

# Liverpool Film Seminar

2015 – 2016 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.

## **Gary Needham** (Nottingham Trent University)

### **Hustling Minimalism: Screen Performance in the Films Andy Warhol**

Andy Warhol's 1965 film *My Hustler* is an important starting point in trying to understand the different approaches and exploration of screen performance, particularly in relation to categories like 'just being yourself', 'not-acting', and 'bad acting'.

The current work on screen performance in film studies doesn't address the types of acting we see in underground and experimental cinema although such approaches are useful for telling us what so-called 'non-acting' performances are not.

Paul America, the 'superstar' of *My Hustler* and two unreleased subsequent *Hustler* reels, a *Screen Test* (ST4), and a 66-minute reel-to-reel videotape was, along with Edie Sedgwick, one of the Warhol beauties of 1965. Described by Warhol as 'unbelievable good-looking – like a comic-strip drawing of Mr. America, clean-cut, handsome, very symmetrical', America's 'performance' in *My Hustler* was in keeping with a number of transformations in Warhol's filmmaking that year that sought to disrupt and challenge conventional concepts of screen acting and performance. While Warhol goes on to write that he 'only wanted to find great people and let them be themselves' one finds that behind such accessible and populist claims is an avant-garde strategy; in this case performances at the limits of what might constitute film acting. I will outline the idea that one of Warhol's strategies was to empty out the acting from screen performance, in short, conceiving of the possibility of acting in relation to *minimalism*. Furthermore, *My Hustler* and the following year's *Chelsea Girls* also opens up what one might refer to as a 'performance dialectic' - one of several oppositional strategies evident in the tension between the 'talkers' and the 'beauties'. [This talk will include also include a screening of the first reel of *My Hustler* (33m) and *Screen Test: Paul America* (4m)]

## Biography:



Gary Needham is senior lecturer in Film and Television Studies, Nottingham Trent University. He is the author of *Brokeback Mountain* (2010) and co-editor of *Warhol in Ten Takes* (2013), *Queer TV* (2009), and *Asian Cinemas* (2006). He is an associate editor of the journal *Film, Fashion, and Consumption* and book series co-editor (with Yannis Tzioumakis) of *Hollywood Centenary* (Routledge). He is currently working on a book about the films of Andy Warhol and Edie Sedgwick for Bloomsbury.