

Conference Reports – February 2011

Table of Contents

British Film 2000-2010: Crossing Borders, Transferring Cultures A Report by Ron Walker	2
NERFS (North-East Regional Film Seminar) A Report by Louise Anderson and Erin Hill-Parks.....	8
Investigating <i>Torchwood</i> : Text, Context, Audiences A Report by Ross P. Garner.....	11
NECS 2010 Annual Conference A Report by Ozgur Cicek.....	14
MeCCSA-PGN 2010: Media, Communications and Cultural Studies Association Postgraduate Network Conference A Report by Douglas McNaughton.....	17
<i>Screen</i> Studies Conference: Screen Performance A Report by Melanie Hoyes	21

British Film 2000-2010: Crossing Borders, Transferring Cultures

Germersheim School of Translation, Interpreting, Linguistics and Cultural Studies, University of Mainz, 18 – 21 February 2010

A Report by Ron Walker, University of Mainz, Germany

This weekend conference held at the Germersheim School of Translation, Interpreting, Linguistics and Cultural Studies of the University of Mainz, Germany, was intended to provide a forum for a critical survey and review of British film in the first decade of the 21st century. Initiator and organiser of the conference was Professor Dr Klaus Peter Müller of the host university.

Sponsors: DFG (Deutsche Forschungs Gemeinschaft) Germany's largest research funding organisation, Nolte moebel-industrie Holding GmbH & Co. (furnishings company), the Johannes Gutenberg University and the association of friends of the faculty.

Four specific areas of discussion were proposed. 'British Film: British? International? Global? Regional? Ethnic?' encouraged participants to address British and Britishness as labels, to ask how meaningful such categories are in the context of film, how appropriate or useful the way in which we discuss films is in general, and whether the language used is adequate to the purpose. 'Characteristics of British Films from 2000 to 2010' invited examination of the specific qualities of British films and how they relate to their international counterparts, the relationship between reality and fiction in British films and the ways in which they reflect current political debate on Britishness and identity. 'British Film as a Medium of Cultural Transfer' was intended to spark discussion of film's effectiveness, or otherwise, as a communicator of cultural differences in the way people understand and perceive the world. Finally, 'British Film and Media Convergence' aimed at stimulating discussion of British films in the context of media convergence and convergence culture and how future technical developments might impact on film production and consumption.

Conference Chairs were: Professor Dr Peter Drexler (University of Potsdam), Professor Dr Eckart Voigts-Virchow (University of Siegen), and Professor Dr Barbara Korte (University of Freiburg).

Opening speaker was Professor Andrew Higson (York University). In his paper 'Culturally English Filmmaking', he addressed the discrepancy between notions of local and national film in circumstances where the production of such films is often transnational. He talked about the reluctance to discuss the concept of English cinema and the difficulty of delineating and defining Englishness as a distinct and meaningful concept in the face of the various manifestations that emerge across different genres of film and modes of film production in an

increasingly transnational and globalised film industry. But, he concluded, Englishness in its various forms was still engaging the interest of financiers, producers, distributors, and audiences in ways that made it viable well beyond national borders; new visions of Englishness, however, were often provided by the more modest films, the English global brand relying on familiar identities and territories.

Brian Baker's (Lancaster University) paper 'The Post-British Science Fiction Film: the Subject, the Nation-State, and the Imagination of Catastrophe' looked at the tensions between national and generic imperatives in contemporary cinema by analysing 'post-British' science fiction films in which the constructions of the nation-state, the subject, and the idea of a 'British' cinema are re-negotiated.

Julia Hallam (Liverpool University) discussed Englishness in 'Where is England? Space, Place and Locality in the New Media Landscape', which explored the aesthetics of low-budget filmmaking in the converging media landscape. She detected a revitalisation of British realist traditions in the burgeoning of low-budget regional filmmaking, but suggested that these new regional films, far from offering the traditional pleasures of the pastoral idyll, are often characterised by a relationship between landscape and character that is narratively redundant, yet often symbolic of an elegiac sense of loss or disconnection.

Dr Yasmin Hussain's (Leeds University) paper on 'Gurinder Chadha and the "Desification" of British Cinema' looked at the ways in which the director explores and re-defines British identities as culturally plural, how she transforms traditional elements of British cinema through the introduction of South Asian elements, to create the specifically British South Asian forms of cultural hybridisation that are such a striking feature of her films.

Screenwriter and film critic Simon Rose took a provocative poke at the British film industry, the quality of its productions and its future prospects, both financial and creative, in his paper 'Do the British Hate British Films'.

Professor John Hill (Royal Holloway College, University of London) identified the significant Scottish and Irish 'turns' in veteran British director Ken Loach's work in 'Routes English, Irish and Scottish: Representing Nationality, Region and Class in the Films of Ken Loach'. He discussed Loach's active contribution to Irish and Scottish film, in particular his association with a resurgence in Scottish filmmaking from the mid-1990s, and how this development can be related to the class and internationalist politics that have traditionally been the hallmarks of the director's work.

Professor Tobias Hochscherf (University of Applied Sciences, Kiel) and James Leggott (Northumbria University) presented a joint paper on 'Working Title: From the Mid-Atlantic to the Heart of Europe' looking at the marketing strategies

Conference Reports

employed by the eponymous and highly successful British production company. They argued that Working Title's identification with a "'mid-Atlantic" strategy of combining nationally specific content with a Hollywood dramaturgy and aesthetic' was only part of a wider and identifiably European trend whereby Hollywood's own strategies were being successfully employed to take on the American giant at its own game.

In 'Rats, Dogs, Slums: Questions of Cultural Translation Suggested by British Film in the Course of a Decade', Janet Harbord (Goldsmith's University of London) examined the notion of British film as a 'travelling medium' able to cross regional and national borders and how recent British films have attempted to handle ideas of cultural specificity and cultural translation. She used close analysis of two films – *Ratcatcher* (Lynne Ramsay, 1999) and *Slumdog Millionaire* (Danny Boyle, 2008) – utilising the trope of the slum to suggest local entrapment to examine whether film can truly become international by first being local or if difficulties of cultural difference are simply lost when films aim at a global vernacular.

Finally, Bärbel Bucksch-Hinniger (Hamburg) gave her audience an insight into the intense and demanding world of film dubbing. Her paper 'Dubbing Film: Problems and Practical Solutions' provided an introduction to the challenges involved as well as highlighting the versatility and adaptability required of the practitioners of this particular branch of cultural transfer.

Day two began with Professor Sarah Street's (University of Bristol) paper on 'Digital Britain and the Spectre/Spectacle of New Technologies' taking a close look at the new technologies debates that have characterised the decade, comparing them with similar debates from the early 20th century. She focused on three aspects of contemporary digital development: the impact of high definition, the impact and implications of Digital Screen exhibition delivery, and the use of digital technologies in preserving and reviving 'classics' of British cinema. In the concluding part of her paper Professor Street looked at how digital technologies are impacting on current filmmaking practices.

'Yes and No. Culture and Cognition in the Cinema of Sally Potter' by Professor Dr Matthias Bauer (University of Flensburg) investigated the dialectics of convergence and divergence in the films of Sally Potter. Several of Potter's films were analysed and the question of the types of rhetorical tools that must be employed by film, if it wants to communicate or transcend geographic, national or political borders, addressed. The way in which films stimulate cognition and conjecture as a possible key to answering the question was a focus of the paper.

Dr Claire Monk's (De Montfort University, Leicester) paper 'Not Represented: On Absences, Specificities and Post-Punk Music Cultures in British Film, 2000–2010' focused on 'absences and inadequacies in contemporary social representation' and on the 'cross-genre presence of British post-punk music cultures in post-

2000 British films'. She was critical of the institutions of British film for failing to 'engage with escalating globalisation, the experience of work or the marginalisation and de-resourcing of rural communities', or dealing in any meaningful way with the complex realities of middle class life. Films exploring British post-punk culture, on the other hand, allowed a reworking and renewal of region, place, identity and culture, which defied generic clichés whilst creating a space for convergence with music cultures which could be both regionally and locally British without sacrificing international appeal.

In 'British Art Lite and Weightier Matters', Amy Sargeant (Tisch School of the Arts, London) talked about the reasons for some artists choosing to make the move from gallery to cinematic exhibition and distribution. The paper discussed some of the problems and issues that such a change of direction has entailed, both for the artists and the reception given to their art/film. She suggested that the apparatus and methods currently available to both art and film critics were not adequate to allow a full appreciation of this development.

Dr Carole Jones's (University of Edinburgh) topic was post-devolution Scottish films. In 'Devolved Masculinity? Rehabilitating the Hard Man in Recent Scottish Films', she asked whether a theme of devolutionary masculinity, of gender in transition, was detectable in recent Scottish films, and whether the 'devolutionary moment' might also be interpreted as a moment of transition in 'Scotland's famously masculinised national image and identity'. If so, might this also announce a more fundamental break with the old masculinised national identity and allow new ways of imagining Scotland and Scottishness?

In '*Spooks* and Contemporary British Television Drama', Professor James Chapman (University of Leicester) made the case for shifting the conference focus a little towards television. Television, he maintained, should not be ignored at a conference such as this, because recent British television drama was in many ways just as innovative and challenging as recent cinema. He singled out several recent television drama series that he saw as exemplifying a move towards 'quality' or 'high concept' drama on British television. *Spooks* was a key example and particularly apt in the context of the conference themes of transnationalism and crossing boundaries because of the way it regularly crossed national, cultural, social and genre boundaries and transgressed audience expectations.

Dr Paul Newland (Aberystwyth University) looked at Sarah Gavron's 2007 film adaptation of Monica Ali's 2003 novel *Brick Lane* in his paper, 'Overcoming "Going Home Syndrome": Psychological Spatiality, Liminality and Placelessness in Sarah Gavron's Film Adaptation of *Brick Lane*'. He focused on the film's construction of liminal territories as a means of exploring post-imperial identity. He analysed the way musical registers, languages, and styles were used during key sequences of the film to articulate aspects of the female protagonist's spatialised experience. Location and music came together in key sequences in

Conference Reports

the film, he argued, to evoke 'Nazneen's liminal material and psychological status – her existence "in" and "in between" places'. This liminal or 'placeless' territory was one in which, the film suggests, an immigrant woman in London may positively come to terms with the many contradictory elements of identity confronting her.

'Always Look on the Dark Side of Life: Contemporary British Crime and Horror Films' was the title of Professor Robert Murphy's reflection on British cinema's move away from the lighter romantic comedies, so beloved of the British audiences of the last years of the 20th century, towards a darker, more violent reflection of a sleazy, amoral world of motiveless crime, torture and cruelty. He identified the influences for these films in the popular noir fiction of writers such as Derek Raymond, Cathi Unsworth and David Peace. The dark crime and horror films of the first decade of the 21st century, he noted, owed something to the noir tradition in British cinema, and, beyond that, to the perceived contemporary decline in British society.

Professor Keith Tester (University of Hull) was unfortunately forced to withdraw at short notice. His paper, 'Humanitarianism: The Group Charisma of Postcolonial Britain', was read by Miriam Schroeder (Mainz University) to close the second day. In his exploration of the British search for a contemporary imaginary to replace the historical imaginary of the British imperial past, Professor Tester identified 'humanitarianism' as a focus of that search. Humanitarianism, he said, was 'constitutive of group charisma'. In order to maintain its sense of charisma in the context of a confusing present, however, the contemporary imaginary relied to some extent on a vestigial emphasis on the imperial past. An analysis of *Amazing Grace* (2007) was used to examine aspects of how the contemporary imagined that past.

Sight and Sound editor Nick James opened proceedings on the final day with a personal and professional review of the British films of the decade in 'An English "Excuse Me": Aesthetic Reticence in 21st Century British Cinema'. This reticence, both financial and artistic, was, he felt, something that had continued to dog British film throughout the first decade of the new millennium.

Phillip Bergson, film critic and founder and former director of the Oxford Film Festival, lamented the passing of some of the traditional qualities and strengths of British humour from the contemporary British comedy film in his paper, 'Laughing in the Dark: Comedy, Parody and Satire in the New British Cinema 2000-2010'. The harsh, more abrasive, even aggressive humour of much contemporary cinema, he felt, was lacking in the more subtle qualities of the British satirical and parodic tradition.

Dr Tim Edensor (Manchester Metropolitan University) talked on 'Filming the Textures of the Everyday'. He focused on the way many contemporary British films make use of 'an unreflexive sense of (national) identity in capturing the

texture of space that sustains a sense of belonging' by evoking the mundane geographies of everyday life in contrast to the more overtly picturesque sceneographies of Englishness. Space not directly relevant to narrative or action had the potential to foreground archetypal feelings; the everyday, non-celebratory unreflexive sense of being in national space was something that could be evoked by film and, if done well, the unreflexive could be made reflexive, the unconscious brought to consciousness.

The penultimate paper, 'The Online Explosion and Its Impact on British Film Production, Distribution, Exhibition and Criticism', came from Sheila Johnston (film editor of theartsdesk.com website). She outlined the increasing influences on the traditional film industry – production, distribution and marketing etc. – of the Internet.

The final paper by Professor Karl Renner and Marlies Klamt (University of Mainz) on 'Crossing Borders: Popularising Science through Audio-Visual Media', looked at how the various scientific disciplines make use of the World Wide Web, not only in an attempt to make their findings and research accessible and popular, but also to cross borders and facilitate communication between the various branches of scientific endeavour.

A clear message from the conference was that new technologies, new forms of convergence and the challenges these will bring are going to play an increasing role in determining future directions for film. How we perceive, relate to and interact with the environments in which we live our lives is also evidently very much at the heart of the preoccupations of contemporary British film and its engagement with changing perceptions of local, regional, national, religious, ethnic and other identities. In this sense, concerns over finance and funding evident in several papers notwithstanding, the essential relationship between British film and British society emerged as a vital one.

NERFS (North-East Regional Film Seminar)

Northumbria University, Newcastle, 15 July 2010

A Report by Louise Anderson and Erin Hill-Parks, Newcastle University, UK

In recent years it seems film and television research in North-East England has maintained a studiously low profile. However, if the inaugural North-East Regional Film Seminar (NERFS) conference is anything to go by, that is all about to change. Held at Northumbria University Newcastle in June, the conference brought together academics and students from six universities to showcase the rich diversity of work being undertaken throughout the region. Conference organiser James Leggott (Northumbria University) opened proceedings with the hope that this would be the first of many such events.

The first panel of the conference featured four papers on aspects of British cinema production, exhibition, and consumption. Louise Anderson (Newcastle University) presented findings from her doctoral research about newsreel theatres on Tyneside in the 1940s. Through the lens of architecture and space, Anderson suggested that since news theatres were often regarded as spaces of transit they were used for a variety of activities, and not only for viewing the newsreels. Staying with audiences, Mike Kirkup (Teesside University) discussed the relationship between cinema audiences' expectations and the sites of exhibition. Kirkup presented plans for his upcoming research on specialised film exhibition in Britain. Next, Paul O'Reilly (Northumbria University) presented his doctoral research into the national network of politically active independent filmmakers known collectively as the Workshop Movement. Focusing on *The Miners' Campaign Tapes* (1984), O'Reilly charted the movement's fortunes against the backdrop of the rapidly changing cultural landscape of the 1980s and early 1990s. In the final paper Stephanie Piotrowski (Teesside University) considered the Beatles' made-for-television movie *Magical Mystery Tour* (1967), which marked the apotheosis of the band's decision to distance themselves from their mainstream pop beginnings.

The second panel of the day demonstrated the region's wide variety of research on national (non-British) cinemas. Although markedly different in their focus, each paper identified the need to avoid a unified theory, and instead to look at diverse theories of national cinema, taking historical, political, and cultural shifts into consideration. Guy Austin (Newcastle University) considered the continuing struggle to represent the Berbers in Algerian cinema, given their cultural and political situation, especially in relation to language. Both Phillip Hodgson (Northumbria University) and Laura Leonardo (Newcastle University) presented papers exploring the trans-national filmmaker. Hodgson presented his research on German/Turkish director Fatih Akin, discussing how Akin's films explore issues of local identity, and question the wider dynamics between nation states and local communities. Leonardo outlined her upcoming research into similar issues, looking at the role of food in the Italian-language films of Turkish director Ferzan Ozpetek. Focusing firmly on cultural politics, in her paper Sarah Leahy

(Newcastle University) proposed that the screenwriters of French film's classical period were unjustly ignored following the emergence of the French New Wave, which shifted critical attention to the concept of auteur cinema. Together the four presentations made a forceful appeal for continued research into transnational, rather than national, cinemas.

In a parallel session, panel three explored the limits of revelation and masquerade in papers ranging from Spanish folkloric films to American horror. In the first, Ann Davis (Newcastle University) examined the cinematic realisation of the alleged affair between Spanish star Imperio Argentina and Adolf Hitler in Fernando Trueba's *La Nina de tus Ojos* (1998). Davis argued that while Argentina, as the object of Nazi desire, evokes contemporary discomfort, Trueba's film allows us to indulge the vicarious pleasures of the alleged affair while at once denying the historical possibilities. Davis's examination of the woman as 'exotic other' led seamlessly on to Katharine Ferrimand's (Newcastle University) radical re-reading of the monstrous feminine. In her compelling paper, Ferrimand argued that a more productive critical approach to the beautiful alien femme fatale of films like *Species* (1995) and *The Faculty* (1998) was to regard her ambiguity as offering a point of resistance rather than threat. The final two papers in the panel explored the relationship between emergence, sexuality and Spanish national identity. In his paper, Adrian Gras-Velázquez (Durham University) used Allan Collin's four stage model of the economic development of urban 'gay villages' to analyse gay spaces in Spanish cinema. Focusing on Madrid's Chueca neighbourhood, as the setting for a number of recent films, Gras-Velázquez explored the gradual emergence and increasing visibility of gay urban spaces in Spanish cinema. And finally, Santi Fouz-Hernandez (Durham University) explored the transsexual ambiguity of key musical performances in Pedro Almodóvar's *Bad Education* (2004) and Ramón Salazar's *20 Centímetros* (2007), likening these transitional performative moments to Spain's move towards democracy and with it the promise of a wholesale abandonment of the past.

In the afternoon's session the topic for the first two panels was 'broadly' American popular cultural production. Noel Brown (Newcastle University) started panel four with a discussion of his doctoral research on the Hollywood family film. Brown discussed the lack of tropes or similarities in these films, identifying instead, their financial motivations as a point of similarity. However, Brown argued that rather than being ignored these apparently innocuous films deserve much more serious attention. In contrast to Brown's wide-ranging investigation, Chris Durham (Newcastle University and University of Sunderland) presented a detailed analysis of Robert Altman's *Nashville* (1975). Durham argued that *Nashville* is a product of the fractured social, political, and cultural fabric of the United States at the time of its bicentennial, and thus, can be seen as a lasting cultural representation of the period. Martin Zeller-Jacques (University of York) also discussed political and cultural reflections on the United States in film by analysing the role of the Civil War veteran in Westerns. While initially these films presented a cautionary tale of veterans' rehabilitation, Zeller-Jacques argued that contemporary Westerns have developed a more critical consideration of their role. Although markedly diverse in their approach, each presentation demonstrated the need to consider Hollywood film as more than simply entertainment.

Conference Reports

In a parallel session a diverse panel explored the queered spaces and liminal practices of American television. Andrew T. Smith (University of Sunderland) began with an engrossing exploration of the career of TV scriptwriter Rod Serling, creator of the *Twilight Zone* (1959-1964, CBS). Having identified a gap in television to film adaptation studies, that is the process of self-adaptation, Smith explored Serling's reflections on his own work through the process of adapting his own scripts. Next Melanie Waters (Northumbria University) examined the gothicisation of femininity, domesticity, and the maternal in recent American television series. Focusing on *Mad Men's* (2007- present, AMC) Betty Draper, Waters revealed how the performance of the pre-feminist perfect wife and mother is presented as uncanny. She went on to examine female-centred gothic television series including *The Ghost Whisperer* (2005-2010, CBS) and *Medium* (2005-2009, NBC), in which paranormal insight is part of a terrible maternal legacy, and which, Waters argued, resists enlightened post-feminist culture. Finally, Rosie White (Northumbria University) gave a compelling insight into the life and career of Lucille Ball. White explored the queer (peculiar) contradictions in Ball's on and off screen personas, as well as the *I Love Lucy* (1951-1957, CBS) show's queer account of domesticity. White went on to argue that throughout her television career Ball's gender identity (her queer femininity) became increasingly questionable.

The final panel of the conference explored elements of technology and creative regeneration in contemporary cinema. Utilising Paul Virilio's theory of the integral accident, Rob Bullard (Northumbria University) opened the session with an entertaining exploration of the paradoxical nature of the technological accident, which is both unexpected and inevitable. Bullard examined film's long affair with the technological disaster, and compared the localised accident at the heart of Atom Egoyan's *The Sweet Hereafter* (1997) and the global catastrophe of David Cronenberg's eagerly anticipated adaptation of Don DeLillo's novel *Cosmopolis* (2003). Next, Erin Hill-Parks (Newcastle University) outlined her recently submitted doctoral thesis in which she explores the auteur persona of Hollywood director Christopher Nolan. In her paper, Hill-Parks argued that Nolan's carefully crafted auteur persona provides a unifying structure to his films' discursive surround. The final paper of the conference, again focusing on Nolan's films, was presented by William Proctor (University of Sunderland) who outlined his plans for further research exploring the notion of the film reboot, as a reimagining of a series of films following either a catastrophic critical or economic failure.

The overriding impression left at the end of a packed day was of the richness and diversity of film and television research being undertaken in the North-East, which certainly warrants an annual event of this type. Let us hope that next time the event will attract more representatives from the four universities south of the Tyne and delegates from even further afield. But for this year the NERFS conference left only one question unanswered – what took them so long?

Investigating *Torchwood*: Text, Context, Audiences

Cardiff School of Creative Arts, University of Glamorgan, 18 June 2010

A Report by Ross P. Garner, University of Cardiff, UK

Located en route to the Mermaid Quay complex that forms the cornerstone of Cardiff Bay and host to the iconic 'tower' that acts as the real world place-marker for the fictional *Torchwood* hub, the University of Glamorgan's glamorous and modern Atrium building provided an apt setting for an academic symposium on BBC Wales's *Torchwood* (2006- present). Certainly, through juxtaposing the city's longstanding railway network with the easily-identifiable 'Alto Lusso' flats that lead character Captain Jack Harkness (John Barrowman) frequents within the diegesis so as to survey the city, the view from the Atrium's 'Zen Room' beautifully captured the sense of 'old' and 'new' Cardiff that episodes such as 'Ghost Machine' (2006) have used to full effect. More than just providing stimulating panoramas, however, this was also the setting for a set of informed papers and engaging discussions that explored *Torchwood* from a predominantly cultural and/or literary perspective.

Proceedings began with a keynote speech from Cardiff University's Matt Hills, who picked up from where his recent publication *Triumph of a Time Lord* (2010) left off by considering *Torchwood* with the same level of academic rigour that has been applied to its parent series, *Doctor Who* (BBC 2005- present). Hills' paper approached *Torchwood* from the perspective of its complicated and continually-evolving brand identity. Adopting this stance meant that the paper located the programme within a range of contemporary Television Studies debates since, as has been noted elsewhere (see Rogers, Epstein and Reeves 2002; Johnson 2007), practices associated with branding have become integral to the television industry within the present TVIII era. However, rather than simply drawing upon these ideas, Hills nevertheless complicated attempts to separate out discrete 'periods' of television by showing how *Torchwood* has moved across ideas linked to TVI, TVII, and TVIII throughout the course of its three series. Moreover, alongside this critique of applying American understandings of television production to the British context, Hills' paper also called for the analysis of individual television programmes to move beyond such 'traditional' issues as character and narrative by combining this approach with greater attention to branding discourses. Ultimately, the presentation pointed towards new considerations, which scholars with an interest in television series at the level of the text should address and confirmed that Hills' forthcoming study of *Torchwood* will display a typically questioning attitude towards taken-for-granted ideas within Television Studies.

The three panels that followed were organised by theme: topics such as narrative (in Martin Griffin's (University of Tennessee) and Rosanne Welch's (Claremont Graduate University) discussion of representations of class and the family in 'Children of Earth' (2009)), and monstrosity were tackled by various presentations. This resulted in some fine dovetailing of papers: the correlation between Daniel Rawcliffe's (Newcastle University) discussion of *Torchwood*'s gothic tropes and Rebecca Williams's (University of Glamorgan) outline of the

use of abjection within the episode 'Countrycide' (2006) probably being the best example of this from the day.

Core paradigms in fan/audience studies were also well represented across the three panels and, due to the recurrence of these ideas, were returned to frequently across the course of the plenary discussions. For example, the first two papers of the morning panel, provided by Laurie Cubbison (Radford University) and Jeannette Vermeulen (University of Technology, Sydney), restated the ongoing popularity of the 'resistance paradigm' (see Jenkins 1992) as a way of accounting for fan practices by using these ideas to discuss fan reactions to the onscreen deaths of the *Torchwood* team's returning characters. Both of these papers trod solid established ground – Vermeulen's point concerning how the 'outsider' status of characters such as Toshiko (Naoko Mori) and Ianto (Gareth David Lloyd) provided a space for some fans experiencing similar emotions to articulate these feelings was especially interesting – but perhaps could have been furthered by adopting a psychoanalytic perspective and focusing upon the theme of 'trauma' that underpinned both. The theme of 'further development' then also arose, albeit focused in a completely different manner, in Craig Haslop's (University of Sussex) fascinating introduction to his PhD research on audience responses to, and discussions of, queer identity in *Torchwood*. Audience reactions and negotiations of such forms of representation are, as Haslop recognised, an under-theorised area of contemporary audience studies and, from the snapshot provided here, *Torchwood* has opened up an arena through which discourses on sex and sexuality can be engaged with. Elsewhere, the issue of fan/subcultural 'value', as theorised by Pierre Bourdieu (1984), was returned to by Benjamin Earl (University of Glamorgan) in his entertaining yet insightful analysis of why it is that fan-tourists continually want to be photographed by the aforementioned *Torchwood* 'tower'. What was especially notable about Earl's paper was that, in the following question and answer session, it opened up a debate concerning the form of 'capital' that having your photo taken by this location generates; is this an example of 'mainstream-subcultural' or 'sub-subcultural' capital if it is compared with other fan practices such as obtaining photographs of *Torchwood* whilst it is being filmed? When taken together, then, all of these papers suggested that audience response has been of central importance to how *Torchwood* has established and maintained its popularity.

What was slightly worrying about some, but not all (i.e. Haslop and Earl), of the fan/audience studies papers was, however, their tendency to rely on author-based readings. The readiness with which quotes attributed to Russell T. Davies – *Torchwood*'s executive producer – were taken at face value instead of being analysed through such theories as Foucault's (1979) author-function sometimes hindered the development of the points raised. This was especially the case if such analyses were considered in relation to both Hills' prior keynote (which successfully demonstrated the need to display reflexivity towards production discourses) and Chris Chibnall's status as executive-producer/head writer to *Torchwood*'s first two series.

Issues relating to the BBC and its status as a public-service broadcaster were absent from most of the papers aside from Hills' keynote and my own engagement with the 'production strategies' (see Johnson 2005) put in place to

discourage child audiences from watching *Torchwood's* first series. Discussing the role of the BBC and the concept of public service would have not been relevant to all of the papers but, for example, Stephen Lacey's (University of Glamorgan) otherwise excellent discussion of how *Torchwood* has represented Cardiff-as-spectacular by combining the programme's 'realistic' understanding of the city's diverse locations with an internationalist/tourist gaze could have also addressed the BBC's devolution policies. Similarly, Laurie Villar (University Paris IV) provided a very good paper concerning how the character of Captain Jack represents a British take on the traditionally-American category of the superhero but, given the responsibilities of the BBC to provide representations of national culture, these ideas could have been extended to include the Corporation's public service framework.

'Investigating *Torchwood*' was, overall, a fine addition to the ongoing series of symposia offered by the University of Glamorgan on contemporary television series (previous days have centred around *Life on Mars* (BBC/Kudos 2006-7), *Gavin and Stacey* (BBC/Baby Cow Productions 2007- present) and drama-documentaries concerning the 'War on Terror'). Bringing together a small but dedicated group of academics to discuss *Torchwood* generated an imitate and encouraging arena where ongoing issues central to Television and Cultural Studies could be thought through in relation to this continually mutating series.

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NECS 2010 Annual Conference

Communication Faculty, Kadir Has University, Istanbul, 24 – 27 June 2010

A Report by Ozgur Cicek, Binghamton University, USA

The 4th Annual NECS 2010 conference brought hundreds of film and media scholars from all around the world to Istanbul. This year Istanbul was an especially perfect location for a conference on urban mediations. While scholars from around the world were debating concepts like urban praxis, representation of urbanity and the necessary theoretical background that speaks to/for urban mediations, the city itself, as a crossroads between two continents and as the European Capital of Culture in 2010, was performing its own mediation of cultural diversity and urbanity. Composed of eight parallel panel sections, three keynote speakers, graduate workshops and eight film screenings (four of which included director participation), the conference had a rich and intense programme.

The three keynote speakers, Saskia Sassen, Charlotte Brunsdon and Thomas Elsaesser, focused on different perspectives of 'cityness' and its representation. While Sassen set the grounds for a critical and integral debate on the relationship between cityness and the digital societies, much of the conference's controversial discussion was initiated by Brunsdon who questioned the reasons for the recent interest of scholars in cinematic cities. In her provocative speech, Brunsdon highlighted questions of how the cinematic city functioned in academia and if the cinematic city was a remedy for a disciplinary fatigue so that, as she states, architects have started to work on cinema and film scholars have started to work on geography. This, she argued, mobilizes film and cinematic cities between different disciplines and thus leads to a notion of a restless cinematic city. Furthermore, the mobility of films created a cinematic city discourse that constantly revolves around issues such as disregarded detail, unexpected juxtaposition, fleeting glimpses of beauty, vanished landmarks, material traces of post history, the anonymous crowd and being alone in that crowd, in addition to the coexistence of abject poverty with spectacular wealth.

Brunsdon also noted that it is not possible to come across a book or article on cinematic cities that does not refer to theorists such as Baudelaire, Simmel, Benjamin and Lefebvre and was critical of the conception of the 'interdisciplinary' tendency that has come to dominate the field of film studies. As she argued, when a historian uses film in their work, their work is considered to be 'interdisciplinary'. However, as she suggests, when a film scholar attempts to use conceptions involving historical models in their academic work, it is not considered 'interdisciplinary' but rather, it is an approach that assumes 'history' is already an integral component of this research. Thus the mobility of film between different disciplines brings about an interdisciplinary quality to a number of fields, such as architecture, history, or geography. The field of film studies, however, can hardly achieve this same quality – and this, as Brunsdon argues, is unfortunate for any attempts to attract funding through using buzzwords such as 'interdisciplinary' or 'cross-disciplinary'.

In the third keynote speech, Thomas Elsaesser touched upon the relationship between film festivals and cityness, and their 'ambiguous ways of sociality'. He argued that film festivals create unsocial sociabilities and bring about 'mobility and locatedness' so that the location or the city of the festival remains central to competitions. Thus, at times, the festivals become the producer of films, promoting new auteurs and motivating new different national cinemas.

As well as the striking speeches of the keynote speakers, nearly all the panels were fully attended and invited much participation. In particular, the presentations in the panel entitled 'The Layered City: Cinematic Traversals', chaired by Alexandra Schneider, were highly enlightening and informative on their specific and interesting topics. Jennifer Streetskamp's presentation focused on Installation art, particularly Kutlu Ataman's installation work *Kuba* (Kuba is a recently emerged neighborhood in one of the ghettos of Istanbul). As discussed by Streetskamp, Kuba has different sites of installation, one of which is located in London. In interviews Ataman conducted with the residents of Kuba, their stories were aired on screen via forty TV sets and each TV set was accompanied by mismatched living room furniture. Set at low volume, the TVs indicated a multiplicity of mumbling voices all over the installation site. Streetskamp argues that this artwork creates different layers of digital images and this complicates the apprehension of the here and now with the there and then. Indeed, 'there and then' turns out to be embedded in 'here and now', creating a layered city of placement and displacement, not only on the level of representation, but also with the installation's different and continuously changing installation sites.

Another significant presentation on this panel was Wanda Strauven's interesting paper entitled 'Tracking, Zapping, Zooming'. While her focus and analysis was not on specific art works or films, she did focus on three key concepts in narration and the three visual dimensions of the practices. First analyzing the tracking shot, she indicated that the tracking shot is like a navigation shot and thus has a media archeological fashion, having the ability to arouse an uncanny feeling of depth of layers. Later in her talk, she discussed the conception of zapping, indicated that zapping came with controlling and skipping the advertisements on TV, so that 'to zapp' means to kill. Killing here can also mean killing time when considered with TV watching. But this practice has created a new attitude as she indicated, one that is also defined as 'Zaptitude' by Hans-Ulrich Obrist. This new attitude of zaptitude indicates a new fashion in narration consisting of continuously changing images where the viewer does not have to 'zapp' because it has already been done for him. She also stated that this zaptitude is actually an alternative urban imaginary of constant decontextualization and recontextualization. Lastly, she turned to the question of zooming, arguing that digital zooming has a sense of touch and a sense of vision corresponding to that of an 'urban flâneur'. Hence, with zooming we do not see the spaces of the past or passing spaces as much as we feel them rush past. Thus, Strauven's presentation indicated that urbanity does not just reflect itself on the level of setting or the narrative, but it has also been altering and playing with style and narration and in this way is transforming perception.

Finally, 'Architecture, Film and the Ideal City' panel, which was chaired by Gabu Heindl was also very well designed. Andrew Hussey's paper 'The Naked City: The Urban Visions of Guy Debord' indicated a different perspective on the cinematic

Conference Reports

city and Baudelaire's concept of the flâneur (which was recurrent throughout the conference). Hussey, referring to Guy Debord, highlighted situanist cinema and how it can be theorized as a critique of the city. Furthermore, he argued that in situanist cinema the notion of flâneur becomes an active political agent and the city is rediscovered as the space that resists urbanism.

The NECS 2010 conference assembled many film and media scholars to discuss contemporary debates on urbanity and its representation. The well-attended conference and inspiring discussions in panels reflect the controversial nature of urbanity, which seems not yet to be exhausted but to have more to be debated and discovered.

MeCCSA-PGN 2010: Media, Communications and Cultural Studies Association Postgraduate Network Conference

University of Glasgow, 31 June – 1 July 2010

A Report by Douglas McNaughton, Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, UK

The 2010 MeCCSA postgraduate network conference was held at the University of Glasgow on 31 June and 1 July 2010. The multiple panels on offer and the diversity of papers presented meant that the conference was something of an embarrassment of riches. As so often then, the review offered here is a necessarily selective and subjective account.

The opening panel on 'Historicising Performance' highlighted the changes to acting styles brought about by material conditions of production, as Richard Hewett (Royal Holloway, University of London) compared similar scenes from 1963 and 2005 episodes of *Doctor Who* to demonstrate the shift from theatrically derived, technically detailed acting styles to an emphasis on more spontaneous, internally motivated naturalism. In a complementary paper, Trevor Rawlins (University of Reading) drew on his own training as an actor to consider similar issues, contrasting American and British performance techniques, but from the perspective of how such styles might affect ways in which screen acting is taught.

Professor Christine Geraghty's (University of Glasgow) plenary paper, "'Who speaks and to whom?": in defence of Media Studies', offered a historical account of the development of the discipline and in particular possible future directions for the delegates to consider as their own careers progress. She emphasised the increasing significance of teamwork in cultural studies work, and suggested that when Leitch (2007) calls for a new discipline of 'textual studies' it is already with us, in the diversity and interdisciplinarity of media studies. The complexity and heterogeneity of the field was emphasised in the ensuing question and answer session, in its insistence on consideration of online new media as well as print media, often neglected in media studies.

A session on 'Space and Performance from Gardens to Cities' looked at screen spaces from a variety of perspectives. Using studio floorplans, adaptation theory and textual analysis, my own paper demonstrated some of the strategies by which the BBC production of *I, Claudius* adapted the novel to the specific material resources of the 1970s television studio. Looking at the garden as a site understood through its relations with colonialism and tourism, and its status as museum, memory-space and microcosm, Lavinia Brydon (Queen Mary, University of London) suggested that filmmakers have long understood and utilised the appeal of the garden as a cinematic space to rival that of the city. Lin Feng's (University of Nottingham) analysis of the development of Chinese actor Chow Yun-fat's star persona demonstrated the way in which the action star is understood as a comedy performer in local Hong Kong cinema and looked at the social significance of the star's 'everyman' persona in the 1980s and early

Conference Reports

1990s. The paper argued that Chow Yun-fat's comedy persona is connected to dramatic social and cultural changes occurring in Hong Kong when its inhabitants were reviewing their own identities as cosmopolitan citizens.

The panel 'Negotiating Narrative and Image' engaged with cutting-edge issues of form and style emerging in various media. Chris Buckle (University of Glasgow) identified a 'raw footage' aesthetic which has come to denote authenticity since 9/11 and argued that public images of 9/11 have shaped the representation of the War on Terror. Drawing on a range of textual examples including news reports, citizen journalism and fiction films, he argued that the use of 'raw footage' in fiction has both an aesthetic and a structural effect, resulting in viewer disorientation and a very specific form of audience engagement. Examining *Blade Runner's* visual rhetoric and adaptive strategies, Lyle Skains and Amy Chambers (both University of Bangor) presented an assessment of narrative techniques in the emergent literary genre of digital fiction. In a highly visual presentation they suggested ways in which digital fiction offers unprecedented opportunities for presentation of narrative using *mise-en-scène* and lexia (onscreen text) in new ways. In a lively paper, Vincent M. Gaine (University of East Anglia) analysed critical and popular responses to *Avatar* to identify critical frameworks in reactions to the film. While many critics were dismissive of what they saw as one-dimensional characterisation and narrative, others appreciated the film as an aesthetically immersive experience, which offered a new and essentially cinematic form of spectacle. Gaine argued for an understanding of the film for what it is, rather than for its critically-perceived omissions. All three presentations suggested the increasing importance of aesthetics and stylistics in construction of meaning across a variety of traditional and new media.

The second day opened with the panel 'Imagining Nation on Television'. Melanie Hoyes (University of Sussex) examined representations of class, national identity and youth in British television comedy. Focusing on similarities and contrasts between *Little Britain's* Vikki Pollard and Catherine Tate's Lauren, Hoyes suggested that the greater critical disapprobation applied to Pollard is a consequence of the character's class status, and examined the ways in which the character fits into discourses around poverty and deviance. Comparing the way in which Lauren has access to institutional spaces unavailable to Pollard, such as the Royal Variety Show and Downing Street, Hoyes argued that the characters express middle-class guilt and open up much-needed discussion of neglected social topics. Debra Ramsay (University of Nottingham) explored the strategies of cable channel HBO in positioning itself as a quality broadcaster and argued that broadcast is no longer the primary site of consumption for television. Her analysis of the marketing strategies and consumption practices of HBO's *Band of Brothers* box sets shows how these strategies help to position the series as quality television, and promote the series to audiences outside the point of transmission and its original marketing strategies, as well as the ways in which audiences incorporate repeat viewing into their personal histories. In addition, she touched tantalisingly on the ways in which World War Two veterans have adopted elements of the DVD set as signifiers of authenticity in their own commemorative practices.

The second day also offered a plenary, in which Professor Philip Schlesinger (University of Glasgow) offered a summary of debates around the contribution of academic expertise to public media policy. Setting out the key issues in the field, he discussed issues of funding, the role of the celebrity intellectual, the emergence of the creative class, the multiplication of (non-academic) expertise, and the tensions applied by audit culture and the demands of academic institutions. Noting that no funding is ever innocent, he stressed that the older model of the autonomous intellectual must coexist with the dominant market-driven model of the public intellectual, and that these issues must be considered by all those present who will engage with the public domain and issues of cultural policy in their future careers.

A useful workshop on academic publishing combined the experiences of published academics (Dr David Archibald, University of Glasgow; Dr Glyn Davis, Glasgow School of Art; Dr Jonny Murray, Edinburgh College of Art) with the advice of Rebecca Barden (BFI/Palgrave) and Kat Hughes (eSharp Postgraduate Online Journal). A very open debate about the obstacles to publishing that might result from lack of patronage or contacts led to a fruitful discussion about both practical and strategic routes to publication. In the face of some anxiety around the possibility of getting published and the pressures of the RAE/REF, Professor Christine Geraghty offered a useful intervention. Firstly, she suggested that the existence of the REF will lead to greater institutional encouragement and support for early career researchers to research and publish. Secondly, she pointed out that the number of outputs required by the REF is not that high, allowing for the planning and publishing of research through the REF process, and the presentation of research plans at job interviews. Thirdly, it was noted, the increasing fragmentation of publishing into increasingly niche journals suggests the wider availability of outlets for work, whatever the subject; whilst the increased use of electronic search tools means that the interested audience will find that work.

A final session on 'Identity in Flux' addressed issues of representation of gender, race and ethnicity through a variety of texts and approaches. Lei Chin Pang (University of Sussex) used the work of Hong Kong film director Wong Kar Wai to consider issues of mobility, both as physical journeying and fluidity of identity. Arguing that in the ambiguous spaces of postcolonial culture, women are doubly colonised by both men and colonisers, the paper showed how Wong Kar Wai's women seem doubly empowered. Their peripheral status allows them to evade both local patriarchy and foreign colonialism, resulting in a mobility that informs our understanding of contemporary Hong Kong in the age of globalisation. Hanita Mohd. Mokhtar-Ritchie (University of Glasgow) examined the Malaysian film *Sepet* (2004) to consider Malaysian film's appropriation of the melodramatic mode in its representation of the female protagonist negotiating the cultural aspects of patriarchal Malay society. Suzanne Passmore's (University of Western Australia) paper rejected traditional sociological theories of fandom to consider fan-produced Harry Potter fiction as texts for study in themselves. Passmore examined some of the ways in which fanfictions fill the gaps of source texts thus revealing the ideological gaps inherent in those source texts, arguing that fanfiction's critical interventions can therefore be read as political criticism. Antonella Palmieri (University of East Anglia) examined the figure of 1950s Italian film star Anna Magnani to consider the European actress as imported

Conference Reports

'Other' in American cinema. Palmieri drew on Magnani's films, along with promotional discourses and critical commentary, to examine the construction of the actress's public persona. Arguing that ethnic femininity represents a challenge to ideological control and American white patriarchy, Palmieri demonstrated the ways in which Magnani's image both negotiated and resisted the tensions within the assimilationist culture of 1950s American society.

This well organised and friendly conference provided a supportive space for discussion of current work in a wide variety of topics, affording delegates useful feedback on their research. The networking opportunities at the conference proved useful and the plenaries and workshop provided welcome and practical additions to the research being presented. The range of compelling presentations demonstrated the diversity and quality of the work being conducted by postgraduates in the broad church of media, communications and cultural studies.

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Screen Studies Conference: Screen Performance

University of Glasgow, 2 – 4 July 2010

A Report by Melanie Hoyes, University of Sussex, UK

This year, the 51st Screen Studies conference centred on the theme of Screen Performance, once again providing this long-running and well-established event with a timely and rich subject through which to discuss and explore the field. Programmed by Dr Karen Lury, the scope of the topic was demonstrated throughout around 90 papers presented in over 30 panels. Some papers focused on more traditional notions of performance on screen, such as star studies and the performative body, whilst others expanded to incorporate ideas such as the performance of spaces, animals, celebrity and national identity, to name but a few. This ensured an eclectic and fascinating mix of subjects all incorporated under this wide umbrella.

The conference was sandwiched between plenaries, which emphasised the need to consider performance in an academic context, an area which can be overlooked in screen studies. All of these papers looked in detail at the performances in specific case studies ranging from the popular to the independent, from film to the phonograph record. Andrew Klevan (University of Oxford) analysed scenes of films from Classical Hollywood frame by frame in order to highlight the detail in gestures by film performers, which are often overlooked in their fluency and rapidity from scene to scene. Lesley Stern's (UC-SanDiego) paper analysed the improvisation of the everyday in Charles Burnett's realist film, *Killer of Sheep*. The closing plenary echoed some of these themes in relation to different subjects. Christine Holmlund (University of Western Ontario) turned her attention to the star persona and performative body of Sylvester Stallone, while Jacob Smith (University of Nottingham) explored the celebrity impressionist and what he termed 'imitative performance' to construct a history of media based on performance. These papers identified some of the complex and multi-faceted ways in which performance can be explored as well as identifying a lack in screen studies, which the content of this conference served to fill.

This idea of unexplored facets of screen studies was furthered in Frances Bonner's (University of Queensland) paper on Stephen Fry. Bonner explained her ongoing interest in 'invisible television' and examined possible reasons for the lack of academic writing surrounding Stephen Fry despite his popularity. Fry's performance of class and sexuality were at the forefront of this discussion exploring whether his 'safe' performance of these aspects of his personality fed into his popularity with audiences but left little of interest for critics to grapple with.

Iris Kleinecke-Bates (University of Hull) furthered some of these questions in her paper on celebrity chefs in the UK, focusing on the season of Channel Four programming packaged under the banner of *The Great British Food Fight*. Looking particularly at Michelin-starred chef Heston Blumenthal, the paper suggested that this series of programmes mobilised these individuals to operate

Conference Reports

on political and social terms, authenticating their personal concerns with food integrity and quality produce in Britain to educate and inform the British public and engineer a national lifestyle. The paper argued that merging the public and private personas of these celebrity chefs authenticated and legitimised this process and created a sense of Britishness for the audience to aspire to.

Not all papers focused on individual performances. Helen Wheatley's fascinating paper discussed the potential for spectacle on television, describing a kind of performance of the British landscape via programmes such as *Coast* and *Wainwright's Walks*. Moving away from the idea that television only allows for distracted viewing and is not suited to what is seen as cinematic spectacle, Wheatley argued that these programmes adopt these cinematic techniques in order to present a pictorial, heritage view of the British landscape with aerial shots and slow-moving cameras, allowing for a more contemplative mode of viewing on the part of the audience.

As always at *Screen*, the subject of performance was only a guideline for submissions and there were papers that did not directly address the notion of performance. For instance, Max Dawson (Northwestern University) highlighted a need to reinsert technology studies into the field of television studies and argued that television is not just an appliance but also a cultural object. There were also panels centred around 3D realism, television drama, puppets and music and film, for example, once again highlighting the breadth of scope of this conference, integral as it is to the media and film studies calendar.

In addition to the breadth of scope in terms of content of the papers, academics at all stages of their careers were represented. Well-established scholar Victor Perkins (University of Warwick) presented a rare and therefore highly attended paper about the performance of animals in film. Alongside this were a number of papers from researchers in the closing stages of their doctorate or early stages of their academic career, which compared well to the more experienced presenters in a conference where the quality of the papers was consistently high.

The sheer size and breadth of *Screen* makes it a highly valuable conference that draws on a wide range of subjects and disciplines. This can make it intimidating for some doctoral candidates or early career academics but potential attendees should rather be encouraged. It is precisely the mix of people and topics that makes *Screen* such a success and a great opportunity to gain insight into current areas of research and discussion. It is also an incredibly enjoyable way to meet a wide range of like-minded academics. The conference made for an engaging and extremely pleasurable few days, made all the more so by the high level of organisation and welcoming nature of the *Screen* committee. It is a conference that continues to promote discussions around screen studies in a friendly yet intellectually-charged environment. The multidisciplinary nature of the conference is what makes the conference such an institution and continues to build on fruitful personal and academic connections in the fields of film, television and media.