne Yeo, University of London, UK

This year's Screen Studies conference marked a milestone in the disciplines of film, television, and new media studies: the 50th anniversary of the journal, *Screen*. Like the anniversary issue, the conference was organized around the theme of "Screen Theorizing Today" and divided into four strands: After Cinema; Screen Experience; Screen Cultures; and Spectatorship, Looking, Address. The conference featured two plenaries, thirty-two panels, and eighty-eight speakers. John Caughie (University of Glasgow) chaired the opening plenary with papers by Annette Kuhn (Queen Mary University) and Mary Ann Doane (Brown University), while Annette Kuhn chaired the closing plenary with papers by Francesco Casetti (University of Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan) and John Caughie. Other noteworthy speakers over the weekend included Christine Geraghty (University of Glasgow), Lynn Spigel (Northwestern University), Janet Staiger (University of Texas), and Ginette Vincendeau (King's College London).

Annette Kuhn's opening plenary paper, "*Screen* and screen theorizing today," provided an historical account of the development of the journal, drawing attention to its pedagogical as well as scholarly roots. It also provided an intellectual rationale for, on the one hand, the orientation of "1970s Screen Theory" and its commitment to establishing film studies as a discrete discipline, and on the other hand, the need for a more open and interactive approach to thinking about screens in the post-cinematic age. Kuhn suggested that a contemporary framework for screen studies should seek to understand the moving image screen or screens, what is displayed on these screens, and the nature of our encounter with them. In her paper, "Does the medium matter?" Mary Ann Doane surveyed the philosophical debates about the specificity of the medium and the materiality of film. She observed that although the concept of an aesthetic medium dates from the 18th century and is historically mutable, concerns about medium specificity have tended to persist. This is because the materiality of a medium determines its range of signifying practices and its ontological and ethical *limit*. Doane suggested that in the present, the limits of photography and film (or lack thereof) lie not in the depths of the image per se, but in the event of the production of the image, and in the proliferation and dispersal of the screen.

The Saturday morning panel, 'Screen Cultures: Transcultures,' chaired by Jacqueline Maingard, took up many of the themes raised in opening plenary, particularly the need to situate screen theorizing in specific socio-historical contexts. Neziha Erdogan's (Istanbul Bilgi University) paper, "City forgotten and then remembered again: early years in cinema in Istanbul" argued for early cinema to be understood not just in relation to a single, universal modern experience, but to Turkey's particular processes of modernization and westernization. Kirsten McAllister's (Simon Fraser University) paper, "Temporal movements: from historical displacements to transnational flow" situated the reconstructive tendency of earlier

generations of Japanese Canadian films and videos in relation to the internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II. She referred to the film, *i have no memory of my direction* (dir: Midi Onodera, Canada, 2006) as exemplary of a newer generation of screen media that is exploring more complex flows of culture in the present-future. Miriam Ross' (University of Glasgow) paper, "Transculturation: contemporary practice in South American cinema" found that although global film funds such as the Herbert Bas Fund and the Cine en Construcción offer financing opportunities to select independent filmmakers in the region, they also impose constraints on how these films signify their "Third Worldness" and the ways in which they circulate on the film festival circuit. The topic of trans-border flows was addressed in two other panels, 'The Africa Screen,' and 'Rethinking Approaches to Transnational Cinema,' both on Saturday afternoon.

Throughout the conference, the status of the body in screen theorizing was a dominant concern. This theme was explored in several panels, including 'Screen Experience: Embodiment,' chaired by Dorota Ostrowska. The first paper in the panel was Jinhee Choi's (University of Kent) "Aesthetic sensibility: corporeal or cultural?" Choi proposed the concept of "sensibility," evoking both perception and cultivation, to supplement current phenomenological accounts of the cinematic experience. Alla Gadassik's (Northwestern University) paper, "Reanimating the screen: placing animation in digital cinema" was an incisive critique of what Doane referred to in the opening plenary as, "the dream of digital immateriality." She argued that recent applications of digital technology such as Warner Brothers' *Beowulf* (2007) and Image Metric's *Emily* (2008) challenge the corporeal presence of both actors and animators. According to Gadassik, digital cinema theory would do well to incorporate animation theory that is self-reflexive about the process of image production. The third paper in the panel was Pepita Hesselberth's (University of Copenhagen/University of Amsterdam) "Unattainable presence: on camcorder recording." Hesselberth proposed the concept of the "unattainable now" in her discussion of how the handheld aesthetics of films by Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne and Lars Von Trier generate both spatial confrontation and temporal suspension.

The theoretical and political implications of the re-location of the screen were admirably set out during the Saturday afternoon panel, 'After Cinema: Digital Screens,' chaired by Aylish Wood. Lanfranco Aceti's (Sabanci University) paper, "Ubiquitous digital screens: images across media from mobile phones to giant screens" offered a dystopic perspective on the issue, using the case study of the dissemination via YouTube of the recent election protests in Iran. He argued that new technologies may appear to increase participation, but actually empower authorities to maintain control. In contrast, Dale Hudson's paper, "Mobile screens, global networks, digital structures and politicizing "film" offered a social change perspective, referring to the spread of tactical media such as Robert Spahr's *Distress Cruft* and Permanent Transit:net.remix. He argued that new technologies are potentially opening up ways of engaging with controversial subjects, such as globalization. Two other papers in the panel also spoke to the implications of the proliferation of screens. These were Suzanne Buchan's (University of the Creative Arts, Farnham College) "Theorizing animation as the manipulated moving image" and Joana Pimenta's (New University of Lisbon) "*Pictures at an Exhibition*: spectatorship and the digital screen." The latter contended that Chris Marker's YouTube-distributed work repositions the viewer in time and space by situating her or him in relation to multiple screens that fold/unfold/refold.

Questions of screen-spectator relations recurred in the Sunday afternoon panel, 'Spectatorship, Looking, Address: Witness,' chaired by Martin O'Shaughnessy. Key papers

here were Dagmar Brunow's (Hamburg University/Halmstad University College) "Deconstructing representation: *Handsworth Songs* as media criticism and filmic intervention" and Stefano Odorico's (University College Cork) "*Encounters at the End of the World* is not another documentary about penguins!" However, Adam T. Schrag (University of Minnesota) questioned the politics of witnessing on an entirely new level in his paper, "Picture torture: Abu Ghraib's photographic screens and Errol Morris's *Standard Operating Procedure*." Schrag argued that the iconic photos of Abu Ghraib prison do not simply serve as documentary evidence of torture, but were part of the staging of the crime. Elke Weissmann (Edge Hill University) took an altogether different approach to the engagement of the viewer in her paper, "Silent images: empty signifiers in *Who Do You Think You Are?*" She argued that the objective of the visual sequences within the BBC series was to elicit contemplation, thus creating a space for reflexive rather than embodied empathy.

Finally, the Sunday afternoon panel, 'Screen Experience: Immersion,' chaired by Lanfranco Aceti, featured two papers that engaged with several of the conference strands, while also existing in productive tension to one another. Roya Rastegar's (University of California, Santa Cruz) paper, "New frontiers off the screen: physical cinema at the Sundance Film Festival" was an ethnographic account of alternative programming and exhibition practices at New Frontiers, an experimental multimedia program within the Sundance Film Festival. Rastegar questioned whether practices that emphasize the spectator as embodied and differentiated are leading to new screen encounters and sensory experiences. Ariel Rogers' (University of Chicago) paper, "From immersion to connection: digital cinematic experience in light of widescreen" adopted an historical perspective. Rogers found that whereas widescreen technology in the 1950s promised to immerse the audience in the cinematic spectacle in a way that heightened the senses, digital cinema promises to connect the audience with the spectacle through direct transmission, thus by-passing the body altogether. The placement of two papers together seemed to caution against any easy generalizations about the post-cinematic age, screen experience, screen cultures, or spectatorship, looking, and address.

This sense of different approaches to screen theorizing co-existing rather than replacing one other was evident in the closing plenary as well. Francesco Casetti's paper, "Back to the homeland: the film theatre in a post-mediatic epoch," examined the transformation of filmic experience enabled by the re-location of the screen. He identified two modes of filmic experience: a mode of attendance emphasizing focus, immersion, and catharsis, associated with the classical space of the film theatre, and a mode of performance emphasizing the decentralized gaze, multi-tasking, and self-direction, associated through new platforms, spaces, and devices, such as the computer and the mobile phone. Both modes of filmic experience are beautifully depicted in Atom Egoyan's short film, *Artaud Double Bill* (2008). Casetti contended that despite the advent of post-cinema, the classical filmic experience persists because of our need for a shared space, situation, and diegetic world. The final paper of the conference was "Mourning Television," by John Caughie. While Annette Kuhn's opening plenary paper had focussed on the process of screen theorizing, Caughie's discussion focussed on the process of mourning, or "working through," the changes experienced by the British television sector and television studies over the decades. These included the incapacity of television series such as the BBC's *Occupations* to register a national trauma, and to contribute meaningfully to a national public sphere. According to Caughie, *Screen* theorizing today needs to come to terms with these changes. It also needs to find new frameworks for understanding the dissemination of screen media, including television, in alternative ways.

From the 2009 conference, it was evident that the concerns of "1970s *Screen* Theory" have not faded away. For example, feminist approaches were addressed within the Saturday afternoon panel, 'Screen Cultures: Feminist Interventions,' and psychoanalytic approaches within the Sunday morning panel, 'Spectatorship, Looking, and Address: Film Analysis and Post-Jungian Approaches to Participatory Viewing.' Rather, *Screen's* preoccupations with the political and the theoretical have been re-configured to respond to new screen objects and processes within a radically transformed screenscape. This mix of established and emergent approaches, together with the high standard of papers delivered throughout the conference, bode well for *Screen* and screen theorizing in the years to come.

Sepancine Conference 2009

Sepancine Conference 2009, 5º Congreso Internacional de Teoría y Análisis Cinematográfico (5th International Congress on Film Theory and Analysis), 1–3 October 2009, Morelia, Michoacán, México

A report by Dale Hudson, Texas State University–San Marcos, USA

With scheduled delegates from five continents, the 5º Congreso Internacional de Teoría y Análisis Cinematográfico (5th International Congress on Film Theory and Analysis) convened in the historic centre of Morelia, Michoacán. Lauro Zavala of Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana–Xochimilco (UAM-X), James Ramey of UAM–Cuajimalpa, and Jacqueline Gómez Mayorga of Universidad Intercontinental served on the steering committee of the conference, which was organized by the Asociación Mexicana de Teoría y Análisis Cinematográfico ("Sepancine," Mexican Society of Film Theory and Analysis) in collaboration with the Cuerpo Académico "Expresión y Representación" ("Expression and Representation" Working Group) at UAM-C and the Festival Internacional de Cine de Morelia (FICM, Morelia International Film Festival). The Sepancine conference facilitates dialogue and debate among scholars from different disciplinary and interdisciplinary training—whether cinema and media or Latin American studies; music, theatre, or video art; feminist, gender, or postcolonial studies—as well as different generational, cultural, and political perspectives. If cinema and media studies is a global conversation, then the Sepancine conference prompts insights into ways that the scope and content of the very questions asked of cinema and media differ—insights, which are productive in unthinking the familiar entrenchments of "home" fields and institutions.

Across as many as four concurrent sessions, themes and figures emerged as nodal points within this conversation. Attention was distributed across areas, including classical studio productions, transborder feminist documentary, the latest commercial releases making the circuit of international film festivals as México's "third" or "new" wave, as well as non-Mexican cinemas such as Bollywood, Nollywood, and Hollywood. Papers were presented in Spanish or in English with simultaneous Spanish translation. The conference serves well the field of cinema and media studies by situating Mexican cinema more prominently than it tends to feature in other conferences. Indeed, Mexican cinema circulates regionally, hemispherically, globally—and has done so since the early twentieth century; its sounds and images attach at a distance, detach in an instant, and reattach altogether differently, sometimes without explicit concern for their historical and cultural context of production, distribution, exhibition, and reception. Whether globalized figures from Mexican cinema and television, such as *El Santo* and *La India María*, or whether appropriations of figures from globalized British drama and Hollywood cinema, such as William Shakespeare and Alfred Hitchcock, the conference unsettled assumptions and expectations about "Mexican cinema"—as well as México's historical position within regional, hemispheric, and global cinematic flows and exchanges.

President of the Sepancine, Zavala, described the association's main focus on constructing cinema studies in México and Latin America. This year's conference served to establish debates and expand conversations, to develop a common language for the scholarly community, and to promote graduate research in the field. "What is at stake," he explains, "is the construction in Latin America of a field of research that has been growing in Europe and the U.S. since fifty years ago, and being able to establish a scholarly dialogue with peers elsewhere." In fact, Zavala believes that the field needs to be acknowledged as a subject worthy of being taught in elementary school. This year's conference was about three times larger in terms of panels and attendance than previous years, attracting filmmakers, archivists, programmers, and the general public in addition to scholars in part due to the conference partnerships with the festival and with UAM-X, which recently launched Latin America's first doctoral program in film theory and analysis. Mara Fortes (University of Chicago), who was instrumental in the conference's realization, explained, "the conference organizers also encouraged discussion on pedagogical approaches, something which I believe was also tremendously beneficial for those working in institutions and universities in Mexico, and who are working to design curricula and degree programs in film studies." Author of *Specular City: Transforming Culture, Consumption, and Space in Buenos Aires*, Laura Podalsky (Ohio State University) praised the conference for providing her with "a much better sense of the breadth and diversity of film studies as carried out through the aegis of Mexican universities" and remarked upon the "rapid growth and institutionalization of film studies as an academic discipline." Podalsky taught as a visiting professor at Universidad de Guadalajara in 2004–2005.

Zavala believes that Mexican and Latin American scholarship has much to offer the field, particularly in terms of an "inter-, multi-, and trans-disciplinary approach" that encompasses "synthesis, dialogue, translation and encounter." Indeed, the conference contributed to broader debates about theory and history, as well as the position of Latin America within cinema and media studies. In the context of the field's institutionalization in México, Zavala describes theory as a means to facilitate dialogues across disciplines and establish a "distance" from the evaluative film criticism popularized in journalism. As elsewhere, cinema and media studies in México negotiates what are often conceived as competing demands for the cultural specificity of historical analysis and the academic rigor of theoretical analysis. Current negotiations also respond to earlier ones whose results appear antiquated today, such as "theory" developed from criticism of *only* European/Hollywood/East Asian cinemas, with a globally comparative approach that reveals the uneven and unequal distributions of power that have historically marked where criticism ends and theory begins. As a space of encounter, the Sepancine conference served as a site for exploring ways that both history and theory can most productively be developed locally and appropriated globally.

The conference honored María Eugenia Contursi y Fabiola Ferro's Spanish translation of Robert Stam's *Theory and Practice of Adaptation*. Indeed, exchanges between scholars, whether trained or working in México or elsewhere, served to highlight what comes into focus—and what fades from view—in relation to cultural and political location, while also pointing towards newer directions to negotiate differences without ending in absolute relativity. Many delegates, for example, noted that scholars affiliated with Mexican universities focused on "serious" cinematic modes; scholars affiliated with universities elsewhere, on "popular" modes. This tendency marks a departure from past generations of non-Latin American scholars, who, as David Wood (Museo Nacional de Cine) points out in recent article in the *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, often took seriously only

Third, Imperfect, and New Latin American cinemas, whose "radically 'other' cultural practices" were "attractive to politically committed academics." Recent scholarship on Latin American cinema in Spanish, Portuguese, and English, he argues, has begun to negotiate more fluidly the demands of history and theory. Laura Gutiérrez (University of Arizona), author of *Unsettling Comforts: Sexualities in Contemporary Mexican and Chicana Performance*, notes that such culturally and geographically situated differences are highly productive insofar as they "generated a lot of dialogue, if not immediately following the panels themselves, definitely in more social settings." Her observations point to ways that objects of study become institutionally legitimized according to timelines that operate under unequal pressures, underscoring the continued significance of acknowledging the pluralities of cinema and media studies (rather than, say, the oppressive singularity of "film study") as an interdisciplinary around the world.

Delegates applauded Sepancine's contributions to the global field of cinema and media studies, whose more established conferences often preserve the dominating position of Hollywood/European/East Asian commercial narrative cinemas—a position that is largely organized by transnational media corporations and the international film festival circuit into "mainstream" and "national" cinemas. Sepancine generated space of cinema studies within Latin American studies, whose conferences often prioritize fields such as sociology, history, and literary studies. "There were more talks about Mexican cinema than I have ever seen at any other conference," responded Sergio de la Mora (UC Davis), author of *Cinemachismo: Masculinities and Sexuality in Mexican Film*, when asked how Sepancine compared with conferences such as SCMS and LASA. He hopes that a future Sepancine conference might focus specifically on Mexican cinemas. In addition to established scholars, several doctoral students and candidates—the future of the field—mentioned that they found that the conference facilitates interdisciplinary thinking by not alienating to scholars working *alongside* cinema studies, rather than engaging only with those working *within* it. They also found that many of the papers presented conveyed useful interdisciplinary methodologies.

Several papers addressed song and dance in classical cinema as a point where competing discourses of race and ethnicity converge, not only within México, but throughout the hispanophone world, including cosmopolitan parts of the United States. Laura Gutiérrez's "'Hip-notic' Nation: Tropicalizing Mexico and Its Cultural Industries" analyzed the role of popular genre films within classical Mexican cinema in producing a type of blackness within Mexicanidad (Mexicanness) that drew upon the music and dance rhythms of Cuban rumberas, which were subsequently exported throughout Latin America and Spain since the 1920s. Sergio de la Mora's "*Comedia ranchera* and the Sounds of Mexico" explored the qualified insights and specific limitations in applying critical paradigms developed in analyses of classical Hollywood musicals to comedias rancheras, such as *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (1932 and 1946; dir. Fernando de Fuentes). In "The Sounds of the Prostitute: Music and Meaning in Antonio Moreno's *Santa* (1931)," Jacqueline Ávila (UC Riverside) analyzed ways that the bolero and danzón came to be associated with racial hybridity and protestation before becoming assimilated into a more generalized sense of Mexicanidad.

In "¿Es éste el noble moro...? La adaptación de *Otelo* a las pantallas de México y la India," Alfredo Michel Modenessi (UNAM) compared and analyzed narrative adjustments in adaptations of Shakespeare's *Othello* in Bollywood's *Omkara* (2006; dir. Vishal Bhardwaj) and in México's *Huapango* (2004; dir. Ivan Lipkies). Although Mexican critics largely ignored the latter film, he finds that María Elena Velasco, who wrote the screenplay for the film, works against Shakespeare's narrative conceit of sexualized racialization and

misogynistic violence in ways that adapt the play to the complexities of race/ethnicity in México. Velasco is one of the few female directors working in the commercial narrative film and television industry in México, but she is perhaps better known for her performance of the "controversial" character La India María. Minoritized audiences, especially transnational ones living in southern California, delight in La India María's subversion of a complex nexus of gendered, classed, and racialized power structures at play within México and the Mexican-U.S. borderlands, as Seraina Rohrer (Universität Zürich/UCLA) argued in "Recycling La India María on YouTube." La India María wears blouses and shirts, as well as her hair in braids and ribbons, in ways that are considered "typical" of indigenous or "Indian" women. She also politicizes the comedic acrobatics and martial arts routines that have traditionally been reserved only for male actors, such as Buster Keaton in Hollywood and Bruce Lee in Hong Kong. It is hardly surprising that the character should enable radically different interpretations, as was made clear by one woman in Rohrer's audience, who suggested that La India María embodies anti-feminist discourses and racist stereotypes. Rohrer's study found that comparable attacks on Velasco in text comments posted on YouTube were often rejections of the fantasies, desires, and pleasures that La India María enables for audiences who themselves are minoritized by gender, race/ethnicity, class, and age.

In "'Me enamoré de ti en un bazar': Gender, Consumption and Identity in *Amar te duele*," María Luisa Ruiz (Saint Mary's College of California) offered a careful analysis of the complex interrelations between neoliberal political economies in post-NAFTA México, which generate globally manufactured images evident in new urban spaces of shopping malls and multiplex cinemas, in relation to a contemporary romantic comedy that resists the often commodified masculinity, drugs, and sexuality in much of the contemporary Mexican cinema hyped and hocked by international film festivals. Comparably, Laura Podalsky's "Landscapes of Subjectivity in Contemporary Mexican Cinema" examined ways that subjectivity becomes flattened as surface in contemporary Mexican films that are often considered disinterested in Mexicanidad. Evoking Nestor García Clancini, she argued that México is unimaginable in its totality. Indeed, papers such as "El neobarroco como un postmodernismo alternativo" by Lois Parkinson Zamora (University of Houston), "De objeto a sujeto y del escarnio a la comprensión: la representación del sujeto gay en el cine mexicano reciente" by Michael Schuessler (UAM-C), "(In)visibilidades, (des)corporalizaciones y globalizaciones: El cuerpo migrante en el cine mexicano de la frontera de los 2000" by Stephany Slaughter (Alma College), "Hijas de su madre: El cine intergeneracional de Busi Cortés" by Elissa Rashkin (Universidad Veracruzana), "Madres ausentes, padres malogrados: Representando la experiencia adolescente en el cine mexicano reciente" by Ilana Luna (UC Santa Barbara), "*Traspatio/Backyard* de Sabina Berman: El arte y el negocio de hacer cine activista" by Emily Hind (University of Wyoming), "Geographies of Power: Representations of Marginalization in Mexico, Chile and Colombia" by Alice Driver (University of Kentucky), and "*Los últimos treinta años de México* de Salvador Toscano: entre cine, fotografía y literatura" by David Wood testified to the complexities of "México" as a cinematic subject. The complexity multiplies in light of the different critical perspectives of scholars trained on different continents at different moments.

The conference also considered non-Mexican films. In "Superocheros asquerosos (Chicano cinema)," Jesse Lerner (Claremont College) investigated experimental filmmaking by Chicana/o muralists, performance artists, and filmmakers living and working in Los Angeles during the 1970s, careful neither to force these films to fit with extant discussions of Chicana/o cinemas, nor append them to the more widely discussed histories of "avant-garde"

film cultures that emerged with the very heart of Hollywood, such as Maya Deren and her male counterparts. Sheetal Majithia (NYU Abu Dhabi) examined the various effects of international critical acclaim for the transnational art-house hit, *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008; dir. Danny Boyle), upon India's policy towards the Mumbai "slum" of Dharavi, alongside an historical contextualization of this film, which Majithia argues, rejects the conventions and concerns of Bollywood cinema in favor of a British cultural chauvinism in the tradition of David Lean. James Ramey's paper, "Buñuel's Entomological Eye in *Un Chien andalou*," provided an original reading of a very familiar film. Drawing upon Luis Buñuel's interest in entomology, Ramey argued that the Death's Head Moth that appears in a series of close-ups and extreme close-ups in the film suggests another point of entry into the enigmatic surrealist collaboration by Buñuel and Salvador Dalí—one that draws upon both classical mythology and modern entomology.

The conference plenary panel showcased new directions within the ongoing contributions to the field by feminist scholars and filmmakers. Patricia Zimmermann (Ithaca College) and Helen De Michiel (National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture) presented "The Open Space Project: Towards a Collaborative and Relational Theory of International Documentary" in which they advocated for the concept of "open space" as a strategy to provoke new conversations within media ecologies divided and regulated by global corporatism. They recommended that media makers and exhibitors become "context providers," rather than mere "content providers." Indeed, the panel's other papers pointed towards ways that context can serve to unhinge thinking from the lock-down of what scholars across disciplines have called the financialization of every aspect of life by neoliberalism and corporatization. In "Aesthetics and Politics in Transnational Latin American Women's Cinema," Patricia White (Swarthmore College) resituated extant lineages of women in men's art cinema by examining female subjectivity in films by women such as *La mujer sin cabeza/The Headless Woman* (2008; dir. Lucrecia Martel) and *Madeinusa* (2006; dir. Claudia Llosa). Finally, in a bilingual presentation, "Interculturality and Transborder Feminist Documentaries," Rosa-Linda Fregoso (UC Santa Cruz) provided context to widely circulated and discussed *Maquilapolis: City of Factories* (2006; dir. Vicky Funari and Sergio de la Torre) in which woman working in maquiladoras deploy video-making towards legal struggles for human rights within the lawless "free trade zones" generated through collusion of transnational corporations and the Mexican government.

The plenary panel, then, underscored the relevance of cinema and media studies to the world at large. In fact, the conference coincided with important events taking place throughout Morelia. October 2nd saw the annual student marches, marking the anniversary of the Tlatelolco massacre of student protestors and bystanders by police in 1968; October 3rd, the inauguration on of the Instituto Mexicano de Investigaciones Cinematográficas y Humanísticas (Mexican Institute for the Study of Cinema and the Humanities), offering courses in cinema studies; October 4th, the opening of the 7º Festival Internacional de Cine de Morelia (FICM) during which federal and state officials vowed to increase financing of the Mexican film industry. The Sapencine conference, then, was punctuated by everything from Hollywood filmmaker Quentin Tarantino's lackluster festival-weariness, faintly disguised in enthusiastic gringoisms, to the protestors chanting slogans against state privatization of farms and schools. FICM, however, is not preoccupied exclusively with the vacuous scene of celebrities parading down its red carpet. It is a venue for indigenous media, political documentary, and experimental media, providing an audiovisually engaging and intellectually stimulating post-conference site for "sorting out" the direction of cinema and media studies both in México and elsewhere. In fact, the Sepancine conference sits poised to

emerge as one of the most vibrant points within the emerging global network of cinema and media studies conferences around the world.

Images of the Afterlife in Theology and Film

Images of the Afterlife in Theology and Film, Conference of the International Research Group "Film and Theology" Catholic Academy, Schwerte, Germany, 25-28 June 2009

A report by Marie-Therese Mäder, University of Zurich, Switzerland

Twenty years ago, the international research group "Film and Theology" was founded and has been holding conferences twice a year ever since. In addition, the research group is editing a series of the same name on the interface of religion and film, published by Schüren, Marburg. This June's conference took place in Schwerte, Germany, and focused on images of the afterlife, a substantial subject in religion, theology and film. Dr. Chris Deacy (University of Canterbury) and Dr. Ulrike Vollmer (University of Wales Lampeter) were in charge of organising the conference. The programme included four screenings: *What Dreams May Come* (Vincent Ward, NZL/USA 1998), *No te mueras sin decirme a donde vas* (Eliseo Subiela, ARG 1995), *Jacob's Ladder* (Adrian Lyne, USA 1990), *A Matter of Life and Death* (Michael Powell/Emeric Pressburger, UK 1946).

The presentations given can be grouped into three approaches. The first one contained three speeches on theological reflections and studies upon the afterlife: "Eschatology, Death and the Afterlife in Modern Christian Thought" by Prof. Paul Badham (Lampeter/Wales); "Ideas of the Afterlife: Biblical Perspectives" by Peter Erdmann (Muenster/Germany); and "Resurrection of the Dead and Internal Life: A Systematic Approach to the Tradition of the Kingdom-Come in Christianity and its Evidence" by Prof. Christian Wessely (Graz/Austria). The second group's two presentations contrast theological concepts with filmic representations. They were "Apocalypse Now? Towards a Cinematic Realized Eschatology" by Dr. Chris Deacy (Canterbury/England), and "Staring into Heaven: In Search of Jacob's Ladder" by Dr. Jolyon Mitchell (Edinburgh/Scotland). The third approach focuses on film analysis and cinematic construction/representation of death and the afterlife. The two talks were "Images of the Otherworld, Invisible Dimensions from the Perspective of the Study of Religion" by Prof. Daria Pezzoli-Olgati (Zurich/Switzerland) and "Pier Paolo Pasolini's Staging of Death" by Prof. Reinhold Zwick (Muenster/Germany). The theological approach was located within a Jewish-Christian perspective. In accordance with this film journal's direction, the report focuses on the latter two groups.

Paul Badham's opening talk about "Eschatology, Death and the After-Life in Modern Christian Thought" set off with a brief representation of the historical perspective on how Christian philosophers were constructing the cosmos within the realm of their worldview(s). In the main part, he discussed contemporary conceptions of the afterlife in the context of near-death experiences; Badham referred to current field studies interviewing hospital patients. The presentation outlined the current social debate about conceptions of the afterlife. The presentation gave an overview on the conference's topic from an exclusive theological perspective.

The first contribution with reference to the film *No te mueras sin decirme a donde vas* was by Prof. Dr. Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati. The conference participants had the option to watch the discussed film in the afternoon prior to Pezzoli-Olgiati's talk. Her approach was based on the argument that representations of the otherworld belong to the core of religious symbol systems, and that religious semantics are often deployed in such representations. After a short discussion from a comparative perspective of the concept of the otherworld as synonymous to the opposite world, and of their visual representations, she analysed the diverse religious symbols, semantics and narrative programmes found in *No te mueras sin decirme a donde vas*. The film explicitly refers to a spiritualist setting and expresses a belief in paranormal and parascientific phenomena. An independent and original vision of an opposite world is created that demonstrates an intense interaction with the protagonists' world. Death and (re)birth are important points of contact between the protagonists' inner-filmic world and the opposite world of the ghosts. Therefore one can conclude, as Pezzoli-Olgiati argues, that this film is religious in a strict sense. Yet, on the audiovisual level, there is identification between opposite worlds and the screen. Pezzoli-Olgiati notes that in this particular case, the cinematic otherworld functions as a means to draw attention, not to a transcendent world beyond death and human reality, but to an immanent role of cinema as a place of creativity and invention.

Saturday morning started with Dr. Chris Deacy's talk about "Apocalypse Now? Towards a Cinematic Realized Eschatology." The first part of the presentation examined the extent to which the medium of film can shed light on a number of key theological teachings related to death and the afterlife. While referring to films like *The Shawshank Redemption* (Frank Darabont, USA 1994), *Unforgiven* (Clint Eastwood, USA 1992), and *The Big Lebowski* (Ethan and Joel Coen, USA 1998), Deacy states that the attainment of redemption and of a new life is no longer associated with conventional theistic ideas concerning the Kingdom of Heaven as presented by Jewish and Christian eschatologies, but that it has been reread as a distinctly earthly paradise. The second part of his presentation discussed Christmas movies dealing with supernatural or other-worldly characters like angels, elves, and/or Father Christmas. A similar conclusion followed as from the first part: in traditional Christian terms, supernatural agents are seen to relate to the afterlife. Yet, within the films discussed, they interact with adults and children from this world. Deacy asks whether films consist of secular versions of important theological themes as resurrection, redemption and the transcendent and what kind of implications follow for theology.

One highlight of the congress took place outside the official programme, but was kindly integrated within the schedule. It was a workshop presenting five ongoing research projects in film and religion: "The Journey in Fiction Film as a Process of Transformation" by Marie-Therese (Mäder, Zurich), "Censorship and Self-Expression: the Banning of the German Propaganda Movie *I Accuse*" by Fabian Perlini (Zurich), "Body-Language – The Communication of the Good and the Bad by the Coding of Ideational Bodies" by Dr. Christian Feichtinger (Graz), "Religion in the DEFA Fairytale Films" by Alfons Wrann, Graz and, "Post-Human Utopias" by Dr. Alexander Ornella (Graz).

Professor Reinhold Zwick (Muenster) presented a distinguished paper on Pier Paolo Pasolini's filmic stagings of death. The clips discussed were among others *Accatone* (I 1961), *Teorema* (I 1968), *Medea* (I/F/BRD 1969), *Il Decameron* (I/F/BRD 1971), and *I racconti di Canterbury* (I/F 1972). Starting from a poem written by Pasolini one year before his violent and still mysterious death, Zwick concludes that if dying represents a transitory phase and if death is prefixed by metamorphosis then questions of the afterlife, understood as a sphere

beyond the threshold of death, gains urgency. Pasolini's whole oeuvre reflects on such topics and he undertook various investigations to find answers or at least to take a stance regarding these questions. *Medea* presents a key concept of death in so far as Pasolini visually joins a ritual of human sacrifice with a citation from the Bible (John 12:24). The wheat-verse remains nucleus and becomes part of the basic coordinates of life, death and cosmogony by connecting it with a prehistoric religious concept. There are many christomorphic elements in the mise-en-scene of the human sacrifice, like the setting of the grain field. The human sacrifice is also supposed to promote fertility and may be paralleled with Jesus' death on the cross as a crucifixion is staged in the ritual as well. Zwick drew a consistent argument from Pasolini's life and death to his artistic creativity and demonstrated how the topic of a world beyond is expressed in his work in multiple facets.

The last presentation "Staring into Heaven: In Search of Jacob's Ladder", by Mitchell, dealt with the cinematic uses of staircases within film. He followed the question of how film could shed light on the different uses and interpretations of the story of Jacob's Ladder (Genesis 28:11-19). Two different semantics were identified in which the staircase became significant in film. "As a site of violence" (*Battleship Potemkin*, Sergej M. Eisenstein, UDSSR 1925; *The Godfather* 1972, Francis Ford Coppola, USA), here, the staircase becomes a place of fear, panic and death. The chosen examples allow no evidence of a heaven or an afterlife. The second semantic was called "between heaven and earth" (*A Matter of Life and Death*, Michael Powell/Emeric Pressburger, UK 1946). Here, the staircase is portrayed as a place of transition to ascend toward heaven, but also to flee from heaven. In the third part of the presentation, biblical theological and artistic sources within a Christian context were brought into account to provide further resources and challenges for reflection upon moves toward heaven. He concluded on the use of staircases in film as symbolising a place of drama, a connecting space, a symbol or a transitional space.

As the conference's final discussion, the participants made a start to summarise the different aspects of the afterlife. The immense and substantial thematic field was mentioned and an attempt undertaken to work out the cinematic handling of the topic. Also, the unilateral Jewish Christian approach of the speakers was noticed. This was on the one hand seen as advantageous, because of the complexity of the topic as it eliminated the danger of superficiality. On the other hand, the lack of discussion of films and concepts of the afterlife of other cultures was pointed out. Cinematic symbols are often global and expressing various intermingled cultures, and thus cannot be reduced to an exclusive Western perspective of analysis. For example the topic of reincarnation was evident in three of the screened films.

The conference was comprehensive, and there was enough time for exchange and discussion about the films and the presentations among the participants. The next conference of the "Film and Theology" research group is planned for 17th-20th June 2010 in Graz/Austria, and entitled "Violence, Politics and Religion."

Beyond the Politics of Identity

Beyond the Politics of Identity, University of Aberdeen, 20th June 2009

A report by Tom Smith, University of Edinburgh, UK

This conference set out to explore the new ways that identity is both theorized and practiced in the visual arts. With a total of twenty-one speakers, the day was organised around parallel sessions occurring throughout, an approach that was positive in the scope it offered for discussion, but which left attendees in the position of having to choose between panels and missing presentations that they would otherwise want to see. By implication, this report only offers a partial insight into the discussions raised.

The day started with the keynote speech from Professor Michael Renov (University of Southern California), whose paper, "Civil Rights on the Screen", tracked the representation of the civil rights movement in documentary film. The most contemporary part of his talk centred on a You Tube clip in which the anonymous filmmaker had combined video footage of Barack Obama speaking at a campaign rally with audio from a speech by Dr. Martin Luther King Junior dubbed over it. Renov noted a number of inconsistencies in the clip, most notably the title, which indicated that the creator believed the audio to be from King's 1963 "I have a dream" speech, when in fact it was from a speech he made on April 3rd 1968, one day before his assassination. Renov argued that this carelessness was indicative of the overall lack of thought that went into the video, as it attempts to construct Obama's identity as that of a successor to King, an idea that is profoundly a-historical. Through this one example Renov highlighted how user generated content possesses the ability to forge connections that distort history and identity beyond recognition.

Continuing this theme, the first panel focused on the individual's shifting relationship to technology. Margot Buchanan's (University of Stirling) paper "Spectatorship in the New Media Age: Susan Boyle and her Facebook Fans" addressed how quickly Facebook fan pages began to appear for UK TV reality contestant Susan Boyle, a number that, at the time of writing her paper, had reached over five hundred. Buchanan noted that this represented an interesting trend in how individuals want to assert their allegiances, as it seemed to be motivated by the false notion that it brings them closer to the object of their fandom, even though Boyle herself in interviews has admitted that she has no interest in the internet. Heather Morgan (University of Aberdeen) directed her attention toward a technology that has particular resonance in the UK: the rise of CCTV culture. Morgan drew on her own experiences of visiting police surveillance units, providing anecdotal accounts of how staff reacted according to the gender of those they were monitoring. Her paper emphasised how gender stereotypes are maintained through this technology due to the subjectivity of those controlling it.

The second panel looked at 'Emerging Cinemas'. Jacob Patterson-Stein (University of Edinburgh) concentrated on questions of national identity in Walter Salles and Daniela Thomas' 1996 film *Terra Estrangeira*. Looking at the experiences of the Brazilian characters in the film who move away from their home country to live in Lisbon, Patterson-Stein

applied the Ancient Greek term "metics" (meaning 'resident aliens') to the characters to argue that the film shows identity to be paradoxically migrant and yet tied to a specific locality, as they are constantly defined by their home origins and yet are alienated from any notion of a home community. Nadine Robinson (University of Glasgow) looked at strategies of self-representation in a number of films made by Pacific Islanders, who until quite recently were unable to exert control over their own image-making and representation. Robinson highlighted the decision by many of its filmmakers to embrace colonial practices as part of their strategy of self-representation, as the desire to communicate their traditions, ancestry, and cultural practices to outsiders is just as much of a concern to them as their desire to satisfy local audiences. However, many have reacted against these colonial elements and as a result the films have frequently been rejected entry into film festivals. Her paper confronted the difficulty in attempting to counter misrepresentations of cultural identity while at the same time trying to articulate it in a way that it can be understood by those outside it.

With a focus on self-reflexive filmmaking, the final panel proved to be the most satisfying of the day, as it provided both theoretical discussion as well as filmmakers screening examples of their work. On the theoretical side, Imogen Robertson (University of Lancaster) looked at temporality and change in Su Friedrich's *Sink or Swim* (1990) to highlight how the film problematizes concepts of representation, truth and the self; while Jill Moriarty (University College Cork) discussed Todd Haynes' *I'm Not There* (2007) as an example of it being one of many American studio films that are currently expanding the genre of the biopic by translating notions of fragmented identity into adventurous storytelling strategies.

On the practical side Johannes Sjöberg (University of Manchester) showed extracts from his 2007 film *Transfiction*, a work of 'ethno-fiction' (an experimental ethnographic film genre pioneered by Jean Rouch) in which the film's subjects – transgender stage artists, prostitutes and health workers living in São Paulo – re-enacted moments from their lives in order to revisit and reflect upon them. It proved to be a technique well suited to the subject matter, as the transgender subjects already embody the notion of identity-as-performance as part of their daily existence. Tianqi Yu (University of Westminster) also screened extracts from her film (currently a work-in-progress) in which she addresses her position as a Chinese woman living in the UK, whose home country is undergoing radical transformations in her absence. The question of what constitutes 'home' is therefore at the centre of her concerns. Yu's approach to the question was highly poetic, one that constructed China as an abstract entity defined by personal memories rather than social reality, a China that could only be located through her first-person voiceover, which attempts to map out the emotional landscape of her imagined 'home' even though the physical landscape her camera documents is now unrecognizable to her.

Overall, the day raised many questions and showed that identity is now almost always addressed from the position of it being considered multiple and fragmented. None of the papers were able to argue that we are now *beyond* the politics of identity, but the day was successful in highlighting how the politics of identity has *diversified* now that we are almost ten years into the twenty-first century.

Beyond Life: The Undead in Global Cult Media

Beyond Life: The Undead in Global Cult Media, Cine Excess: The Third International Conference on Cult Film Traditions, Curzon Soho Cinema and Odeon Covent Garden, London, 30th April - 2nd May 2009

A report by Rachel Mizsei Ward, University of East Anglia, UK

Cine Excess is a very special academic conference. Unlike many other conferences, Cine Excess combines academic papers with a film festival and guests from the film industry. This creates a wonderful opportunity for a dialogue between academics and the film industry. It is remarkable to consider that despite researching film and television so few other conference organisers take their events to this logical conclusion. The three day conference was jointly organised by the Schools of Arts and Social Sciences at Brunel University, as part of their continuing commitment to cult cinema. The university is an important centre for Cult Film studies with an MA in Cult Film and Television and hosting the only academic research centre for worldwide cult film with over 3000 cult films, interviews and other resources available to researchers in cult film. Mathijs and Mendik define cult films thusly:

[c]ult films transgress common notions of good and bad taste, and they challenge genre conventions and coherent storytelling, often using intertextual references, gore, leaving loose ends or creating a sense of nostalgia. (...) In spite of often-limited accessibility, they have a continuous market value and a long lasting public presence. (Mathijs & Mendik 2008: 11)

As a result Cine Excess takes a wide view of film, and often deals with films that could be considered shocking or in bad taste. This year's conference was themed around various kinds of the undead, including vampires and zombies, in cult media. Along with key notes from Jeffrey Sconce and Chris Jenks, we were treated to special screenings of *Viva* (2007), *Deadgirl* (2008), *The House by the Cemetery* (1981), *Zombie Virus on Mulberry Street* (2006) and the UK theatrical premiere of *The Last House on the Left* (2009).

The first keynote was given by Jeffrey Sconce, author of the influential article "Trashing the Academy: taste, excess, and an emerging politics of cinematic style" (1995) and *Sleaze Artists* (2007). Sconce's keynote was about the zombie as the last monster still capable of causing revulsion. For Sconce this most obvious of monsters is a creature of the post-uncanny and decidedly ungothic. The zombie is a very literal manifestation of the repressed realisation that human life will come to an end. It inverts the more gothic ghost – that is a body without spirit rather than a spirit without body. Its rotting flesh suggests a spectacle of social disintegration – as the zombie's body decays, so does society. He also argued that many zombie films use the media coverage of zombies as a common theme. There is often a breakdown in the media and this causes a corresponding breakdown in social cohesion because it is the media rather than the government which creates this cohesion. Sconce

suggested that the end of the media may be the end of meaning because it is the media that imposes narrative and meaning upon news events.

The depiction of the female vampire creates interesting ways to interrogate gender, something that Lorna Jowett (University of Northampton) did through her examination of the character of Harmony in *Angel*. As a regular television series *Angel* is able to mock stereotypes while continuing to perpetuate them. The stereotype of the female vampire derived from 1970s vampire films such as *The Vampire Lovers* (1970) and *Lust for a Vampire* (1971) is that of a powerful, seductive and dangerous female with a voracious sexual desire. Harmony destroys this vampire stereotype, acting more like the stereotype of the "dumb blonde" and provides comedy to the series rather than a dangerous sexuality. As a frequent character, particularly in season five, she normalises the vampire. The stereotype-breaking characterisation of Harmony is similar to the characterisation of Angel, who is used to poke fun at over-serious expressions of masculinity. Vampires are frequently depicted as self absorbed and narcissistic and through Harmony this is equated with a certain type of self absorbed feminine behaviour. Despite Harmony being a poor example of a vampire, her vampirism still alienates her from friends such as Cordelia.

That least charismatic of film monsters, the mummy, was examined by Basil Glynn (Liverpool Hope University). Unlike the more popular undead such as the vampire, little academic work has been done on the mummy in film. Glynn suggested that this was in part due to there being few iconic mummy films; no specific stars associated primarily with the role of the mummy and that there were no specific texts like *Dracula* for researchers to compare films to. In the 1920s the mummy was a tragic figure, in part connected to the discovery of Tutankhamun. As a tragic figure who died in the prime of life, the mummy more generally was equated with First World War soldiers. However the mummy is an eastern monster, revealing orientalist fears. By the 1940s the mummy had become mentally enfeebled and connected strongly to Asia, while the Suez Crisis in the 1950s brought mummies who punished colonial arrogance. This body with soul is bound by transgressive desires for women that he cannot have, either in his past, or one that is out of bounds in the present.

The zombie and pornography does not at first glance appear to be the most likely combination but Steve Jones (University of Sussex) used the zombie-porn film *Porn of the Dead* (2006) to explore issues between pornography and horror. The juxtaposition between horror and pornography in *Porn of the Dead* creates a jarring experience. The film combines the "cumshot" with human bodies being eaten, both abject spectacles, suggesting a breakdown of order. Its depiction of necrophilic desire reduces the subject to an object. The use of zombies blurs lines of gender and humanity. It is not possible to assign agency to either gender because both male and female zombies appear in *Porn of the Dead*. However while the women performers are clearly differentiated between human and zombie; the male performers are not so clearly defined, suggesting a lack of humanity. The film suggests that pleasure is everything, superseding even death.

Part of the conference's dialogue with the film industry was a panel on film distribution. It was attended by Anna Biller, the director of *Viva* and Martin Nash from Nouveaux Pictures and they were able to give a real insight into the process. What came across were the difficulties of selecting films for a region two release, particularly films that have already been released in other regions. Internet shopping has made it easier for fans to get cult films from other regions, so a region two release needs to establish itself as different to other

versions and worth buying. This is done through special elements such as unique extras, restored prints and complete, uncut versions. Other important issues that distributors need to consider are the profitability of a title, and if the BBFC is likely to require significant cuts or even certify a film at all. The panel was also used to announce a collaboration between Nouveaux Pictures and Cine Excess to release special DVD editions of cult films, including *Viva* and *Suspiria* (1977) with special features that would be of interest to not only the cult film fan, but also to the academic.

The second keynote was given by Chris Jenks, Vice Chancellor at Brunel University and professor of sociology. Jenks gave us a fascinating view of the purpose of the monster at a sociological level. He argued that society creates monsters from famous murderers such as Myra Hindley, Rosemary West, Robert Thompson and Jon Venables. Their purpose is to maintain order and prescribe limits to our conduct by acting as examples of how not to behave. By defining someone as a monster we are able to expel them from the social order and purge society of their taboo-breaking transgressions.

Personally the highlight of the conference was the guests of honour, Dario Argento and Claudio Simonetti. This created an interesting opportunity to question Argento and Simonetti about their work together, including films such as *Suspiria*. Argento was asked about his use of architecture in his work and if there was a particular experience of a building that had stuck with him. This led to a fascinating anecdote about a childhood daytrip to an abandoned fascist town outside Rome. However, as an interested fan, I felt that some of Argento's other answers were less satisfactory. This was particularly the case in his answers to questions about how he directs films and where he got certain motifs from. To answer these with the explanation that he is an instinctive film maker and that his ideas just come from his subconscious suggests either a lack of personal reflection or a deliberate attempt to conceal his working process behind a patina of personal myth.

Cine Excess remains a vibrant event for academics to get together to discuss cult film. The panels I attended were never less than interesting, and the huge range of work suggest that the undead are still very much alive in research circles. I look forward to next year's conference.

Reference:

Mathijs, Ernest & Mendik, Xavier (eds.) (2008) *The Cult Film Reader*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

B for Bad Cinema: Aesthetics, Politics and Cultural Value

B for Bad Cinema: Aesthetics, Politics and Cultural Value

A report by Ramon Lobato, University of Melbourne, Australia

Film studies has tended to be most comfortable in the realm of the exceptional (the masterpiece, the progressive text, the filmic controversy) and the popular (the blockbuster, the classical Hollywood film, the genre text). By and large, it has had less to say about the rest of film culture – the many thousands of films which do not get reviewed by critics, which lack the production values to be taken seriously as cinema, or which confound or contest norms of taste, aesthetics, and textual quality.

Welcome to the world of *B for Bad Cinema: Aesthetics, Politics and Cultural Value*, a three-day conference hosted by Film and Television Studies in the School of English, Communications and Performance Studies at Monash University. Held at the University's Clayton campus in south-eastern Melbourne, *B for Bad Cinema* was a welcome opportunity to hear from over a hundred scholars about recent research on a wide variety of topics and texts, loosely connected under the bad film rubric.

Presenters travelled from across Australia and New Zealand to attend, with some hailing from universities as far afield as Taiwan, Denmark, the USA, Canada, Wales, India, and Malaysia. This was the first time a conference of this size has addressed bad cinema in Australasia, and it is one of the few events of its type to have been held anywhere in the world.

Keynote addresses by international guest speakers Ernest Mathijs (University of British Columbia), Murray Pomerance (Ryerson University), and Jamie Sexton (Aberystwyth University) each took a different slant on the theme. Mathijs provided a fascinating discussion of how notoriously inept films like *The Room* and *Troll 2*, which unwittingly defy the technical norms of narrative cinema through continuity and pacing errors, can change the way we experience time. Sexton surveyed a series of historical precedents for the study of cult cinema, while Pomerance explored the on-screen depiction of badness through a discussion of evil film characters from Hitler to Hannibal Lecter.

In other keynotes, Melbourne-based critic and scholar Adrian Martin (Monash) offered a reading of the films of French art director Jean-Claude Brisseau through the lens of debates around badfilm, thus opening up a new perspective on a concept which is usually applied only to forms of commercial cinema, while Angela Ndalians (University of Melbourne) surveyed recent developments in the zombie film genre along with cross-media migrations of zombies into literature, comics, and video games.

Parallel sessions were divided into five streams, so unfortunately I was able to sample only a small number of the papers on offer. Many presenters approached the topic by focussing on B

genres and their contemporary reincarnations. Mark Ryan (Queensland University of Technology) offered a richly detailed industrial analysis of recent Australian horror production, ranging from major titles like *Wolf Creek* through to ultra-low-budget "credit-card" horror films sold through international long-tail circuits. Several papers in other parallel streams also focussed on genres such as splatter, blaxploitation, sexploitation, J-horror, the *giallo* film, and reality TV. Even Brazilian women-in-prison movies were covered in a paper by Antonio Marcio da Silva (Birkbeck University of London).

Other papers introduced a new dimension to debates around bad film by considering the ethics of film/TV production and circulation. Sun Jung (Victoria University) examined a recent controversy in Korean TV involving the sexual and economic exploitation of young female soap stars which culminated in the tragic death of the starlet Jang Ja-Yeon.

In her study of Filipino *pito-pito* films, Shirlita Africa Espinosa (University of Sydney) developed a compelling critique of some of the assumptions and exclusions which structure the reception of "bad" cinema from developing nations. This was also a theme echoed in film critic Ekky Imanjaya's paper on the so-called "exploitation" films of New Order Indonesia. Both papers called attention to the US/Eurocentrism of cult film distribution, which removes Asian film cultures from their sociocultural contexts and repackages them as third-world kitsch for consumption by first-world cinephiles. These critical perspectives on what is often erroneously understood in the West as Asian cult cinema were a welcome addition to existing discourse around this topic.

Tessa Dwyer (University of Melbourne) explored issues of language in cinema, focussing on bad subtitling and dubbing practices. Dwyer raised a series of important questions about the functions of translation as both a cross-cultural mediator and an agent of meaning in its own right, and made a strong case for an emergent "error theory" through which to study the textual modifications, additions, and subtractions which are inherent in all acts of filmic translation.

The panel "Teaching Bad Objects in Film Studies", chaired by Jodi Brooks (University of New South Wales), Therese Davis (Monash) and Belinda Smaill (Monash), canvassed pedagogical issues around both good and bad cinema, touching on the material constraints and implicit value assumptions that shape what is screened in university film/TV studies classes.

Day two of the conference culminated in a party at the The Order of Melbourne, an inner-city bar, with local soul DJ Mohair Slim spinning film-related B-sides and rarities. The conference also featured a meeting to discuss the foundation of a proposed National Association of Film Studies – Australian film scholars should hear more about this initiative in the coming months.

Throughout the three days of *B for Bad Cinema*, a small army of volunteers ensured the smooth running of the conference, working tirelessly with the organising committee of Alexia Kannas, Claire Perkins, Con Veveris, and Julia Vassilieva. On behalf of all attendees, I extend my thanks to everyone involved in *B for Bad Cinema* for an enjoyable and stimulating event.

American Independent Cinema: Past, Present, Future

American Independent Cinema: Past, Present, Future, Co-organised by Liverpool John Moores University & University of Liverpool. Hosted by Liverpool Screen School, Liverpool John Moores University, 8-10 May 2009

A report by Carl Wilson, Brunel University, UK

In his opening remarks, Yannis Tzioumakis (University of Liverpool), one of the principle co-organisers of the conference with Claire Molloy (Liverpool John Moores University), briefly explained the ambitious agenda for the conference speakers: they were to "map out" and "open up the field" of independent cinema studies with a specific emphasis on (re)examining and revising the established dichotomies between Hollywood and independent film, film-makers, and film studios.

A task this large signalled the first collaborative major international academic conference between the newly developed Liverpool Screen School of Liverpool John Moores University and the film department from the University of Liverpool, and reflecting this widened expertise base, the papers also varied considerably. The four Keynote addresses covered terrain as diverse as the evolving criteria for the term 'independent', Stanley Kubrick, 'Data-Mining' *Inland Empire* (2006), and the crisis/renewal of indie cinema. There were also fifteen panels, and they were equally spread around all notions of the term 'independent'; examining horror, music, the 'quirky', race, exploitation, rotoshop animation, self perceptions, Hollywood majors, genre, Cassavetes, women, and speciality labels.

Despite the multiplicity of themes, Claire Molloy's closing remarks accurately summarised the academic tendencies and interests examined in Liverpool, and I will use them in this report to discuss and draw parallels between individual papers. Claire noted that there was a marked usage of Foucauldian discourse theory in attempts to map out the boundaries of 'independence', and as such there was a distinct attempt by academics to problematise arbitrary limits and drive away from singular definitions. Janet Staiger (University of Texas, Austin) provided the opening Keynote address with a paper examining the evolving contexts in which definitions have been employed: "Independent of What? The Ideology of 'Alternatives' to Hollywood". Drawing upon her earlier work with Bordwell and Thompson, Staiger mapped out a brief history of independent film production: from 1917 to the 1960's, independent films were produced to be virtually the same as the films made by the majors. However, from 1960 onwards "the desire to make 'independent' mean more than industrial factors seems to have developed". According to Staiger, this shift is partly prompted by the writing of the history of American cinema at the time. Inspired by theories such as the auteur theory, filmmakers started changing the definitions of their films from 'avant-garde' and 'experimental' to 'personal' and 'independent'. Consequently, a dual-track history emerges of 'New Hollywood' and 'New American Cinema' which culminates, in the 1990's, with the renewed majors beginning to take on small 'independent' films, with the eventual trading on the arbitrary definition of an 'indie' film as a brand/idea different to the mainstream.

Definitions and the contexts in which they are employed have altered over time, and at the Liverpool conference there was also an interest in looking at micro-relationships and the speciality of labour relationships. According to Molloy, this examination of "communities of practice" troubles the notion of an authorial signature and invites a "nuanced appreciation of relationships, perhaps real or imaginary." Peter Krämer (University of East Anglia) delivered the second Keynote address, with a paper entitled: 'The Making of an Independent Filmmaker: Stanley Kubrick and Post-War Hollywood.' Peter examined the development of Kubrick's work from his early years as a staff photographer at *Look* magazine in the 1940's through to his films in the 1960's, emphasising that his industrial approach enabled him to define 'independence' as being contingent upon contracts, finance, distribution, thereby rejecting *auteurist* notions of ownership. Krämer described how Kubrick started within the mainstream when making his feature films and that "there are limits to his control": he had to collaborate with other people, taking on many roles out of sheer necessity. Kubrick's first film, *Fear and Desire* (1953) could have been an expression of Kubrick's individual liberty, but it could have also been a "miscalculation", as Kubrick may have meant to have made a WWII film but "accidentally" made it into an art film due to the constraints of the circumstances in which he made his film. When Kubrick worked on his first 'Union' film, *The Killing* (1956) it is entirely plausible that the reason Kubrick clashed with his cinematographer was due to Union restrictions on how many roles Kubrick could perform on set. Furthermore, Kubrick's next script with UA, *Spartacus* (1960), had to be a star vehicle as UA wanted their contracted 'independents' to make at least one 'big film' for prestige purposes. Only after the success of the Kirk Douglas driven *Spartacus* did the press elevate Kubrick to "brand name status". Peter Krämer concluded his paper by offering that the term "interdependence" might be a better term to describe the relationships between the so-called 'independent' filmmaker and the industry in which they work.

Problematising notions of 'independence' was a recurring theme throughout a conference that may have appeared to initially support the idea of tentatively marking out the term. Whilst several of the panels at the conference examined companies and figures within contemporary American independent cinema, the panel entitled 'Exploitation and Independence' examined the co-dependence between the major studios and the 'independent' minded producers and production companies of the early 1930's through to the 1950's.

Kyle Edwards (Oakland University) explored the 'Poverty Row' independents with a specific emphasis on the history of Monogram Pictures. Kyle explained how Monogram operated within the Hollywood system but with different strategies. They released thirty to fifty features annually, so they were not what one would consider a small independent company, but they focussed on producing 2nd features so that they would receive a flat rental fee. By 1935 80% of all theatres presented double bills and in 1930's three quarters of all films released were 'B' films. However, the A/B distinction also gave rise to distinctions in the quality of the product, which gave rise to a situation that one could easily compare to the modern Hollywood franchise films, where when the Bowery Boys and Charlie Chan films had run out of steam at Warner Bros., Monogram started making them as 'series' films with significantly cut budgets.

Jason Scott's (Leeds Trinity and All Saints) paper on Sol Lesser complimented Kyle's paper as he discussed the two main approaches of 1930's-1950's 'B' products to 'A' counterparts: differentiated product / competition, and co-dependent / imitation. Lesser successfully worked with Columbia (1930-36) and Fox (1932-38), and with his "Principal Distributing Corporation" specialising in 1930's exploitation exotic or adventure films, such as *Amazon*

Head Hunters (1931), MGM wanted to combine its Tarzan franchise with his own versions, giving him the film rights to future adaptations. From this position of 'independent' producer power, when Lesser worked with RKO (1936-55), Orson Welles' prestigious Mercury Production Company was ordered off the RKO lot to make way for Sol Lesser's Tarzan unit, where similarly to Monogram and their 'series' films, Lesser made at least 11 more Tarzan films.

Whilst the exploitation panellists examined figures from the past, James Russell's (De Montfort University) absolutely fascinating paper, "In Hollywood, but not of Hollywood", Christian Film Production and the Evangelical Market", gave an interesting insight into an academically neglected area of contemporary independent film. According to James, no-one in Sherwood Pictures (an Evangelical film company) considered entering the evangelical market as one would expect, they only talked about competing with Hollywood. Although distributed through Provident Films, a small distribution company for religious films, when Sherwood Pictures' *Fireproof* (2008), was released in September 2008, it opened widely in over 800 screens and made substantial profits. Despite its critical mauling, the Christian response was largely positive as the film offered a faith affirming message to a speciality audience. Traditionally, Hollywood doesn't go anywhere near the Evangelical market, but as with several 'independent' sectors in the film industry, Provident Films eventually moved in with Sony Pictures following the *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) money making phenomenon. Mirroring the more recognisable 'indies' of Sundance *et al*, independent faith films became co-opted by the major studios and Hollywood as other studios followed suit by creating their own boutique religious brands such as Fox Faith.

Whilst Edwards, Scott and Russell examined the ways in which specific companies or figures intersected with notions of independence, the first panel of the conference, 'The horror of independent cinema', demonstrated how genre figures as an 'irritant' (to borrow Molloy's term) to concepts of independence. Building upon the paper of Sarah Wharton (University of Liverpool) who had examined the progression of standardisation and sanitation of 'horror' in the *Friday the 13th* series, Richard Nowell (University of East Anglia) explored how *Friday the 13th* (1980) had no negative pickup deals set in advance and no ready entry into major distribution companies so it was targeted at the MPAA for an R rating. Furthermore, with the evocation of previous hit films and the avoidance of the X rating becoming the governing principle of early teen slasher production, *Friday the 13th* led directly to the rise of the 'summer camp' film, an establishment of animal comedy, an emergence of the masculinised heroine, and the "omen of the painless set-piece death". As Sarah and Richard had demonstrated with their case studies of one franchise, John Berra's (Sheffield Hallam University) paper indicated that more than any other genre, horror has interrogated the effects of change and modified itself accordingly. Comparing the original *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977) with the 2006 'reimagining', John showed how the unknown actors, minimal budget, gradual release strategy and independent distribution of the original was countered in every way by the remake. Yet as a part of a contemporary strategy in which American independent horror films compete via more explicit material (*Saw* (2004), *Hostel* (2005)), experimental material (*Blair Witch Project* (1999), *Open Water* (2003)), and revise key characteristics of the 70's cycle, modern horror films can be perceived to be an enhancement and development from their predecessors.

Although the horror genre exemplifies how filmmakers have attempted to modify the film itself to ensure that is more saleable, the conference also paid attention to the use of extratextual materials, such as marketing, interview material, the internet and the ways in

which it can facilitate numerous relationships between a film and its audiences. The panel, '(self) perceptions of independence' was incredibly interesting as it examined how the directors control over extramedial discourses can vary drastically. Mark Gallagher (University of Nottingham) investigated the "formation of transhistorical taste cultures" by demonstrating how the director Steven Soderbergh has repeatedly encouraged a connection between his own films and the products of filmmaking luminaries from the New Hollywood era, thereby invoking additional discursive fields and complicating notions of 'independence'. In addition to Mark's paper, Erin Hill-Parks (Newcastle University) discussed the use of advertising materials in a slightly different way. Erin studied Christopher Nolan's presentation in various marketing materials, paying particular attention to the promo material for the Batman films, to show how Nolan's authorial 'independent' identity has been constructed and modified in alignment with the burgeoning of his career from a £3,000 début British feature made in his spare time to a fixed staple of the Hollywood film industry.

Examining the articulation of depictions of 'independence' presented in multiple ways by the media requires an understanding of the audience's reception to the various sound-bites and streaming images. In the third Keynote address, Warren Buckland (Oxford Brookes University) delivered a paper examining 'The Reception of *Inland Empire* on the Web'. In collaboration with Thomas Elsaesser and Richard Rogers, the Data Mining World Cinema Project was set up to help relieve academics' "anxiety of abundance" over the vast amounts of information available on the internet. To measure the "dynamics of social debates on the net", Buckland proposes that academics turn to tools such as Google Insights for Search which can track 'issue networks' and represent them statistically. Furthermore, using an 'issue crawler', the information can be used to create a sprawling spider's web map of interconnected websites denoting how often these sites get 'hits' from searches. More significantly, the diagram is not historically static, it can be used to track the development of these links, blogs, and searches over a period of time so that academics can begin to understand how information and interests are dispersed and how networked communities and discourses develop.

Buckland's historiographic nodal maps demonstrated the impermanence of fixed concepts and in her closing remarks, Molloy quipped that "Independence is built on shifting sands", however, it is notable that with all of the mapping out and opening up of independent cinema studies, there was little attempt made to give a solid working definition of independent film beyond Staiger's opening address. Traditional interrogations of independent film have usually been a thematically categorised examination of 'issues' personal to the director, such as race or sexuality, and whilst these papers were certainly represented, academic focus seems to have shifted towards discerning how these films and their discourses operate as a part of an industry. Furthermore, there appeared to be a definite conflict between the theorists that took an industrial stance to those that preferred to examine the cultural, artistic discourses surrounding the texts.

There were several papers presented that dealt with the classic divisions of Hollywood, or the artistic undercurrents of genre, but they were largely discussed as if they were incompatible approaches to the same field. The closing Keynote Address by Geoff King (Brunel University), 'Thriving or in Permanent Crisis? Discourses on the State of Indie Cinema', took a wider approach than many of the papers, examining the effect of the 'credit-crunch', digital video production, the internet, Filmmaker Magazine, and the 'indiewood' sector; explaining that through these discourses, types of indie cinema have become institutionalised with competing claims for authenticity, but these oversimplifications cannot also be rejected

because they have values in themselves. Geoff also introduced the work of Wendy Fonarow and her use of 'Puritanism' to explore contemporary British music, paralleling Protestant reforms with aesthetic systems, to explore the "mutually implicated" crisis and renewal of indie cinema, thereby demonstrating that the current debate surrounding contemporary American film is not an especially unique occurrence in history.

With a wider sociological perspective being introduced in the final paper, and academics arguing over the validity of their varied approaches and methods of research to the abundance of competing discourses, the American Independent Cinema Conference certainly opened up and partially revised and reorientated aspects of the field; but as far as one can discern an outline on "shifting sands", the mapping of it will have to wait for the further debates that will emerge from the fascinating and important work presented at the Liverpool conference.