

Liverpool Film Seminar

2010 – 2011 series

Every year, Liverpool Film Seminar invites experts to deliver a series of talks. Topics vary greatly and the series does not focus on a specific aspect of film. Instead, a range of genres and approaches are celebrated, from historical reach to the internet's impact on cinematic material.

Professor Paul McDonald (University of Portsmouth)

Hollywood, Post-studio Stardom, and “The Will Smith Business”

Since the vertical disintegration of the Hollywood studios, the production of stardom has moved outside the studios, forming a ‘post-studio’ star system. Taking the example of Will Smith, this paper focuses on three dynamics which now define the place and value of Hollywood stardom in the post-studio era. Although stars are no longer tied to studios under long term contract, they are still dependent on the major studios to provide the scale of production and distribution exposure necessary to make and maintain their fame.

Taking the example of Smith’s on-going relationship with Columbia, the paper will initially argue the relationship of stars to studios should be conceptualized in terms of ‘relative independence’. Secondly, the star-based independent production company (what will be referred to here as the ‘sindie’) is now a standard feature of the Hollywood film industry. Profiling Smith’s company Overbrook Entertainment, the paper outlines five forms of relationship which exist between sindies and the studios. Finally, with Hollywood continually looking for new opportunities in overseas markets, the paper concludes by examining Smith and Overbrook’s well-orchestrated international strategy, particularly how the star and company have cultivated business relationships with India and China.

Biography:



Paul McDonald is Professor of Cinema at the University of Portsmouth. His research specialises in two key areas: cinema and film industries, with an emphasis on the structural, operational, technological and legal dynamics which shape the workings of the film business; and stardom and acting, with a particular focus on Hollywood Cinema.

His books include: *Video and DVD Industries* (BFI, 2007); *The Star System: Hollywood's Production of Popular Identities* (Wallflower, 2000), the collection *The Contemporary Hollywood Film Industry* (Blackwell, 2008 - with Janet Wasko) and his most recent, *Branded Bodies: Stardom in Contemporary Hollywood* (Blackwell, forthcoming), the research for which was supported by a Leverhulme fellowship. He is also co-editing the "International Screen Industries" book series for the BFI, which so far has published seven titles.