

# 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 Stella Bruzzi** (University of Warwick)

### **Approximation: Documentary, History and the Staging of Reality**

This paper offers a response to our current preoccupation with diversifying the ways in which the media and related cultural forms represent, use and manipulate real events and the ways in which recognised, discrete categories such as 'documentary', 'dramatisation' and 'fiction' are now undergoing radical reassessment.

What is occurring is an excitable flirtation with how to show and perform facts and evidence, with mixing genres and switching cultural arenas, the collective effect of which I will explore through the concept of 'approximation', a term used in this context to signal works whose aim is to approximate reality rather than more straightforwardly represent it.

The longer project I am engaged in begins as a response to the multiple responses to '9/11', our shorthand for the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre, 11 September 2001, an event that inevitably spawned a multitude of media, cultural and artistic responses.

In an essay about Gerhard Richter's painting 'September', Robert Storr comments: "No one sees the same thing when they look at the same thing". Although the documents and facts on which 'approximate' texts are based remain pre-eminent, it is the detachment between the two that is my focus. Of particular interest is the dynamic relationship between raw documentary data (documents, archive, news etc) and their re-use and repackaging by cinema and television.

What 'approximation' offers is the mise-en-scene or staging of fact and history: a place where what is known about a historical event, a factual occurrence, a real person is inserted into a narrative, not in order to be collapsed into fiction, but to co-exist in collision with it. 'Approximations' are propelled by the frisson of recognition: of knowing a film, painting, opera or drama's point of reference, but also being able to recognise that the reconstruction and the point of reference are not equivalents. I will test these

ideas through one specific example: the multiple performances in film and television of former Labour leader, Tony Blair, looking in particular at news and current affairs footage, Molly Dineen's 1997 Party Election Broadcast, the 'Michael Sheen trilogy' (The Deal, The Queen, The Special Relationship), The Trial of Tony Blair, Roman Polanski's *The Ghost*, Alison Jackson's *Tony Blair: Rock Star* and concluding with a discussion of British artist John Keane's latest exhibition 'Scratching the Surface, Joining the Dots' (Flowers Gallery, Jan—Feb 2012).

### Biography:



Stella Bruzzi is Professor of Film and Television Studies at Warwick University. Her books include: *New Documentary* (2006), *Seven Up* (2007), *Bringing Up Daddy: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Post-war Hollywood* (2005) and *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies* (1997). Currently on a Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship, she is researching *Approximation: Documentary, History and Staging Reality*, on which this keynote is based. Also in preparation: *Men's Cinema: masculinity and mise-en-scene in Hollywood* (EUP, 2013) and a revised edition of *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations and Analysis* (Routledge, 2013).