

# Conference Reports – October 2012

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## **The Distribution and Exhibition of Chinese and Asian Cinema in the UK**

Cornerhouse Cinema, Manchester, UK, 28-29 March 2012

### **A Report by Jonathan Wroot, University of East Anglia**

This was the first conference organised by the Chinese Film Forum UK (CFFUK), and was supported by both the Arts and Humanities Research Council UK and the Research Institute for Cosmopolitan Cultures (University of Manchester). In his opening address, Andy Willis (University of Salford) expressed his aims and intentions for the conference. He stated that its aim was to present outlooks and processes involved in the distribution and exhibition of Chinese and Asia cinema within the UK. He also hoped that the event would bring academics and industry figures together to discuss issues involved within this topic, and lead to suggestions for how more Asian films could be brought into the country.

The first keynote speech, from Valentina Vitali (University of East London), was entitled "In Absentia: Marketing the Asian Film Author," and examined the ways Asian film directors feature in articles and reviews in the British press. Vitali's focus was on the critical reception of the films of Hou Hsiao-Hsien, specifically from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, wherein comparisons were often made between his films and those of European filmmakers. Vitali concluded that such standards should be avoided, as they lead to over-simplistic categorisations of the director's films.

The following discussion, led by Jason Wood, added more background to the previous topic. He had been invited to the conference due to his work in Curzon Cinemas and its DVD distribution label, Artificial Eye. Seeing his job as trying to gauge audience responses, he explained that he tries to negotiate his own tastes, the needs of screening Asian films for profit, and what is likely to be a success. While he respected that other distributors (such as Eureka, Third Window and StudioCanal) release a wider range of Asian films, he emphasized that it is a difficult business for all of them. Wood did believe, though, that the adoption of digital projectors would make it easier for cinema exhibitions, as most digital prints cost only £95 for distributors, while importing a 35mm print of some films can cost up to £4000.

Independent scholar Roy Stafford then presented material that he hoped to include in a new book on global cinema. Stafford's statistics evidenced the importance of a global view that included both Hollywood and other countries. The Motion Pictures Association of America states that 30% of the revenue of the USA's film releases comes from domestic exhibition, with the other 70% coming from abroad. And while certain countries have always remained serious competition to Hollywood in their respective regions (China, Japan, India, etc.), the output of other countries such as Indonesia, Iran and Turkey is becoming increasingly visible. Stafford's discussion was helped by illustrative examples that pointed out interesting trends. For instance, local remakes of films that were hits across Asia were often not successful. Stafford illustrated this with the Korean film *My Sassy Girl* (Jae-young Kwak, 2001). The remakes subsequently produced in India, Japan and the US did not meet with similar critical and commercial acclaim. By contrast, co-productions between countries like Japan, Malaysia and Singapore were found to attain both commercial and critical success.

The focus was brought back to the UK in the next discussion, an open panel between the delegates and two speakers, Sonali Joshi and Sarah Perks. Joshi shared her experiences running film festivals, such as the Pan-Asian and Tibetan festivals within the UK, and Perks related her own attempts to screen a more diverse range of films at the conference venue, Manchester's Cornerhouse Cinema. Both speakers described the advantages and disadvantages of their positions. Joshi has a background in finding exhibition venues for Asian films in France, and so has links in place to get films shown in the UK that are not picked up for commercial distribution. However, she explained that there are numerous problems and costs involved with setting up and organizing festivals for films not already acquired by UK distributors. Perks also emphasized that the Cornerhouse was the only Manchester cinema that regularly screens Asian films, meaning that while these films have a loyal audience, it is a relatively small one. In the past, the cinema has run festivals for films from Asia and other areas of the world, but it has now found it more cost-effective to screen shorter seasons of films. Perks was especially keen to get both academics and students involved to screen a wider variety of films within these seasons.

An important parallel method of Asian film distribution was the subject of Virginia Crisp's (Middlesex University) "Pirates and Professionals: The Attitudes of File-Sharers to Film Distribution Companies," the first paper

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of the second day. After presenting a brief view of how online media piracy is discussed in both academia and the commercial press, Crisp explained that access to such illicit media was often found through particular online message forums. It was one of these forums that she researched for her thesis, which gave access to films not licensed for distribution outside of Asian countries. Within the forum's messages, content from countries outside of Asia, and from Hollywood, was not ignored entirely but was derided for being promoted and sold purely for commercial reasons. Therefore, forums praised distributors that seemed to share the file-sharers' aim of getting Asian films seen by as many people as possible. For example, Third Window Films was regularly discussed, and legitimate purchases of their special-edition DVD releases such as *Confessions of A Dog* (Gen Takahashi, 2006) were encouraged. Despite the illegal practices, the example highlighted the equal importance of "shelf impact." This meant that the file-sharers acquired the physical copy of the film where available, so it could be added to their large collections of DVDs, which were also discussed in the forums. Crisp made it clear, in light of this seemingly contradictory behavior, that ownership of media (through legitimate or other means) was the goal of the file-sharers.

The following discussion panel moved on to look at legitimate methods of distribution and exhibition. The panel comprised Ian Wild of the independent Sheffield Showroom Cinema and Rachel Hayward of the Cornerhouse Cinema. As with Joshi and Perks on the previous day, Wild and Hayward discussed their experiences in their respective cinemas regarding screenings of Asian films. While both agreed that there was no easy solution that would lead to more Asian films being distributed and exhibited in the UK, they both saw ways forward. Programs of films from particular countries and directors are held in both cinemas, particularly after an initial trial screening has proved popular. The use of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, in addition to the cinemas' websites and newsletters, has helped increase audience turnout. Greater flexibility from foreign distributors was then stressed as a point that may ease the cinemas' difficulties. Foreign distribution companies often insist that their films are screened several times a week, meaning that the cinemas have to screen them when they know audiences will not show up. Wild also saw the unwillingness of national and local newspapers and publications to advertise their screenings as another hurdle to their efforts. Despite such barriers, both speakers did say they manage to maintain strong links with local audiences that do come to their screenings.

The remaining talks were given by academic researchers, with the last panel of the day featuring papers from Joe Hickinbottom (University of Exeter) and from me. Hickinbottom's paper outlined his research on Japanese cinema's "cultification" in the UK. The categorisation of "cult," as defined by Ernest Mathjis and Jamie Sexton in their book *Cult Cinema*, can affect film in several ways. After outlining this claim, Hickinbottom stated that he is examining certain processes that films go through (distribution, exhibition, reception and consumption) to see what effect the term "cult" has. His initial assessment of potential case studies shows that "cult" status does not affect all films in the same way. He illustrated this finding through the films of Japanese director Takashi Miike. Only some of Miike's films have been released in the UK, and through several different distribution companies. Hickinbottom suspects, however, that the critical and commercial success of *13 Assassins* (2010) could alter this trend. Hickinbottom's paper intersected in several ways with my own paper, which addressed the reception of UK DVDs of Japanese films, focused on the distributors 4Digital Asia and Third Window and the layout and content of reviews of their output in the UK's NEO magazine. My paper emphasized the importance of DVD in making Asian media accessible to UK audiences. The volume of questions both speakers received afterwards showed that even though the conference had been organised by CFFUK primarily to discuss Chinese cinema, our Japan-centred case studies attracted audience interest as well.

Rosa Fong provided the final keynote lecture. She was invited to the conference both in her capacity as a lecturer at Edge Hill University and as a filmmaker. Her background included making shorts for companies such as Channel 4. She began her talk by describing the lack of commercial and critical success, and interest, in representations of the British Chinese population. This has hindered filmmakers and actors of both a British and Chinese background. Such filmmakers now tend to travel to the US to work in the industry, as films depicting this ethnic background remain as unpopular and unseen in the UK as they were in the late 1980s and early 1990s (as was the case, for example, with *Soursweet* [Mike Newell, 1988]). Fong believes that, as a consequence, only stereotypical representations of people with a Chinese background appear widely in British media. This ranges from the role of Widow Twanky in pantomimes, to sinister Chinese gangsters being regular villains in films and television shows, with characters often limited to these examples. Fong finished her talk by stating that she does not know why revisionist interpretations of the Chinese population are not put

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forward by people within the community itself. However, she stressed her efforts in making and circulating short films to raise awareness of cultural intersections and stereotypes.

The general exposure and promotion of Asian cinema in the UK, through both established and new-media resources, was a topic that several delegates and speakers pursued in their papers and the discussions which followed. Though this was the first conference of its type, whose goals were perhaps modest, it was successful in sparking ideas for how certain topics could be taken forward. Andy Willis spoke on behalf of all the organizers at the conference's close. He was particularly pleased at bringing academics and industry figures together to discuss new and existing interests in Asian cinemas. This conference thus represented not only an important step forward in increasing the distribution and exhibition of Asian films across the country but also an important collaboration between the UK's academic and film-industry communities.

## **Deleuze, Guattari and China Symposium**

University of Nottingham, Ningbo, China, 23 May 2012

### **A Report by Yun-hua Chen, University of St. Andrews**

Co-chaired by the Division of International Communications, the Institute for Creative and Digital Cultures, and the Centre for Advanced Studies at the University of Nottingham-Ningbo, and organized by David H. Fleming, a film and Deleuze scholar, this one-day symposium opened up a productive conversation regarding the relevance of Deleuzian, and Deleuze and Guattarian, philosophy in the context of Chinese cinema, politics and visual culture. In papers that ranged from cinema and visual culture to philosophy and politics, various key concepts of Deleuze and Guattari, such as rhizome, becoming, time, space, body, pluralities and memory, were revisited and contemplated in the light of some core issues pertinent to current political and socioeconomic situations such as social control and the crisis of capitalism. These issues are especially important given the current political events in the Middle East, the Occupy movements and, in particular, the aftermath of Chen Guangcheng's departure for the US.

The symposium opened with a keynote address by Jiang Yuhui (East China Normal University), who translated Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* from French into Chinese in 2010. His paper addressed the process of the translation in relation to image, imageries and aesthetics in Chinese culture. He started by comparing the concept of "racine/root" and its Chinese translation, 根 [gen], as well as "rhizome" and 塊莖 [kuaijing]. In both cases the Chinese characters carry visual components, which bring out sets of visual associations obviously absent in the original terms. Jiang asserted that through this new visual aspect, the Chinese translation of Deleuze and Guattari's writings opens up new ways of thinking about Deleuze and Guattari and new possibilities of assemblages.

Jiang Yuhui's keynote was followed by a plenary session, "Politics and Aesthetics," in which John Marks (University of Nottingham), Iain MacKenzie (University of Nottingham) and Robert Porter (University of Ulster) presented papers. Marks's paper, "Developing Deleuze's Concept of Control Societies: Debt, Addiction, Accountability," reflected upon capitalism, realism and constructions of indebtedness, especially in relation to the representation of the current financial crisis and subjectivity crisis in cinema and visual culture. For Marks, the current crisis of the world economy and the capitalist system reflects the crisis of the Western society, which relies on the principles of post-Fordist-addition

when the outside invades the inside and *travail sur soi* is transformed into *prendre sur soi*, in which one wants to pay back but is unable. Ian MacKenzie and Robert Porter's papers, "Dramatising the Political: Deleuze and Guattari" and "Dramatisation as Critical Method," respectively, focused on dramatization as a critical method in relation to the political. They proposed a new relationship between political studies and the world of art in the framework of Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari, and argued for a new reading of dramatization in the analysis of contemporary cultural and political forms. Both MacKenzie and Porter's papers used examples of the visual cultures of changing cities, such as slogans and the architectural art in Belfast, to demonstrate the dramatizing effect in their social functions as happenings.

The following panel, "Working with Deleuze and Guattari in China," particularly emphasized cinema and visual culture. David Fleming's paper "Deleuze and the (Si)neo-Realist Break" argued that Wang Xiaoshui's *Beijing Bicycles* (2001) deterritorializes the action-image in a similar way to Italian Neo-Realism, and introduces time as a spatialized dimension and theme. According to Fleming, the film demonstrates a loosening of cause-and-effect structures in post-national or post-socialist Chinese cinema, helping us reflect on the condition under which time-images emerge in the Chinese context. He elucidated some of the similarities linking together the post-war Italian neo-realism to what he terms "si(neo)-realists of the Chinese Urban Generation." Using the films *Beijing Bicycles* and *Bicycle Thieves* (De Sica, 1948) as a means of comparing the form, content, aesthetics, tone and politics of these two movements, separated by huge vistas of chronological time and extensive space, Fleming argued that both films frame their narratives in cities which are in the process of being demolished or rebuilt with the body presence of non-actors to act out fragmentary and chopped-up encounters. Both also emerge as "minor" political cinema under their distinct temporal and geographical contexts, pertinent to Deleuzian "minor literature," by dealing with comparable experiences of bewilderment, powerlessness and alienation during periods of ideological and material change or upheaval. Fleming suggested that the complex interplay between striated political space, deterritorialized any-spaces-whatever, super-modern heterotopic non-spaces, and newer forms of virtual territories contribute to a creative interplay between Deleuzian time- and movement-images in the Chinese cinema.

My own paper demonstrated how Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari can help us understand cinematic works such as Hou Hsiao-hsien's *Good Men, Good Women* (1995) in the Chinese context. As the film wanders between present and past, virtual images and actual images, it interweaves film images belonging to different temporalities and virtualities in relation to the narrative, which chase one another. These indeterminate and indiscernible images are not representations of the reality, but rather in a constant process of being modified and put in doubt. Present and past,



virtual and actual images thus work like the crystal image in Deleuze's *Cinema 2*, but in a different geographical and socio-political post-war context. By weaving myriad layers of virtualities and temporalities, the film refuses to directly tackle unspeakable pain stored in collective memories through representation, but instead provides a route for consolation and reconciliation.

The third paper of this panel, Hermann Aubie's (Université Rennes 2) "Exploring Relations Between Deleuze and Guattari's Philosophy and China's Political Context," used the visual production of prosecuted Chinese dissidents, including videos, images and interactive writing on blogs, to explore Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy. Aubie argued that Deleuze and Guattari's ideas help us to reimagine our political life and subsequently to unlearn it. Questioning the status quo of Chinese governance, this intentionally provocative paper laid out the map of Chinese dissidents, artists and independent filmmakers who are often censored, banned from publication or even prosecuted, such as Ai Weiwei, Liu Xiaobo, Cheng Guangcheng, Liu Bolin and Zhang Xiaogang, as isolated Deleuzian "lines of flight," which manage to flow between rigid regulation through deterritorialization and the virtual. He used He Yang's documentary *Herzog Days* (2010), which tracks the trials of a group of bloggers, jailed for spreading information online against the local police's report on a raped and murdered young woman, to demonstrate visually Deleuze and Guattarian becoming-imperceptible.

David Martin-Jones's (University of St Andrews) keynote, which revisited Deleuze's *Cinema* books in the context of Chinese martial art films, was a thought-provoking end to the symposium. He used the *wuxia* film *Reign of Assassins* (Chao-Bin Su, 2010) and the *kung fu* film *Ip Man* (Wilson Yip, 2008) as examples to demonstrate the juxtaposition between movement-images and time-images. As Deleuze's montage categories outlined in *Cinema 1* were theorized without taking Chinese cinema into consideration, Martin-Jones's paper aimed to reconsider the categories in relation to Chinese cinema's different aesthetic traditions, such as Chinese opera, and to explore the insertion of dreamlike flashbacks as time-images in these films. He pointed out that the trained bodies depicted in Chinese martial-arts films demonstrate the affective nature of the spectacle differently from their normal perception in Anglo-American film-studies tradition. He thus argued that Asian cinemas, absent from Deleuze's discussion in the *Cinema* books, enable us to reconsider and refine the Western film-studies taxonomy and history of cinema they construct.

The ground was prepared for research for future collaboration: in the first instance these resonances between the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari and the Chinese context will be further explored in a special issue of *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* edited by Martin-Jones and Fleming,

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scheduled for publication in fall 2014. There will also be a resonant panel in The First Deleuze Studies in Asia Conference (31 May– 2 June 2013) in Taipei. Like the drawings of Marc Ngui, inspired by Deleuze and Guattari's works, displayed on the background throughout the day, which in simple strokes connect vague shapes of cubes, human figures, points and circles, the Deleuze, Guattari and China Symposium worked as a node to connect intersecting disciplines and parameters in the Chinese context.

## **The Cinema of Sensations: Fourteenth International Film and Media Studies Conference**

Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, 25–27  
May 2012

### **A Report by Francesca Hardy, University of Cambridge, UK**

The constellation of yellow, pink, and purple dots that made up the lead graphic for the Fourteenth International Film and Media Studies Conference hosted by the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, served as the perfect mechanism for acknowledging the multiple interpretations afforded by the conference theme “The Cinema of Sensations.”

Enfolded within this graphic’s uncertain configuration is a seemingly endless multiplicity of questions, its nebulous nature inducing the encounter between seeing and believing and sensing and knowing to materialize. It is a concern for these encounters that inspired the first keynote address of the conference, delivered by Yvonne Spielmann (University of the West of Scotland). Entitled “Seeing to Believe – Sensing to Know: From Film Form to Perceptual Environment,” Spielmann’s intervention began with a brief genealogy of how, over time, our cultural dependence upon the ocular was destabilized and became imbued with sensations beyond those extracted by gazing at the painted, and later, filmic image. Fruitfully invoking the interstices between theory and practice, Spielmann illustrated this slippage by highlighting Monet’s practice of painting the same subject at different moments of the day, meaning that each image engaged with a divergent set of sensory experiences thanks to the singular moment each captures. Fast-forwarding to the contemporary, the latter part of Spielmann’s plenary engaged with recent projects by British filmmaker and artist Gina Czarnecki (*Nascent*, 2005; *Spine*, 2006) and Japanese installation artist Masaki Fujihata (*Orchisoid*, 2001). Departing from these works, Spielmann examined how the slippage between seeing and believing, sensing and knowing, has prompted a compound mode of being with the world. For through the proliferation of data networks that weave the human and non-human closer together than ever before, “personal experience” is increasingly caught up with the inputs of others (i.e. CCTV footage, search engines). Spielmann’s reading of Czarnecki’s works, each of which is composed from the insistent passing of warped and interwoven chains of bodies, took up this compound mode of being to expose how the sense of intersubjectivity bred by the convergence of technology and the body “tips over” into the objective, rather than a multiplicity of subjectivities as per the artist’s intentions.

Through careful analyses of Czarnecki's films, Spielmann suggested that the vertiginous pervasion achieved by the digital could be attributed to the commonality of the body. We are all in possession of a body upon which technology can encroach, as Czarnecki's *Spine* and *Nascent* intimate through the trace of humanity that persists as the works unfold. However, we are not all in possession of the expertise needed to produce images such as these. This disjuncture thus opens up questions of access not only to the image but to the different technologies used, and Spielmann pursued this rise in "expert culture" in her reading of Fujihata's *Orchisoid* project. This work, with its 10,000-year aim to see whether a crop of orchids mounted onto robotic bases will learn to walk by using these mechanical prostheses, is characteristic of such expert culture, for it necessitates specialist knowledge of its physical mechanics in order to be sure of its intellectual foil.

Laura Marks (Simon Fraser University) also warmly embraced the cold materialism of inanimate objects in her particular consideration of seeing and knowing, during the second keynote address, entitled "Thinking like a Carpet: Embodied Perception and Individuation in Algorithmic Media." When read alongside Spielmann's plenary, Marks's intervention tacitly mobilized a tension between the two, for whilst Spielmann's address articulated a full-bodied engagement with new media, Marks's address was wholeheartedly occupied with an old medium: the carpet. In inviting us to think like a carpet, Marks shifted us from a compound way of being with the world to an atomistic one. Drawing on the work of Leibniz and Deleuze, particularly where the two are in dialogue, Marks asked us to abandon the molar level of existence, concerned with ideology, psychology and representation; and to plumb the depths of the molecular, that plane of being that thrives on affect, attraction and performance. Dialoguing further with Deleuze, this time through Elena del Rio's reading of Marylee in Douglas Sirk's *Written on the Wind* (1956), Marks deftly juxtaposed these two phenomena. Their harmonized account of Marylee considers her, in Marks's words, a "mass of molecular energy" that "cannot be tamed by the molar morality" at work within the film, and so she "bursts the seams of representation," just, according solely to Marks here, like a carpet. A carpet thus overflows figuration, refusing the "discipline" of the line, in lieu of abstract patterns that draw our bodies in, inviting us to partake in a mode of shared embodiment. In this way, despite the centuries that separate the carpets that Marks examines and the installation and video art that Spielmann explores, each medium, old and new, everyday and expert, involves cases of the body being caught up with external, material forces.

The many panels that filled the rest of the schedule reflected and enriched the concerns of the two plenary sessions. Papers by Ivo Blom (VU University) and Hajnal Király (University of Lisbon) entitled respectively "Of Artists and Models: Painters and Sculptors in Italian Silent Cinema"

and "Frames, Windows and Mirrors: Sensing Bodies in Films by Manuel de Oliveira," exemplified how rich disjuncture can be through readings of silent Italian film and its playful use of sound in sealing the fates of protagonists (Blom), and an imagining of the limp as both an intrusive and disruptive presence that is simultaneously capable of effecting a "euphoric floating," like the floating particles of the molecular (Király).

A second panel provided an emphatic echo of the plenary interest in how our bodies are increasingly caught up with technology, with each paper reflecting upon how the use of "gear" transforms directors' and spectators' relation to the image, most notably in terms of the revised access to the image it enables. The first paper, "Apparatus and the Cinema of Attractions in Augmented Reality," by Geoffrey Alan Rhodes (School of the Art Institute of Chicago), self-consciously foregrounded the use of cutting-edge gear in filmmaking, taking it to the heart of its very physicality. Throughout his presentation, the "actual" Rhodes did not utter a word, and instead his prose was delivered by means of a modified deck of cards upon which pre-recorded clips of his "virtual" self played out when placed into contact with a sensor. Rhodes used this uncanny mode of delivery to great effect, for the highly mediated content of his intervention "spoke" of film's ability to perform illusions, either manifestly through profilmic magicians for instance, or discreetly through special effects, which seek to do away with the magician's wand and seamlessly collapse into the diegesis. Very broadly, these episodes articulate film's shift from representation to simulation. Following Rhodes, Romain Chayeron (University of Kansas) gave a paper entitled "Connecting the Personal and the Social: Haptic Vision and the Experience of Difference in Agnès Varda's *The Gleaners and I*," neatly introducing to the session a sense of the everyday-versus-expert access to the image. Chayeron's intervention celebrated Varda's own enthusiasm for the liberating properties of the digital camera and the more immediate and unpredictable connection to the material world it offers. This immediacy permits Varda a greater proximity to the things she films, admitting greater enjoyment of their textures and surfaces for director and spectator alike. Likewise, as Chayeron particularly stressed, it effectively blurs the line between the personal and the social, for all of Varda's subjects are filmed in the same way; whether an artist's oeuvres, the director's aging body, or a harvested potato. While, then, the figure of the magician may have disappeared from cinematic screens, there is still hocus pocus afoot, and the magic of his presence remains through the pleasure garnered in being drawn into the apparatus itself in creating images.

Notions of a lingering charge, fruitfully left over from former models, was also present in two further papers, this time on separate panels. Lucy Bolton's (University of London) paper "Sensing Solitude – Sharing

Contemplation through Cinema” asked “what can film do?” when treated as a text with an immanent philosophy. Through a reading of Stephen Daldry’s *The Hours* (2002), Bolton’s intervention gestured towards Marks’s proposal of a molecular way of being in its treatment of the recurrent images of water that punctuate the film. For Bolton, the film’s aqueous particles narratively carry a spectator across the many decades its story spans and sensationally immerse us in the “lived bodily experiences” of the women the film pursues. Nikolaj Lubecker’s (University of Oxford) “On the Bodily Education of the Film Spectator: Lucile Hadzihalilovic’s *Innocence*,” sought to restore sexuality to the film which he perceives as being too hastily, or wholly, neglected by a recent reading. Important for Lubecker, and hence for its relation to molecularity, he does not wish this restoration to fix any sense of sexuality to the gaze, but rather to see it scattered amongst the entire filmic body, like a lingering charge.

A final thread of the weekend, and alternative interpretation of “sensation,” came from papers discussing horror films, a number of which suggested, like others throughout the conference (including Király and Rhodes), how what we today deem to be a “cinema of sensation” is in fact a “cinema of attractions reloaded.” The J-horror genre taken up by Megan Brown (Ohio University School of Film) in her paper “J-Horror and the New Cinema of Attractions” and the cinema of Barbara Laner’s (University of Innsbruck) “Fake Found Footage Films as Cinematic Attractions” both acknowledged the presence of the audience through their particular impulses to “show and tell” their stories (Brown) with an almost “exhibitionist” (Laner) thrust. Further to this, Laner’s paper also highlighted how this expository force exceeds a simple horizontal address between spectator and screen, for central to these fake found-footage films is the role of the camera as the only “remaining” witness to events. These films therefore “address future audiences” at the expense of the contemporary camera operator, and consequently form a series of diegetically-driven instances of the non-human winning out over the human.

“The Cinema of Sensations” thus granted all delegates a fabulous opportunity to think and feel film freely. This freedom was not without the occasional sobering moment of reflection to question the cost of our getting up close and personal with film, with sensation occasionally pitted against subjectivity. The broad spectrum of papers attracted by the conference, and wide-ranging discussions inspired by the nearly one hundred interventions, however, effectively illustrated that “the cinema of sensations” is in no way a placeholder for a particular brand of film and spectatorial engagement, but rather a conceptual springboard from which to launch a plethora of ideas.

## **NECS Conference 2012 – Time Networks: Screen Media and Memory**

New University of Lisbon, Portugal, 21-23 June 2012

### **A Report by Nessa Johnston, University of Glasgow**

This year's annual European Network for Cinema and Media Studies (NECS) conference brought together a diverse group of media studies academics from across Europe and beyond. Its theme of Screen Media and Memory created scope for intersection, interaction and debate amongst researchers with widely differing specialisms, yet succeeded in sparking productive discussion by virtue of not being too vague or diluted. The fundamentally time-based nature of moving-image media offered an opportunity for conference attendees to situate their research in relation to "back to basics" questions, such as those concerning ontological and phenomenological aspects of media. At the same time, the increased accessibility of moving images from the past, and the reproducibility of contemporary moving-image works, coalesce with the subjective nature of human memory, such that we increasingly both consume and produce memory in the digital era.

The decentralized, "bottom-up" organization of NECS makes it easy and non-bureaucratic for researchers at all career stages with similar interests to team up and form working groups. These groups initiate the academic conversation well in advance of the conference itself, enabling scholars in a variety of locations to form panels and other initiatives, fostering a cooperative spirit of mutual benefit. A number of panels at the conference were formed in this way, including one in which I presented (entitled "Prosumer Media and Memory"), which was a product of the NECS New Media Working Group. This gave me a chance to present alongside, and interact with, academics based in a variety of European regions, instead of my usual UK/Ireland milieu. In addition, with English as its working language, a key strength of the conference as a whole is that it gives participants exposure to scholarship that might otherwise only be communicated in a less widely-read language, given Europe's linguistic diversity.

The scope of the conference was wide, with each of the three days' programming running for approximately eleven hours, and with each session consisting of ten concurrent panels. However, a number of key strands of exploration were discernible. Reflecting a shift in emphasis away from theatrically released feature films as objects of scholarly enquiry, home cinema, amateur cinema and "other" cinemas were explored in several panels, including the panel "Changing Practices of

Memory Staging: The Cultural Dynamics of Home Movies.” Susan Aasman’s (Groningen) presentation engaged with the changing status of home movies in an era in which the ubiquity of YouTube and Facebook means that they can be shared and viewed widely, sometimes by millions of strangers, contrasting with the previous designation of home movies as private and screened selectively to family members. This “digital turn” was also explored by Alexandra Schneider (Amsterdam), in her quasi-historical media archaeology of video calling (including Skype) which she intriguingly defined as a “live home movie” and linked to wider practices of the digital era including “lifecasting,” in which individuals choose to broadcast themselves continuously engaged in everyday activities via streamed internet video. Annamaria Motrescu (Cambridge) used amateur and newsreel footage shot by British colonial settlers in Asia and Africa to engage with their manifestation of characteristics of British imperialism through their approach to the filmed colonial subjects, pointing the way towards historians using film analysis as a tool of enquiry, instead of accepting these films at face value as objective documentary.

Other aspects of the digital turn were explored, including in a panel entitled “Analogue and Digital Shifts: Revealing, Layering and Interfering with Histories,” focusing on experimental film and video. Michael Pigott (Warwick) used the works of Joseph Cornell to explore the temporality of the moving image, while Janet Harbord (Queen Mary, University of London) also engaged with this theme, demonstrating instances of stillness in the moving film image alongside the sense of movement in still photographic images. Catherine Fowler’s (Otago) paper “Static: How Video Interfered with Film” offered another perspective on stillness and movement in images in her exploration of shots of visual static and the familiar noisy, chaotic movement which occurs in these “still” images. Paradoxically, Fowler argued, the movement in moments of static is characterized by a lack of change, unlike cinematic movement. In the subsequent discussion, Harbord argued that we must move away from essentializing the analogue and the digital and instead investigate how we might profit from the encounter between them.

The conference’s overarching theme of memory, both subjective and mediated, inevitably strayed into ethical territory, as explored by the panel “Film and Ethics.” This panel incorporated case studies of documentary alongside fiction filmmaking, allowing an exploration of the ethics of representation to transcend the traditional distinction between the two forms. Agnieszka Piotrowska (Birkbeck, University of London) presented on the ethics of documentary explorations of collective trauma, as remembered by victims, witnesses and perpetrators, using the case studies of the Khmer Rouge-themed documentary *Enemies of the People* (2009) alongside the more well-known example of Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah* (1985). Odile Bodde (Leiden) and Mattias Frey (Kent) followed with presentations on cinematic representations of the dead human body, and



the taste frameworks and ethical discourses surrounding “extreme cinema.” Despite their diversity, the three papers shared an enquiry into the ethical dimensions of depicting violence and death, whether attempting to articulate the trauma of collective historical events, or the idea of cinematic “truth” in fictional representations of violent acts. Discussion afterwards hinged upon the notion of directorial intention and distance (for example, the “scientific detachment” from screen representations of sex and violence proposed by arthouse auteurs such as Breillet and Haneke), as well as cultural frameworks of taste. This dovetailed effectively with the thorny issues of subterfuge in documentary filmmaking and made for a productive revisiting of the perennial questions of truth and fabrication that haunt representational approaches to media criticism.

The notion of haunting, including Derridean “hauntology,” emerged in a panel on the subject of “Spectrality and Haunting from the Avant-Garde to the Mainstream.” Representing the “avant-garde” (non-narrative) half of this diverse panel, Donatella Valente (Birkbeck, University of London) investigated the experimental films of the artist Ugo Nespolo, while Jenny Chamarette (Leicester) explored the sound installations of Janet Cardiff and Anri Sala, which Chamarette intriguingly termed “sightless cinema.” The “mainstream” half of the panel presented on US “Indiewood” cinema, with a paper on Sofia Coppola’s *The Virgin Suicides*, and another on both Tarkovsky and Soderbergh’s versions of *Solaris* (1972/2002). John A. Riley’s (Birkbeck, University of London) paper “Remake as Haunting” presented an intertextual analysis of the two versions of *Solaris*, reading Tarkovsky’s version “through” Soderbergh’s and showing how it “haunts” Soderbergh’s film, while simultaneously articulating a collective US post-9/11 trauma. In a similar oscillation across the decades, Anna Backman Rogers’s (Groningen) provocative Deleuzian reading of the 1970s-set *The Virgin Suicides* (1999) demonstrated how its formal echoes of clichéd 1970s visual representations of women and girls, ranging from advertising to soft porn, mean that the whiteness, purity and innocence of the film’s Lisbon sisters evoke death and decay rather than youth and vitality. This sense of the “impossible female” evoked through these visual references articulates a crisis in the cinema of the movement-image, such that the girls “haunt” the film.

The three keynote addresses took contrasting but complementary approaches to the conference’s topic. The first address, Elizabeth Cowie’s “Experiencing Time Between Fiction and Documentary: Memory, Affect and the Digital,” focused on a wide range of experimental, digital documentary works, including Manu Luksch’s affecting surveillance-themed short *Faceless* (2006), exploring how such works engage with the transmedial status and ubiquity of the digital image. Andreas Fickers’s keynote, “Analogue Memory Machines: A Techno-Melancholic

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Retrospective,” provided a thought-provoking yet refreshingly humorous journey through the cultural history of broadcasting, via the rich repertoire of pop songs – from the 1950s to the present – that have transistor radios as their subject. Fickers argued that this treasure trove of songs provides a more useful cultural history than the meagre quantity of scholarly work on this subject. With their references to the contexts and practices of listening, constructing the radio’s status as an intimate, consoling “friend,” as well as being a repository of musical memory and a means of intergenerational transfer of cultural heritage, Fickers demonstrated how the songs articulate and are associated with “analogue melancholia” – a melancholic retrospection of our analogue past, rather than a longing for an impossible return to the past. It is intriguing to relate this sense of nostalgic pastness as articulated in Fickers’s research to the peculiar loss of this sense of time in the digital works explored by Cowie.

Appropriately for the conference’s location, the closing address by Lúcia Nagib explored cinematic Portugal. Entitled “Stasis, Scale and Urban Portugal,” it celebrated Portugal as a center of what is often referred to as “slow cinema,” exemplified by the work of Pedro Costa. Nagib traced a path through three feature films shot on location in Portugal by non-Portuguese – Wim Wenders’s *The State of Things* (1982), Walter Salles and Daniela Thomas’s *Foreign Land* (1996) and Raúl Ruiz’s *Mysteries of Lisbon* (2010), showing cinematic Portugal as inhabiting a time/space hiatus. With its coastal locations on the “edge” of Europe, the films show characters who exist in their Portuguese location within the framework of the Deleuzian time-image, as observers rather than agents. The manner in which Nagib’s address brought together philosophical, historical, transnational and extratextual lines of enquiry was emblematic of how much of the research presented at this diverse conference operated as a productive encounter between typically divergent approaches. Ultimately, this was the NECS conference’s main strength, fostering as it did dialogue across a wide range of specialisms.