

Liverpool Film Seminar

2011 – 2012 series

Every year, Liverpool Film Seminar invites six 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 Bill Osgerby (London Metropolitan University)

Your Town Could Be Their Killing Ground...: Exploitation, “Otherness” and Transgression in the 1960s Biker Movie

Released in 1966 and billed as ‘the most terrifying film of our time’, *The Wild Angels* laid the way for a slew of low budget, lurid and gratuitously violent movies based around the exploits of marauding motorcycle gangs. This paper explores the nature and significance of this seldom discussed film genre. In their pageant of transgressive machismo, it is argued, the 1960s biker movies conjured with themes of an uncontrolled ‘Otherness’ whose unrestrained lusts and sneering disaffection set it beyond the pale of mainstream culture. Informed by the ‘carnavalesque’ traditions of exploitation cinema, however, the biker genre’s treatment of these themes was avowedly ambivalent.

On one level the bestial depravity of outlaw bikers was presented as chilling evidence of a societal order in a state of collapse. But, in other respects, the biker movies revelled in their anti-heroes’ flouting of mainstream tastes and conventions. Ribald and bawdy, the 1960s biker film delighted in tweaking the tail of conformist sensibilities.

Rather than reading the biker movie as an ‘oppositional’ film genre, however, the paper argues that it was a site of conflict and contradiction. While many mainstream cultural norms were certainly flouted in biker movies, they also affirmed many of core values of American popular conservatism. In particular, the biker genre configured the outlaw motorcyclist as a pioneering frontiersman – a ‘last American hero’ who embodied the distinctly masculine and conservative themes of rugged, autonomous individualism.

Biography:



Bill Osgerby is Professor in Media, Culture and Communications at London Metropolitan University. He has published widely on modern American and British media and cultural history, with particular emphasis on the areas of gender, sexuality, youth culture, consumption, print media, popular television, film and music.

His monographs include, *Full Throttle Cinema: Hollywood, Subculture and the Biker Mythology - A Study in Cultural History* (I.B. Tauris, 2007), *Biker: Style and Subculture on Hell's Highway, Guildford, CT* (Lyons Press, 2005), *Youth and the Media* (Routledge, 2004), *Playboys in Paradise: Masculinity, Youth and Leisure-Style in Modern America*, (Berg/New York University Press, 2001) and *Youth in Britain Since 1945* (Blackwell, 1998). He has also co-edited Action TV: 'Tough Guys, Smooth Operators and Foxy Chicks' (Routledge, 2001).