

# 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.

Below you'll find a list of speakers and topics from the 2015 – 2016 series:

## **Professor Daniela Berghahn**

(Royal Holloway, University of London)

### **Seeing Themselves Through Western Eyes? Diasporic Filmmakers as Purveyors of the Exotic**

Contemporary western society appears to enjoy an insatiable appetite for 'the exotic', be it in the shape of ethnic fusion food, world music, Asian cool, yoga, thai chi and Ayurvedic retreats, global adventure travel, ethno chic, world cinema or prize-winning postcolonial literature.

Yet in academic circles, at least, 'to speak of the exotic [...] is to condone all manner of European imperialisms and colonialisms, and to deliberately condemn the so-called 'subaltern' to continued misery' (Shapiro 2000: 41).

In my paper, which is part of a new research project I am currently developing, I wish to rehabilitate exoticism by focusing in particular on the contributions diasporic filmmakers have made to the emergence of a new kind of exoticism in contemporary cinema.

Drawing on Victor Segalen's posthumously published 'Essay on Exoticism' (2000), Chris Bongie (1991), Peter Mason (1998), Charles Forsdick (2000), Graham Huggan (2001) and Alison Griffiths (2002) insightful discussions of the exotic and exoticism, I shall attempt to define this elusive and contested concept. Associated with the long history of imperialism and colonialism, the subjugation and objectification of the subaltern and ethnic stereotyping, exoticism, alongside the related concept of Orientalism, is an aesthetic category and cultural practice that is burdened with highly pejorative connotations.

As I intend to illustrate, the kind of exoticism that we encounter in contemporary diasporic cinema is characterised by processes of reciprocity and exchange (see Khoo 2007). Compared with earlier films, such as Fritz Lang's *The Tiger of Eschnapur* (1959) or British Raj revival films of the 1980s, which rely on the spectacularisation of cultural difference, the underpinning hierarchies have changed. The new kind of exoticism is no longer predominantly a projection of Western fantasies of the Other.

Instead of passively enduring the exoticising gaze, postcolonial diasporic filmmakers such as Deepa Mehta, Mira Nair and Gurinder Chadha are playing an active part in the construction of their own images. The critical and commercial success of films like *Water*, *Salaam Bombay* and *Bride and Prejudice* is, however, not as widely celebrated as one might expect and this despite the fact that it signals the growing recognition ethnic minority filmmakers are enjoying in the West.

Instead diasporic filmmakers are blamed for seeing themselves through western eyes, for colluding in strategies of 'auto-ethnography' (Pratt 1992), 're-Orientalism' (Lau and Mendes 2011) and self-exoticism in a bid for mainstream western audiences, often at the price of alienating domestic audiences in their real or putative 'homelands'.

Yet why are diasporic filmmakers expected to make culturally authentic films, whereas everyone else is entitled to create exotic fantasies? In fact, such is the allure of the exotic, and especially India, that majority culture filmmakers like Danny Boyle (*Slumdog Millionaire*), Michael Winterbottom (*Trishna*), John Madden (*The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*) and Lasse Halström (*The Hundred Foot Journey*) are jumping on the bandwagon and emulate the aesthetic strategies that have been tried and tested by their diasporic colleagues, deploying the recurrent visual tropes of exoticism, such as 'poverty chic', a vibrant, saturated colour scheme, 'ethnic' music and synaesthesia to evoke the intense sensory experiences associated with the exotic.

### Biography:



Daniela Berghahn is Professor of Film Studies in the Media Arts Department at Royal

Holloway, University of London. She has widely published on post-war German cinema, the relationship between film, history and cultural memory and transnational cinema. Her extensive work on migrant and diasporic cinema in Europe has been supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and is documented on the websites [www.farflungfamilies.net](http://www.farflungfamilies.net) and [www.migrantcinema.net](http://www.migrantcinema.net). Daniela's publications include [Head-On](#) (BFI, 2015), [Far-flung Families in Film: The Diasporic Family in Contemporary European Cinema](#) (Edinburgh UP, 2013), [European Cinema in Motion: Migrant and Diasporic Film in Contemporary Europe](#) (co-edited with Claudia Sternberg, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) and [Hollywood Behind the Wall: The Cinema of East Germany](#) (Manchester UP, 2005). Building on her work on diasporic and transnational European cinema, Daniela is working on a new project that explores exoticism in contemporary transnational cinema.

# Professor Thomas Elsaesser

(University of Amsterdam/Columbia University)

## Double Occupancy and Self-Exoticism: Space-Time Warps of Transnational Cinema

My paper will offer a brief overview of what I think are the shortcomings of most of the terms we use (world cinema, global media) – including the inherent contradiction of the term ‘transnational’ – before proposing an expansion and refinement to the term ‘double occupancy’ which I first introduced for the study of European cinema in its post-national/post-auteurist phase, in order to highlight uneven power-relations and ‘always-already’ anti-essentialisms.

The aim in once more taking up the concept is to claim its heuristic and historical value, both for the study of films and cinemas that are only visible via the festival networks (where the tendency towards self-colonizing and self-exoticising is especially strong) and for the study of global Hollywood, whose economic dependence on world-wide audiences, hybrid platforms and accumulation of cultural capital through on-line communities makes for other forms of double occupancy.

Finally, the alternative to double occupancy is not identity politics, but abjection and post-mortem subjectivities: negative forms of double occupancy, i.e. double voiding and vacating, which is where and how the potential for resistance and dissent re-emerges.

### Biography:



Thomas Elsaesser is Professor Emeritus at the Department of Media and Culture of the University of Amsterdam and currently teaches at Columbia University. He has authored, edited and co-edited some twenty volumes on Early Cinema, Film Theory, German and European cinema, Hollywood, New Media and Installation Art. His books have been translated into German, French, Italian, Spanish, Czech, Polish, Hungarian, Turkish, Hebrew, Japanese and Korean.

Among his recent books as author are: *Film Theory: An Introduction through the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 2010 [2<sup>nd</sup> revised ed. 2015], with Malte Hagener), *The Persistence of Hollywood* (New York: Routledge, 2012) and *German Cinema - Terror and Trauma: Cultural Memory Since 1945* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

## **Professor Ewa Mazierska** (University of Central Lancashire)

### **Creating the Canon of Polish Cinema**

Ewa Mazierska will discuss the problems of creating a canon of national cinema, considering Polish cinema of the period of state socialism as her case study. She will identify its main agents, such as influential film critics and present several criteria of canon-making, pertaining to Polish cinema, such as focusing on authors, rather than films, privileging films about the past, as well as those critical of the reality of state socialism.

Ewa Mazierska will also analyse the reasons certain types of films remained outside the canon and what are the main differences between the canons of Polish cinema for external and internal consumption, as reflected in the histories of Polish cinema, lists of the 'best Polish films' compiled in Poland, and the positions Polish films got in 'Sight and Sound' questionnaires. Finally, Ewa Mazierska will show how the Polish canon starts to be undermined by the political changes and recent developments in film studies, such as a greater attention granted to popular and transnational cinema.

### **Biography:**



Ewa Mazierska is Professor of Film Studies at the School of Journalism and Media, University of Central Lancashire. She published over twenty monographs and edited collections on European cinema, representation of work in film, gender and popular music.

They include *From Self-Fulfilment to Survival of the Fittest: Work in European Cinema from the 1960s till Now* (Berghahn, 2015), *Falco and Beyond; Neo Nothing Post of All* (Equinox, 2014), *Postcolonial Approaches to Eastern European Cinema:*

*Representing Neighbours on Screen*, edited with Eva Näripea and Lars Kristensen (I. B. Tauris, 2014), *Work in Cinema: Labor and Human Condition* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) and *European Cinema and Intertextuality: History, Memory, Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

## Dr Mark Gallagher (University of Nottingham)

### Tony Leung Chiu-Wai: Acting Sexy in Hong Kong and China

Described by one publication as looking “like sex in a white suit” (Ko 2001), Chinese actor Tony Leung Chiu-Wai has since the early 1980s enjoyed a reputation as a sexually attractive figure. Internationally distributed films such as *Chungking Express* (1994), *In the Mood for Love* (2004), and *Lust, Caution* (2007) along with many Hong Kong romantic comedies, thrillers and martial-arts films have capitalized on his physical appeal and on his ability to perform as a sexually charismatic man.

This paper investigates Leung as a regional and global star, focusing on attributes of his acting that convey sex appeal or have been received as sexy. A lead actor of scores of genre films and television series in his native Hong Kong, Leung has acquired an international reputation based on roles in efforts from filmmakers such as Wong Kar-Wai, Ang Lee and Hou Hsiao-Hsien. Leung thus appears a popular star in a regional Asian context but a more rarefied, art-cinema performer internationally. Despite his bifurcated reputation, his sex appeal provides a powerful symbolic currency bankable in local as well as global contexts.

Through attention to the highly legible yet difficult-to-quantify category of sex appeal, I identify features of Leung’s acting and stardom that inform his overall career activity. With attention to a screen star’s performance history and long-term creative trajectory, this paper seeks to account for the complex performative and cultural phenomenon of cinematic sex appeal.

#### Biography:



Mark Gallagher is Associate Professor of Film and Television Studies at the University of Nottingham. He is the author of *Tony Leung Chiu-Wai* (BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming), *Another Steven Soderbergh Experience: Authorship and Contemporary Hollywood* (University of Texas Press, 2013) and *Action Figures: Men, Action Films and Contemporary Adventure Narratives* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), and co-editor of *East Asian Film Noir* (I.B. Tauris, 2015)

## **Professor Philip Drake** (Edge Hill University)

### **Independent film, critical media industry studies, and video-on-demand**

In this talk I reflect on the process of working on a funded Digital R&D for the Arts research project on independent film production and distribution. This was a partnership with the public agency, *Film London*, and a commercial business, *We Are Colony* (a VOD platform: [www.wearecolony.com](http://www.wearecolony.com)).

The platform launched in beta in July 2014 and offered the research 'inside' industry data about audience demand for VOD content, in particular 'companion products' that allow film-makers to present curated additional content to audiences. The project bought distribution rights to a number of titles, allowing their VOD data to be tracked across the platform, interviewed a number of independent film-makers, producers and executives, and conducted an online survey of users. The project aimed to uncover data around VOD and audiences that hitherto has been inaccessible to academic researchers, in order to understand issues faced by low budget independent filmmakers and their audiences.

In the first part of the paper I present key research findings from the project as well as position it in relation to recent research on digital content distribution and independent cinema. In the second part I reflect on the politics of conducting such 'three-way' knowledge exchange research projects with industry partners. Studies of media industries often combine a variety of methodological approaches, drawing on interviews, oral and archival histories, participant observation and ethnographic studies alongside analysis of available industry data. These approaches raise important ethical questions about the relationship between subject and researcher, the status of evidence, and the conditions of industry access. Conducting research in collaboration with industry and policy partners can present both significant advantages and major challenges, and I will conclude with a discussion of a range of issues and debates that arose during the project, and the need to balance and maintain a critical and independent academic approach alongside respect for the different needs of project partners.

### **Biography:**



Philip Drake is Head of the Department of Media and Professor in Film, Media and Communications at Edge Hill University, UK. He recently co-edited *Hollywood and Law* (BFI Palgrave, 2015) and has researched film marketing and distribution (2008),

'reputational capital' and Hollywood independence (2012), talent and creative industries in the UK (2013), and other areas relating to media industries. He has also written on image rights in Hollywood, and on television and deregulation, and on screen performance and celebrity. He is a member of the Editorial Board of Media Industries Project (MIP) Research, and is completing a research project for an AHRC Nesta and ACE funded Digital R&D for the Arts project on independent film distribution and Video-On Demand (VOD).

## 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.

## Dr Ian Scott (University of Manchester)

### Propaganda Wars, Projections of America and the Dismantling of the Office of War Information at the close of World War II

The OWI was *the* key agency for the distribution and dissemination of film and propaganda by the United States during World War Two. Working at home and abroad, it was the Overseas Branch of the OWI that came to dominate activity and the Motion Picture Unit of the OB that helped shape documentary production during the war. The OWI is thought to have had its activities wound down as the war came to a close in a manner in keeping with the reversion to peacetime government policy.

Yet, as this paper argues, events within the OWI in the last year of the war throw up previously uncovered evidence that suggests the agency was being deliberately sidelined – even undermined - in preparation for a more rigorous and ideological post-war propaganda apparatus. This propaganda philosophy was set in train by a select number of individuals, and their investigations into, and criticism of, the OWI is revealed for the first time in this presentation.

#### Biography:



Ian Scott is Assistant Associate Dean and Senior Lecturer in American Studies at the University of Manchester. He is the author of *American Politics in Hollywood Film* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed) Edinburgh: EUP, 2011, and *In Capra's Shadow: The Life and Career of Screenwriter Robert Riskin* Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006, amongst other works, and has written extensively on political movies and Hollywood's relationship with Washington and American political culture more generally. He also works in documentary film and his first collaboration with docdays Production in Berlin, *Projections of America*, has appeared at various film festivals and was shown on ARTE in Europe in 2014 and Canadian television in 2015. It won the documentary prize at the Dallas Videofest in Oct 2015. He is currently completing a book of the film, *A Better Tomorrow: Transatlantic World War II Propaganda*. His new book, *The*

*Cinema of Oliver Stone: Art, Authorship and Activism* (co-authored with Henry Thompson) will be published in summer 2016 by Manchester University Press, and is the result of an extensive series of interviews with the director conducted over more than five years.

# Michele Hilmes

## Co-Production and Conflict: Locating the Transnational in Television

For television, strongly based in national contexts, mandates, and policies, the presence of “foreign” programs on the schedule has long been regarded as problematic. Yet between the US and Britain, transnational influences and practices are a long-established, integral tradition, despite occasionally arousing more drama behind the screens than on them. Here I will briefly trace a history of this uneasy relationship, looking closely at one of its most contested practices: trans-Atlantic co-production, from *Civilisation* to *Downton Abbey*. What prompted this long-standing relationship? How is creativity negotiated in a transnational situation? What changes has digital distribution made – and is television still “national” at its core?

### Biography:



Professor Emerita Michele Hilmes taught media and cultural studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison for twenty-two years. Most of her research and publication has centered around media history, with an emphasis on radio and sound studies and on transnational media flows.

Professor Emerita Michele Hilmes' books include *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting 1922-1952* (1997), *Network Nations: A Transnational History of British and American Broadcasting* (2011), *Only Connect: A Cultural History of Broadcasting in the United States* (4<sup>th</sup> edition, 2013), and most recently *Radio's New Wave: Global Sound in the Digital Era* (2013). She was a 2013-14 Fulbright Research Scholar at the University of Nottingham, England, working on the subject of British/American television co-production.

Current projects include co-editing *Contemporary Transatlantic Television Drama* with Dr. Roberta Pearson (University of Nottingham) and Dr. Matt Hills (University of

Aberystwyth) as well as a history of the American radio feature, in the research stage. With Dr. Mia Lingren (Monash University) she is co-editor of *The Radio Journal: International Studies in Radio and Audio Media* and is Conference Director of the Radio Preservation Task Force, a joint project of the Library of Congress and the National Recording Preservation Board. In November 2015 she was the recipient of the University of Texas-Austin's Wayne Danielson Award for outstanding contributions to the field of communication study.