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 Carol Mavor (University of Manchester)


With children, we often feel a sense of *Einfühlung* (feeling into) that is not reciprocated: an *unfeeling* made manifest by the non-response of the child. This *unfeeling* of the child is a focus *doubled* by Jean-Pierre Gorin’s documentary about the two young, pretty, black-haired twins, German immigrant girls, living in San Diego, California, entitled *Poto and Cabengo* (1980).

The girls, who called each other by their invented names of Poto and Cabengo, were believed to have developed a secret language. Everyone (parents, educators, therapists, newspaper-reading public, TV watchers, even a Hollywood movie producer) wanted to believe that these beautiful girls made of staccato rhythm, were magical. Gorin claims the story of the girls as a ‘fairy tale’.

The treatment of the child in the fairy tale is often viewed as particularly unfeeling with its foci on abandonment, written in a matter-of-fact style. Grimms’ Hansel and Gretel is our most familiar representation of parental abandonment. Such loss is at the heart of the fairy tale and especially the dystopian story of *Poto and Cabengo*. Must each child, as so many fairy tales tell us, lose paradise? Must the child lose the childish voice that enables what Jean-Luc Nancy describes as ‘listening beyond meaning’? Removed from what was for Poto and Cabengo a ‘fairy tale forest’, their *cement garden* (a drab, depressing apartment complex) the little girls were not so much released into the outside world as they were kidnapped by it and made mute. Gorin’s emphatic *unsentimentality* of the child provides us with entry into the body of the child through an *ethics of unfeeling* that moves laterally through siblings and is without the power play of an Oedipal story. Gorin gives voice to a feeling *into* the doubled child.
Biography: