

# Conference Reports – June 2012

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## **East Winds: East Asian Cinema and Cultural Crossovers Symposium**

Coventry University, Coventry, 2–3 March 2012

### **A report by Pierce Conran, Modern Korean Cinema ([modernkoreancinema.com](http://modernkoreancinema.com)), Seoul, South Korea**

The “East Winds: East Asian Cinema and Cultural Crossovers Symposium”, held at Coventry University and organized by Spencer Murphy and Collette Balmain (both based at the host institution, which also funded the event), sought to reflect the diversity of East Asian cinema through a variety of different perspectives. In the current globalised world of cinema, international cross-pollination has become increasingly commonplace. Asian cinema, in the last fifteen years or so, has seen an explosion in co-productions as previously contentious diplomatic relationships across the continent have thawed. The already eclectic national industries of the Far East are beginning to collaborate more and more, creating newer hybrids and showcasing the enormous depth of East Asian cinema to a broader public.

The conference began with a keynote presentation by Jinhee Choi (King’s College London). Her paper “Exiled in Macau: Hong Kong Neo-Noir and Paradoxical Lyricism”, sought to explore transnational imagery in *After This Our Exile* (*Fu zi*, Patrick Tam, 2006) and *Exiled* (*Fong juk*, Johnnie To, 2007), both Hong Kong films set in Malaysia and Macau respectively. She discussed how idyllic imagery in these films evoked a sense of exile and further went on to consider “paradoxical lyricism”, a term she used to denote these films’ aesthetic strategy of counterbalancing idyllic imagery with violence as a means to reflect the anxiety that stems from feelings of being exiled within one’s own homeland.

The first panel of the symposium, chaired by Spencer Murphy, was called “Audiences and Fans”. Beginning the session was a paper on “Cult Connotations: The reception of Japanese films on DVD in the UK through NEO Magazine”, which was presented by Jonathan Wroot (University of East Anglia). He discussed the distribution and marketing strategies of Japanese films on DVD in the UK, in particular how the strategies employed by the now-defunct Tartan distribution company continue to

raise complicated issues for the distribution of Far Eastern cinema. The next paper was Pierce Conran's discussion of "The 4<sup>th</sup> Act: Reconfiguring Korean Melodrama". The focus was on the tendency in recent Korean cinema to package films with numerous generic codes, creating hybrids consisting of action, horror, science fiction and more, saving melodrama for use as an extended coda, often following a false conclusion of the narrative. The final presentation came from Marlies Gabriele Prinzi (University College London), who expounded on fansubbing in her talk "When Fans Translate: 'Visible Invisibility' and Other Challenges to Translation in the Fansubbing Community of East Asian Cinema and Drama". Prinzi gave an overview of the phenomenon of the fan as untrained translator and how anonymity and comity have changed how we consume foreign language media.

The afternoon triptych of talks was titled "Dissent, Sex and Social Issues" and was chaired by Jonathan Wroot. Beginning the session was "You Kids Settle Down – The Decline Of Dissent In The *Chanbara* Film" by David West, author of *Chasing Dragons: An Introduction to the Martial Arts Film*, which examined the evolution of the *chanbara* film from being a tool for the critique of Japan's Imperialist past in the 1950s and 60s to becoming a conservative and toothless vehicle for teen entertainment in the modern era. Antoniya Petkova (Coventry University) followed this with a discussion on "Social Issues in Contemporary South Korean Cinema". Her focus was on the marginal individuals of society and their attempts at integrating in the existing social order; to highlight her point she discussed films like Lee Chang-dong's *Oasis* (2002) and Lee Hae-jun's *Castaway on the Moon* (2009). Paul Quinn, the editor of [hangucelluloid.com](http://hangucelluloid.com), concluded the panel with his talk "Sex Sells...The Emergence and Growth of Sexual Content in Korean Cinema". He sought to map out the history of sexual representation on screen and delivered a considered, chronological overview of the evolution of sexuality starting with Kim Ki-young's seminal Golden Age melodrama *The Housemaid* (1960) and progressing all the way through to the dawn of the new millennium with Jang Sun-woo's controversial *Lies* (1999).

The first day of the symposium came to a close with a keynote presentation from Colette Balmain on "Cross cultural flows in East Asian Horror Cinema". Challenging the idea that contemporary Asian horror can all be traced back to J-horror, notably *Ringu* (Hideo Nakata, 1998), Balmain elucidated a more complex form of continental borrowing that involves shared cultural characteristics. She noted that this reductionist

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view of Asian horror as a series of originals and copies takes little account of the difficult historical relationships between countries in East Asia. To demonstrate her point she compared the death scenes from the Japanese *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* (Nobuo Nakagawa, 1959) and the Korean *A Devilish Homicide* (Lee Yong-min, 1965). Furthermore she pointed out how the shared characteristics between Japanese and Korean horror films can also reflect those countries' historical roles as ruler and colony.

Day two began with a panel on "The Legacy of Japan", chaired by Colette Balmain. The first discussion was Cyril Lepot's (Université de Paris Panthéon-Sorbonne) "Suspended Life in Japanese Cinema". In considering live action cinema and animation, he was led to the paradoxical concept of "suspended animation" and this, along with the idea of "floating worlds" in Japanese culture, led him to some interesting conclusions on what he dubbed "storyless" experiences in many Japanese films. Robert Hyland (Queen's University, Canada) followed with his discussion on "Liminality in Studio Ghibli's *The Borrower Arrietty*". Through the prism of liminality, he explored *The Borrower Arrietty's* transgressions over age, environmental and societal borders as well as the uneasy balance between the film's Western and Japanese elements. Rounding off the symposium's final panel was Kate E. Taylor-Jones (Bangor University) and her talk on "The Intra-East Cinema: Legacy of the Japanese Colonial Empire and the Construction of a Pan-Asian Cinema". She examined how the legacy of the Japanese Empire has prompted revisionist narratives across East Asia and how it has been remembered and interrogated by the cinemas of its previous colonies.

The third keynote and also the closing session of the conference was Paul Bowman (Cardiff University) with "Film Culture Crossover: Cultural Translation and Post-Bruce Lee Film Fight Choreography". His focus was on the "Oriental style" that has been transplanted to Hollywood and its paradoxical relationship with authenticity. With the visual aid of numerous clips and behind the scenes footage, Bowman discussed how a closer look at the purportedly deracinated styles of martial arts, that have been Westernised and assimilated in mainstream American cinema, actually reveals the neglected rise of other forms of fight choreography, such as Filipino martial arts. He went on to discuss what this means for how cultures and texts are constructed, as well as how our reading practices can lead us to problematic ethno-nationalist discourses.

Throughout the symposium's twelve talks, many facets of cultural crossovers in East Asian cinema were explored. Aside from the

conference there was also a three-day event, the East Winds Film Festival. The event screened a diverse selection of films from the Far East and many, such as Satoshi Miki's *Adrift in Tokyo* (2007) and Na Hong-jin's *The Yellow Sea* (2010), were useful entry points for the ideas discussed throughout the symposium. The conference succeeded in its aims by presenting a series of discussions on varied aspects of East Asian cinema which each reflected on the state of the region's complex cultural crossovers. As the rate of cultural sharing increases in tandem with the world's connectivity, conferences such as these, which explore new and exciting fields of study that occur as a result, are becoming ever more important and the East Winds Symposium should only build on its success when it returns next March.

## **SCMS 2012: Society for Cinema and Media Studies Conference**

Boston Park Plaza Hotel & Towers, Boston, 21–25 March 2012

### **A report by Joan Dagle, Rhode Island College, USA**

The 52<sup>nd</sup> annual Society for Cinema and Media Studies conference held in Boston, Massachusetts saw the largest attendance in the society's history and included the addition of a fifth day. As noted at the society's business meeting on March 23, SCMS is no longer a "small organization", the membership having now grown to more than 3000. Reflecting this growth, the conference organized nineteen sessions with 428 panels along with thirty-three screenings and seven off-site special events. This year's conference did not feature a theme; instead, the conference program continued the society's recent emphasis on moving beyond film and television to encompass all media, with panels ranging across film history, TV studies, video games, radio, and emerging media. The increasing interest in the study of video games was especially noticeable, with eight panels sponsored by the Video Game Studies Scholarly Interest Group. There were also at least three panels on radio history and criticism, and one panel, "Scaling Data's Many Faces: Data Mining, Information Visualization, and Other Non-Optical Vistas", explored new areas of visualization such as data journalism, conceptualizing the universe, screening the genome, and data mining as conceptual art.

Although the conference was not structured around a theme, it did feature a number of panels and, particularly, special events that emphasized the historical and the local. In celebration of the conference locale, the panel titled "The Global Southie: Boston and the Cinema of Class" investigated cinematic constructions of Boston and in particular its specific class and racial "markers" in such films as *The Company Men* (John Wells, 2010), *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* (Peter Yates, 1973), and *The Social Network* (David Fincher, 2010). The prominent emphasis on histories and archives in many panels was reflected, for example, even in one of the Video Game Studies SIG panels, a workshop on "The State of Video Game Archiving and Preservation". Another workshop panel, "Teaching the Archive", chaired by Constance Balides (Tulane University), featured Robert Allen (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill), Mark Cooper (University of South Carolina), Dudley Andrew (Yale University), and Christine Gledhill (New York University) as participants, and noted not only the increasing multiplicity of types of image archives but also the need to develop "ideologies of their locations", for example, in the case of archives housed in military or domestic spaces. However, this topic was perhaps most effectively showcased in five of the conference's special events. Four of these were designed to be a collective showcase of New England moving image archives with each event featuring the holdings

and resources of one of the archives: The National Center for Jewish Film, the WGBH [Boston's public radio and television station] Media Library and Archives, Northeast Historic Film, and the Harvard Film Archive. The other historically oriented special event was a screening of Josef von Sternberg's 1928 film *The Last Command*. The screening was held at the restored Paramount Theater, a 1932 Art Deco movie palace, and featured a live musical accompaniment by the Alloy Orchestra, the Boston-based group that composes, performs, and records original scores for silent films. The combination of past and present in this film/music event was echoed in another of the special events, this one celebrating the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Women Make Movies through a screening of *The Heretics* (2009) with director Joan Braderman present.

In addition to this emphasis on the historical and the local, the conference also focused attention on the emerging and the global. As an example of the first, the series of special events was rounded out by an evening honoring the experimental filmmaker Ernie Gehr and his recent turn to digital art. In addition, there were multiple panels or workshops focused on the future of the discipline, such as "Digital Methodologies for Screen Histories: Performing Research in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" and "Identities and Agencies Online". There were also panels focused on new theoretical and material investigations of the screen itself. One featured Giuliana Bruno's (Harvard University) paper on "Surface Matters: The Architecture of the Screen" which drew attention to Maholy-Nagy's artistic/technological concept of the screen as "architectural", "luminous", and "multi-directional" in order to understand how contemporary digital experiments, where the "fabric of the screen" is "made palpable" through light, might potentially bring art and technology back together. The other featured Mary Ann Doane's (University of California, Berkeley) paper on "Cinematic Scale, Perspective, and the Modern Sublime" which investigated the IMAX screen in relation to what she termed the "fuzzy" concept of immersion; the "boundlessness" of the IMAX screen in relation to the concept of the Sublime; and Terrence Malick's *The Tree of Life* (2011) as problematizing the concept of the "technological sublime". Attention to the global, or to what one panel called "cineglobalities", was present throughout the conference. One noteworthy example was a panel focused on "Korean Cinema Cultures" with presenters from Kyungwon University (Marc Raymond), Ewha Womans University (Hyung-Sook Lee), University of Southern California (Hyongshin Kim), and University of California, Riverside (Mariam Lam).

Other presentations at the conference centered on wider issues, examining aspects of the professional and pedagogical in media studies. Professional issues were investigated in workshops on such topics as "Video Essays", considering these as "film scholarship's emergent form", and "Navigating the Academic Job Market", which included participants

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from Canadian, UK, and USA institutions. In terms of pedagogy, one workshop looked at the challenges of teaching queer cinema and media studies at conservative Catholic, Mormon, and Christian colleges and universities, while another examined the problems of teaching film and media studies at small liberal arts colleges with limited resources. A third, with participants from universities in Oregon, Illinois, Georgia, and the UK, looked at the possibilities and limitations of teaching film and media industry studies at institutions not located in or near Los Angeles.

The conference saw noteworthy presentations in virtually all areas of film studies and in many areas of media studies. One especially promising new area, intermediality, figured prominently in several panels. For example, "Genre Issues", chaired by Leger Grindon (Middlebury College), included two papers that approached film and TV genres intermedially rather than as closed, medium-specific formations. The first, Wyatt Phillips's (New York University) "Uncle Josh Goes to the Movies: Genre and Appropriation in Early American Cinema", examined the Edison cycle of Uncle Josh films begun in 1900. The paper focused on the films in relation to Cal Stewart's creation of the Uncle Josh vaudeville character and to Stewart's Uncle Josh sound recordings for Edison begun in 1897. Stewart's stage performances and sound recordings continued during the years of the film cycle, and Wyatt argued that the films explicitly relied on and referenced this extratextual knowledge of the character. The second paper, Joanne Morreale's (Northeastern University) "*The Donna Reed Show* and the 'Hollywood Sitcom'", offered a rethinking of the relationship between Hollywood studios and Hollywood stars and the "lesser" realm of the TV industry in the late 1950s. Through a detailed examination of the complex production techniques and narrative content of episodes of *The Donna Reed Show*, Morreale argued that this 1958-1966 TV series was in fact a synthesis of film and television genre traditions, a synthesis reflected also in the anomalous position of Donna Reed herself within the industry. This synthesis allowed *The Donna Reed Show* to help develop the family sitcom while also allowing the series to push the boundaries of the genre. Several papers in a panel organized by the Nontheatrical Film and Media SIG approached intermediality in the context of pre-1920 screening spaces. Andy Uhrich's (Indiana University) paper examined the early twentieth century illustrated lectures on "Hiawatha" that were accompanied by slides and films of the Ojibway Indians. Gregory Waller's (Indiana University) paper focused on the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exhibition and its sixty venues for film screenings connected to educational exhibits. Caitlin McGrath (University of Chicago) discussed the convergence of photography, magic lantern slides, and film in the public lectures by J.K. Dixon which mixed anthropology and the spectacular in a new form of public education.

In addition to the wide range of topics presented in the nineteen sessions, screenings sponsored by a growing number of caucuses and scholarly



interest groups followed each of the sessions and reflected the diversity of “formal, stylistic, and cultural traditions” called for by the conference organizers. The thirty-three scheduled offerings included several documentaries, among them the interesting pairing of the recent *Coal Country* (Phylis Geller, 2009) with the classic *Coal Face* (Alberto Cavalcanti, 1935), a program sponsored by the Caucus on Class and the Documentary Studies SIG. Jean-Luc Godard’s 2010 *Film Socialisme* was featured, sponsored by the Caucus on Class, the French and Francophone SIG, and the Media Literacy and Pedagogical Outreach SIG, as was the less well-known but no less intriguing *Angst Essen/Eat Fear*, Ming Wong’s 2008 reconstruction of Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s *Angst Essen Seele auf* (1974) with Wong playing all of the roles, chosen by the conference screening committee. Several interesting “revivals” were presented as well, including Lizzie Borden’s feminist classic *Working Girls* (1987) and Joan Micklin Silver’s rarely screened *Between the Lines* (1977), both sponsored by the Women’s Caucus and the Caucus on Class. Current work was also represented, as in experimental filmmaker Hoang Tan Nguyen’s work-in-progress *Untitled*, sponsored by the Queer Caucus, screened along with his 2000 film *Pirated*, the “revisionist memories” of his encounter as a young Vietnamese refugee with Thai pirates. The generic diversity of the offerings was rounded out by the Animated Media SIG co-sponsorship of the screening of two recent works by David Jones, *Poised and in the Throes* (2008) and *The Secret Loves of Jesse James* (2009).

This year’s conference saw the continuation of the “SCMS Live!” feature on the SCMS website which provided the opportunity to join conference blogs and to follow the conference twitter feed. The March 23 business meeting, open to all attendees, included a report on plans to partner the website with others, such as ScreenSite, with the goal of becoming the premier destination for film and media scholarly resources. The society also reported new alliances with organizations such as BAFTSS, Screen, and UFVA. President Chris Holmlund (University of Tennessee) announced that Will Brooker will take over as editor of *Cinema Journal* on January 1, 2013. The society also noted that it is exploring the possibility of hiring an Executive Director due to the organization’s growth and increasing complexity, an idea that generated some questions from members about the cost and timing of such a move. The officers responded that they have been researching peer organizations and that no decisions about such a position have yet been made.

The Awards Ceremony and reception, always a highlight of the conference, was held on March 23 and began with a moving tribute to Robert Sklar, renowned American film scholar who died suddenly in July 2011. The awards ceremony ended with the conferring of the Distinguished Career Achievement Award to Vivian Sobchack of the

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University of California, Los Angeles. In her acceptance remarks, she set her own history and career in the context of the history of SCMS, reminding everyone in the audience of the remarkable and ongoing journeys of both. With close to 1400 papers and 180 workshop presentations covering virtually every aspect of cinema studies and touching on emerging areas of media studies, the conference committee organized an event that demonstrates the vitality of the field and makes a convincing case for the SCMS conference as the premier venue for scholarship in film and media studies.

## **Contemporary Psychoanalysis, Literature and Film Symposium**

University of Sussex, Sussex, 2 April 2012

### **A report by Joanna Kellond, University of Sussex, UK**

The "PsyLitFilm" Symposium, held at the University of Sussex, provided a timely intervention into the field of cultural psychoanalysis, aiming to supplement existing discussions dominated by the figures of Freud and Lacan. The symposium was intended to provide a space in which to contemplate the contribution other theorists and practitioners might make to critical discourses in the fields of literature and film. This was also the occasion for the launch of the PsyLitFilm online academic network, designed to encourage and assist interaction and collaboration between those working in the field. Each speaker delivered a paper attentive to, or inflected by, the work of a largely unrecognised theorist.

In his introductory address Dr David Bell, President of the British Psychoanalytic Society, gave an overview of the intellectual terrain, reiterating how insufficient "application" is as a description of the relationship which pertains between psychoanalysis and cultural objects. The body of knowledge which Freud built up about the mind came from "unique research", attention to symptoms, the arts, jokes, society and culture. Do cultural objects, therefore, merely render visible psychoanalytic insights (or vice versa), or are there deeper resonances between the cultural and the psychological? Whilst Freud was assiduous in avoiding the topic of creativity itself, Bell highlighted its centrality within the British Independent Tradition of psychoanalysis, which closely aligns the development of the mind and the possibility of creativity in general. The work of Hannah Segal, for whom the Kleinian depressive position provided the key to both artistic work and audience response, proved exemplary. Bell evoked psychoanalysis as a "frontier creature" implicated at the borders and crossing places between disciplines and ways of thinking.

The first two papers took up the idea of the border in distinctive and fascinating ways. Naomi Segal (Birkbeck, University of London) gave a paper entitled "Didier Anzieu: Touching and Itching" which brought to the fore issues of containment and contamination. The skin, she suggested, provides the best metaphor for thinking psychoanalytically about the body, and concurrently "embodies" the cultural significance of feeling and

touch. Anzieu's work highlights the importance of the body in psychic life; a theoretical preoccupation long denied the attention it warrants whilst the linguistic and the visual have held us in their thrall. Quoting André Green's well-known caveat that the contemporary patient is no longer neurotic, but borderline, Segal reiterated the timeliness of thinking about borders in an age when setting limits, both personal and national, seems imperative. Lyndsey Stonebridge (University of East Anglia) was also attentive to borders in her paper "'To be borderline': André Green and Poetic Statelessness", in which she drew attention to the mutual implication of the mental and the geographical. The tendency to think about the psychical in terms of the spatial pervades Freud's conception of the psyche and also finds purchase in Green's paper "The Borderline Concept", to which Segal also referred. Stonebridge suggested that Green's articulation of a borderline state might provide a pertinent and timely way to think about geo-politics and issues of "statelessness". For Green, the borderline – a "no-man's land", a frontier, an absence – offers, for the very reason of its emptiness, the possibility of creativity and hope. Those on the borderline – the stateless between states – might be able to occupy this position as a positive means to negotiate their experience of dispossession.

Josh Cohen's (Goldsmiths, University of London) paper "Something Lost: Words and the Avoiding of Psychic Reality", took as its point of departure Lionel Trilling's articulation of an affinity between the unconscious and the poetic. Whilst attentive to Trilling, Cohen offered a supplement to his work: the unconscious and the poetic *may* converge in how they are spoken, but in externalisation something is always lost. Cohen drew attention to the need, truly psychoanalytic, to attend not only to manifestation, but to what remains impossible to manifest. This problem of self-presentation is encoded in the work of Wilfred Bion, whose clinically-styled papers are accompanied by an equally long auto-critique (in the form of footnotes), pointing out the impossibility of adequately representing what takes place within an analytic session. The intellectual influence of Maurice Blanchot on Bion's work attests, once again, to the imbrication of psychoanalysis and literature. Blanchot saw literature – the movement from idea to word – as an unhappy transition, wherein the perfection contained in potentiality is lost. Keeping this point in mind, Cohen suggested, might have wide-ranging consequences for how we think about both cultural and academic modes of representation and knowledge.

The afternoon session began with a different take on the relation between psychoanalysis and narrative, giving us stories of psychoanalysis, psychoanalysis as story. In his paper "Freud, Ferenczi and *Rosmersholm*: Incestuous Triangles and Analytic Thirds", Peter Rudnytsky (University of Florida) turned his attention to the latent autobiography of psychoanalytic writing. Employing Ferenczi's concept of the "unconscious third" – created as two unconscious minds relate to each other – Rudnytsky read Freud's essays on love and his reading of Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* as "analytic thirds": creative products of the interplay of the two men's unconscious. Rudnytsky argued that the description of a split in male desire – between a maternal figure who can be loved and a debased figure who can be desired – was modelled on Ferenczi's love triangle with a mother and daughter. Freud's own imbrication with both his wife Martha Bernays and her sister Minna was also resonant in the work, whilst Minna's eventual "usurpation" of Martha's position, when she came to live in the Freud house, repeated the structure Freud identified in *Rosmersholm*.

In her paper "D.W. Winnicott and *The Memoirs of Bruno Walter*" Vera Camden (Kent State University) shifted focus again, examining how literature might operate in the potential space of an analytic setting. Camden gave a highly personal account of her long and inspirational years working with "Miss T", a patient who introduced into the analytic session pages from the memoirs of Bruno Walter, a conductor treated by Freud in 1906. In reading Walter's memoirs, Miss T became aware of the importance of presence, a realisation which enabled her to recognise how Camden had been present for her as an analyst. Literature became a means for Miss T to perceive and reflect on the nurturing which took place in her own treatment, providing a potential space from which the patient's sense of self could emerge.

Camden's paper raised an important consideration: What is psychoanalysis? What should it be? How do we negotiate the axes of interpretation and handling? In her paper "Aphanisis, affect: Patricia Williams and Ernest Jones", Vicky Lebeau (University of Sussex) suggested the utility of this distinction in thinking about what the humanities are for and do. Lebeau turned to the work of legal theorist Patricia Williams to think about the "aphanistic dimensions of cultural life". Williams seeks to understand the role of affect in public life, attending to the ways in which the law might produce a sense of dispossession and helplessness in those of minority descent. For Williams,

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the destituting of some members of society leads to feelings of futility and despair, to a sense of nothingness or non-being which shadows and haunts the world. Lebeau suggested that Williams' work might add to our understanding of aphanisis, bringing another dimension of the term into relief. Aphanisis – the idea of the total extinction of the possibility of sexual enjoyment introduced in 1927 by Ernest Jones – signifies a parental threat, a form of dread, which could displace and predate castration as the prime mover of our investment in culture. Describing a relationship between loss and life, aphanisis, the “worst thing in the world”, suggests the possibility of being alive, but bereft. The concept thus articulates not just a dread, but a state of emptiness, a means of defence which might be assumed in response to feelings of helplessness. Invoking Williams, Lebeau suggested the fecundity of an analogy between psychic and social death, asking us to think about how a felt experience of social or legal helplessness might result in a sense of liminality or non-existence. The paper proved a reminder of how previously under-theorised psychoanalytic concepts might help the humanities think about under-acknowledged areas of experience and feeling.

The final paper of the day turned to film. Esther Rashkin's (University of Utah) paper, entitled “Unmourned Dead, Filtered History and the Screening of Anti-Semitism in Kieślowski's *A Short Film About Killing*” (1988), argued that this film invites us to think about the failures of mourning underlying Polish culture since the Second World War. Employing Abraham and Torok's idea of the crypt, Rashkin suggested that unmourned events, such as Jewish martyrdom and the violent oppression of the Poles at the hands of Hitler, Stalin and Jaruzelski, are encoded within the film both narratively and visually. The viewer, like the analyst, must reconstruct the secrets from their haunting embodiment in the murder committed by the protagonist Jacek and the visual techniques – such as backward-looking and inversion – employed by Kieślowski. Here film itself was aligned with the externalisations of the mind through which the unconscious can come to be known.

The round table discussion which concluded the day's proceedings addressed what the symposium might mean for the future of psychoanalysis within the university. Suffering cuts in funding, psychoanalysis and the humanities find themselves in an increasingly precarious position. Yet what makes psychoanalysis antithetical and threatening to a system driven by economic gain might just be the source of its appeal to the humanities: the attention it maintains on the unknowable and enigmatic. A shift was noted in the key issues

psychoanalysis is being called on to address; attention has moved from sexual difference to refocus on urgent political questions. The idea of a new psychoanalytic universalism which might facilitate the political turn brought into relief divergent attitudes to what psychoanalysis is and should be about. Much of the ensuing debate focussed on the value of retaining Freud's theory of the drives. Whilst Peter Rudnytsky suggested that the theory should be abandoned, Josh Cohen argued for its retention, as the only means we have of thinking about the unconscious or the unintended. Vicky Lebeau and Vera Camden suggested ways in which drive theory and universalism might be brought together. Lebeau appealed to Jean Laplanche's attempt to describe a universal situation of "general seduction" which produces drive theory. Camden, on the other hand, noted that Winnicott's notion of creativity as the third drive might also provide a solution. The discussion wrestled with issues at the heart of current psychoanalytic thinking, not least the status and place of psychoanalysis in the humanities, attesting to the process of creative change currently taking place which the PsyLitFilm Symposium and network will no doubt help to foster.

## **Monsters: Subject, Object, Abject**

University of Manchester, Manchester, 12–13 April 2012

### **A report by Ian Pettigrew, University of Miami, Florida**

Organized by Manchester-based creative writing and literature organization Hic Dragones, the two day interdisciplinary “Monsters: Subject, Object, Abject” conference had a significant focus on works from visual media. In the last century, cinema’s fascination with the monstrous has carried over into television and video games, providing us with countless portrayals of monsters, in such guises as aliens, beasts, ghouls, goblins, witches, wolf men and vampires. The majority of the papers explored our relationship with these monsters, considering why we are so fascinated by them.

Matthew Freeman (University of Nottingham) presented “Who’s Monster?: Monsters, Subjectivity, and the Figure of the Child in *Doctor Who*”, which began the “Monsters in Popular Culture” session by addressing recent criticism of the sci-fi TV series concerning the level of scariness for its target audience, children. Freeman contends that several of the latest episodes of the show “both reinforce and complicate the representation of the monster as the antithesis to humanity or as the vessel through which children are ultimately reassured of humanity”. Evidence for this was provided in a thorough analysis of key episodes, with Freeman arguing that the series challenges the monster’s status as “other” by allowing children to identify with these creatures. Specifically, Freeman showed a clip from, and discussed, the 2010 episode “A Christmas Carol”, wherein the Doctor brings a young boy to confront his older, monstrous self, to demonstrate the conflicting positions children can adopt when watching the show. Questions of viewership were raised again in Christina Wilkins’ (University of Southampton) paper “Transatlantic Differences and the Importance of Religion in Post-9/11 Monsters” in which she compared the UK and US versions of the TV series *Being Human*. Wilkins asserted that the original UK series is comic, while the US series treats its monstrous characters in a more serious manner. The paper found that in the American version, the vampires’ parallel existence to humanity can easily be likened to terrorists hiding among “normal” people. The cultural shifts that generate changing attitudes towards monstrous figures were also addressed in the “Literary Monsters” panel. Lisa Tagliaferri (CUNY) presented “S’el fu sì bel com’elli è ora brutto: Dante’s Vision of Lucifer”, which also compared contrasting reincarnations of the same monster from



different cultures, as the description of Satan was originally informed by both Christian and pagan sources. Tagliaferri demonstrated how Dante's Satan evolved visually in various cinematic and video game adaptations of *The Divine Comedy*, at times moving away from, and at times returning to, the author's original literary description in the *Inferno*.

The first day ended with two papers exploring complex monster figures in recent visual media. Lorie Hamalian (California State University) explored the reasons for the hybridity of the monsters in *District 9* (Blomkamp, 2009) and *Black Swan* (Aronofsky, 2010) in her paper "Swans and Prawns: Monster Metamorphoses and Hybrid Identities in Aronofsky's *Black Swan* and Blomkamp's *District 9*". This was followed by a fascinating analysis of the continuing transformation of a Japanese monster in independent researcher Alexandra McGlynn's "Kappa: Buttocks-Ball Eating Monsters of Shinto Suijin". McGlynn outlined the Shinto roots of the kappa monster before discussing the strange shift the creature has undergone in contemporary representations in programs such as the *How to Raise a Water Imp* anime TV series. The cultural implications of the Kappa were discussed, including how the creature has become a cute and cuddly figure where once it was a monster whose function was to frighten children from playing too close to bodies of water.

The next day began with a panel on "Spaces of Monstrosity" in which Garfield Benjamin (University of Wolverhampton) presented his paper "Virtual Monsters: Becoming Death and the Quantum Immortal". Benjamin looked closely at several video games that allow the gamer to adopt an unfamiliar engagement with their characters. In their interaction with these games the player is offered innovative ways to escape death: Benjamin holds that gamers then take on an unsettling identification with immortal figures. Sources for the paper included research from the domain of quantum physics as well as recent work by Slavoj Žižek. *Limbo* (Jensen, 2010) and *Braid* (Blow, 2008) were two of the titles examined that provide the player with the chance of correcting the choices in the game that led to their death. Benjamin suggested

Perhaps [...] the reason so few examples of digital media can fully embrace the undead of the virtual monster, is that we fear that very immortality. If we seem to live forever on the interface screen, how then can we return to our mortal lives as finite humans?

## Conference Reports

Maria Chatzidimou (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki) began the panel "Of Monstrosity and Humanity" with her paper "I am not an elephant! I am not a man! I am a colonized abject! : Re-viewing David Lynch's *The Elephant Man*" (1980). Chatzidimou provided a reading of the Elephant Man as a type of Caliban figure to whom the film's hospital serves as a school for civilization. Ian Pettigrew (University of Miami) presented "The Monster's Choice to Be Human: Guillermo del Toro's Incarnations of a Hitchcockian Theme". The paper argued that a source of inspiration, the philosophy of Ralph Waldo Emerson, for several of Alfred Hitchcock's troubled protagonists, chiefly Marnie in *Marnie* (1964), but also others such as L.B. Jeffries in *Rear Window* (1954), and Young Charlie in *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), has also influenced the monsters and humans in Del Toro's cinema. This was demonstrated through a comparison of scenes from *Shadow of a Doubt* and *Pan's Labyrinth* (Del Toro, 2006). The link between the young female protagonists in both films occurs when they learn that anyone, including themselves, is capable of monstrous actions and only through their own choices can they confirm their humanity.

Michael Bongiorno (CUNY Staten Island) concluded the panel with "Another One for the Fire: Spectatorship, Apparatus, and Recognition in *Night of the Living Dead*" (Romero, 1968). Bongiorno began by giving a historical background to the development of horror and feminist scholarship in film studies. He suggested that recent studies in the genre have not kept up with contemporary feminist thought. In an attempt to draw these two disciplines back together, he provided a close analysis of *Night of the Living Dead* utilizing the works of contemporary feminist and gender theorists such as Richard M. Juang and Leslie McCall. He felt this horror classic worked well as an example of how to re-approach the genre because

The film's monstrous others go unrecognized both by the characters in the film and by the system of law present in the narrative. The monsters are systematically excluded from legal representation because of their intersectional nature, being trapped [...] between living and dead.

In the final panel, David McWilliams (University of Lancaster) closed the conference with his paper, which demonstrated the reasons for the 'humanization' of Aileen Wuornos, Charlize Theron's Oscar-winning role in *Monster* (Jenkins 2003), and the ways in which this is achieved.

Discussion in the panels following the presentations frequently returned to conversations about why the monstrous has continually fascinated cultures throughout history. The papers presented established that there still remains a great deal of underexplored issues regarding the monstrous in screen studies that need to be addressed. The level of engagement that met the presenters' observations made it clear that continuing in these studies will lead to a worthy contemplation both of our fears and of ourselves.