

# Liverpool Film Seminar

2012 – 2013 series

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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)

### **A Grimm Fairy Tale: Feeling into Jean-Pierre Gorin's *Poto and Cabengo* (1980)**

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:



Carol Mavor is Professor of Art History and Visual Studies at the University of Manchester. She is the author of four books, all published by Duke University Press: *Reading Boyishly: Roland Barthes, J. M. Barrie, Jacques Henri Lartigue, Marcel Proust, and D. W. Winnicott* (2007), *Becoming: The Photographs of Clementina, Viscountess, Hawarden* (1999) *Pleasures Taken: Performances of Sexuality and Loss in Victorian Photographs* (1995) and *Black and Blue: The Bruising Passion of Camera Lucida, La Jetée, Sans soleil and Hiroshima mon amour* (2012). Her essays have appeared in *Cabinet Magazine*, *Art History*, *Photography and Culture*, *Photographies*, as well as edited volumes. Mavor has lectured broadly in the US and the UK, including The Photographers' Gallery (London), University of Cambridge, Duke University, the Royal College of Art and the Guggenheim Museum. For 2010- 2011, Mavor was named the Northrop Frye Chair in Literary Theory at University of Toronto. Mavor's *Blue Mythologies: A Study of the Colour* is forthcoming with Reaktion Books in 2013. Currently, she is hard at work on fairy tales and a novel entitled *Like a Lake*.