

Liverpool Film Seminar

2012 – 2013 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.

Below you'll find a list of speakers and topics from the 2012 – 2013 series:

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).

Professor Tim Bergfelder (University of Southampton)

Whatever Happened to Popular European Cinema?

From the late 1980s, the history of 'popular European cinema' became one of the major academic concerns in the UK and elsewhere, evidenced by numerous publications and conferences intent on rehabilitating cinematic traditions and genres that had in previous decades been neglected in favour of an emphasis on art house auteurs and movements. In the last decade or so, this trend has seemingly stalled or even reverted. In this paper, I want to trace this shift, but also take account of the migration of 'popular European film' cinephilia into diverse other manifestations, from the imitation of 60s popular genres in recent German and French cinema to the nostalgic reflection of these traditions on blogs and websites.

Biography:



Tim Bergfelder is Professor of Film at the University of Southampton. He is the author of the monograph *International Adventures: Popular German Cinema and European Co-Productions in the 1960s* (2005). His most recent books are *Film Architecture and the Transnational Imagination: Set Design in 1930s European Cinema* (2007, co-written with Sue Harris and Sarah Street), *Destination London: German-speaking émigrés in British cinema, 1925-50* (2008, co-ed. with Christian Cargnelli), and *The Concise CineGraph: Encyclopaedia of German Cinema* (2009, co-ed. with Hans-Michael Bock).

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*.

Professor Roberta Pearson (University of Nottingham)

Remembering Frank Sinatra: Celebrity Studies Meets Memory Studies

The talk uses Frank Sinatra as a case study to explore the intersection between celebrity studies and memory studies. The particular focus is upon spaces of memory, looking at the ways in which the primary places associated with Sinatra (Hoboken, New Jersey, the “hometown,” Los Angeles and Las Vegas, sites of performance and Palm Springs, site of retirement and burial) have become mobilized simultaneously for heritage and for commercial purposes. This investigation of sites of Sinatra remembrance addresses the interactions of officially sanctioned public memory with the collective memory of individuals or groups of individuals as well as the ways in which public heritage and private commercial interests benefit from the exploitation of memory by privileging certain representations of the past over others.

Biography:



Roberta Pearson is Professor of Film and Television Studies and Head of the Department of Culture, Film and Media at the University of Nottingham. She has a long standing interest in the meanings of cultural icons and has written about Batman, Shakespeare, General Custer and Star Trek. She is currently completing her co-authored Star Trek book for the University of California Press.

Professor Karen Lury (University of Glasgow)

Micro-history and the amateur film: From artefact to anecdote

'And you need not fear lest what is peculiar should not meet with sympathy. Each character, however peculiar it may be, and each object you can represent, from the stone up to the man, has generality.' - Goethe

This paper will present what might be called a small-scale or 'micro-history' of an amateur film located in the Scottish Screen Archive, *The Chief's Half Day*, filmed by W.S. Dobson in 1961 (13.30 mins, silent, colour). The 'Chief' is William Merrilees (OBE) – once 'Scotland's most famous policeman'. Like many amateur films, *The Chief's Half Day* confounds conventional categories: a fictional narrative, it simultaneously documents (or provides a re-enactment) of the plausibly authentic activities of a real 'larger than life' character: 'Wee Willie Merrilees'. In the course of the film, Merrilees talks to a penguin at Edinburgh zoo; visits a hand reared chimp at home; and in the grounds of a local children's home he is welcomed by children of all ages – including one little boy in a wheelchair, other boys on tricycles and one little girl in callipers – and here he donates the dog who recently played 'Grey Friars Bobby' from the eponymous Disney film. This chapter will present an analysis of this idiosyncratic text and offer a reflection on the tension between the excitement and confusion generated by the excessive contingency of this and other 'amateur' films, and how this confusion and this excess creates an opportunity to explore the parallel – albeit frequently entangled – concerns of both historiography and film analysis. Specifically I will ally my own approach (and the difficulties therein) to that of historians interested in the potential of small-scale or micro-histories (such as Siegfried Kracauer and Carlo Ginzburg).

I will suggest that by refusing to marginalise, or exclude as trivial, the experiences or representations of children and animals it is possible to revisit and elaborate upon larger (macro) histories of church, child welfare and morality in Scotland. I argue that the peculiarity of the amateur film and its status as both artefact and anecdote, enables a close-up investigation of objects, and human and non-human agents that prompts larger questions and revisits past assumptions.

Biography:



Karen Lury is Professor of Film and Television Studies in the School of Culture and Creative Arts at the University of Glasgow, Scotland. Her most recent monograph is *The Child in Film: tears, fears and fairytales* (I. B. Tauris, 2010) and she continues to research the figure of the 'child' across a range of media. Her current research focuses on amateur film and is related to her AHRC funded project 'Children and Amateur Media in Scotland' (www.gla.ac.uk/cams). She has also published widely in television

studies, including the books, *British Youth Television: Cynicism and Enchantment* (2001) and *Interpreting Television* (2005). Karen is also an editor of the international film and television studies journal, *Screen*.

Professor Jane Wasko (University of Oregon, USA)

Political Economy, Media Industry Studies and Disney

The study of the political economy of the media directs special attention to the question of who controls the media, arguing that the organization, ownership, and motivations of media institutions are still important matters, especially in light of the growth of new media technologies and the global expansion of media-related activities. What media content is produced, by whom, and how is it distributed? How are decisions made? Who makes those decisions and who benefits? In other words, who owns and controls the media? Why do we pay for some media products and not others? What is the responsibility of the media for building and supporting democratic societies? These are the type of questions involved in the study of the political economy of the media.

This presentation will offer a brief sketch of some of the history of critical political economy research in the US, which flourished within the global profusion of critical research in the 1960s and 1970s, and its steady growth since that period through analysis of a broad range of communications phenomena, and a wide array of research methods and critical theories. Examples of studies that integrate political economic analysis with other approaches will be discussed, as well as recent misrepresentations of the study of political economy of the media. Finally, the presentation will offer the analysis of the Walt Disney Company as a case study of how political economy has been employed with other critical approaches to further understand contemporary media.

Biography:



Janet Wasko is the Knight Chair for Communication Research at University of Oregon in Eugene, Oregon, USA. She is the author, co-author or editor of 19 books, including *Understanding Disney: The Manufacture of Fantasy and How Hollywood Works*. Her research and teaching focuses on the political economy of media, especially the political economy of film, as well as issues relating to democracy and media. She currently serves as the President of the International Association for Media and Communication Research.