

Liverpool Film Seminar

2014 - 2015

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 2014 – 2015 series:

Professor Richard Dyer (King's College)

The Shadow of *M*: Serial Killing and Nazism in Film

Serial killing is an extraordinarily rare form of murder and yet it has been widely taken to be symptomatic of the societies and historical moments in which it occurs. Even though there are strong reasons not to equate them, serial killing has often been seen to be at one end of a spectrum of which the Nazi mass exterminations are the other. This presentation explores these two issues in representation through the example of the film *M*.

M has been a constant reference point since its release in 1931, not least through the use of the image of the killer's shadow. *M* has been seen as symptomatic of the cinema and society of the Weimar Republic, including in debates about whether Weimar gave birth to Nazism. It is often an irresistible source of imagery for films dealing with serial killing in both the Weimar and the Nazi eras. It has been used to distinguish Nazism from serial killing (not least, but not only, by Nazi propaganda) and to suggest a continuity between them. In the range of uses, and often their contradictoriness, these films raise the question of what is at stake of wanting to make the connection at all.

Films to be touched on include: *Der ewige Jude*, *Die Mörder sind unter uns*, *Der Verlorene*, *Nachts, wenn der Teufel kam*, *Le Vampire de Düsseldorf*, *Die Zärtlichkeit der Wolfe*, *Dr. Petiot* and *Hitler: ein Film aus Deutschland*.

Biography:



Richard Dyer teaches Film Studies at King's College London and the University of St. Andrews. His books include *Stars*, *The Culture of Queers*, *White*, *Pastiche*, *In the Space of a Song*. He is currently completing a book on serial killing in European cinema and preparing one on *La dolce vita*.

Professor Sarah Street (University of Bristol)

Synthetic Dreams: Colour-Film-Music in the 1920s

In the 1920s cinema enjoyed an expanded relationship with other media. Significant developments in the colour field provoked dynamic exchanges involving avant-garde practices as well as popular narrative forms. The desire to explore colour, film and music as an organic, synthetic experiment was a particularly marked tendency, encouraging lively debates on the nature and impact of that combination of forms. The word 'synthetic' was doubly appropriate, referring to the application of vibrant, synthetic colours produced chemically, and the utopian synthesis of media forms.

While associations between colour and music have a long history, this paper will examine the most notable experiments with Colour-Film-Music during the 1920s. The films of Walther Ruttmann, Oskar Fischinger, Sergei Eisenstein and Viking Eggeling all operated in this tradition; in addition Thomas Wilfred and Mary Hallock Greenwalt's lumia experiments, various colour-organs and moving light displays in movie theatre auditoria were significant.

Such examples will be located with reference to theoretical writings on the phenomenon by Adrian Klein, Loyd Jones and Sergei Eisenstein. As they and others observed, avant-garde practice was particularly suited to innovating with visual and musical correspondences, and the revolution in colour made this arena even more attractive as filmmakers sought to expand non-representational, moving forms while at the same time locate them in terms of codification and aesthetic/emotional impacts.

As Klein (1926) observed, colour-music and mobile colour projections were connected to 'a general pleasure in "colour for colour's sake"' in everyday life. Advertising images contributed to this context of meshing artistic experimentation with the commercial imperatives of the decade. As cinema was developing as an institution characterized by specific sites for film exhibition, at the same time those venues were non-exclusive as locations for intermedial, color-light performances.

The paper will give examples of how movie theatres and cinemas showcased light displays, colour-music experiments, and stage prologues for films, demonstrating clearly how avant-garde practices became relevant to more popular forms of entertainment. Considering this material as part of a larger project that deals with questions around intermediality and theorizing the 1920s in Pierre Bourdieu's terms as a field of complex, interacting and competing cultural production, the paper will conclude by placing the Colour-Film-Music synthesis in relation to broader, intermedial and industrial trends, as well as its implications for conceptualizing the coming of sound towards the end of the decade.

Biography:



Sarah Street is Professor of Film at the University of Bristol, UK. She has published widely on British cinema history. Her most recent publications are as author of *Colour Films in Britain: The Negotiation of Innovation, 1900-55* (2012, winner best book prize awarded by the British Association of Film, Television and Screen Studies, 2014) and co-editor with Simon Brown and Liz Watkins *Color and the Moving Image* (2012) and *British Colour Cinema: Practices and Theories* (2013). Her current project is *Colour in the 1920s: Cinema and its Intermedial Contexts*, working with Joshua Yumibe, Vicky Jackson and Bregt Lameris. She is a co-editor of *Screen* and the *Journal of British Cinema and Television*.

Professor Phil Powrie (University of Surrey)

Soundscapes of Loss: Songs in Contemporary French Cinema

In 2003 I hypothesized that contemporary French films are increasingly using Anglophone songs in their compilations. A recent survey of a large sample of films that I have recently undertaken suggests that something like 20% of the 2250 or so films produced since 2000 are likely to be dominated by English-language songs.

This paper explores the use of English-language songs in a small sample of these films using a range of strategies: the film that has a large number of almost exclusively English-language songs; the film that has very few, but where the songs are all the more striking; the film where songs are sung in English by French singers; and finally the film which demonstrates how English-language and French-language songs work in counterpoint. This last comparative element of the paper allows me to claim that the use of English-language and French-language films in contemporary French cinema functions in very different ways. The former's function is to define a contemporary space and culture, while the latter's function is to retrieve a communitarian past in nostalgic mode.

Biography:



Phil Powrie is Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences and Professor of Cinema Studies at the University of Surrey. He has published a number of books mainly on French cinema, amongst them *French Cinema in the 1980s: Nostalgia and the Crisis of Masculinity* (1997), *Jean-Jacques Beineix* (2001) and *Pierre Batcheff and Stardom in 1920s French Cinema* (2009). He leads the Association for Studies in French Cinema and is the chief general editor of its journal, *Studies in French Cinema*. He is Chair of the British Association of Film Television and Screen Studies. He is currently preparing a book on the French film musical.

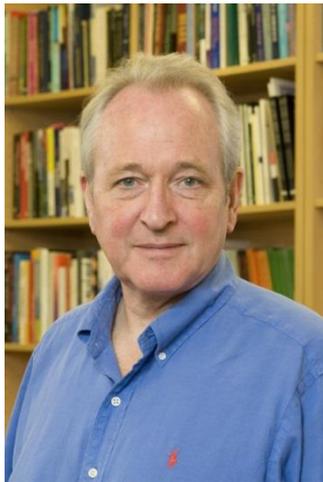
Professor James Donald (University of New South Wales)

Return of the Living Dead: Modernity, Monsters, and Technology

In 1989, I published an edited volume on *Fantasy and the Cinema*. One theme to emerge from several of the essays included was a disquieting but historically specific uncertainty about the boundaries of human finitude – the anxiety about the border between ‘human’ and ‘technology’ emblematised in *Frankenstein*, the uncanny border between ‘human’ and ‘earth’ in *Dracula*, and the resurgence of both in a vogue for cyborgs.

It was at around this time that Mladen Dollar characterised the uncanny as ‘a fundamental dimension of modernity.’ Quarter of a century and many technologies later, how does the argument that uniquely modern anxieties about technology and finitude have been inscribed in cinematic monsters and cinematic technologies hold up? Zombies and surveillance may be part of the answer.

Biography:



James Donald is Professor of Film Studies and Dean of Arts and Social Sciences at UNSW Australia, and a Visiting Professor in Media and Communications at the University of Liverpool. He is the author of *Sentimental Education: Schooling, Popular Culture and the Regulation of Liberty* (1992), *Imagining the Modern City* (1999) and *Some of These Days: Black Stars, Jazz Aesthetics and Modernist Culture*, which will be published by Oxford University Press in March 2015. He was editor of *Screen Education* and founding editor of *New Formations*. He has published over a dozen edited volumes, including *Formations of Fantasy* (with Cora Kaplan and Victor Burgin) and *Close Up, 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism* (with Laura Marcus and Anne Friedberg). He is an Associate of the Centre for Modernism Studies in Australia and a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities.

Professor Will Brooker (Kingston University)

Batman: 75 Years as a Transmedia Text

This talk surveys Batman's development across multiple media platforms since his inception in 1939. Convergence and cross-platform characters are assumed to be a recent phenomenon, but Batman was adapted into newspaper strips and film serials very shortly after his first appearance, and subsequently crossed over into television, toys, animated series, video games and fan-made culture. Using Batman as its case study, the seminar explores the way in which cultural icons operate in a 'matrix' of influence, with one form influencing and borrowing from the other.

Biography:



Will Brooker is Professor of Film and Cultural Studies at Kingston University, London. He is editor of *Cinema Journal* and author of numerous books on popular culture and audience, including *Batman Unmasked: Analysing A Cultural Icon* (Continuum, 2001), *Using the Force: Creativity, Community and "Star Wars" Fans* (Continuum, 2002), *Star Wars* (BFI, 2009) and *Hunting the Dark Knight: Twenty First Century Batman* (I.B.Tauris, 2012). He has also edited the collection *The Blade Runner Experience: The Legacy of A Science Fiction Classic* (Wallflower Press, 2006) and co-edited the collections *The Audience Studies Reader* (Routledge, 2002) and *Postmodern After-images: A Reader in Film, Video and Television* (Hodder, 1997).

Professor Lucia Nagib (University of Reading)

The Politics of Slowness and the Traps of Modernity

In this lecture, I will re-evaluate the diachronic, evolutionist model that establishes the Second World War as a watershed between classical and modern cinemas, and 'modernity' as the political project of 'slow cinema'.

I will start by historicising the connection between cinematic speed and modernity, going on to survey the veritable obsession with the modern that continues to beset film studies despite the vagueness and contradictions inherent in the term. I will then attempt to clarify what is really at stake within the modern-classical debate by analysing two canonical examples of Japanese cinema, drawn from the *geidomono* genre (films on the lives of theatre actors), Kenji Mizoguchi's *Story of the Late Chrysanthemums* (*Zangiku monogatari*, 1939) and Yasujiro Ozu's *Floating Weeds* (*Ukigusa*, 1954), with a view to investigating the role of the long take or, conversely, classical editing, in the production or otherwise of a supposed 'slow modernity'.

By resorting to Ozu and Mizoguchi, I hope to demonstrate that the best narrative films in the world have always combined a 'classical' quest for perfection with the 'modern' doubt of its existence, hence the futility of classifying cinema in general according to an evolutionary and Eurocentric model based on the classical-modern binary. Rather than on a confusing politics of the modern, I will draw on Bazin's prophetic insight of 'impure cinema', a concept he forged in defence of literary and theatrical screen adaptations.

Anticipating by more than half a century the media convergence on which the near totality of our audiovisual experience is currently based, 'impure cinema' will give me the opportunity to focus on the confluence of film and theatre in these Mizoguchi and Ozu films as the site of a productive crisis where established genres dissolve into self-reflexive stasis, ambiguity of expression and the revelation of the reality of the film medium, all of which, I argue, are more reliable indicators of a film's political programme than historical teleology.

At the end of the journey, some answers may emerge to whether the combination of the long take and the long shot are sufficient to account for a film's 'slowness' and whether 'slow' is indeed the best concept to signify resistance to the destructive pace of capitalism.

Biography:



Lúcia Nagib is Professor of Film and Director of the Centre for Film Aesthetics and Cultures at the University of Reading. Her research has focused, among other subjects, on polycentric approaches to world cinema, new waves and new cinemas, cinematic realism and intermediality.

Lúcia Nagib is the author of *World Cinema and the Ethics of Realism* (Continuum, 2011), *Brazil on Screen: Cinema Novo, New Cinema, Utopia* (I.B. Tauris, 2007), *The Brazilian Film Revival: Interviews with 90 Filmmakers of the 90s* (Editora 34, 2002), *Born of the Ashes: The Auteur and the Individual in Oshima's Films* (Edusp, 1995), *Around the Japanese Nouvelle Vague* (Editora da Unicamp, 1993) and *Werner Herzog: Film as Reality* (Estação Liberdade, 1991). She is the editor of *Impure Cinema: Intermedial and Intercultural Approaches to Film* (with Anne Jerslev, 2013), *Theorizing World Cinema* (with Chris Perriam and Rajinder Dudrah, I.B. Tauris, 2011), *Realism and the Audiovisual Media* (with Cecília Mello, Palgrave, 2009), *The New Brazilian Cinema* (I.B. Tauris, 2003), *Master Mizoguchi* (Navegar, 1990) and *Ozu* (Marco Zero, 1990).

Dr Marijke DeValck (University of Amsterdam)

Festival Audiences, Popular Cinephilia and the Sinuosities of Taste

Film festivals are proliferating worldwide. In my talk I will focus on expressions of cinephilia at film festivals, in particular the festival in my hometown Rotterdam. Cinephilia is about the love for cinema. As I wrote elsewhere: “it alludes to the universal phenomenon that the film experience evokes particular sensations of intense pleasure, resulting in a strongly felt connection with the cinema, often described as a relation of love.”

Although the love for film is shared by all festival visitors, there is not one cinephilia that is celebrated, but there are many versions of cinephilia that cohabitate the Rotterdam festival space each year in January. Most significantly, there is a distinction between the cinephilia of professionals and of the general public. A lot has already been written about this latter type of cinephilia, which is closely related to the IFFR’s image in the international festival circuit. Little has been said, on the other hand, about Rotterdam audiences, and this will be the main focus of my lecture. I will address the issue of audience’s taste, and talk about the influence of place, arguing that popular cinephilia today is not only cosmopolitan, but clearly tied up with local affinities and identities.

Biography:



Marijke de Valck is Associate Professor in the Department of Media Studies at the University of Amsterdam. She is best known for her work on film festivals. Together with Skadi Loist she leads the Film Festival Research Network and edits the festival review section for NECSUS. For Palgrave Macmillan she edits with Tamara Falicov the book series Framing Film Festivals. Marijke is also the Program Director of the MA Preservation and Presentation of the Moving Image, a graduate program in audiovisual heritage and curation that collaborates with non-academic partners like EYE Film Institute the Netherlands and the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision.

Chris Holmlund (University of Tennessee, Knoxville)

Mutual Muses in Independent Film: Women Directors and Female Stars

Working on the lower economic end of the contemporary "indie" world, with budgets ranging from \$8 million to just \$300,000, Nicole Holofcener/Catherine Keener and Kelly Reichardt/Michelle Williams explore the 'everyday' worlds of ordinary people.

Concern not just for self but also for others preoccupies their films. The choices the lead characters make are historically and economically delimited, and that delineation is something that the actresses translate through the minutiae of performance choices. Reichardt/Williams portray migrants and immigrants; Holofcener/Keener craft suburbanites and urbanites. Unsurprisingly, the films resonate somewhat differently politically: at times Reichardt/Williams wrench potentiality from powerlessness; consistently Holofcener/Keener sketch middle class ennui and options. Drawing on the recent writings of Luce Irigaray, I engage with sexual difference in my discussions of five of their films. I am, however, less interested in a "difference from" that opposes women and men than in a "difference for" that enlists gender variation, recognizes racial, generational and class contexts, and has ethical implications.

Biography:



Chris Holmlund is currently Hedda Andersson Visiting Research Professor at Lund University (Sweden) and Past President of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies. This summer she will return to the University of Tennessee; there she is Arts and Sciences Excellence Professor of French, Women's Studies and Film.

Chris Holmlund is the author of *Impossible Bodies* (Routledge, 2002), editor of *The Ultimate Stallone Reader: Sylvester Stallone as Star, Icon, Auteur*, (Columbia UP/Wallflower, 2014), *American Cinema of the 1990s* (Rutgers UP, 2008), co-editor (with Justin Wyatt) of *Contemporary American Independent Film* (Routledge, 2005) and (with Cynthia Fuchs) of *Between the Sheets, In the Streets: Queer, Lesbian, Gay Documentary* (Minnesota UP, 1997). Current projects include books on *Female Trouble* and *Being John Malkovich*, and a co-edited issue on "Sexuality" for the *Journal of Scandinavian Cinema*.

(The above took place at Liverpool University)